And through the rents in substance
the book is torn apart

words
come from other pages

of the book

into the substance of description

into colloquy

every passage shimmers

as it sudden occurs to the reader
from which each fragment derives

wherein we now read of
"ivy slithering into ruins"

or

"the diligence of lightning"

like a fabric

all manner of words

are patched onto sentences
left gaping
by fire
by brutal winds

meaning fused from
palimpsests raised
from chapters

read and already
forgotten
but for their general sense

archaeology of the pages
as narratives are now
fragments with no stability
in voice, or place, or time

each of the sensible passages

enfolded this chaos

in 'sense'
barely contained

(Steiner—the nostalgia for war. Men would once more scale the heights of Gallipoli and intervene, heroically, in their own destiny.

OR

Mrs Hacker, moving past with the tea-trolley, notices the light has been left on after a meeting. It is a perennial problem with people who should, she thinks, be setting an example of frugality. She reaches inside the door and plunges the space into darkness.

ON THE NATURE OF EVIL

There was a song, popular during the 1940s (one which continued to remain popular with school children for many years after the war; and one popular with children who had been born long after its hostilities had ceased), sung to the tune of the march, *Colonel Bogey*, whose lyric—although I am sure there were regional variations—ran something like:

> Hitler had only one brass ball,
> Goerring he had two, but small,
> Himmler had something similar,
> And Goebels had no balls at all.

I am not sure of the chicken-or-the-eggness of this situation—the association of evil with some aberration of the testicles. It would be valuable if the song had a second verse clarifying whether the condition of the German leaders was there at birth, or whether all were stricken at some later stage—at puberty, say, or by disease. In the absence of this verse we are left with two possibilities: Acts of great evil affect the testicles of the evil-doer; or, evil-doers can be identified by the state of their testicles (as the National Socialists attempted to measure intelligence, and anti-social propensities by skull size and the expanse of the nose). To near exhaust my store of Latin phrases—a *quid pro quo* if there ever was one. In the case of Goebels, the difficulties proliferate. Has the evil arisen from a cruel act of nature? A childhood accident, perhaps? Or from castration? And, if the latter, undertaken by whom, and for what reason? All of which makes the early examination of a child's testicles in order to ascertain their future proclivities—prevention, as they say, being better than cure—a less than exact science; with the probability of most slipping through the net.

Or was this phenomenon of the brass testicles embedded in German folklore—was there, for instance, a cancelled aria in Wagner's *Ring Cycle*?
If so, how it must have thrilled this inner sanctum of Hitler's regime, knowing this badge of power hung so naturally within their trousers. What dare-devils they must have thought themselves—completely outstripping, for instance, those men with black patches over their eye. How they must have looked forward to the expression on the faces of their mistresses as they revealed their metal appendages. Only Goebels must have kept to the darknesses of the bedroom, knowing his condition would not, to the average person, indicate the *presence* of brass *absent*. How proud, though, must have been the Fuehrer—that prince of evil—with his single brass ball, be it natural or added at some later stage in the manner of a gold tooth, or a wooden leg. I imagine him, after the fall of Poland (when the whole world must have seemed it would collapse before him like a house of cards) standing before the mirror, fondly swinging it to-and-fro, like a pendulum ticking down to the moment of World domination, seeing the metal catch the light and glint there for his delight [pleasure].

My personal view is that the brass is engendered through evil. That the German henchmen would have, one evening, have detected a certain hardness in the genital area which, when investigated and cosseted would have been seen as the generation of metal. How, after the initial shock, it must have thrilled them, seeing this badge of power growing so naturally beneath their trousers...

etc.

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF LEPERS TALE

The lazaret on Channel Island was home to seventy souls. The terrible scourge of their flesh made no distinction between Europeans, Aboriginal full or half-bloods, or those of Asiatic extraction. A great leveller it was, being the lowest of the low. And from such a position the lepers passed their days in harmony.

Banished from the mainland they lived under the supervision of Superintendent Farrelly, a tight, curly-headed man with a deeply furrowed forehead, who lived on the highest part of the island in a small stone cottage with his wife Miriam.

The superintendent's wife felt herself condemned, with no society as support. On occasional visits to the mainland she became afraid to speak her name lest it stirred the memory ('Miriam Farrelly... Where do I know that name from? Heavens! It's the same name as the woman who lives on the island with all the lepers.') Companionless in either society. A pariah.

On the island itself Miriam lived in perpetual fear of the lepers. Her dreams, glutted with images of shedding. Her hand, for instance, would reach for some object (the iron, say) but the grasping fingers felt nothing. Even though she might look down and *with her own eyes* verify her hand's presence on the handle—nothing. And it would then come to her that should she lift her hand from the iron the flesh of her palm and her under-fingers would remain adhered (so she dreamt) to the handle. With this realisation she would wake.

So often did she dream such things that in her waking life she developed a morbid fear of touching anything, lest her fingers remain. Superintendent Farrelly found the morning recitation of these dreams unsettling and feared most of all that his own dreams would become infested with situations from his wife's lurid imagination.

As the months passed, so did Miriam Farrelly's condition worsen. The act of eating became fraught with problems—might not her lips come away with the cutlery? She could picture the pink slugs of them resting in the hollow of a retreating spoon. In response to this eventuality, the Superintendent's wife had developed a singular manner of eating in which, mouth opened wide, she would toss small pieces of food to the back of her throat—posing thereby no threat to either lips or, importantly, tongue. The morbid fear that parts of her digestive tract might come away with the passage of say, a coin of banana, failed to materialise; liquids, in their rapid descent, likewise posed no problem. She was, then, alive, if meagre.

As a consequence of this phobia—on which the local doctor made some general comments, adding though that such things were not within his area of expertise (a psychoanalyst being unsuitable as the patient would never consent to lying on a leather couch)—Miriam took to wandering the house in a state of *déshabillé totale*, with one exception—on her feet she would tolerate a pair of light open-topped slippers which she never removed. Were the skin to have adhered to the leather of the soul, so be it, for this would only happen the once and with the slippers on, would never be noticed. This was far less harrowing than the thought of walking barefooted on the floorboards, turning constantly to see whether she had left a track of her movements in the form of gossamer-thin prints of flesh. That she lived in a tropical region where the temperature rarely dropped much below seventy-five degrees was a great boon and a salve to her feelings of persecution.

Superintendent Frank Farrelly watched the small motor launch draw in at the jetty below and made for the bedroom to advise his wife of its arrival. From behind the door came the sounds of someone moving about the room, readying themselves. He tapped twice.

"The launch is here, Miriam."

"Thank you," came her reply and, after a breath, the enquiry in a raised voice—

"What is going to be done about the lepers?"

"The Japanese won't go anywhere near them," he answered with conviction, his face close to the door. "At least if they've got any sense, that is."

"But how will they *know* they are lepers?" she persisted.

"By the obvious symptoms," Farrelly began. "Depending of course on which of the three types of the disease they have. The most common, the lepromatous form, attacks peripheral nerves, the skin, the hands and feet, the mucous membranes (such as the lining of the nose), and the eyes—"

And would have continued thus for her general edification had not his wife interrupted—

"But their symptoms will not be obvious from an aeroplane."

"If they remain on the island they'll be out of view and I'm sure the Japanese aren't going to waste bombs on an abandoned island. In the unlikely circumstance of paratroopers, the situation pertains as I outlined before. But really, my dear," he said, rocking back on his heels at an argument well put, "you must stop worrying yourself with these sorts of details."

There was silence from behind the door.

"Miriam?" he enquired.

"I have been considering my situation," came her voice after a moment, "and I have decided it best that I remain on the island with the lepers."

"That's quite out of the question!" he huffed back. "We are under imminent attack from the Japanese—an obsessive and barbaric people. We must flee immediately."

"But the Japanese won't go anywhere near the lepers," she replied. "At least if they've got any sense, that is."

"They will not *know* they are lepers, my dear," he persisted.

"But there are the symptoms," she began. "Depending on course on which of the three types of the disease they have—"

And would have continued thus for the sake of argument had not the superintendent grasped the doorknob and entered the room.

The sight that confronted him was singular.

All about the bedroom were patches of skin, some of which were recognisable, such as the right hand wrapped about the outside of a glass, and the left, laid out upon the dressing table like an evening glove. Otherwise, the skin could have come from any part of his wife's body—though, as he looked, the two round patches upon the seat of the chair had most probably belonged to her buttocks. The room was draped with the stuff. Here, a dress abandoned inside out across the floor with its extra lining. Here, a lip curled upon the scarlet of a lipstick.

Miriam herself was standing ('naked', was not the word for it) like a well-coiffured anatomical model in the centre of the room. She still, however, wore the sandals; above them the skin of her feet remained intact like a pair of pinkish-white socks.

The doctor had spoken in passing of hysteria, but Farrelly had hoped the situation would never come down to this.

"Miriam," he soothed, "you must stop worrying yourself so—getting into these terrible states."

His ministrations were cut short by an insistent knocking from the front of the house. Flustered, Farrelly left the bedroom, closing the door on his wife and half-ran down the hallway to attend to the knocking.

The superintendent opened the front door to reveal a middle-aged man dressed in shorts and a blue singlet.

"Superintendent Farrelly?" the man enquired. "I'm here with the launch."

"Ah, yes. Frank Farrelly," said the superintendent. "We're running a bit behind schedule I'm afraid."

"Geoff Reynolds," the man announced, and held out his hand.

Farrelly shook Reynold's hand, withdrawing it to find that skin of the man's hand had slid off, adhering to his own palm, leaving an arm which ended in a glistening intricacy of sinew and tiny bones.

The superintendent found himself being stared at with consternation.

A TALE

Si resucitará?
Goya

Amongst the hundreds of the dead she was alive.

Whilst the shovelfuls of dirt clubbed or pattered at her body she subsisted on the shallowest

of breaths waiting for the man-made darkness to arrive.

With that darkness, with the silence of it, she began the small arrangements of her fellow villagers who lay about her, releasing the pockets of air trapped in the rough hatch of their fleshes. And with it, always seeking to move incrementally upwards, her fingers scratching the cold dirt above her, eyes closed, head faced downwards, against the fall.

She lived thus as a mole, a burrowing creature of some description, never knowing whose face, or arm, or leg, her fingers might find. Knowing that amongst them was her family. Her husband and her child. Until her anger at this atrocity waxed so great that a metamorphosis began within her. A terrible creature hatched from the space her body once had occupied. A creature that grew at an alarming rate, across the width and length of the pit, the sheer expansion of its body pushing the dead, the dirt, irresistibly aside. A thing that breathed the smell of rotting flesh and throve upon it. That ate its fill in darkness on what next came to hand. To mouth. Knowing that her family was amongst them. Her husband and her child.

When she was fully grown (occupying the entire space once filled with the dead, that is, the size of the fifty-six villagers), but with a form which owed nothing to a human's shape, the creature—for the thing could no longer be described as a young woman—gathered itself to break upwards into air. Into light.

All of this within a single hour.

As it happened, some of those same soldiers who had recently engaged in the slaughter were seated in a clearing at little distance from the grave—such was their confidence or perhaps their disdain. Such, their lack of compassion. They told jokes and smoked cigarettes. Some sat admiring the souvenirs they had looted from the town.

Just beyond their view, the soil which covered the grave burst open and the creature which the young woman had become exploded into the evening possessed of a terrifying rage. It drew itself from the earth only to reel at the stench of common air. It doubled over and vomited the flesh and the fabrics it had recently devoured.

The noise of this vomiting reached the soldiers who snatched for their rifles, rose, and crept slowly back towards the grave. With the keen hearing of an animal, the creature heard their cautious approach. With the keen vision of an animal, the creature detected the movement through the trees and undergrowth. So it was that the rage of the creature could no longer be restrained. It reared to its full height—that of four or five men and stampeded towards those who had destroyed the town and slaughtered its inhabitants.

In terror, the soldiers opened fire and gunned the apparition down.

The soldiers approached the object of their fear to find nothing but a young woman, of perhaps nineteen years of age, horribly torn by bullets. Such, they spoke amongst themselves, was the power of evening to conjure monsters from shadows.

Always, though, she stayed with them, the pale young woman whose face had so eluded them whilst the townsfolk had been rounded up. The young woman in her soiled dress.

After the war those soldiers (all of whom had managed to survive) took it upon themselves, each without the knowledge of the others, to seek amongst their own people a bride who bore the features of the young woman—not her double, for this was near impossible, but someone who bore resemblance—in a turn of the head, in the dark roundness of the eyes, in a certain set of the mouth.

And no matter how faint the resemblance, every child they fathered to this marriage, bore her face, as if the characteristic features of their own lineage had been erased. No boy was ever born to these soldiers, nor other daughters. Just this single girl with her unchanging face to which they all in time grew perfectly accustomed.

On the Anxiety of Shadows

Out from her, ranged Missy's shadow, long in the early morning light, newborn from the darkness that it had broken from. Curling, manœuvring itself those moments unobserved as she stood there in the chartered pool of Vic Turner's studio, adjusting itself such that it might believe itself severed entirely (evermore!) from its origins, and become now at one with light.

But the slightest of movements from Missy (and she barely moved) brought home the inescapable fact of the shadow's continuing presence—true, the black of it shrunk back to a near alchemical quintessence, but *present*.

Overhead, the sun had crept on and, shift as it might, the shadow grew each second incrementally longer. All about, the other shadows had begun this same motion. Missy's shadow, though, having the mechanics of its shaper's body in perpetual motion (she walks about the studio) could conceive itself as different from those others tied to their everyday inanimate objects. How pedestrian their advance and their retreat, chained thus.

What is more, at the heart of this difference was an opportunity to disguise, to hold from itself, the irreversible fact of its lengthening. How much easier it was to dispute the process when the movement of Missy (now she bends, now...) might cause the shadow to range over different planes—half across the floor, half ascending the adjoining wall—allowing the argument that its length might have been arrested; where the growing shadow cast by a sideboard, or a chair, could be demonstrated by noting its location on the floor by a chalk-mark and comparing this with its position an hour hence.

But now she retreats towards the sofa
And now she sleeps
the shadow crushed beside her.

Soon it will be night. Soon the shadow will dissolve in darkness. It cannot move to wake her. It will die and only its ghost will remain with the other ghosts—those frail shadows that know neither sun, nor darkness, but exist in an arbitrary purgatory until a switch, or a snuffer, brings their existence to an end.

etc.

[Those hours it felt the burden of its origin withdraw
Deep blackness at mid-day.]

MISSY

From the Coral Sea then, only silence.
From the islands, only silence.
No fanfare, no trumpets, no banjos.

Nothing more on these great conflagrations.
Only the silence of waves from the vast open plain of sea.

In the newspapers, whiteness.
Page upon page too long with whiteness.
The whiteness of bone picked white.

At night, brought by an unseasonal North wind
(as if it too were fleeing)
came the whirr of bicycle chains
came the whirr of spokes in air
came the drum of rubber on macadam.
At night, the chirrup of thirty thousand tiny bells
loud as a summer garden's riot of cicada.

Too long the silence of the Americans defeated and in shambles.

HANNAH

1

Here, in the high citadel of her suburb, as a child, it seemed she could remember only summers. Endless bleached skies. The glare of white weatherboard, or brick rendered white. The glare of limestone driveways. The relentless chirr of the cicadas, below which the air hung silent.

That particular summer, after the recent death of his wife, the doctor took to taking Hannah with him on his rounds. The last of the early morning mist which had veiled the garden at the time of their arrival had already been burnt away. From the limestone driveway in which the doctor's car was parked came a dazzling reflection of aged white stone. Beyond, another blare of white, the house stood on the lawns of the large block, its wide verandahs garnering shadow in a broody manner.

The doctor reached over to the backseat upon whose leather stood his arch-topped Gladstone bag.

"I won't be long," he said to his daughter, his voice somewhat strained by his orientation in the car and the lifting of the bag without decent leverage; but even so, there was an ominous tone to its delivery.

Hannah was pointing to some shade, the adjective for which she had chosen was *delicious*.

"Do I *have* to stay in the car?" she had pleaded, "there's some *delicious* shade over under the tree," pointing to an old Golden Ash and to the deeply-mottled area it had created in the harsh light. "It will get *so* hot in the car. Can I sit under the tree, *please*. Daddy?"

With a daughter so precocious, endearing, and bearing such an adjective, he had little choice but to acquiesce: he who would do anything for this girl, who was *his* girl alone, as she had often told him, the doctor, his daughter. Whose wife had provided the entire *modus operandi* for his dealings with the world, and without whom he was hopelessly adrift; whose daughter's every request was eventually met for fear he might lose the remaining traces of his wife, that lived on residually in Hannah's intonation; the occasional phrase she had grafted onto her vocabulary; a certain pace of step; an inclination of the head; her complexion; her hair's vibrant colouring. And, of course, her artistic bent (the doctor's entire artistry might be witnessed in a deft incision) for Hannah showed early in her school work a talent for writing, for painting and, if one particular gift were to be noted, for playing the piano.

Hannah made her way to the Ash's shadow, her feet disturbing the pile of the grass, bruising it. To her right she watched her father mount the two stone steps to the verandah and knock at the front door. If she had not seen, quickly after, movement at the window on the near side of the house (knowing it would be him, admitted to a room) she might never have followed her whim as she did. The phrase 'I won't be long' and the manner of its delivery had aroused her curiosity. Somewhere in the house lay the subject of this pronouncement and she would see it.

Hannah made her way to the back of the house. A help was at some distance, back turned, in the business of hanging out some washing and Hannah found easy entry by the kitchen door. Once inside, the layout of the house appeared almost identical to her own—indeed, everything conspired to urge her onwards. Were she to be detected she would resort to innocence—*My father is the doctor*, she would say. *And there was a horrid stinging insect under the big tree*. Something similar.

Inside there was the pervasive dimness of a house closed up in preparation for the heat. More than ninety degrees she had heard Penny say that morning. From what she took as the sick room came voices reduced to rhythms and pitches—her father's, an older woman's, occasionally a child's.

She continued through the kitchen into a living room on whose central wall was an archway leading to the hall. She paused, breathless, at its opening. But it was only when she found herself here, at the very heart of the house, that she was struck by the transgression of her presence.

The child-voice was no longer speaking. The other voices continued in succession, loudening, as the sickroom door opened out into the hall. Hannah slipped back to the living room, pressing herself against a sideboard, allowing herself the most minimal of aspects.

Through the door came her father, followed by a woman (old enough to be her own mother) who showed him to the front door. Their conversation was subdued, as if this were a more public place, and she could catch none of it. Then her father was gone and the door closed behind him. The hallway light was on, Hannah suddenly realised, but the woman made no move to extinguish it. She simply moved a few steps back down the hallway before disappearing into a front room on her left.

Hannah's heart raced. She would have two, or, more dangerously, three minutes. She walked delicately to the bedroom, avoiding the central floorboards which she assumed would be noisy in this house as well, turned the low doorknob and let herself into the room.

The light inside was even more subdued emanating from the single shaded window through whose lace curtains an oblong of lawn was visible, glared by the fierce sun of just afternoon. A ceiling fan lopped the air, pestering the netting which fell bridally from a wooden hoop above a double-bed.

And so she found her.

To one side, the right as she saw it, a girl of her own age, sat bolstered upright beneath a light counterpane. The room was decorated in white-on-white, a succession, differentiated as much by distance as anything else. Whites of Alabaster, of bone, of eggshell. Of milk, or lily.

Other than the green afforded by the windowscape, the overall pallor was broken by one other feature (for her hair was white-blonde)—the flush, high, dangerously so, of the girl's cheeks, such that she appeared more like an exquisitely-constructed doll than a human being.

Later, and many years so, she wondered whether she had spoken from fear rather than spite, as much to dispel this morbid figure as to goad her with her remark:

"You're going to die, aren't you."

But the doll remained still. Silent. So she struck her again.

"The doctor you just saw was my father. I drove to your house with him and he told me you were going to die."

This time the silence was quickly broken.

"Then you will die as well—*and* your father. If you breathe the same air as a consumptive (and she said the word with a fierce arrogance) you become one yourself."

She paused, her first instinct to flee. But an equal arrogance held her there, just inside the closed door.

"That's a lie," she said, confidently. "My father has been treating consumptives for *years* and he's still alive."

As though she had summoned him, she heard, a sudden, her father's voice, muted by the glass; and he appeared, his distant figure framed by the window. He was agitated, she could tell. He had hailed one of the servants, a gardener or odd-job man by his appearance and general demeanour, and the two were talking, in turns each pointing in various directions. It looked ridiculous, the two men and their waving arms.

"What's funny?" the doll asked.

"Nothing I'm going to tell *you*," she snapped back and turned to leave. As she was half-way out the door, the doll's voice came after her.

"You're stupid if you think you die straight away" it spat. "Sometimes you can go on living for years."

The doll-girl's mother had, she thought, caught voices—the voices of children—from within the house. She placed her tatting on the side table, rose, and moved to the hallway. Anna's door was still closed. The voices had however stopped. She quickly checked the other rooms—her own bedroom, the bedroom opposite her daughter's, then down the hall to the bathroom, on into the living room, through to the kitchen. She returned to Anna's room, quietly opened the door and peeked inside.

There was no-one but her daughter Anna, eyes closed, asleep, still propped-up in bed. She watched the slow steady breathing with relief. She pulled-to the door and returned to the front room.

The doctor's car had already gone from the drive. She waited several moments at the window, her hand holding back one half of the French lace. When she eventually returned to the tatting she

could not rid her mind of the notion her child had been speaking to her own soul. Or that some other-worldly creature had come to prepare her for—. She hesitated at the word. She would not say it. Her daughter was still alive. She would look after her, protect her, until she recovered—which she *must*—if only through the exercise of her mother's will.

Hannah meanwhile, long fled from the house, had already offered her apologies and settled in the front seat, ready once again to salve her father's wounded heart.

HANNAH
2

[Change into Present Tense]

She could remember only summers. Days in which she would catch herself wondering where her mother might be, even calling out her name, wandering the large cool rooms branching from the hallway's wood-panelled stem. Her name. The sound of which—*Maude*—like the thud of a muted drum, spoke bluntly of her death. Dead, it said. Dead, dead, the doctor's wife, giving birth to a still-born child that would have been a sister for her.

And what of the doctor? His wife betraying him like this, unforgivably, with this too early a death. He, absent from her funeral by way of protest; by way of showing his disgust. With the resentment still smouldering in him years afterwards.

A child in such circumstances might discern that she must now assume the role of mother, a task which filled her with a sense of pride (how house-proud she became those early months) and a certain resentment at the unexpected weight she now seemed to be carrying, Hannah, somewhere between a girl and a young woman.

That time, a time emptied by her mother's death, she became her father's [salvation] [sole purpose] ???, this emptied man, desperately grasping for his daughter (so like her, so like) to keep himself from drowning in the sudden sea of helplessness. Of embitterment, of guilt. And she, who had become each year more of his life found herself, with each passing year, burdened the more with it.

Until all that remained unaccounted for was the sharing of his bed. This, he *knew* (for much else had occurred without his consciousness of it), above all else, he must resist—he who may already have brought down damnation on his soul for even having conceived of such a thing. This final agony which rent the doctor as if he were laid upon a wheel, a rack, of torture. What he *could not* cleanse himself of was watching over her. Padding the hallway in his socks, avoiding the looser boards, easing the door ajar.

At least up until the time when, eventually, she had woken, gasping, to his presence in the room; and he had heard his own voice leak out, adequate enough: 'Hannah, are you alright my child? I heard you crying out. In your sleep. A dream, it must have been'.

"I'm alright, father," she had said, her eyes aching once more for sleep.

And, with the perfect semblance of reassurance, he had gone. This explanation, believable the once, and now, once used, what then?

Only to return. For sleep, it seemed, unlike his child, was quite beyond him, the doctor, who would be scalpel-in-hand the following day, at eleven.

Back. Standing at the bed-end. Gazing down in awe at her face, illumined in lamp-glow.

Only she had heard his return—the very quietness of it, waking her; every cushioned step of it and the long hour of his vigil. (The performer, and the audience of one, locked in this near lightless *Noh*.) Felt and heard him there. Heard the breathing, and nothing of comfort about it. No angel watched over her, she knew it instantly, he should not be there. Not watching like he did.

Shortly after she began a game: stepping as a child steps to avoid the pavement's cracks, lest disaster fall, each day stepping down the darkened hallway as a madwoman might do, picking a way amongst things invisible to the usual mind.

Down and back in absolute silence. A game played only when he might come upon it being played. And he never asking what it was she did, who knew its meaning all too well.

By year's end the pain of her had become near unbearable and he made enquiries of various schools for young girls. His decision was the restored Appleyard College—an unattractive building made of Castlemaine stone—a few miles out of Macedon on the Bendigo Road in central Victoria. She would be boarded there for the three terms and the two inter-sessional breaks, returning to Kew a week or so before Christmas.

By the middle of her first year at Appleyard, the doctor had become increasingly less the subject of her concerns. With boarding school and its daily rituals numbing her, the house at Kew fell from her mind and by third term was but a distant memory.

The time of her end-of-year return to Kew corresponded with an 'unforeseen but necessary absence' of her father. Once more, within her, this gave rise to contradictory emotions—she felt betrayed and abandoned, but she could not help admitting that an extraordinary weight had lifted from her shoulders. She was left to wander the house with only the far sounds of Penny at work in the kitchen or the laundry. She slept and ate when she chose and learned the etiquette of giving orders. By thirteen, on her own, she was already mistress of the house, unused to having any of her requests or opinions questioned.

Years came to pass in this manner before the Summer in which Hannah returned from Appleyard for the last time, as the doctor had seen it, a woman. Not only beautiful, but in appearance cruelly similar to his wife.

This year, there was no 'necessary absence'. He seemed content to have her within the house; indeed, encouraged her to stay there so that she might greet him at the time of his return from house visits or from the surgery. The only disturbance in his temperament came at her overly-long descriptions of the Appleyard end-of-year ball where the graduating class had been joined by boys from a private school in Castlemaine. What about her studies he had enquired? Why did she not talk at length on them?

With her return however, any commerce with the outside world was resented and, eventually, forbidden. Her much anticipated presence at a Gallery in South Yarra (the exhibition was of the elder brother of Samuel Horsfield whom she had met at the Appleyard ball) was taken from her, unforgiveably, she felt, the day before the opening.

Following scenes such as this—for there were angry disputations in concert with his denials—the doctor would generally appear the next day with flowers, or other gifts. He asked for her understanding; he needed someone at home he could fully trust to answer any telephone calls of a serious nature—Penny, he now felt, was unsuitable. So it was that new roles for Hannah began to proliferate.

Undoubtedly she had returned a beautiful woman. But closeted as she was, quickly became a very *bored* woman. She took to painting; watercolour studies of shade through foliage. There was new paper for her upon the new easel, there were new brushes, new pots. Everything she could have wanted. But she still understood herself to be a captive within the house. She could, of course, go for walks; such things were not unreasonably withheld from her. Skirts raised, she would work her way down the steep banks to the Yarra, watching its lazy flow; the oilish mud-dark surface. She could absent herself, but at the cost of accounting for her time. Hearing her father's arrival later in the day; going straight to Penny; hear his enquiry—how was your day, Penny? And Hannah? Was she out today at all?

Innocent enough questions, innocently posed.

She would wait for him to seek her out on the verandah. The sun long ago too hot for any watercolour work.

"Hannah, my dear," the doctor would say, moving across to her and kissing her hair. His hand there amongst the thick of it a moment. "And how was your day? Penny tells me you were out this afternoon."

Of course he sensed it, this ache for freedom. To move beyond the confines of the house. And he knew the situation could not last much longer as it was. Out of this an idea came to him, a plan, brilliant in its simplicity.

"Hannah," he announced one evening over dinner. "Do not imagine I haven't thought of you, here, in the house. I realise how tiresome it must get, day-in, day-out—even with the painting. It has been quite remiss of me to have done nothing about it. I have been thinking about this for

some time, the solution to our dilemma. How would you feel if I were to say you were about to go on a European tour? I know how interested you are in the Arts. I know I was unreasonable back in January about the Gallery opening. Let me seek your forgiveness by offering, in its stead, the great galleries of the world!"

She was thrilled and, rising from the table (her serviette falling to the parquetry) ran to her father, embracing him from behind, her arms about his neck.

"Hannah, dear Hannah," he said, laughing, "It is so good to see you happy."

She broke from the embrace. Stood straight. The doctor half-turned in his chair at the table, in time to catch the smile die upon her face. To see a look of consternation pass across it.

"But who shall I take?" she was asking.

"Take?" he said, confused. Then he understood her meaning.

"An *escort*, you mean? Hannah, there will be no need for an *escort*. *I* will be there with you. There is absolutely no cause for concern."

And he smiled reassuringly.

That night she dreamt her father at the foot of her bed. He hovered there, ghost-faced, holding in his hand the alligator-skin Gladstone bag. She sought to free herself from the encumbrances of the bed—the tightly-tucked sheets, the blanket and the eiderdown. She urged her body to prise the covers from her, but she had power in neither her arms nor legs and she remained helplessly restrained.

When he spoke, his words were barely voiced, played out in rasping air; a cello note with the long exhalation accompanying it.

"You're going to die," it came.

She heard her own voice in reply:

"Then you will die as well."

She tried once more to rise from the bed but the covers continued to hold her down. Struggle as she may, she could not break free in order to defend herself from the figure which no longer looked like her father, but a dead-eyed floating being drawing ever closer; before the nearness of it woke her.

The dream returned, twice, three times a week, such that one afternoon, less than a fortnight after his announcement, the doctor came home early to find Hannah in her bedroom, packing a suitcase. He broke into laughter.

"Hannah, Hannah," he exclaimed, "this is too soon! Far too soon!" And he laughed again at the silliness of all these clothes spread across the bed. "The voyage is not for several weeks."

But she did not cease in her packing. Nor say a word. It was his laughter that ceased.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his mouth quickly dry at what must surely be an impossible circumstance. "Hannah?" he asked, sterner than before; and she, as she continued to be, disobedient.

"Is it that your activities here are unrelated to our European tour? Am I to take it that you are about something else entirely?

His voice sounded pompous—a character from a late nineteenth century novel.

"I'm leaving," she declared.

"You are doing no such thing," he shouted back. "Your place is here with me."

The choice of words was surprising, but for Hannah, the cue she most needed.

"I'm not *her*," she bellowed back at him. "You will not bind me to you forever!"

She shouted it, like a command. A charm spoken (half in hope, half in disbelief) to a minor demon. To a *Djinn*. For a moment she felt herself possessed of the 'magic' of childhood; a child's belief flooding all rationality. Had it worked he would have evaporated in the air, or fallen, consumed by flame.

None of this transpired. She was left with her father, no spirit, no demon, only feet from her. A real man, suddenly wounded. She watched his gaze darting, striking out at the room, this way, that, totally beyond his control. How restrain this rocking world? How hold its axis firm?

But she continued, mounting the arguments he would not dare admit himself, yet could not hope to deny; and he incapable of stopping her—stepping forward, halting, stepping back. Whimpering.

Until the suitcase was full and strapped.

And he now in tears. Uncontrollably. As she swept past him to the hallway.

"I am telling you, you shall not do this!"

His commands in the intonation of a beggar.

Hannah moved out though the house. Always at her back the desperate, wavering, voice:

"You shall not leave this house! I forbid it! Do you hear me? I forbid it!"

And he, the doctor, afraid to step across the boundary of the verandah.

There were a few smaller articles from her early childhood which were beyond any argument, as she saw it, *hers* (a book of Fairy Tales, photographs, a lace handkerchief with her mother's initial). These she had already gathered together and packed, the only other object she felt she had undisputed claim to from the family home was an ornamental screen; and the day after her departure she came back to collect it. She had a taxicab waiting in the driveway—her last claim, she knew, would have to be fought for.

In point of fact, it came to pass much as she had imagined it—her standing in the hallway, the large antique vase—the priceless heirloom, the doctor's mother's and her mother's before that; in the family for generations—heavy in her hand, and the words spitting from her mouth:

"I'll have the screen or I swear I'll smash this vase to kingdom come."

She stalked him down the hall, heirloom raised.

"Now take it to the taxi!"

She followed him outside, down the path to the driveway.

"Give it to the driver," she demanded.

The astonished cabby climbed from the cab and received the screen from the outstretched arms before him. He took the folded panels and lowered them gently into the back seat.

"Now stand well away!" she yelled at her father.

The doctor took several steps back.

"Stay there!" she ordered, and made her way to the far side of the cab, every now and then raising the vase, making to dash it to pieces on the driveway.

She got into the cab. She told the driver to reverse to the front gates. She swung open her door. Placed the vase on the limestone, clear of the vehicle. Then told the cabbie to drive off.

After she had gone. After he had retrieved the vase and carried it back to the empty table in the hallway, the doctor made his unsteady way to his bedroom and closed the door. He had no idea how much of the debacle Penny, the help, had heard—she had at least made herself scarce, by which he assumed nothing would be said of it on her side. Fortunately she had not been witness to his dissolution.

He stayed in the closed room until the tears exhausted themselves and the sobbing had ruined his throat and the sorrow turned to anger. He went to the bathroom and examined his flushed face, his bloodshot, puffy, eyes. He splashed cold water on his face, time and again, the tap left open, pouring water down into the porcelain sink.

Afterwards, he walked to his study and from the locked cabinet which contained his instruments he drew a scalpel. He moved from the room and made his way back to Hannah's room. About the walls, variously propped up on furniture, on the sideboard, the dresser, the top shelf of a bookcase, were Hannah's watercolours.

As the cab sped down Princes Street she told the driver to take her to Spencer Street Station. She had determined several days before that she would board the Bendigo train, disembarking one last time at Woodend. There, by prior arrangement, she would be met by her mother's sixty-year-old sister, Aunt Gertrude, and be driven to her farm which lay outside Trentham on the Daylesford road.

At Spencer Street, Hannah, having purchased a one-way ticket (her resources already badly undermined by her previous night's accommodation, the telephone call and the taxicab fare), walked down the steps of the great Station with her bag and a coat, in anticipation of winter, whilst

a porter followed with the screen, down to the vast departure hall where the glass dome above, filled with its ancient sulphurous clouds, broiled a change in weather.

EPILOGUE: OCTOBER, 2001

A letter to the editor—find a real one, which summarises people's paranoias.

It is a week since his mother's death. Ross and his wife sort through Missy's belongings. Amongst them are a few badly yellowed images of emaciated men. These are not works by her de facto husband, Roy, who is now well known, but by a friend who served in the army and was sent to work the iron-ore mines at Yampi Sound where he had died, not long before the Japanese surrender. They were brought to her long after the war had ended. And the artist was dead.

Margaret notes, how, for the time she knew her, she had never heard her speak about the war.

"A few things from before, but nothing of those five years—I mean she'd say how hard it was to get by, general things.

Ross looks up from the newspaper, its front page trumpeting to be read.

"I can't remember much about that time—I can remember paddocks and a chook-run. I was living with a Great Aunt for a while, Daylesford way. *Trentham*—that was the place. Nothing else before. I'd've been around ten? I think the earliest memory I have…"

What was it? And then he had it! He, stretched out on the living room floor beside a quilt—the old roses one. The quilt gathered to different heights and thicknesses. And amongst this lie of land, his soldiers.

He tells it to Margaret.

"She wouldn't talk about it. She'd sit in that chair in silence, remember."

"I'll never forget the silence. God alone knows what was going on in her head. Those last few years, you'd struggle to get a word out of her.

"How are you, Mum?'

"Can't complain.'

"What you been up to?'

"Nothing much.'

"Tell us about your week.'

" 'Nothing to tell'," comes in Margaret in unison with her husband's imitation.

Ross's gaze falls back to the paper and the photograph which covers a good quarter of it—a sinking boat, the waters around it filled with people.

Ross places the paper on the table.

"It could have been so different," he says.

"What?" asks Margaret, lighting a cigarette.

"If there hadn't been an invasion—all this bloody paranoia."

He hits the newspaper with the back of his fingers.

"And all those years as an American protectorate. Without that there wouldn't be all this American crap everywhere—on the television, in films. We'd have carved a destiny for ourselves. We'd be Australians, with our own culture and... and a pride, and sufficient faith in ourselves that we'd open ourselves up to others and be glad of the difference they might bring. But, now, look at us."

A BUMP IN THE NIGHT

by

REGINALD THOMAS

NARRATOR: The peculiar events that form the subject matter of this tale have not yet occurred, and whilst some people will find them plausible enough, most will be struck by their absurd improbability. But a story-teller cannot take account of such reactions. His task is simply to say: 'This will happen', when he knows that such things will, and that a whole society will have their lives affected as a consequence. But he will also know that in times to come there will be witnesses who will weigh up in their hearts the truth of the matter, and raise their voices to declaim, yes, everything he said came to pass. But it is time to have done with such meditations and philosophizing and turn to the story itself.

Under, sounds of the countryside, late evening: bird calls, departing currawongs.

NARRATOR (CONT.) Suffice it to say, one fine, still, early-Winter's evening, Bill McGowan, a farmer from the town of Tallon, emerged from his barn…

Bring up the sound of the sheep dog, close, and barking.

McGOWAN: Hey there, Tess, what's all this noise? Just because I'm late with your tea.

But the barking continues and its cause becomes clear to us, for approaching is the drone of an aircraft, flying low.

McGOWAN: What's a plane doing out here? And flying this low?

The noise grows quickly louder.

McGOWAN: (CONT. With concern) Quick m' girl, we'd better find some cover!

Footsteps running off, the drone reaches its loudest and then all sounds are subsumed under the roar of an explosion.

McGOWAN: (CONT.) What the blazes…

The blast subsides and fades out. Bring up the sound of two men walking through the grass of a paddock, their

voices approaching.

McGOWAN: Then there was this almighty bang, like a bomb going off. So I reckoned I should get on the blower first thing and get you to check it out.

REYNOLDS: That's why the police are here, Bill.

McGOWAN: I reckon it fell just over the rise… yep, there we are!

REYNOLDS: Well, if nothing else, I reckon, you've nearly got yourself a new dam for free.

Footsteps continue, then halt.

REYNOLDS (CONT.) Something's exploded here all right -but it's pretty small far as bombs go. Hang on… Bring the torch back a bit… across. There! D'yer see it.

McGOWAN: I see something.

REYNOLDS: Keep the light on the spot, that's right… I'm going down to have a look.

Noises of descent, loose dirt and small rocks fall into the pit.

McGOWAN: See anything?

REYNOLDS (Off) Looks like a metal box of some sort. Come apart in the blast, I'd reckon. A wonder it survived at all. Otherwise... nothing, so far as I can see.

Sound of Reynolds climbing up from the pit.

REYNOLDS (CONT.) Best thing, I'll drop by early tomorrow, have a good look at it then. You've got no animals in the paddock… nothing that might injure itself?

McGOWAN: Only the dog. I might keep her inside tonight, case she starts sniffing around the place.

REYNOLDS: Good idea, Bill. We'll wait till we can shed some morning light on things.

The two men walk back through the paddock.

McGOWAN: Baffles me why someone might be dropping a bomb right in the middle of nowhere.

REYNOLDS: Maybe the locals reckon you've been winning too many prizes at the annual show. (Pause) Hang on a sec.

Footsteps cease. The sound of energetic scratching.

McGOWAN: What's up?

REYNOLDS: Bloody itchy leg.

The scratching continues.

McGOWAN: Bloody, hell, Geoff. Now you've got me going!

Fade out on the sounds of the two men scratching.

from
THE WATCHER
JANUARY 1942

The Bunyip

It appears the Bunyip has 'ruffled the feathers' of some migratory birds. Indeed a couple of so-called owls have been putting about a pamphlet which raises concerns about the "grave possibility of the rise of racial hatred" against refugees and in particular refugees of Jewish extraction.

Messrs. Fox and Cole could not have reached the age of twenty without being aware of racial differences and antagonisms, and of the so-called Jewish Problem; and they could not have been so stupid as not to realize that for there to be a Jewish Problem there must be a race (or species or section) of people known as Jews; and, surely, neither of these men could have reached the age of thirty without knowing that Jews class as of Semitic stock as distinct from Aryan, Negro, Mongolian and other stocks.

The Jews themselves not only claim to be a race (or tribe or species of mankind) distinct from others, but claim to be *The Chosen Race,* by their particular God, to ultimately dominate all the other races of the world. *Thus the Jews have created for themselves the Jewish Problem.*

We of THE WATCHER assume that Messrs. Fox and Cole, although Gentiles, are favourable to the Jewish aim, and doubtless expect to derive advantages for themselves thereby.

Mr. Fox and Mr. Cole divide their pamphlet into 25 question-headed sections (as follows). *The Bunyip* thanks the gentlemen for their interrogations, the true answers to which appear below, stripped of the rhetorical flummery which characterised their own prevarications.

1. "How many Jews are there in Australia?" We guess 30,000; and think it 20,000 too many.
2. "Are the Jews capitalists?" Yes, like Gentiles, most of them.
3. "Do the Jews control Australia?" No, but their influence is disproportionate to their number.
4. "Do the Jews control our Press?" No, but their influence is disproportionate to their number.
5. "Do the Jews control World Finance?" No, but their influence is disproportionate to their number.
6. "Are the Jews Communists?" Many are; and they influence Gentile Communists against Gentile Capitalists.
7. "Do the Jews form Foreign Groups?" Yes; they practise racial segregation in every country.
8. "Do the Jews 'sweat' their Employees?" Many do; particularly their Gentile employees.
9. "Is the Nazi Race Theory Scientific?" Yes, fundamentally; as is also the Jews' own race theory.
10. "What are the Protocols of the Elders of Zion?" A brilliant exposition of Jewish aims and ways.
11. "Did Anti–Semitism save the German People?" Not save; but it greatly increased their power.

12. “Will Anti-Semitism save the Australian People?” Not *save; but* Pro-Semitism would ruin them.
13. “Why Anti-Semitism in the Past?” Because of Pro-Semitism.
14. “Why Anti-Semitism Today?” From the same cause as ever—-Pro-Semitism.
15. “Why has the Jew been Chosen as Scapegoat?” Because he chose himself to dominate the world.
16. “Who is Stirring up Anti-Semitism in Australia?” The Jew Refugees, by being Anti-Gentile.
17. “Do Refugees cause Unemployment?” Yes; more or less.
18. “Are too many Refugees being admitted?” Yes, certainly. No Jew Refugees should be admitted.
19. “Are the right kind of Refugees being Admitted?” No—the Jews are disruptive.
20. “What Disabilities do Refugees Suffer?” Their just desserts as sinners.
21. “What should be our Attitude to Refugees?” Uncompromising hostility—the Germans are right in this.
22. “What is being done for Jewish Refugees?” Stupid Gentiles are helping them.
23. “What is being done for non-Jewish Refugees?” Very little.
24. “What is the Jewish attitude to Anti-Semitism?” Only the Jews can know.
25. “What is the Solution of the Jewish Problem?” There can be none while a Jew lives.

The Shopkeeper's Tale

They were half-way through loading the last planeload of evacuees when someone noticed Jack Buscall's absence. Which was surprising, given it was Jack.

The proprietor of *Curio Cottage*, had a number of years before become bed-ridden. Determined to keep the business going he had arranged for his bed to be transported from his living quarters at the back of the cottage to the centre of its shop floor where it was set down amidst the shelves of stock. At the base of his bed, mirrors had been installed so he could keep a watchful eye on things on his blind side.

So arranged, customers would search for what they needed and bring their choices to Jack's bed, where he wrapped from a tableful of paper on one side and took their money for the till on the other.

It was commonly known that Buscall had no intention of leaving Darwin. It had been his life. He had met and married a Darwin woman. He had seen her buried in Darwin soil. And that was it. A bunch of Japs wasn't going to frighten him. And he, for one, wasn't leaving a good business to be looted and vandalised—because looting and vandalism there would be.

The police for whom he had a modicum of respect had sought to persuade Jack on a number of occasions, but when push came to shove it was always easier for them to say if he didn't go this time, they'd be after him the next, so he should get used to the idea of being evacuated and to turn his mind to what would be in the single suitcase of things he was permitted to take with him.

"Bugger off," he'd replied.

Now they were back, Roberts and Henley. From a quick look through the window there seemed to be no sign of the bed.

"Where's the old bugger hiding?" mused Phillips.

"He'll be in here somewhere," came Roberts. "C'mon, no standing on ceremony."

And the two men forced the door.

Once inside there was little doubt as to Buscall's whereabouts.

"I'm not goin'," came the voice from above their heads.

The town policemen stood inside the door looking up towards the ceiling where the bed hovered, out of their reach, a foot or two from the ceiling.

"I'll have to ask you to come down, Mr Buscall," said Sergeant Roberts.

The Provost Guardsman's Tale

Straight from Larrakeyah Barracks, Provost Sergeant-Major Corbett, flanked by five of his men, made his way towards the first of the policemen he made out amongst the melee in the railway yard. The evacuation train was to have left from

Darwin—only the station had been bombed out in the raid. Everything had been shifted to Parap, three to four miles further up the line.

The string of wooden-slatted cattle trucks had been earmarked to take all the remaining women, children and elderly to Adelaide River and on to Alice Springs; but word had spread quickly of its existence and the yards were packed with suitcase-carrying men fighting their way through the crowds to secure a place on board.

"Who's in charge here?" asked Corbett.

"At the moment, no-one," the young officer replied. "It's bloody chaos. Sergeant and most of his men are out at Percy Gorman's place. We're trying to hold the fort as best we can."

"Without much success by the looks of it," Corbett said.

"We just got word that the tracks are damaged up near the RAAF station. They reckon there'll be a delay of at least seven hours."

Corbett caught sight of Union Secretary Jack Randall and eight of his senior officials barging their way towards a carriage. He watched an elderly man fall to the ground in front of them and be trampled underfoot.

"Right," he said to the policeman, "hold on to your hat." Corbett took several strides towards the train then halted and let out a burst of gun fire above the heads of the crowd. A sudden silence fell.

"First, my name's Corbett. Provost Sergeant-Major Corbett. Second, this town's just been placed under martial law. Third, from now on you do what I say or else I'm within my rights to shoot you. Is that clear?"

There was a murmur of assent from the sea of faces.

"Now, I was under the impression that this was a train for women, children and the elderly. You don't need to be Sherlock Bloody Holmes to see there's some strange looking women, children or elderly on board."

Corbett made a path to the train and, half-climbing the wooden ramp, reached into one of the wagons. From the shadow of its interior he pulled a man into the light, then sent him tumbling down to the yard.

"Is that his suitcase?" he called into the wagon. "Give it here."

He took the suitcase and flung it above the heads of the crowd, who turned, watching its flight and how it sprang apart on impact, spilling the man's clothing out across the dirt.

"Right," he said to the crowd. "I'm going into Darwin for an hour or so. When I come back if I find anyone who's not a woman, a child or just plain old on this train, I'm going to hang the bugger by his balls. Is that clear?"

Corbett waited for the message to sink in.

"Now, all you men in the train, start getting your arses out now!"

He stepped down from the ramp and headed through the crowd back to his men.

"I want you men back here in two hours. If there's any shyster on that train you've my permission to deal with him as you see fit. In the meantime though, like

I said, I reckon we'll head for the *Darwin* and have a few complimentary ales.

The *Hotel Darwin* stood like a ghost ship; a *Marie Celeste* with food left unfinished on plates and half-empty glasses of beer. The plan as outlined by Corbett was simple enough. A couple of beers on the house, then a search of the hotel for anything of value—radios, sewing machines, clothes, cutlery and crockery—and lorry it down to the harbour wharf where the goods could be exchanged for cigarettes.

Those men who had been looking through the guests' bedrooms all found the same thing—the mattresses were gone, as was most of the lighter furniture.

"One bloody guess," said Corbett.

Indeed, across from the *Hotel Darwin*, sections of the RAAF camp had received a refurbishment. Huts were now carpeted. Men would now sleep on innerspring mattresses. And Corbett was welcomed by a group lounging in cane chairs and tapping the ash of their cigarettes into smokers' stands.

Corbett needed diversion. The first few car headlights of the evening provided an opportunity.

"See all these fuckers driving with their lights on—I've declared a blackout for tonight. I reckon I'll take myself off to the highway," he said. "Have a bit of target practice. Anyone for the ride?"

Davidson had taken up the offer and the two had settled in for an hour or two, in the jeep, their feet on the back seats, buttocks eased down on the ledge above the spare tyre. They sat in silence, as though fishing.

Corbett was ready to waylay any vehicle which had the temerity to stop, assaulting them with standing orders and pointing out that their headlights were putting everyone in Darwin at risk and that they were bloody lucky that any action against them finished there. Unless, that is, they wanted to take matters further. Of the few who had stopped, none had taken up the offer. And Corbett had swayed back to his position, glancing over his shoulder as the blinded vehicles crept their way south, until only the engine noise, incrementally fading, testified to any progress.

The headlights had been divided between them left and right. Corbett, whose aim was more true when intoxicated, was leading Davidson 25-22 when, as the Provost Sergeant-Major was lining up for his twenty-sixth, Davidson's Lee-Enfield went off.

"Bloody Hell!" Corbett heard him exclaim. And watched as the approaching car sped past them, then veered from the road and disappeared down a slight embankment some twenty yards or so down the narrow road.

"What the fuck!" he yelled. "The headlights. You're suppose to be taking out the headlights, not the drivers."

"Sorry," said Davidson. "I must've been nodding off. I don't remember pulling the trigger."

The two men got out of the jeep and walked along the road. They could see where the car had ended up. The tail-lights were visible enough. Only they had come to rest one above the other. The headlamp light splayed itself across the long spindly grass and one of the wheels spun.

"Best we'd call it a night," said Corbett, half-fancying a room at the *Darwin* if there were any mattresses left. "I don't know about you, but I'm pretty buggered."

"I'm pretty buggered," echoed Davidson. "I hope none of the locals have been causing trouble while we've been away."

"By Christ, they better not've," puffed Corbett. "This town's under bloody martial law now."

The Lepers' Tale

The lazaret on Channel Island was home to seventy souls. The terrible scourge of their flesh made no distinction between Europeans, Aboriginal full or half-bloods, or those of Asiatic extraction. A great leveller it was, being the lowest of the low. And from such a position the lepers passed their days in harmony.

Banished from the mainland, the lepers lived under the supervision of Superintendent Farrelly, a tight, curly-headed man with a deeply furrowed forehead, who lived on the highest part of the island in a small stone cottage with his wife Miriam.

The seventy had been ferried from Channel Island in loads of ten upon a makeshift raft with a ragged sail of torn bed-sheet under the captaincy of Gregory Howard, a coloured man and himself a leper. Howard had made landfall on the fringe of a mangrove swamp where, he supervised the construction of some bush shelters by way of temporary accommodation.

Earlier that day those still-sighted ones had watched the buildings and the ships explode and the air grow foul with blackness. The city which had banished them was burning. From that same vantage-point, an eyrie of a fiercely dropping cliff face, they had seen the superintendent and his wife escorted from the island on a launch.

By the fourth raft-load, the Japanese planes had withdrawn, leaving behind them a city in ruins. That the superintendent had been taken to the mainland at the earliest opportunity suggested subsequent attacks or an invading force may well appear over the next few days.

At first light the following morning a small party went back to the island for supplies. Following their return they searched for safer ground to strike camp; eventually settling on a location some distance from Darwin, but close enough that returning for supplies or for purposes of reconnaissance remained feasible.

Almost three months passed in this manner. Cautious returns to the island found the lazaret still empty. A mood then began to develop amongst their number that a full-scale return to Channel island would be preferable to their hand-to-

mouth existence on the mainland. But, others argued, what if the island were to *remain* abandoned. Darwin itself, from what they could tell through Farrelly's garden telescope, lay deserted. What would befall them when the supplies in the kitchen ran out? Would they not then be back in the same situation as they were now? If not worse—for here at least they were able to supplement their diet with hunted lizards, snakes, crabs and grubs. Others again, most full-blood aborigines, expressed a wish to return to their tribal lands.

So a rift developed in their numbers. Of the seventy, twenty, mainly those in the best physical condition, including Gary Howard, made their way back to Channel Island. The remaining fifty would seek a more permanent resting place (encamped with, or close to, one of the local tribes, for instance) which might offer a subsistent existence until such time as help appeared.

The march began. A line of souls linked hand-to-hand or, where this was not possible, necks joined by a strip of cloth. A march of blundering. Of endless collisions. Of walking sticks and crutches sinking into muddy swampland. The rags of themselves catching on low branches, leaving a trail of flesh: a flapping clothing of skin hung out in the hot, damp, air.

Then the land had changed. The water gone and rain nothing more than a distant smear behind their backs. In its stead came unrelenting cloudless skies and a landscape of flint. An earth of shattered surface, of sharp protrusions, where a blundering step would find the toe all but gone.

Now, rising like a wave that would engulf them all, was a rock-face, hundreds of feet high, sheer, razor edged, which each day claimed for itself more of their horizon.

No-one spoke of it, each hoping that another harboured the means to pass beyond its wall. But there was silence.

One afternoon, while the party had fallen exhausted, despairing, to the ground, an older man, Benny Snake, had ventured forth alone, summoned, he felt, by the sheer rock walls themselves. He returned the following day to find the mood much as he had left it. Calling the group together he offered a suggestion. As their present circumstances were so unpropitious would they consider continuing their search in the past? Or perhaps they might seek a future in which they had all been saved? Or further still—when they had returned to the earth from which they had come and had been released from all their suffering.

Seeing as how oblivion was going to come to them anyway, Sidney Watts said he was not in favour of the returning to the earth option. But he was not averse to trying the past, so long as it was *the past generally* and not a repeat of the past he'd already had. After a short period of discussion a vote was taken and, by an overwhelming majority, the past was chosen as the path they would pursue.

"So, we all agreed now?" Benny Snake asked. "We go on another journey into the caves?"

And there was agreement.

By the end of the following day, the lepers had laboured their way to the foot of the mountain range and entered the cave which their guide indicated. It was less than an hour before Benny Snake heard the first of the voices coming to him from a side tunnel. It was that of a young man, urgently calling again and again—'Lidenbrock! Lidenbrock!'.

Two or three others had also heard the call.

"Did you hear it, Benny?" they asked.

Snake nodded.

"I heard it alright," he said, moving on, not breaking his slow stride.

"What's down there?" they asked, pointing to the mouth of the tunnel.

"Not where we wanna go," he replied. "That go down to the centre of the earth."

A List

HENNINGSEN, Albert Percival
INVENTORY OF PERSONAL EFFECTS
- 1 suitcase
- 1 grey overcoat
- Collection of typed papers purporting to be a telling of the Burke & Wills expedition (to be retained for examination)
- 1 Dictionary (to be retained and checked for possible use in coding)
- 1 woollen cardigan
- 2 shirts
- 2 underpants
- 2 singlets
- 2 pr socks
- 2 pr trousers (drill & corduroy)
- 2 pr shoes
- 3 ties (why does H. need 3 ties? To be retained and checked)
- 1 Fedora hat
- 1 pr cufflinks (retain for inspection)
- 1 toothbrush
- 1 tube toothpaste (already opened)
- 1 face flannel
- 1 set keys (to be retained)
- 1 potato
- 1 fountain pen
- 1 bottle blue-black ink

- 3 sheets blotting paper
- 300 sheets lined foolscap paper
- 1 gentleman's watch

EXAMINER'S NOTES
- suggest detailed examination of Burke and Wills manuscript. What is the significance of the B & W story? Who or what do these characters represent? If his, as he says, why does his name not appear anywhere on the manuscript? As with dictionary, possible use as code book?
- 300 sheets of lined foolscap — what use could he have for these? What does he expect to be doing here?
- Likewise, the ties and cufflinks. Is he expecting to be invited to a dinner party? Or have a night at the opera?

C. McD. 3/4/42

IN PARLIAMENT

Mr. BLACKBURN (Bourke) — Mr Speaker, over the past week I have been in correspondence with the Attorney-General in relation to the 'One Australia' movement, an organisation which, so far as I have been able to discover, operates mainly in Victoria. I believe that fifteen members of this movement, all Australian born, have been interned at Melbourne, in Victoria. Mr Speaker, as a matter for the record, I do not believe that the persons were in any way in sympathy with the Japanese. Though the Attorney-General made some suggestion to that effect. Any such suggestion should be investigated. I have consistently taken the position in this House and elsewhere, that persons, particularly those who are Australian born, should not be imprisoned without trial or on the mere suspicion that they have committed offences. I have also taken the position very strongly that the agent of a foreign enemy, or a spy, in Australia is not likely to be a person engaged in addressing public meetings and openly opposing Government policy. Spies are not likely to be found among persons openly constituting minority groups. It is far more likely that such persons will conform to the opinion of the majority. Otherwise they would not be of much use as spies or foreign agents. The subjects proposed to be discussed at meetings of the One Australia Movement were circulated to members of Parliament. I believe that they were subjects which could reasonably be discussed in these

days. On some subjects the members of the movement were strongly critical of Government policy, but that is not a sufficient ground for stamping them as persons who should be prohibited from addressing public meetings.

Mr. MORGAN — Was not one of the men a Rhodes scholar?

Mr. BLACKBURN — I take it you are referring to Mr. Henningsen. I believe he was among the persons interned. I strongly disagree with certain views held by Mr. Henningsen, but he is a man of great ability, energy and courage, for whom I have considerable admiration. Although he has expressed unpopular opinions, I do not believe that he is the kind of man who would be an enemy agent. I do not believe that there are in Australia any vocal sympathizers with Japan. It may be that there were some vocal sympathizers with Germany. I can understand that some people may believe that the German idea of government has something commendable in it. I do not believe, however, that there are any people in Australia, especially Australian-born people, who would sympathize with Japan or act as agents of that country. I therefore urge the Government to bring these fifteen persons to trial at the earliest possible date, or to give them some kind of a court of inquiry, or to liberate them.

A CONCERT

The inaugural performance of the Tocumwal Quartet, augmented on the occasion by an additional viola for a string quintet, was held in the second week of April. There were a good number of guests from Tocumwal and nearby towns (as far, indeed as Corowa). The invitation was extended to the whole of the friendly aliens' camp, though they were instructed not to enter through the front door. Instead, they were ushered down the side by the housekeeper Mrs Dobson onto the back verandah where they were told to remove their boots and proceed to the living room via the kitchen and hall.

By way of introduction the present owner of *Woodsome Lees*, Bob Donaldson, gave a short history of the homestead from its construction in 1869 to its current status as 'concert hall'. The history finished, Donaldson once more welcomed his guests to the house and announced the program for the evening's concert—one, he hoped, of many. The entertainment would commence with Beethoven's String Quartet (looking down at his slip of paper) Op.59, No.3 in C; to be followed by Mozart's Quintet in G minor. He introduced the players one by one, each entering the salon in formal dress (a search for which had swept the township over the preceding weeks) not all of a perfect fit, but adding in its slight disarray an aura of artistic genius.

And so the musicians drew voice from their hollow, varnished boxes; let loose the conjured harmonies on the air. Mischka watched the fingers' flight, their landings, quiverings, their fine pressures. Out the back of the homestead Ted Butler (condemned from birth to his occupation) and Mrs Dobson were having a cigarette. The music drifted to them through the house, taking up the curve of

the tobacco smoke in the all-but still night air. At their backs, the row of boots which ranged the length of the verandah, quietly tapped time.

So it was that the quartet sent itself out, intoxicating the air—the melodies occasioning any number of otherwise inexplicable circumstances.

Such that

the old tree-swing began its to-and-fro in the windless night

Such that

the water in the dogs' bowls leaned out far enough to spill upon the porch

Such that

in the tree-tops, day-birds withdrew their wing-shrouded heads and gave out their calls into the darkness

Such that

in the close darkness of the shed, milk flowed from the udders of the cows, rich and hot.

And in the morning, though the music itself had long dispersed, traces could still be seen of it on the fences, the thousand dew-notes on the staves of fine wire.

MISSING LEPERS PRESUMED DEAD

DARWIN, TUESDAY — A party of around fifty lepers, previous inmates of the lazaret on Channel Island, are now presumed to have died in the desert lands of the Northern Territory.

The lepers, including women and children, had been displaced after the Japanese attack on Darwin in February of this year.

A recent search had been organised by Patrol Officer Gordon Sweeney, of the Native Affairs Department. With the assistance of aboriginal guides he patrolled the area east of the harbour. Mr Sweeney said he had anticipated little difficulty in overtaking the group, most of whom were badly crippled. None of the missing party were found.

It was only a matter of days before the party of men came upon a settlement at the base of a long peninsular which led south from the main body of the lake. The inhabitants displayed a variety of forms—some limbless, others clearly blind or halt. But though they went about their business with walking sticks or crutches, there was a lightness to their movement, an ease, a facility such as comes with a state of unadulterated joy and peace. Young children played on the verdant banks which ran

down to the waters' edge. Cattle grazed on a luscious grass. Beyond again were watered plains where timber houses were being built. And one could see how this would be the beginning of a new city.

from *FAMOUS BATTLES*

THE BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA

The waters of the Coral Sea are amongst the clearest in the world and the unique formations of its sea-bed can be seen across the immensity of it.

Neither the Americans nor the Japanese had visited these regions before (why would one wish to visit places such as Celebes, Sumatra or Borneo unless one were an entomologist or had an interest in wild men?) and both nations were deceived in thinking that the blue shown upon maps meant that the waters were easily navigated. In fact so shallow are the waters that even swimming is impossible on account of the coral which, though exquisite to the eye, is of extraordinary sharpness. In stout boots however it would be possible to walk out from the adjoining shorelines for a hundred miles. This shallowness was particularly demoralising for the Americans, with great expanses incapable of soaking the trousers much above the shin.

The two great fleets of Japan and the United States faced each other, if a hundred miles apart, having both run aground at the furthest reaches of (respectively) the North and the South Pacific Oceans. The naval guns were rendered useless for the destroyers could not get within range of each other. As this sea battle would now have to be fought entirely by aeroplanes, the Americans realised they had blundered in bringing fine weather with them.

The Japanese fleet however lay hidden below a barrage of cloud, much of it gathered from the upper slopes of Mount Fuji as depicted by Hokusai in his coloured woodcuts. Hampered by this heavy swirling vapour, the American search planes were unable to gather any intelligence on the whereabouts of the enemy.

The fine weather above the American force, however, offered no such hindrance and their ships provided easy targets for the squadrons of Japanese bombers.

Each night a deep silence fell upon the diminishing fleet, a silence broken only by the negro sailors as they scrubbed the decks of the smouldering carriers, the Yorktown, the Lexington; their doleful choruses drifting over the waters—

> *Dem bones, dem bones, dem wet bones...*
> *Dem bones, dem bones, dem wet bones...*

The words adapted by grief to an oceanic context; the melody transposed by lamentation into a minor key:

> *Dem bones, dem bones, dem wet bones...*
> *Now hear de Word of de Lord.*

So it was the sea began to fill with the bodies of the young Americans, their clothing and their flesh slowly razored away by the coral in the to-and-fro of the tiny waves, until only their bones and their eyes remained, affecting the changes of which Shakespeare himself had sung—but leading in later years to thriving tourist and pearl industries in the area.

from *FAMOUS BATTLES*

THE BATTLE OF GUADAL CANAL

After their success in the Coral Sea it seemed only a matter of time before Port Moresby fell and the Japanese took control of the seas east and southeast of New Guinea. In desperation the American forces planned a last ditch defence of these areas. The key theatre for this was the eastern side of the Guadal Canal. America's hopes lay with a massive invasion force of marines. On June 7th, 1942, 19,000 members of the 1st Marine Division left their transports and began their offensive.

What often goes unmentioned in memoirs of this period (those very documents on which our history books are written) is that until 1948 the great islands to the North of Australia were joined together in a single land mass. This apparent oversight is easily explained—why would one bother to describe something that simply *is*. Why describe a continuous landmass as *not* being a chain of islands? (Where, indeed, would such a procedure end? 'I remember General MacArthur as being a General and not as a Private. Moreover, there was only one of him. He was certainly none of the following: a Spaniard, a dwarf, a cabbage, a translation of the *Satyricon*...') Thus, the continuous landmass was not described as being a continuous landmass.

Those, such as ourselves, who come after will look upon their maps and assume what they see upon the page is how it was for thousands upon thousands of years. They will not know of the brutal earthquakes in April of that year which would shatter the land, like a dropped plate, into islands besieged by the sudden in-rush of ocean.

With victory in the Coral Sea it was a simple matter for the Japanese to continue pedalling their bicycles along the promenades of this isthmus which led—with only one obstacle—from Singapore to the Eastern tip of New Guinea. The sole barrier to their advance was the Guadal Canal.

Guadal Canal (now generally assumed to refer to a similarly-named island in the Solomons) was the last project of Ferdinand de Lesseps—already a man of seventy-four—in a vain attempt to restore his finances and some credibility to his life after his indictment for fraud in 1881.

This wonder of engineering cut one hundred miles across the entire Eastern reaches of New Guinea and on into the adjoining bed of the Coral Sea giving passage to large vessels seeking to voyage between the North Pacific and the Indian Oceans. He who controlled this canal controlled the Pacific and the resource-rich continent of Australia.

In the latter days of the Battle of the Coral Sea the invading force of the Japanese had peddled relentlessly along the South Pacific Boulevard and taken up positions along the West bank of the canal. This assault was led by General Horii who rode a white horse (Trigger) at the front of his cyclists. Their advance was accompanied by ritual chanting of traditional Japanese war songs whose words have been translated thus (though the English rhymes add a banality not at all present in the original)—

> *If you want to know who we are,*
> *We are gentlemen of Japan:*
> *On many a vase and jar —*
> *On many a screen and fan...*

The Americans were now obliged to defend the canal's entire Eastern front. Stretched increasingly

distant from the Oceans, the Marine Division's trousers had become dry and, as a consequence, morale was dangerously low.

Most importantly, 'Guadal' was no 'Panama'. A palindrome could not easily be made of the name. Though teams of American poets were assembled to come up with a catchy, pertinent, fortifying phrase, their results were feeble—

Lad aught no man it 'oot—in a month: Guadal!

Là, daughter! Et tu, uttereth 'Guadal'.

Lad aught rib foetal Nemo. We revere women late of birth, Guadal.

And these, the pick of an impoverished collection, most barely intelligible, let alone pertinent. None a battle cry!

Whilst the halls of American Command thrummed with pacing poets, in the Southern Solomons, the Japanese, unhampered by any necessity for palindromes (what is a palindrome for those who have no letters?) began to sing and chant and row in punts down the still waters of the canal—*blade on the feather!* They chanted. Punt after punt. Barge after barge. Carrying their light tanks, their bicycles.

The rout of the Americans began. Port Moresby fell. And nothing now stood between the Japanese and Australia.

'DIG' by Albie Henningsen (Extract N°2)

By the end of January the relentless cracked pavement of gibber plain was left behind and the rat-filled lagoon a distant memory. Now, through a wretched bewildering light, the two lines of camels lugged their burden through shifting corrugations of red earth—a sandscape ridden with salt-bush and spinifex. Behind them, the shudder of the wooden ship, the creak of it, tossed upon the wooden frame. Its white wings ready to spread like a massive bird of death, waiting to take its terrifying flight, carrying their party, off into the dark. Early one morning King drew the party's attention to a single figure isolated on the horizon. The figure turned out to be that of an aboriginal boy carrying a letter written in a tremulous hand in the margin of a scrap of newspaper. It read as follows: Dear Mr Sweeney, All lepers here except those who died. The boy show you where to find us. We need medicine and food. We very tired from our march from 1942. Signed Tom Snake. "Who is this Mr Sweeney?" Burke enquired of the boy. "I have no knowledge of the man." "You not Mr Sweeney?" the boy asked "Of that I am quite certain," said Burke, smiling. "And I have a party of men to vouch for the fact." "You not Patrol Officer Gordon Sweeney, of Native Affairs Department?" "No," Burke reiterated, this time loudly and with no trace of a smile. "You come anyway," said the boy. "I show you where lepers are. Come!" And he tugged at Burke's coat. "They not far." "Unfortunately," Burke replied, "our mission does not take us in that direction. I am sorry. Now, away with you!" And the procession of white men passed on, heading for a terrain of raw jagged hills—razor-backed and for the most part unsoftened by any vegetation.

DO NOT WRITE BETWEEN THE LINES.

BRETON IN MELBOURNE

How dare they suggest he be interned!

His nationality at this point was quite beside the point. He had—*there!* slamming it on the table, open at the page—a visa from the United States of America.

He had no wish to return to France.

To occupied territory, from which he was fortunate enough to escape.

Which was only possible because of his *important international connections*.

Because of his status as the founder and chief spokesman of Surrealism.

And yes, he could appreciate how the situation in the Pacific had deteriorated. He could understand how fewer ships were now prepared to make the crossing.

However.

He wished to leave as soon as his new lecture series was concluded (allowing a week or two to gather further information on the revolutionary, Ned Kelly.)

Breton had grown impatient about his new manifesto. It would be anti-climactic to launch it in Melbourne—he already knew by name virtually everyone who would be likely to come. No, far better to launch it to the greater audience of New York. Far better to sing the praises of Melbourne from another continent.

And now, the hideous Oriental hordes were riddled throughout the country. The people who came from nowhere—for on the map, on the true (Surrealist) map, their country did not exist.

The forces of absence. *Le néant*. Were swallowing being. *L'être*.

A book could be written about it. But. For once.

This was no time for books.

A throw of the dice abolishes books.

Trouvez New York!

from THE DARWIN TALES

BERT HOOPER'S TALE

They collided, buffeting one another, each with his own chosen path through the high narrow aisles. But whichever way they rushed, strange inedible things met their eyes. Tall glass jars in which dried contorted objects clung possessively about each other.

"What's this shit?" came one voice and those in his aisle turned in time to see the soldier lift a jar above his head and bring it smashing to the floor. "What's the chink been selling here?"

They gathered around the spilled contents. Ears. They were tiny ears, the size of a newborn child's, only leathery—ears then of something they had never seen before. In other aisles, similar circumstances were unfolding. As each container's contents were observed. And it came to them that any one of these horrible objects would be reason enough to destroy the shop. So they set about their business.

Jar upon jar was toppled from the shelves leaving the floor swimming in an astonishing array.

Furless cats' paws, or were they the shrunken hands of children?

Out the back, was a large ice-box. The men stared inside.

Long coiled pink tubing wound about sticks.

Tongues still slowly writhing, searching for a mouth so they could tell what had happened to them.

A bloated semolina of what looked like eyes.

Momsen vomited, steadied himself against a jar whose chutneyish substance was difficult to differentiate from his own spillage at his feet.

The mark of barbarity was everywhere inscribed. The chink was lucky he'd made a run for it. How were these sort of shops allowed? If they had found out about this earlier...

Bert Hooper was still at the end of a left-hand aisle. He had not followed the others into the back room. Instead he remained, captivated by a jar of what he took to be the dried penises of bulls. He could understand why one might be tempted to eat such things. He wondered how such things were prepared. Were they ground to a fine powder and sprinkled over meat? Or possibly they had to soak in water overnight—

He paused in his thoughts, finding that he felt an uncommonly strong stirring. Best he simply take the jar and leave.

CHAMBERS

April, 1942. Pre-MacArthur.

Little has changed in the room itself, the chambers of War Cabinet.

In this windowless room. Still the airlessness. Still the lacquer of tobacco tar and polish.

Only now the far wall has other maps. Now the purview includes Australia. Now the bombing raids lie thick across Darwin. And now Broome.

No arrows move towards them.
The advice is against them.
The advice says ‘as regards Townsville and Darwin’
The advice says ‘in particular’
The advice says while the main area remains threatened
The advice says ‘no attempt should be made to defend
The advice says ‘No more troops than are in those areas now

In Darwin, and now Broome, the contours lie broken. The fine lines torn asunder. Hyphens. Dashes. As the towns reduce to flatness. Contourless.

Now the lines inform of other things

In Darwin, now, there are only layers, no longer——100——, rather, the levels——riot—— or ——despair——. ——nonsense—— ——profligateness—— ——desertion—— ——pillage—— ——pillage——
——apathy————pointlessness—— ——numbness——.

Order has long gone. The commanders are gone. The troops that remain find themselves defending nothing. With nothing. Supplies no longer arrive. reinforcements are deployed elsewhere.

Daily they fight with the packs of dogs for scavengable food.

Night after night the bombing raids come, against which they become increasingly unable to defend themselves. All there is to do is to dig slit trenches in the churned, soaked, ground and lie there like a crop slowly interred.

Of dogs, cats, left, made dangerous by hunger, ranging the streets, every moment drawing them to an uncommonness with man. To the true, dark, selfish centres of their being.

The Dog catcher himself dead since February. Job would’ve been beyond him anyway—— that sudden vast population of abandoned dogs (no-one was allowed to take their pets with them) cruising the streets for their bountiful provisions…

Otherwise, that same wood panelled room. That same mahogany table with its inkwells and its blotters. Its crystal carafes and tumblers.

And from the corridor the sound of approaching footsteps and of many voices.

CENTRAL NSW

—•—

Australia in the Ascendant

Field-Marshal Sir James Holland reports:—

“There have been no important incidents since my comments on 7th February, when the recaptured positions at —— were consolidated. Our trenches there have since been subjected to occasional bombardment. There has been no infantry fighting, except two small bombing attacks on Tuesday night, which were easily repulsed. Intermittent and

unimportant artillery engagements have taken place on the remainder of our front."

Further communiqués from Central NSW have emphasised the fact that Australians Forces along their various fronts preserve ascendancy over the Japanese in daily artillery duels and in bomb and grenade fighting at close quarters.

HANNAH

In the wake of the train, the stationmaster at Woodend gathers the luggage and walks in the direction of the only disembarked passenger, a girl, perhaps sixteen years of age. He places the suitcase and the screen where she stands on the platform, his right hand lingering a moment open-palmed beneath her gaze.

At which time the swaying, distracting form of a large woman of some seventy years and what seems her elongated shadow, far too black for the watery light, appear through the entrance gate, close by the ticketing office, drawing Hannah away from both hand and obligation.

"Hannah! Hannah!" the woman is calling, her arm raised in a wave. "Hannah! Hannah!" calls the woman in brown corduroy. She wears a corduroy jacket and skirt, with a silk scarf at her neck held by a coral brooch and on her head is a small fez. She wears sandals bare-footed and, as the weather is far from mild, late afternoon with a fine drizzle, the feet seem flesh abandoned largely on account of their remoteness.

"Alice! Alice!" she calls, "the poor girl looks exhausted. You must carry her things." The shadow breaks from behind Aunt Gertrude and takes up the slack of Hannah's possessions without a word. The three women make their way through the wooden-gated exit into an open dirt area in which stands an old Ford motorcar, the only car in the area beside the station, its engine left running.

In the motorcar Hannah falls again into the fevered sleep which has beset her since her journey began. In the car's backseat all but the initial smell of old leather eludes her. Of the dried lavender with which Alice stores all her clothing or the mustiness of dog she smells nothing. In the same manner the fine mist swept shudderingly from the windscreen is noticed by Gertrude alone. As are the trees that grow within a bed of clouds.

Alice helps Hannah from the car, the young girl still partially in her dream. Out she comes, her skirt drawing with it the coarse white dog hair, and unseen against the black of her skirt, the coarse black hairs of the dog.

Amongst the women (for there are, Hannah learns across the days, another four in addition to her aunt and Alice) are distributed the names of Isa Tarrant, Mary Garnett, Rosemary Steele and Phœbe Aroseis, a woman of Mediterranean appearance.

Of most importance is Alice.

Alice is a short woman, black-haired, with an upper lip in perpetual shadow. Her hair is cut in the pudding-basin style. Indeed, quite literally so, as the basin itself stands on the kitchen bench, on thus occasion full of batter being left to 'stand'.

Aunt Gertrude seems forever to be calling upon Alice to perform some task or another.

"Alice! Alice!" she calls, and the ombrous form rises, so that soup and buttered bread can be delivered to the sick bed on a high-sided wooden tray whose base is decorated with hand-painted roses.

(Roses, all the talk seems of roses.)

Gertrude, it transpires, is writing a book about roses.

The device is there on Gertrude's bed linen, Gertrude's notepaper. Her aunt insists it should be incorporated wherever possible.

At dusk, the sun a rose.

Gertrude has been talking of roses and the striped hound Polybe whose black and white hairs cover the back seat of the Ford motorcar.

"Polybe has an incurable passion for eating filth," Aunt Gertrude is saying to Hannah, "and there is nothing will stop him." She breathes in. "He has one civilised trait of which I know. He sits in his chair and smells the roses from the vase. He never tries to eat them, he just gently smells them—"

And suddenly the roses have bloomed in the middle of the conversation:

"A rose by any other name—" Isa Tarrant interrupts, only to be interrupted herself.

For from the sofa Phœbe Aroseis arose:

"Is a rose, Isa?"

"Rose it *is*," Isa could not help but agree.

Just like that.

"Good sentences," Gertrude remarks, much later, as if drawing significance from the conversation of seven hours before, "Good sentences should be like two people talking at once, best *insinuated*, to show how within any set of words there is something else entirely being said.

Hannah remains in her dream.

(The weight of the years since her mother's death is still much with her. Still her father clambers on her back at every step. Still she feels his shoes' leather seek purchase on her hip bones; his arms grapple at her neck, her collar bone and shoulder blades.)

Although she is present amongst any number of breakfast or lunchtime conversations (shawled at the table, or rugged upon an armchair) she follows none of them beyond a few exchanges, the gist deserting her, leaving words as patterns of rhythms and sounds, groupings only now and then emerging again as sense, snatches of mid-sentence. Exclamations bright as hallelujahs. Madrigals. Vowels and consonants in concert, drawing her from and to her reveries.

Snatches of conversations rush above her head like flocks of birds.

"The end of April," Gertrude sighs. "Another month gone. May," she announces to the sound of the turning paper.

"I have asked you not to use that word," says Alice, her voice in a rare tone of annoyance.

"Would you prefer I left the calendar on April for the month?" Gertrude enquires.

"Yes," says Alice. "Now you ask, I would *much* prefer it."

Hannah hears the page fall back.

Outside, the bird flocks twitter and scraw out a dialect, too fast for her to catch.

Alice is typing up Gertrude's *A Woman's Guide to Roses*.

Every afternoon the typewriter patters on, a room away. Its keys hesitantly *tat* out the letters, with only the occasional flourish for often-repeated words. 'The'. *Ta-tat-tat*. The sharp pitch of the metal at the ribbon, battering out. To the paper.

Ta tat-tat-tat-tat ta-tat ta tat-tat-tat-tat ta-tat ta tat-tat-tat-tat...

Listening. Trying to guess the word—an impossible task.

She might as well spell out the sudden rain upon the verandah iron.

Gertrude sits on the armchair facing the fireplace. Above the fireplace is a painting of Gertrude seated on the armchair. The armchair is her favourite even though one of its legs is missing. The very piece upon which she is seated now, her body (as it is in the painting) at an awkward angle despite the pile of ancient hymnals, purchased (for a song) from Blackett's Books, Daylesford, placed beneath one corner.

"When people ask about my income," Gertrude says whenever there are new visitors, "I tell them I am supported by the Church."

The painting of Gertrude does not have the stature of Cézanne's portrait of his wife. For even though nothing in Cézanne's painting is centred, neither is the figure listing to the left hand side. More importantly, although the upper body in the painting forms a reasonable likeness (for instance, she is dressed in her brown corduroy which is her favourite and she wears a coral brooch which is her favourite), she does not have a head.

It was Henry Mattis, a painter, who attempted the portrait above the fireplace, but who found it impossible to capture her face.

"I couldn't get a likeness," he apologised, unloosening the rope that secured a sheet around the canvas. "So I scraped away the head."

The women had gathered around the work which he had propped on the kitchen table. Gertrude, they noted, was dressed in her brown corduroy which was her favourite and wore a coral brooch which was her favourite. She was seated on an armchair, but was leaning uncomfortably to her right.

And she was headless.

Gertrude sits, facing the headless portrayal of herself. Every now and then one might catch her (as one passes by the door, for instance) tilting her head as if seeking the image's opinion. During the day, when the women are all out in the fields, Hannah wanders from her room (or wakes upon the sofa) to find her aunt alone, chatting amiably with the painting.

It is night. Voices are distant, held from her by the closing of the kitchen door and the door to her bedroom. Hannah leaves her bed and finds herself on the verandah, looking out across the moon-palliated darkness. Every tree, each stretch of grass, the paddocks beyond, visible in the moonlight—an illumination whose cost, however, is the colour of things. At this moment she sees the striped hound Polybe dancing in the moonlight upon the back two of his legs, stepping stiltishly about the lawn in a forward motion (a constant falling sans collapse) as if his mistress were ever there before him to receive his weight upon her ample belly.

Without the fez or some other hat (she possesses, for instance, a deer-stalker, a topee and a

borsalino) Aunt Gertrude's hair can be seen to be combed towards the forehead, in a style often affected by balding men. There is the faintest trace of wave within it which, over the day, separates the fringe into a series of triangles across her forehead, such as might be encountered as a decorative feature at the hem of a dress.

One afternoon Aunt Gertrude thinks it is time to hear the origin of her niece's malaise; and because it is now time for her to speak of him, Hannah tells of her father, the doctor. Of his anger at his wife's death. Of his growing dependency upon his daughter. Of his increasing possessiveness. For each of these tendencies she provides an illustrative example.

"None of this comes as any surprise to me. I warned Maude about him," says Aunt Gertrude with disdain. "The man sounds like a lovelorn suitor." She pauses. "I trust he hasn't made any moves in this direction?"

Hannah reassures her, then undoes all the reassurance by mentioning the vigils at the bed-end."

"Well," she says, cheerfully, "Now you are amongst a household of strong women. There'll be none of that nonsense *here*! I shall write a letter to your father, informing him that you are in safe hands and expressing in no uncertain terms my disapproval of his behaviour which is wholly unbefitting the father of a young woman. Rest assured I shall stress that if he seeks to interfere in your life again, he will feel the full wrath of our collective, here, and in the wider community. And that, child, is no mean threat!"

It is late Autumn, but days are still bright and clear. Hannah watches through the windows of her bedroom or the windows of the covered-in verandah the toil of the strong women in the surrounding gardens or the further paddocks—digging, hoeing, picking. Each day, it seems, an abundance of food is brought in to the kitchen in wide, shallow, panniers, whilst Gertrude sips tea made from dandelions or camomile.

What cannot be eaten, which is much of it, is arranged into wooden trays and collected by a greengrocer from Daylesford. He comes for the vegetables late in the afternoons and often stays on into evening, talking with the women about the books he has been reading—a Zane Grey Western, a new Frank Clune.

Alice works in the kitchen making dinner. It is her custom to provide three serves more than there are people in case there are visitors (as there is the greengrocer, who has stayed on) and at least one extra serve for Gertrude who prefers to eat in large portions.

Aunt Gertrude sits down in front of five pounds of rare meat three inches thick. Pounds pile up upon her skeleton. All of it heavy, rubbery, fat. Her face awash with perspiration as if she had been the dish itself simmering in a wine-rich sauce.

Hannah lies sleepless in her small bedroom above Gertrude and Alice's. Through the floorboards comes the voice of her aunt, deep, full and velvety, like a great contralto:

"Come on, come on, my Little Hebrew," she says over and over. "Don't you know, I'm the best cow giver in all the world!"

Hannah's eyes snap open. There is light enough to show the meeting-line of the drawn curtains. She slips from the bed and makes her way noiselessly along the hall to the kitchen. (She has learned to avoid each creaking board as had her father). She wraps herself in one of the coats which hang on wooden pegs inside the back door and lets herself out of the house. Outside, she finds a gusty day, with the wind far warmer than she had expected, such that she hesitates, wondering as to whether she should take the coat at all.

Hannah follows the rammed-earth path which leads through the vegetable garden away from the farmhouse towards an avenue of jostled poplars which have suckered themselves along both sides of the meanderings of Betsy's Creek. On again (the vista originally taken from her by the trees) is a small rise, nothing so grand as a hill, but a rise nonetheless and she determines she will stand upon it. As she makes towards the place, half-running, she grows hot, her face flushed; and, not breaking her stride, she continues on, letting the coat fall from her backwards-sloping arms, from her shoulders down to the ground in her wake.

With the rise, though modest, there is a view back above the poplars and the farmhouse to distant mountains. And with it, the sun rises.

It is still Autumn, everything declaims.

Autumn, with the wind arriving in gusts, riotous, such as she can see the *wings* of it, this wind. And never before has she seen such a thing—the Autumn wind *flying*. Then, the gusting wind stops (as it does, breath held, as though it has been distracted by some distant thing: a massing of cloud, a sun-glint on distant water) and the wings flourish themselves downwards, to lie everywhere like fallen leaves.

WALLY LAUGHLIN ON REFUGEES

"And who are these refugees and their ilk who are keeping Australians out of work?" he asks rhetorically. "I'll tell you who. Slinking, rat-faced men under five foot with chest developments of twenty inches.

"And I'll tell you *where* they work," he continues, after a gasp for breath. "In backyard factories in Carlton and North Melbourne, that's where. And in the streets of the city itself. All for two-and-six a week pocket money and their keep."

So accumulated the delineations of the room, its parallels (slow perambulations of the browsers, Strachan's quicker and more recent curving path, lips of coffee cups, the spoons circling in them) and its meridians (the strands of Hall-Benedict's hair arched over the pale bald spot, the quick slump of Mossman's back, the pinstripes of his jacket) spanned the world Turner had uncovered here.

February, 1942. **Lepers' Tale**. The tropical rainstorms.[Check weather] Breughel, *The Blind Leading the Blind*. Cf. Goya *No saben el camino*. (They don't know the way.) Géricault' s *Raft of the Medusa* [?]

56,416w.

Acting on the ‘insurance policy’ I had put in place some time ago over the telephone in Gelder’s voice:

“Some discreet protection I take it,” Croft was saying. “Make sure the lad doesn’t come to any harm? That’s the sort of thing?”

“Yes.”

“How’s he travelling down?”

“By train from Macedon.”

“Just let me know when he’s expected in and I’ll take care of the rest. Providing no-one tries to interfere, your Mr Telford won’t even know I’m there.”

One which I had activated just prior to leaving *Teffont* with the boxful of papers:

“Hello, Croft?”

“Speaking.”

“Mr G.”

“Ah Mr G. How are you? Well, I trust.”

“Very well, thank you. Now, you will recall when last I spoke to you I mentioned a valuable member of staff who might need watching over in Melbourne?”

“Like it was yesterday, Mr G.—a Mr Telford, if my memory serves me well.”

“He’s coming down today. On the Bendigo line from Macedon, arriving just after 9.00. I know it’s short notice, but anything you can do?”

“Everything will be in readiness, Mr G.”

For that I had no choice but to take my chances. I had one quick telephone call to make before leaving, then I would flee to Melbourne, and from thence to Esther Cole, taking with me the spoils of war.

By the time I attained the gallery, the attendant was at his station beside the ‘visitors book’ and I cursed my sleeping-in. I would be required to sign the register with my own name already taken by Parrot.

> After their success in the Coral Sea the Japanese planned to take Port Moresby and to control the seas east and southeast of New Guinea seemed only a matter of time. In desperation the American forces mounted a last ditch defence of these areas. The key theatre for this was the eastern side of the Guadal Canal. America’s hopes lay with a massive invasion force of marines. On June 7th, 1942, 19,000 members of the 1st Marine Division left their transports and began their offensive.What often goes unmentioned in memoirs of this period (those very documents on which our history books are written) is that until 1948 the great islands to the North of Australia were joined together in a single land mass. Those, such as ourselves, who come after will look upon our maps and assume what they see upon the page is how it was for thousands upon thousands of years. They will not know of the brutal earthquakes in April of that year which would shatter the land, like a dropped plate, into islands besieged by the sudden in-rush of ocean. With victory in the Coral Sea it was a simple matter for the Japanese to continue their peddling their bicycles along the Northern promenades of this isthmus which led—with only one obstacle—from Singapore to the Eastern tip of New Guinea. The sole barrier to their advance was the Guadal Canal. Guadal Canal (now generally assumed to refer to a similarly-named island in the Solomons) was the last project of Ferdinand de Lesseps—already a man of seventy-four—in a vain attempt to restore his finances and some credibility to his life after his indictment for fraud in 1881. This wonder of engineering cut one hundred miles across the entire Eastern reaches of

New Guinea and on into the adjoining bed of the Coral Sea giving passage to large vessels seeking to voyage between the North Pacific and the Indian Oceans. He who controlled this canal controlled the Pacific and the resource-rich continent of Australia. In the latter days of the Battle of the Coral Sea the invading force of the Japanese had peddled relentlessly along the South Pacific Boulevard and taken up positions along the West bank of the canal. This assault was led by General Horii who rode a white horse (Trigger) at the front of his cyclists. The Americans, their forces stretched increasingly distant from the Oceans, were obliged to defend the canal's entire Eastern front. In the Southern Solomons, the virtually unhampered Japanese rowed in punts down the still waters of the canal. *Blade on the feather!* they chanted. Punt after punt. Barge after barge. Carrying their light tanks, their bicycles. The rout of the American forces began. Port Moresby fell. And nothing now stood between the Japanese and Australia.

THE BATTLE OF GUADAL CANAL

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