

**'The Shark Caller'**  
and  
**'The Dog with Seven Names'**  
and  
**'Crafting Animal Characters in Fiction for Young Readers'**

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## Abstract

The fiction component of this thesis consists of two novels, *The Dog with Seven Names* and *The Shark Caller*. These works are linked by their usage of animal characters and their exploration of social themes. *The Dog with Seven Names* is a work of historical fiction for a young readership of 9-12 years; it uses an animal viewpoint to explore the impact of war upon north-western Australia 1939-1943. *The Shark Caller* is a contemporary cross-cultural quest-fantasy for a young readership of 10-14 years; it explores environmental issues set in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. *Shark* involves human protagonists who become embroiled in a fantasy scenario involving confrontation with undersea creatures; *Dog* uses an animal to narrate a sequence of events in close parallel with researched history of the period. In this way each novella could be said to work variations upon a clutch of thematic and technical concerns with animal portrayals (of differing kinds) presenting a major creative challenge in each case.

The accompanying exegesis, "Crafting Animal Characters in Fiction for Young Readers", explores my own authorial practice in the context of a discussion based on a wider survey of exemplar Australian children's titles featuring animal characters.

### **Candidate's Declaration**

This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the published work are:

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## Contents

### Fiction:

'The Shark Caller' .....	4
Tok Pisin Glossary .....	146
'The Dog with Seven Names' .....	150

### Exegesis:

'Crafting Animal Characters in Fiction for Young Readers' .....	261
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<b>Bibliography</b> .....	358
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### Appendices:

Appendix 1: 'A Selection of Australian Animal Characters, 1841-2015' .....	371
Appendix 2: 'Notes to Accompany 'The Dog With Seven Names' .....	404

## **The Shark Caller**

### *Dedication*

For Karen and Owen, with thanks for introducing me to PNG and the wonderful world of diving, and for Sophie, who never gave up on this story, even when I wanted to.

### *Note*

This story is set on fictitious Finsch Island in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea where, as is the case in several Pacific communities, shark calling has been a traditional practice for centuries. Although inspired by this tradition and other Pacific Island customs, my story and the characters within are entirely fictional.

## Before

I was only six when I first heard the voices.

Monsoonal clouds gathered as we paddled across the lagoon.

'Shark road,' Uncle Aaron said, running his fingers through the water.

'Ancestors travel along this pathway.'

My uncle lifted a strange coconut shell rattle.

'What are you doing?' I asked.

'Calling the ancestors.'

'The ancestors?'

'Sharks!' my brother whispered.

'How do you know?'

Ray shrugged and looked away. Perhaps he'd heard something in the men's house.

Dark currents swirled under my uncle's wooden canoe. Then a fin sliced the surface. I flinched and the boat tilted.

'*Nogat wari*,' Uncle Aaron said. 'I won't let the ancestors hurt you.' He balanced on the prow chanting strange words.

As Uncle Aaron dragged his rattle through the ocean, the shark swam closer. Coconut disks distorted the watery mirror of the dawn sky. Then I heard voices. Words seeped through my mind like incoming waves. I turned to my uncle.

'*Tumbuna*,' he muttered.

I stared into the shark's unblinking eye. The voices grew louder. It felt like they were calling me. I tried to understand, but the mako's black eyes frightened me. I looked away.

The voices stopped.

## 1 Returning

*We need in love to practice only this: letting each other go. For holding on comes easily; we do not need to learn it.*

Rainer Maria Rilke

I love that moment when an aeroplane's wheels leave the runway. The cabin angles upwards and the city below shrinks to the size of a toy town.

Tonight our take-off is smooth. We circle Guildford and our plane turns east. My mother squeezes my hand and I think about the urn in my suitcase. It holds my brother's ashes. We're taking him back to Papua New Guinea.

Mum's family owns a dive resort on an island near Kavieng. It's where my brother and I were born fourteen years ago. I haven't been back to PNG for three years, not since my parents split up.

As the pilot guides our Airbus into the clouds, I stare out the window, watching the flashing wing lights. They remind me of the night the police came. It's a moment that's never far from my mind:

*'I'm Sergeant Zoe Crisp and this is Constable Glover. We're looking for Mrs Williams.'*

*'Mum's in her studio printing photographs . . .'*

*'We need to speak with her.'*

*An image of my brother filled my mind. His still body lying on the beach.*

*'Mum,' I yelled, running to the studio to find her. 'The police are here. There's been an accident.'*

*Mum's dark eyes stared into mine. She hurried inside.*

*I followed, stumbling as my vision blurred. Then I felt the hallway closing in. I was tumbling along a tunnel. My brother was floating through the air ahead of me.*

*'Wait!'*

*Ray turned. He seemed close, but when I reached out, the distance between us shifted. And suddenly there were others – spectral creatures with fins and scales.*

**It's up to you, Ray whispered. The community needs you.**



*'I don't understand. Ray, wait . . .'*

*My brother shook his head. **It's up to you now, Izzy. Watch the ocean. The sharks will show you the way.***

*'Sharks?'*

*Ray nodded, then drifted towards a blinding light.*

*'No,' I cried. 'I won't let you go.'*

*'Isabel!'*

*Mum's voice drew me back. The creatures slunk into mind shadows as an officer led me to a chair. I looked at Mum. Her face was pale.*

*'Isabel said there's been an accident.'*

*The sergeant looked puzzled. 'We didn't tell her . . .'*

*'They're twins. She feels things. Please, what's happened?'*

*The policewoman looked at me curiously. 'Mrs Williams, your son has been involved in an accident. We don't have all the details yet. A boy saw an octopus at Abalone Cove where Ray was snorkelling. He said it had blue rings. Your son has been taken to hospital.'*

*'Is Ray all right?'*

*'We're not sure.'*

*Mum grabbed her car keys.*

*'I'll take you,' Sergeant Crisp offered.*

*Then the sergeant's portable radio crackled. She stepped aside to take the call then turned to Mum. Her eyes told us before her words.*

*'I'm so sorry . . .'*

*Mum clutched the carved shark statuette on our mantelpiece. Its shell eyes seemed to glow as an eerie buzzing filled my ears.*

*For the first time in fourteen years I was no longer one of two.*

*'I'll put the kettle on,' Constable Glover muttered. He returned with a mug of warm Milo and said, 'Sip this. The sugar will help.'*

That was three months, two weeks and five days ago. I haven't drunk Milo since.

\*

I look out the cabin window again at the wing lights. What did Ray mean when he said sharks would show me the way? *To where?* Is our family in Papua New Guinea the community he was talking about?

I close my eyes and loosen my seatbelt. There's plenty of time to try to work out what Ray meant. Mum and I are on an overnight flight from Perth to Brisbane before connecting with our morning flight to Papua New Guinea. I plug in my earphones and flick through the audio channels. A song Ray loved comes on. I quickly change channels.

Ray and I spent our first years in PNG and, although I look like other girls on the surface, I've always felt a bit different.

Now it's like I've slid into a parallel world.

I still can't believe my brother's gone. At school I keep thinking he'll be there. My best friends are kind. They offer advice, but their words don't really help.

I can't bear people watching me. My skin feels raw. I hide behind my fringe, avoiding eye contact. In class I can't concentrate. The teachers let me stare into space, but I know they won't leave me alone forever.

At lunchtime, I sit in a toilet cubicle, staring at graffiti-covered walls. Last week the words *Felicity is a Loser* became **Follow the Sharks**. Then other words merged to become an image of my brother. He was clawing at the wall as giant tentacles dragged him downwards.

I scratched those tentacles till my fingers bled.

A Year Seven girl heard me whimpering inside the cubicle. She told the duty teacher, who rang my mother. Mum came to collect me. It was a quiet drive home.

My days are bad, but nights are worse. In my dreams I keep seeing Ray trapped behind a watery curtain. It feels like my brother needs me to do something. Sometimes when I wake from nightmares, I hear Mum crying. I wish I could cry, but the one time I did, it felt like I'd unchained something wild. I sobbed for hours. Since then, I've held back my tears.

I tilt my seat. Mum might know what my dreams mean – she's the daughter of a shark caller – but I can't ask. Since the accident, Mum wanders through the house in a daze, wearing only a sarong and forgetting to talk. When she does speak, it's often in

*Tok Pisin*, the language of her childhood. And mine. I've tried to help, but some days it's like Mum's on another planet.

Then last week she booked tickets to Papua New Guinea.

'We need to return Ray's ashes,' Mum whispered, 'to complete the ceremony.'

'Is Dad coming?'

Mum shook her head. 'He's happy for you and me to do whatever's best for us.'

'What's best for us would be having Dad here.'

'He says he can't leave the business.'

'Can't leave Chloe, more likely!' I stormed away to my room.

Our parents separated three years ago. 'Irreconcilable differences,' they said.

After Ray's accident, Dad moved home for a while to help Mum organise the practical stuff that she couldn't face. It was a relief having him back.

'I don't know what to do,' I told him.

'Your mother's in shock. Give her time.'

*What about me?* I felt like screaming, *Ray was my other half.*

Dad held me tight. I knew he understood and that helped a bit. Part of me hoped Dad would stay, but I soon gave up on that idea. Before Ray's cremation, the counsellor told us tragedy can bring couples closer, but even I could see that wouldn't work with Mum and Dad.

People say opposites attract, but in our house they have trouble living together. After a few days the old tensions bubbled up. Mum and Dad are too different. I guess they always were. Mum believes in fate. She makes space for the traditional ways and is always looking for signs from the universe. It drives Dad crazy. He reckons we make our own destiny. Since Ray's death, Mum has stopped finding signs.

Dad told me things would get easier, but they haven't. Now he's gone back north to his dive business and his new girlfriend.

I hate Chloe. She's everything Mum isn't. Over-confident. Over-dressed. Impossibly petite. If Dad can't see that we need him more than Chloe, then I hate him too.

So that leaves me and Mum.

And now we're returning to the Islander side of my family. Flying back to where my life, and Ray's, began.

\*

My family's dive resort is on Finsch Island, in a deep lagoon near Kavieng in the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea. Finsch Island isn't on the way to anywhere. It's not a turtle or dugong habitat and it has no special trade. Other places have better wave breaks for surfers and better coral. Even in traditional times, the fringing reef made surprise attacks difficult for raiders. Our small clan is a remote community in a faraway province.

From what Mum's told me, our customs are like those in other parts of New Ireland. Sharks are our central spirit totem, and we believe our ancestors can travel through them in spirit form. When the ocean is calm, our shark callers paddle out to search for the smooth currents they call 'shark roads'. They take a conch shell, a coconut rattle *larung* and a lasso called *kasaman*.

When we were little, Ray and I used to watch the men leave at dawn. Then, in the afternoon, we'd wait on a hill to hear the drone of the shark callers' conch shells signalling a safe return.

Like other communities, our men catch shark for food and also to use in ceremonies. It seems weird to me that if our ancestors travel in sharks, then it's okay to eat them. Mum says there's shark caller magic to cover that, but only men are allowed to know it.

Before my family moved to Australia, my uncle took Ray and me into the lagoon in his canoe. Uncle Aaron paddled into deep water and my brother and I watched a mako come to his call. I was just a little girl, but I've always remembered the darkness of the shark's eyes and how I thought I heard voices.

My family has another connection with sharks. Something Uncle Aaron calls *wanblut puripuri*. The words translate as 'one-blood magic', and one-blood means family or clan. The elders believe that if a shark caller from our clan practises enough, and if trust is strong, then he can learn to travel in shark form.

I was always desperate to know more about shark magic, but only men can become callers. Sometimes Ray was allowed to sit in the men's hut and listen to secrets, but Ray never spoke about them to me. Try as I might to bribe or trick him, my brother never shared the knowledge.

Dad wasn't allowed to learn shark magic, either. He's not an Islander.

Mum and Dad met sixteen years ago when Dad was visiting Finsch on a dive trip. A year later they married at the resort. Ray and I grew up on the island, then moved to Australia when it was time to start school. We used to come back each winter, but since my parents broke up, we haven't returned. Mum said the airfares were too expensive, but it feels like there's another reason.

Mum squeezes my hand again as our plane hits turbulence. 'Are you looking forward to seeing Uncle Aaron and the aunties?'

I nod, though I can barely picture their faces. The only one I remember clearly is our cousin. Last time we visited, Noah was like a big brother, always watching out for us. Ray loved him. They were inseparable. I blink back tears.

'I'm looking forward to being warm.'

Mum strokes my hair. 'You've always been one for the tropics . . . Hey, did you see the name tag of the stewardess?'

I shake my head.

'Raylene!'

I smile, relieved that Mum's looking-for-signs antennae are working again. She tilts back her seat.

I hope that going back to Finsch will help us both heal. Mum closes her eyes and I feel her sadness resettle. My mother is beautiful in a proud, big-boned way. Ray inherited her Islander looks, while I got Dad's fair hair and freckles.

It's strange to be travelling back without Dad and Ray. As I flick through movie channels, I think about my family.

Mum's a photographer. Resorts pay her to photograph dive sites, and scientists hire Mum to work on wildlife projects. In between those jobs, she does advertisements, calendars and whatever other work comes along.

Sea creatures and birds are Mum's specialities. She photographs gulls, stingrays, leafy sea dragons and the occasional wobbegong. Her favourite model is an

octopus at Abalone Cove. Not a blue-ring, just a regular Gloomy Octopus. Mum calls her Luska. I used to see Luska during my morning swim, but that was before the accident.

Ray and I often swam at Abalone Cove. It was our special place, a rock pool, protected from the might of the Southern Ocean by a tumble of huge granite boulders.

The week before Ray died, he found a sea cave behind the furthest rocks. Ray said the entry was hidden between two boulders. I swam out with him to explore it, but the swell forced us back. A few days later, Ray told me he'd managed to free-dive into the cave and that he'd seen a wide rock chamber just past the entrance. Dad taught us always to dive with a buddy, so I was mad at Ray for going alone, but he made me promise not to tell anyone. I said I'd only promise if he agreed not to go back without me.

Ray was so excited about that cave. I don't know why.

I went to Abalone Cove once after Ray died – to leave a cowry shell for him. I tried to find the cave, but the sea was too rough. Waves kept pushing me back. Everything felt different that day. Even the fish were acting strangely. And gloomy Luska seemed more aggro than usual.

The day Ray free-dived into the cave, he'd said a strong rip kept pulling him towards the rocks and that the sky looked like Dad's painting.

'What painting?' I asked.

'The one in Dad's old study. You know, the man standing on a bridge covering his ears with swirling colours behind him.'

*'The Scream?'*

Ray nodded. 'That's how the sky looked this afternoon,' he said, 'and when I dived, I heard fish shrieking. It was like the ocean was some TV crime scene with sharks calling from far away . . .'

'As long as the sharks stay far away,' I'd joked, but Ray was serious.

If it were anyone else, I'd say they were mad, but our family is unusual.

Dad comes from a mob of Broome pearlers. His brothers, father and grandfather all dived on the north-west coastline of Australia.

On Mum's side, Ray and I come from an unbroken line of shark callers. As far back as anyone can remember, they have lived on Finsch Island.

Mum was always proud of how observant Ray was. My brother noticed things in the ocean that other people missed; sea dragons camouflaged in clumps of weed and stingrays hiding in the sand. Ray was too young to begin shark calling training, but seawater was in his blood.

It's in mine, too.

I'm less observant, but I do remember the time Uncle Aaron took us into the lagoon. We were only six, but I'll never forget that huge mako shark and the weird voices. Am I meant to listen for them? Is that what Ray wants?

Maybe I should have kept trying to get into Ray's cave. It's not fear of rips, blue-ringed octopus or even shark that stopped me. It's something worse. Being at Abalone Cove reminds me that I wasn't there for Ray when he needed me. My brother had wanted me to go with him the afternoon he died.

'C'mon, Izzy, just a quick swim . . .'

But I'd been chatting to my friends online. So Ray went alone.

The police said a girl on the beach tried to resuscitate him, but she'd forgotten how many breaths to compressions. Two weeks before the accident, I'd done a first-aid course. If I'd been with Ray, I would have been able to save him.

Mum says I shouldn't blame myself, but I can't help it.

## 2 Remembering

*You were born a child of light's wonderful secret – you return to the beauty you have always been.*

Aberjhani, Visions of a Skylark Dressed in Black

'Could all passengers please ensure your belts are securely fastened.'

Mum clutches the armrest and crosses herself as turbulence tosses our plane. Mum's Christian faith happily co-exists with her clan beliefs. The ancestors and Jesus have equal status. Mum simply calls on whoever she thinks is her best bet.

A flight attendant dims the cabin lights.

'You sure you're okay?' Mum asks.

'Mmm.'

I love flying. The bouncier the better, even though it feels wrong to be travelling without my brother. I wanted to bring the urn holding Ray's ashes onto the plane, but Mum said the airline might make a fuss. She wove strands of seagrass into a pouch to protect the urn and we made a nest for him in my suitcase instead.

'I'm going to try to sleep, *Kuka*,' Mum says.

I smile. Mum hasn't called me *Kuka* in ages. It's my island name and it means crab. As a baby I waved my arms about a lot. One of the aunties said I looked like a feisty little crab and the name stuck. It feels good to hear it again.

I tuck the blanket around Mum's shoulder and stare at the flickering screen. I should sleep, but I can't. Ray feels so close. I gaze out the window.

Moonlight silver-lines the clouds and it feels as if some part of my brother is floating alongside the plane.

I twist my trochus shell bangle. A circle of sharks is etched along the inside, but you only see them when I take it off. The bangle was a birthday present from my uncle, and as I twirl it around I wonder why my uncle took me out that morning. Shark calling is male business, but Uncle Aaron wanted me to go.

'*Kuka* should know,' he'd told Mum.

Mum was worried about us going in the canoe, but she couldn't ignore her brother. Clan groups in New Ireland are matrilineal – that means women are heads of



families – but with shark business it's different. Blokes rule that. Even at six, I knew Mum had to listen to her shark calling brother.

She stood on the jetty staring after us as Uncle Aaron paddled into the lagoon. I was more curious than scared. My uncle's chanting and the splash of the coconut rattle fascinated me. Then, as the shark circled, I felt Uncle Aaron communicating with it.

*'Longpela taim world was all darkness,'* Uncle Aaron told Ray and I.

He explained how in that time of darkness, sharks were the first beings, and how, even now, their eyes still hold the emptiness of sky-before-stars. Uncle Aaron said ancestor spirits travel with sharks along the salty highways, seeing the ocean through deep eyes.

*'When we honour our ancestors, the sharks come to callers. Our shark link keeps community strong.'*

Dad was furious when he learnt Mum let us go to the lagoon edge in an outrigger. And that was before he found out about the shark!

I trace the engraving on the inside of my bangle. Tiny slivers of a rock, which Mum calls obsidian, have been wedged into the shell giving the sharks glittering eyes. With me and sharks, it's a love-hate thing. Having the sharks next to my skin reminds me of my shark calling heritage. That makes me proud. But sharks also freak me out, especially their eyes. It's like I sense a deep kinship with them, but that bond terrifies me.

It didn't scare Ray. He loved sharks. Ray knew hundreds of odd facts about them, like how sharks smell in stereo with a nostril on each side of their head and that they have to keep swimming or they'll sink and die. Ray used to tell me about shark migrations and how at dusk, during the evening rise, sharks feast on smaller sea creatures chasing zooplankton up to the surface.

Ray knew which sharks give birth to live pups and which sharks lay egg sacs. He told me that if the mako we saw was pregnant, then pups would hatch inside her womb and eat the yolk of other unfertilised eggs. Ray once found a washed up mermaid's purse, a shark egg sac. He gave it to me for our thirteenth birthday. It was the most precious gift ever.

The stone shards in my bangle shimmer in the dim cabin light.

*Follow the sharks.*

What did Ray mean? I close my eyes to concentrate and the next thing I know, the cabin lights are on and we're beginning the descent into Brisbane Airport.

We recheck our luggage, eat breakfast at a café and I send emails to my friends. Then we go through customs to wait for our international flight. The rest of the day is spent in planes and departure lounges. We arrive in Port Moresby, then board another flight to New Ireland Province. At last we touch down at Kavieng. I step off the plane into a blast of monsoonal humidity.

'Home at last,' Mum sighs.

Uncle Aaron and Noah are at the airport to meet us.

'Olivia. *Kuka! Welkam. Longpela taim tumas . . .*'

Uncle Aaron's bear-hug almost suffocates me. I smell the sea in my uncle's curly hair and remember happier days with Ray and Noah. Mum cries as her brother holds her close.

'*Orait*, no more tears,' he says, releasing her at last.

The adults climb inside the cab while Noah and I settle in the tray with the luggage. I sneak glances at my cousin, feeling shy. Since our last visit, Noah has grown. He's not quite seventeen, but he already looks like a man. With my freckles and his dark skin, no one would guess we're related.

My cousin is well-built, and despite his runners, jeans and t-shirt, he has a powerful presence that's different to the boys at school. It's a solemn kind of maturity. You can tell he's the son of a shark caller.

I unzip my case and cradle Ray's ashes as we pass Kavieng's beautiful harbour. We drive through wide streets and I smell the ripe breath of the fruit market. I watch women balance their babies in woven *bilum* bags and see men spit red betel nut juice onto the pavement. People here love betel nut. It's called *buai* and you chew it with mustard and lime powder. *Buai* is bright red. When people chew betel nut it looks like their mouth is full of blood. Ray loved making Dracula jokes about it.

As we head out of town on a pot-holed road, I breathe deeply, trying to let go of my sadness. The hot breeze feels alive with leafy smells and we're with family. Surely they'll know how to help.

For the first time in months I want to laugh. There's no reason, nothing's funny. I just feel hopeful in a way I haven't since Ray died. My brother seems closer here.

I smile as we bounce along. Noah watches me, but his gaze doesn't burn. When I catch him staring, he looks into the jungle. A comfortable silence rests between us.

The dive boat is waiting to ferry us to Finsch Island. The twenty-minute trip feels like a bridge to another world. As the breeze catches my hair, I notice Mum biting her lip.

'What's wrong?'

'The wind is blowing from the east,' Mum lowers her voice, 'and there are no sea eagles in the nest above the jetty.'

If Ray and I are of the sea, Mum is of the air.

She loves birds. Mum watches their migrations, the sky and cloud shapes before making any big decisions. I guess we never talked much about Mum's beliefs in Australia, but here the inside and outside worlds feel closer.

'Maybe the eagles are out hunting,' I say.

'Or maybe we should have scattered Ray's ashes where he died.'

'It's okay,' I whisper. 'If the south coast is where Ray needs to be, then he'll find his way on the ocean currents . . .'

My words sound lame, but Mum kisses my cheek.

'Maybe.'

I turn away, squinting into the glare. 'Look,' I say, distracting Mum, 'I can see the aunties waiting on the jetty.'

'*Welkam,*' they call as the dive boat speeds closer.

My aunties smell just the same – a wonderful combination of ginger, mango and seawater. I relax into their warm embrace.

'These arms *long taim* impatient *holim yu,*' Aunt Kyrie whispers.

While she hugs me, Auntie Grace drapes frangipani around Mum's neck.

'We grew your favourite flowers to welcome you,' Noah says. He winks at me and I grin.

'You might look all grown up,' Mum says, ruffling his hair, 'but you're still my sweet little nephew!'

I pass Ray's ashes to Aunt Kyrie. As she cradles the urn, crooning, '*Sori, manki,*' Mum begins to cry again.

\*

There are two villages on Finsch Island. The modern one, where my family runs Sea Star Resort, and Tefi, a traditional village on the far side of the island. Sea Star Resort seems smaller than I remember.

Uncle Aaron leads us on a tour of a new outdoor deck with pathways winding through coconut groves to the bungalows.

'It looks great,' I say, 'but where are all the tourists?'

'Not many coming,' Uncle Aaron replies.

I look into his weatherworn face and sense there's more he isn't saying. 'And the kids?' I look up the hill. 'Don't they usually meet the boat?'

'School closed last year,' Aunt Kyrie says. 'Father Pat pass on. No money for new teacher to take his place. *Nau ol pikinini i stap long Kavieng.*'

'The children have to board in Kavieng,' Auntie Grace explains, 'but they come back on weekends.'

I see my old school room and feel sad. Ray and I had so much fun there, counting shells and racing hermit crabs.

'Surely the money from tourists would be enough to pay for a teacher . . .'

'Not many coming,' Uncle Aaron repeats.

Childhood memories fill my mind as I re-explore the resort. My magic cubbyhouse tree is still standing, with its branches wide open for adventures, but it looks shorter now.

I look over the bay towards the closest island and suddenly catch my breath. An ugly patch of earth separates the dense green forest.

'What's happened to Dugong Island?' I ask.

'*Nogut* cousin sold land to loggers.'

'Who would do that?'

'Jacob.' Auntie Grace replies, pointing to a new boat in the lagoon. 'He married my second cousin's daughter, then sold part of the family forest for a flashy tinny. Now the big men at Tefi want new boats too . . .'

I look towards the far end of our island and, if I squint, I can just make out Tefi village, a cluster of overwater stilt houses. Tefi is separated from our resort by thick rainforest. Ray and I used to walk along a mountain track with Mum to visit her Tefi cousins. The pathway was dark and mysterious. It scared me, so as we hiked, Mum taught us the names of rainforest birds in English and Tok Pisin.

I wonder if the men of Tefi still fish from traditional outriggers and whether the women still weave baskets and string shell necklaces for tourists. People living at Tefi and our Resort Village are loosely related and we share kinship ties with the villagers on surrounding islands. There are about 3500 in our clan group altogether and we're divided into two totems; sea eagle and osprey, depending on our mother's family. Mum's totem is sea eagle, so I am too.

Mum stares at the logging scar on Dugong Island and whispers, 'It's horrible!' Uncle Aaron nods. 'Go and rest now,' he tells her. '*Planti taim* to talk later.'

## MAKO I

Hungry old shark drifts below ocean-skin  
waiting for evening-rise  
ready to feast.

Three pups wriggle inside Mako's belly  
hatched but not yet birthed.

Tiny pups squirm and twist  
feeding on unhatched other-eggs.

Warming-water  
itchy skin  
Mako parasites;  
all multiplying.

Mako leaps into air  
to stop is to sink  
to sink is to die.

She dives deep  
following shark highway  
leaving prickle-acid surface-water.

### 3 Calling

*There is no beginning and no end, only a constant cycling and recycling of substance and experiences.*

Louise Hay, *You Can Heal Your Life*

My aunts have organised a feast to welcome us. There's taro, local greens and sweet reef fish, all my favourites. Over dinner we talk about Ray. My aunts sit either side of Mum, arms touching, encouraging her to talk. I watch Mum's face soften and her shoulders relax.

*'Tumora apinun* we'll take Ray's ashes to the lagoon,' Uncle Aaron says. *'Then kambek Haus Tumbuna.* Light fire and sing him home.'

Aunt Kyrie hums a hymn.

*'Olivia, yu kamaut kanu?'*

Mum shakes her head and Uncle Aaron turns to me.

*'What about you, Kuka?'*

Do I want to go out in the canoe? I bite my lip, wishing Mum had told me more about what happens during the memorial ceremony. Then I remember my twin's voice.

**Watch the ocean.**

*'Okay,'* I say.

Uncle Aaron smiles and pats my hand.

When at last everything about Ray has been said, the conversation shifts to other family matters. I hear how upset my aunts are about the logging, rising malaria rates and being unable to pay for a teacher to replace Father Pat. They chat about what our relations are doing or not doing, and then, much later, I overhear snatches of strange conversation.

*'No kambek, Olivia.'*

*'What do you mean?'*

*'No ansaim singaut.'*

*'But the sharks have always answered . . .'*

My ears prick up at the word 'shark'. I know *ansaim* means answer, but I'm not sure about *singaut*. Perhaps it means 'call'. I look at Mum. Her voice sounds frightened.

'*Samting* change,' Uncle Aaron tells her. 'Sharks go around cave. Elders say now we have to answer their call,' he shrugs, 'but *nogat* Diver.'

I remember Ray's words. **The community needs you.**

If my brother were alive, he'd be old enough to begin the shark caller training.

Uncle Aaron notices me staring. He nods to Noah and my cousin stands.

'You sleepy?'

'Not really . . .'

'I'll walk you to your bungalow.'

I can take a hint. I kiss Mum goodnight. She holds me tight and, for a moment, I think she wants to say something. Then I feel her take a deep breath and let me go. 'I'll be along soon.'

The path to our bungalow is lined with crushed shells. They glow in the moonlight and crunch under my feet. I remember Ray and me running along other shell paths, playing hide and seek. Ray always wanted to win. As I follow my cousin, I worry about the ceremony tomorrow. What is going to happen to my brother's ashes?

We reach our bungalow and Noah says goodnight. Everything inside is just as I remember. The furniture is made from bamboo and wood. Mosquito nets cover our twin beds. I sigh. The walls around me smell safe, like they did when I was little. I change into a sarong and climb under my net. Our hut stands beside a big old frangipani tree. A half-moon shines through the window and I watch fireflies flash invitations between the huge branches. The whirring fan sparks memories of past visits. I feel like a little girl hiding in her cubby.

**Watch the ocean . . .**

The sharks are guarding the entrance to an underwater cave. Someone is inside. I look around, fighting panic. It's me. *I'm* inside the cave, searching for something important.

**It's up to you now, Sis.**

Ray's calling. I have to keep looking. And the sharks are encouraging me. They're on my side.



*The ancestors won't hurt you*, a voice murmurs.

A rattling sound echoes through the cave. Then a weird deep sea anglerfish with massive teeth swims towards me. A light bobs in front of its jaws like a lure on a fishing rod. The light becomes brighter . . . then Mum's voice wakes me.

'Are you all right?'

Soft light patterns the wall and I see Mum standing in the bathroom combing her thick black hair.

'I had such a weird dream.'

'You were calling out in your sleep.' Mum looks nervous. 'Something about sharks.'

'I can't remember,' I mumble, feeling exhausted and rolling over.

Mum leans down and kisses my cheek. 'Is it Ray?'

'I don't know.'

'Go back to sleep,' she says. 'It's still early. If you need me, I'll be with your aunties.' She brushes a strand of hair from my face and makes the sign of the cross. 'I'm so glad you're a girl,' Mum whispers before tiptoeing out of the room.

I wonder what she's talking about, then bury my head under the pillow. The next thing I feel are sticky tentacles. They reach into my dreams, probing my memories.

\*

I see an octopus slide out from under a rock crevice. Its small body holds enough poison to kill a dozen adults. None of the swimmers notice the creature drifting across the sand towards my brother. Ray looks down as its iridescent rings glow. Then a sharp beak nips his leg.

Ray's vision blurs. I thrash against the sheets as toxins paralyse his muscles. He lies on the beach, listening to people shout for help. Ray's muscles contract and his breathing slows. I feel my brother's fear as a young woman tries desperately to save him. Ray wills his body to absorb the girl's life-giving air, but her breathing is jerky. He needs more oxygen than she can give.

While Ray gasps for air, the blue-ringed octopus slips back into a sandy brown disguise and swims away. I see a boy pointing after it, but none of that is important as my brother tumbles towards the light.

Ray is almost there . . .

My twin eyes watch younger versions of our father, mother and grandparents pass before him. I see Ray at school, as a little boy and as a baby. Gus, our old kelpie, scampers in and out of the memories. Then, from far away, I hear myself calling.

‘Wait!’

I watch Ray turn. He looks into the light, then back into my own pleading eyes. The distance between us stretches. Ray looks down. We see people bending over his lifeless body.

Glittering in the shadows at the edge of his vision is a statue, carved into the shape of a shark. Eerie red lights flash around it. A battle rages behind the statue as giant squid and angel shark fight over a whale carcass. Then a huge octopus jets past.

I see my twin falling into a briny chamber

**It’s up to you, he calls. I promised the wobbegong . . .**

‘What’s up to me?’

The light is touching Ray’s face. **The community needs you.**

‘I don’t understand. Ray, wait . . .’

He pauses, but I feel the light calling him. **The sharks will show you the way.**

He swirls into the warm, encompassing radiance.

‘No,’ I yell.

**Izzy, don’t do this . . .**

But it’s too late. I shudder as the light is wrenched away. Ray clutches his ears like the man in Dad’s painting. He plummets down, a puppet dragged by invisible strings, towards a murky curtain of waves. I feel him choke on sulphurous fumes as the waves part. Then nothing is clear.

‘Please show me,’ I mutter.

For the briefest moment I see tentacled creatures waiting. As light bleeds from Ray’s body, the creatures crowd around, feasting on his energy.

\*

I wake again and see light streaming through the window. I scan the corners of the room and realise I'm safe. But what about Ray? What's happened to my brother?

Honeyeaters peep outside the window. I breathe deeply, taking comfort in their calls and the soft smell of frangipani. The nightmare felt so real. I remember the fear in Ray's eyes and shiver. Then I hear Mum's footsteps on the porch. She comes to sit on my bed. I bite my lip, wanting to tell her about my nightmare, but not wanting to worry her. Mum asks if I want to go snorkelling before the ceremony.

'Do you mind if I just read by the pool?'

Mum strokes my hair. 'Of course not.'

I laze on a sun lounge with a book, but can't concentrate. There's too much going on in my head. I look out to sea and think about my friends in Australia.

There are four in our group; Lou, Maggie, Felicia and me. Lou lives next door. She's beautiful, clever and fun to be with. Everyone loves Lou. We've been friends since we were little, even though we're totally different. Felicia is quieter. She plays guitar and has a beautiful voice. Maggie is more middle-of-the-herd like me.

Our group aren't the 'popular' girls who party hard, and we aren't sporty, although we do play soccer in winter. Despite Felicia, we aren't part of the music or arty groups. I guess we have a little bit of everything. One thing we all love is the beach. We spend every summer lazing on the sand and swimming.

I wriggle my toes in the sand and wonder what my friends are doing. *Freezing*, I think, feeling smug to be so far away from the southern winter.

I wish I could chat with them online, but wi-fi on Finsch is slow and expensive. The mail boat stops by twice a week. I make a mental note to write postcards before it arrives. As I compose messages in my mind, I remember Auntie Grace talking about the rising rates of malaria on Finsch Island. Maybe my friends would help me fundraise for mosquito nets. Once I'm home, we could organise a dance or quiz night.

As I begin making plans I realise that this place feels more like home to me than Australia ever has. At school I never said much about my Islander background. Being like everyone else was more important. My friends are great, but here, I don't feel like I have to try to fit in. Even with my fair hair and freckles, I feel loved for who I am – a sea eagle girl from a shark calling family.

Noah walks by and I hold the book in front of my face. Its pages are already curling in the humidity. My cousin gets the message and stays away. After Noah's gone I let the book slip and continue daydreaming. Being alone, not having to worry about everyone trying to cheer me up, is when I feel closest to Ray.

While I lounge by the pool, Mum takes her underwater camera to the reef. She wants to photograph pygmy seahorse. After her dive she returns to check in on me.

'Did you find any seahorse?' I ask.

'No, but I saw three lovely batfish.'

I fake a smile.

Mum studies the clouds and says, '*Nais moning*, hey?'

Since Mum stepped off the boat she's using more of her first language. My own Tok Pisin is rusty, but as I listen to her talk, I'm remembering words that I thought I'd forgotten.

Mum heads back to our bungalow, and a few minutes later my uncle comes over.

'*Kuka, yu laikim kamdaun* beach?'

I close my book. The family are certainly putting in a team effort to watch over me!

'You sleep *orait*?' he asks.

I bite my lip, wondering how to answer.

'I keep dreaming about Ray,' I admit. 'Bad dreams. It's like he's trapped somewhere horrible and I need to help him.'

My uncle perches on the sand. '*Kambek* my dreams too, *Kuka. Nogat wari*, after ceremony, Ray can settle.'

'How do you know?'

'*Tumbuna* guide him. It's what we believe . . . Ray didn't have time to learn shark secrets, but he's twin. And he *bilong* water.' My uncle smiled. '*Olsem yu*.'

I rake the sand with my fingers and wonder whether I do belong in water. My bangle catches the light. Uncle Aaron touches the black stones.

'Your mama saw *longpela* clouds when you and Ray born. So I knew you both special.' He frowns. 'But I didn't see Ray's passing. That was hidden.'

'What do you mean special?'

*'Yumi toktok after ceremony.'*

We walk back to the resort and I find Mum in our bungalow.

'What did Uncle Aaron say?' she asks.

'Just family stuff.'

'You don't have to go out in the canoe if you don't want to.'

'I do want to.'

Mum frowns, then hugs me and whispers, 'Ray would be proud.'

We gather flowers then Mum helps me dress in a traditional way. She drapes strings of shell around my neck and ties back my flyaway hair.

As we walk to the beach, Mum whispers, 'No breeze.'

I'm glad. Mum would be frantic if the wind was wrong today . . .

We wait on the sand as my uncle rubs salt over the prow of his outrigger. Aunt Kyrie tells me he's filling it with magic. Uncle Aaron chants words that sound strangely familiar. Then he dips an obsidian carving into the ocean. Light glistens on the rock's black ridges and its whirling patterns fascinate me. Aunt Kyrie whispers that the rock came from an ancient lava stream.

After Uncle Aaron completes the ritual he calls me. The woven pouch with Ray's ashes is sitting in the prow. I hug Mum then step into the boat, cradling my twin for the last time.

The aunties toss lime-scented herbs into the water as my uncle continues chanting. His deep voice is soothing.

We paddle into the lagoon and Uncle Aaron stops at a smooth channel. I hand him the urn. He unscrews the lid, leans over the edge then frowns. A bloom of jellyfish clogs the shark road.

I shudder. I don't want them anywhere near my brother.

Uncle Aaron pushes the creatures with his paddle. I help, flicking them away with my hands. Suddenly I clutch the edge of the canoe.

A fin is skimming towards us. I breathe fast as a battle-scarred mako slices the water. Its dark, unreadable eyes stare into mine. The shark swings its tail back and forth, scattering the jellies, then sinks under the waves.

My uncle lifts the silver urn. He nods to the shark then sprinkles the remains of my brother into the ocean. I watch tiny fragments of Ray drift down into the clear water. For a moment it feels like I can't breathe.

## MAKO II

Long-shadow crosses shark-road  
Mako hears Smoothskin *kanu*  
splash splashing . . .

Tail thrust  
propelling Mako upwards  
dorsal fin breaking surface-water.

Mako's snout tastes air  
smells Smoothskin;  
more than one.

Little Smoothskin is fear  
and something else;  
a thing once known.

Old Smoothskin lifts *silva* can  
whispery voices *singaut*.

Jelly swarm  
clouding, shrouding  
Mako slashes.

Smoothskin-mist swirls through *solwara*  
touching old sandpaperskin  
blood-memories.

Mako's gills filter ash  
nose-cilia brush crushed bone  
Mako tastes the ashy-voice  
then dives down . . .

#### 4 Watching

*Don't grieve. Anything you love comes around in another form.*

Rumi

After the scattering Mum and I follow the villagers to the Ancestor House. It's nestled in a peaceful enclosure on a hill behind the resort. Frangipani petals are sprinkled along the pathway. By the gate there's a statue of *Mano* the shark god. We step inside. Auntie Grace sprinkles more petals while Aunt Kyrie sings softly.

I stare at the bamboo wall built to honour my brother. It's covered in carvings, masks and figurines – things people have made to remember him.

'Ray's spirit waits in these carvings,' Auntie Grace says. 'Now his ashes have gone to *solwara*, the sea. After the burning, Ray's soul will also be free. Then he can travel with the sharks or go back to the beginning until he's ready for his next life.'

I try to imagine Ray's soul waiting to be reborn. Will his next life be without me? I want my brother to be free, but hate that thought.

I stand in front of a mask that's been carved to represent my twin. The eyes are made of cowry shell. They follow me wherever I go.

Aunt Kyrie says, 'This mask shows Ray's spirit face. It won't be burnt.' She points to other masks. 'They also *bilong tumbuna*. Here's your granny's mask. Ol Granny with wise black eyes. Remember?'

My grandma died when we were three. I remember her dark eyes, but my other memories of her are fuzzy.

'Granny and other *tumbuna* are watching out for you and your twin,' Aunt Kyrie says.

Mum hands me Ray's mask. 'See the shark pattern?' she whispers. 'Uncle Billy carved it. The design came to him in a dream.'

I blink back tears as Mum traces her finger over a wooden storyboard. An image of Ray is swimming through the design, surrounded by schools of fish and stingray.

'Souls of dead come into carvings,' Uncle Aaron says. 'Then go on.'



I wonder how my brother's soul can enter the carvings and be in a shark at the same time, but I'm too embarrassed to ask. I bite my lip, realising how little I know about my island culture. Before I can work out the shark-storyboard connection, Uncle Aaron hands Mum the firelighter. She bends to light the memorial.

Flames crackle and grow. They sweep over the tall bamboo wall. As the carvings catch alight and glow, an edgy feeling tingles through me. I want Ray to be at peace, but this fire makes me even more anxious.

The aunties hug my mother and I turn to Uncle Aaron.

*'Nogat wari, Kuka,'* he says. *'Tumora yumi toktok mo.'*

His words scare me.

If we need to talk more, something must be wrong. I peer at Ray's ceremonial mask. The cowry eyes stare back at me.

'What?' I whisper.

The eyes glint.

## 5 Listening

*What would an ocean be without a monster lurking in the dark? It would be like sleep without dreams.*

Werner Herzog

The next morning I can still see occasional wisps of smoke drifting from embers on the hill.

Mum's eyes are red. I heard her tossing in the night. I didn't sleep well either.

'Do you want to go for a snorkel?' Mum asks.

I shake my head. 'I'm happy reading.'

Mum takes her camera, mask and snorkel to the beach while I escape into my book. At lunchtime she shows me photos of the starfish and nudibranchs she found hiding in the reef. Mum also has a file of old-fashioned negatives.

'What are they?'

'Auntie Grace wants me to redo the website, so I'm looking through old photographs.'

One image shows a shark near an underwater cave. I swallow. The photo is grainy, but it looks like the cave in my dream.

'Where's that taken?'

'At the other side of the lagoon. Why?'

'It's a good shot,' I mutter, trying to make my voice casual.

'I like it too.' Mum smiles. 'There's something special about the way the shark hovers over the rocks.'

'Has it been in the brochures?'

'No, Auntie Grace never used it . . .'

Auntie Grace is the practical one in the family. She did a business course in Kavieng, and everyone knows she has the best sense of what tourists want. Uncle Aaron always asks her what she thinks, even though the other men tease him for it.

'Maybe she's worried that it will scare away tourists.'

'Maybe.'

I help Mum resize her photos and then we wrap text around them. Sitting together working on the brochure is peaceful. We find old photos of turtle hatchlings and dugongs grazing in sea grass.

'Your Aunt Kyrie and I used to swim with dugongs when we were girls,' Mum tells me.

'Here on Finsch?'

'No,' Mum looks across the lagoon. 'There was an underwater meadow just off Dugong Island. We were forever nagging Aaron or your grandpa to take us across. Dugongs are so slow and gentle. Kyrie and I loved wallowing with them.'

'Are the dugongs still there?'

Mum sighed and shook her head. 'Before the logging, Jacob and the other big men from his family used dynamite to fish. They got an easy feed for a while, but they ruined their reef. Kyrie says it's a long time since she's seen a dugong.'

\*

On the third day, Noah ignores my body language. He perches on the edge of my sun lounge and tucks his bright *lap-lap* over his knees. I smile. Even in a sarong, my cousin looks more grown-up than any of the boys back home.

'I'm taking a Japanese couple to Coral Gardens. Do you want to come?'

'Is that where you used to take Ray and me snorkelling?'

He nods. '*Nambawan ples*. We leave in twenty minutes. You need gear?'

'No, I brought my fins and mask.'

'*Em nau!* I'll meet you at the jetty.'

It's weird. Part of me wants to be alone, but another part is glad to be doing something. After knowing Ray was always nearby, being on my own is lonely. Maybe snorkelling will take my mind off the spooky shell eyes on his mask.

I bow to the couple waiting by the boat and try to remember the Japanese greetings we learnt at school.

'*Konnichiwa.*'

The couple grin, bow a few times, then link fingers and turn away.

'Honeymooners,' Noah says, rolling his eyes.

We drop anchor at Coral Gardens and Noah shows the couple how to flip backwards into the sea. As they begin their descent, he turns to me. 'I'm sorry about Ray.'

I stare at the ocean and whisper, 'I should have been with him.'

Noah looks puzzled. Before he can reply, I pull on my mask and step off the deck into the sea. As I swim away, a voice echoes in my mind.

*You couldn't be with him oltaim.*

I look up.

*Maybe it was destiny.*

What the . . .?

I stare at the boat. Noah is settling the anchor chain. I look for the Japanese divers. They're ten metres below, exploring the reef. Ray and I often sensed each other's thoughts, and sometimes we said the same thing at the same time, but *hearing* other voices? That's weird.

Stop imagining things, I tell myself as I swim alongside a huge outcrop of brain coral. The water is warm. I hover above an orange nudibranch, then float on a gentle current. Further along I see anemone fish darting between the arms of their poisonous home. The ocean is clear and visibility is excellent. I can see for at least fifteen metres.

I take a deep breath and dive beneath an overhanging ledge. Cords of rope sponge dangle across crevices, crinoids clinging to each long strand. I swim further away from the boat to explore the other side of the reef and discover a feather duster worm clutching a rock. The last time we were here, Noah showed us how to ease their sticky bodies off rocks. I lift the worm gently, unfurl its lacy tentacles and hold it near my mask. Then I let it go, smiling sadly as it flutters downwards.

*It wasn't your fault.*

The words interrupt my memories.

*But now you must be careful.*

What!

I lift my head out of the water and glance back. The voice sounds like Noah and he's watching me from behind the boat. The distance makes it hard to see the expression on his face, but I can't shake the feeling that my cousin is the one speaking.

The honeymooners turn back and I follow. Noah serves tea and biscuits while they check their charts. I know enough about scuba diving not to interrupt. Dad taught us to leave time between dives.

‘Nitrogen builds up in your body,’ he told us, ‘and the nitrogen makes fizzy bubbles of pressure. Too much pressure and you get the bends.’

When Dad spoke about fizzy bubbles, Ray and I used to make jokes about exploding, but Dad was serious.

‘You don’t want to get the bends,’ he said. ‘It’s a bad business.’

I nibble a sweet biscuit and wonder what Dad’s doing now. Maybe he’s diving too. Then I remember the underwater voice. It sounded so like my cousin, but how could that be possible?

Noah’s eyes avoid mine.

\*

We return to the resort for lunch. I eat quickly then follow the pathway to our bungalow. I need to be alone and think.

My room is peaceful. I watch butterflies outside the window and listen to someone playing ukulele in the distance. As I lie on my bed I remember something that I read online.

It was about the inventor, Thomas Edison. He believed that when someone dies, highly charged entities living in the person’s cells leave the body and enter a new cycle. They might end up in water or in the plants an animal feeds on. Then, if someone drinks the water or eats the animal, part of the person lives on in them . . .

It’s hard to imagine, but if part of us really does live on, then believing that ancestors can travel through sharks isn’t that far-fetched. And it means Ray isn’t gone forever. As two butterflies glide through the open window, I wonder where Ray’s ashes will end up.

‘If you were once grubs,’ I tell the butterflies, ‘then maybe one day Ray and I will be sharks.’

\*

Dusk colours the sky as I walk along the shell path to join my family. It's a clear night and the stars are amazing. We eat dinner around the fire-pit. Aunt Kyrie's baked vegetables wrapped in banana leaves have never tasted better.

After dinner, Noah brings out a ukulele.

'Was that you playing earlier?' I ask.

Noah looks embarrassed and mutters that Auntie Grace is making him learn.

'Tourists love our traditional ukulele welcome,' my auntie explains.

'I didn't know ukulele was a traditional instrument.'

'It isn't,' Noah grumbles. 'US servicemen brought it to the Pacific during the war.'

'But tourists love it,' Auntie Grace says firmly.

I feel sorry for my cousin. He's all grown-up, but no one argues with Auntie Grace once she's decided something. I tell Noah that learning the uke has become really popular in Australia.

'Really?' Noah brightens up. 'I'd rather learn guitar, but some songs by that Hawaiian guy, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, are good.'

We listen to Noah play a scratchy version of 'What a Wonderful World' then settle down to hear Uncle Aaron's clan stories about how things came to be. He talks about the *taim bilong tumbuna* and the Great Darkness before stars shone in the sky. My uncle describes how a chunk of obsidian fell from the dark emptiness. And how this black glass became the eye of the first shark. He says that since that time, both sharks and obsidian have been precious to us.

Some of Uncle Aaron's stories involve sorcery. Our clan believes the physical and non-physical worlds are interwoven, with *masalai*, the spirits living in animals, plants, the wind and trees.

Aunt Kyrie looks past the fire-pit and stares across the lagoon. 'Problems come when we forget to make *kastam*,' she whispers.

Of my two aunts, Aunt Kyrie is the most traditional. She explains the importance of making offerings and saying special words to honour each living thing.

I twirl my bangle. Obsidian slivers gleam in the firelight.

I don't understand everything in the stories, but I do know that the obsidian circling my wrist links me to my shark calling heritage. Its glassy surface reminds me of my grandma's black eyes and is a mirror to my past.

As evening becomes night, Uncle Aaron's voice shifts. He tells legends about brave shark calling ancestors free-diving into caves and tales of ancient battles between sharks and giant squid. My aunties cheer when the sharks win. I bite into a second slice of Aunt Kyrie's coconut pie and sigh. My uncle is the best storyteller. I could listen to him for hours.

At last Uncle Aaron takes a break. There's an easy silence as we watch a satellite pass overhead, then Noah suddenly says, 'How about I teach *Kuka* to scuba dive?'

The aunties smile and I know the offer is staged.

'It's okay,' I say.

Mum strokes my hand. 'But, *Kuka*, you've wanted to learn for so long . . .'

I glare at Mum. She knows my reasons.

'Noah is *nambawan* dive teacher,' Uncle Aaron says. 'Even *mobeta mi*.'

'I'm sure he's fantastic, it's just that . . .'

I stop, knowing any excuse will sound lame.

They wait.

'Okay,' I say, gritting my teeth and forcing a smile. 'Thanks, Noah. That would be great.'

My cousin grins apologetically. He knows I don't want to. 'Let's start tomorrow morning.'

'Okay, I'd better get an early night, then. I'll meet you at the pool after breakfast . . .'

'I'll walk you back to the bungalow,' Mum offers.

Once we're alone, Mum takes my arm. '*Kuka*, I know you and Ray were going to learn scuba together . . .'

'That's right,' I growl, sniffing back tears. 'And Dad said he'd take us for our first dive. Don't you remember?'

'Of course I remember. But your papa isn't here. And Noah is.' She strokes my arm. 'I think Ray would like you to learn.'

'How do you know?'

'I feel it.' She holds her hand over her heart. 'I'm worried about you, *Kuka*. You've been spending too much time alone.'

Talk about the pot calling the kettle black. In Australia, Mum spent hours alone, staring into space. But I don't want to complain. I'm glad she's worried about me. It's a nice change.

'I like being alone,' I say.

'Too much time alone isn't good.'

'I said I'd do it!

'*Orait.*'

As Mum walks back to the family, I kick a shell along the path. I know they're trying to take my mind off Ray. To help me forget. What they don't understand is that I don't *want* to forget. I feel Ray in everything. My memories keep him alive, and that's how I want things to stay.

Tiny shells crackle under my thongs. I turn away from the warm light of the bungalow and wander towards the jetty. As I swing my legs over the water, wafts of sweet frangipani mingle with the familiar smell of seawater.

When we were nine, Ray and I sat here in the evenings with Noah. He loved telling us spooky stories about sharks. I shiver as black waves slap the jetty footings.

\*

The next morning Noah waits in the shallow end of the pool with dive gear.

'You probably know most of the theory, so let's start with practical skills. Jump into the deep end and we'll do a few rounds of buddy breathing.'

'Dad taught me buddy breathing when we were little,' I tell my cousin. 'Ray and I loved taking turns to gulp the last puffs of air from Dad's regulator.'

Noah smiles. 'Aaron used to let me do that, too.'

The next skill is flooding and clearing a mask. After a while we take a break and resurface. Noah helps me climb out of the pool then bends to unzip his dive booties. I stare. Delicate folds of skin fan the space between his toes. He's like me, I think. Or like I was . . .



I glance at the scars along the inside of my toes. They're barely visible but, standing beside my cousin, the pink lines feel like flashing beacons. I remember myself as an eleven-year-old in the day surgery. The doctor called the webbing 'syndactyly'. For some reason, I'd wanted to learn the strange word.

I block the memory and wonder how I never noticed my cousin's feet.

Noah smiles.

*He knows about mine*, I think, looking away.

My cousin hands me a towel. 'Are you hungry?'

I nod.

'*Kuka*, before lunch, there's something I need to show you.'

We hop over the hot sand and flop in the shade of a coconut grove. I lean back, listening to the rustle of palm leaves. Everything is peaceful, except for the worried expression on my cousin's face.

Noah waits for a moment then says, 'Ray was the next twin in line, but he wasn't protected. He should have been wearing this.'

Noah reaches into a bag and takes out a necklace. It's a strand of old-fashioned shell money. In the centre there's an amazing chunk of black rock. Carved into the rock is a small shark symbol.

I touch the glassy stone and my skin tingles. 'What is it?'

'Obsidian.'

'Like the pieces in my bangle.'

Noah nods. 'The islands around the Bismarck Sea are famous for volcano glass.'

I look from the necklace into Noah's worried face.

'The elders call obsidian "shark-eye". We use it in our ceremonies. This piece came from a deep sea trench.'

I hold the rock and shiver. 'What do you mean about Ray being the next twin?' I ask.

'There's a lot to explain. And not much time. It's been over three years since I saw Ray, but I remember him so well. There was something special about him.'

Noah's right. Ray was special. It wasn't just the way he saw things in nature. Everything about my brother was wise and otherworldly. Dad used to joke that Ray had been here before.

I dig my nails into my palms, determined not to cry.

'Ray was the last male twin,' Noah continues. 'Perhaps things would have been different if he'd been wearing this . . .'

'How could a string of shells make a difference to what happened? And what do you mean there's "not much time"?'

'Weather's changing. Windy *taim* is moving into the calmer shark catching season – if shark come!' Noah holds out the necklace. 'I've tried to stay near you, Kuka. *Nau mobeta yu holim dispela oltaim.*'

'I don't understand . . .'

My cousin takes a deep breath. 'We live on land, but our clan belongs to *solwara*.' Noah's voice sounds strange, as if he's reciting a story. 'The sea has always been part of us . . .'

'Noah . . .'

He blinks. '*Sori. Tumas tok.* I'll answer your questions. But in the meantime, *Kuka*, please wear this.'

My cousin looks so concerned. I can't see any harm in wearing his lovely necklace. I bend forward and Noah slips the obsidian over my head.

**Child, there's no time to waste.**

What the . . .?

A jumble of voices echoes through my mind. They whisper urgently, like the shushing sound of a seashell at my ear, and I remember those shadows the night Ray died. A wheezy voice interrupts my thoughts.

**The community needs you.**

**Follow the ancestors,** a second voice hisses as a huge shark image fills my mind.

**It's cold,** another moans.

I frown. That one sounds like Ray. I shake my head until the jumbled voices stop.

'Are you okay?'

I pause, wondering how to answer. 'I don't know. I keep dreaming about Ray being trapped, and now, when you put the necklace around my neck, I hear creepy voices.'

'Let's go for a swim,' Noah says. 'And I'll tell you a story.'

He grabs two snorkel sets and we paddle to the Clam Garden on the far side of the jetty. Noah's necklace feels heavy, but also comforting.

As we approach the giant clams, they snap their blue lips. Noah waits as the oldest clam slowly re-opens. I smile and signal thumbs up.

*They're great, aren't they?*

*What the...?*

Noah grins.

*So it was you that I heard underwater?*

Yep.

*But...*

*Underwater talking is one of the old skills. Not many people practise it anymore. Only traditional shark calling families can still communicate by thought. I guess it's not common in Australia?*

*Um, no...*

*Our family's always had the gift, but we weren't sure whether you could hear the voices.*

I remember how Ray and I understood each other without saying anything. But I thought that was something about being twins. We never *talked* underwater.

Noah's voice interrupts my thoughts. *You need another caller to spark the skill. Last time you were here, I heard Ray's underwater thoughts, but you were a mystery.*

*Did Ray know?*

*He was too young. It's unpredictable until puberty. That's when the elders look for callers.*

*What happens when they find them?*

*They begin training.*

*To learn what?*

*Traditional things. How to make spears, fishing nets and canoes. They learn about stars and navigation, naming fish, reading weather. Things to help protect our reef. Also wokim simple magic; like learning to read ocean currents and finding the shark roads...*

*Shark roads?*

*Smooth currents. The ones our ancestors swim along. Your mama told you how the ancestors travel along them, right?*

*If she did, I wasn't listening carefully . . .*

I see bubbles as Noah exhales. *You know how sharks use underwater . . .* His mind is quiet for a moment and I feel him searching for the right word. *Noise? Bikbikbik . . .*

*Vibrations?*

Noah nods.

I didn't know sharks swam to underwater vibrations, but I block the thought. I don't want my cousin thinking I'm totally hopeless. I try to look as if I understand. Not that Noah can see much of my face under the mask.

*Vibrations travel better on calm currents. That's where shark callers go to shake larung – that rattle made of shell bilong kokonas.*

*Coconut shell?*

*That em!*

*Uncle Aaron took one of those rattles the day we went out with him.* I close my eyes to focus on the memory. *The lagoon was choppy . . .* I see my little-girl self watching Uncle Aaron's oar dip in and out of the water. Then I remember how the ocean became calm. *As we drifted into still water, Uncle Aaron said it was a shark road.*

Noah floats beside me and says, *Tumbuna join shark to travel along the shark roads. When they hear larung shaking, they come to the callers.*

*Isn't this shark calling stuff supposed to be secret?*

*Everyone knows about larung, Noah hesitates, but I do need to tell you something secret.* He lifts his head for a moment and scans the ocean. The current has taken us further into the lagoon. 'Let's wait till after morning tea,' he says. 'Aunt Kyrie was cooking banana bread when we left and I'm starving.'

'Okay.'

'Race you back to the jetty.'

My cousin splashes away. I'm a stronger swimmer than Noah, but today my thoughts make me slow; I'm happy to let him win.

I follow a long arm of reef. Refracted sunbeams light the scales of clown and harlequin fish. They twirl through the coral beneath me with colours so lovely that I forget everything else. As my breathing settles I drift along in a dream.

But as I paddle closer to shore, the bustling reef fades into a wasteland of bleached coral. I see crown-of-thorns starfish hover at the ruined edges, moving outwards, feeding greedily.

*What's happened?* I ask.

Noah is twenty metres ahead but his voice is clear. *We need a Caller.*

I shudder.

\*

Aunt Kyrie's banana bread is heavenly. After enjoying a couple of slices, Noah and I walk to the Ancestor House. I sit by Ray's mask and my cousin crouches beside me.

'I'm glad you can hear the voices.'

I raise my eyebrows.

'You're needed, *Kuka*. That's why the family want me to teach you to dive and to explain about the voices and some of the old customs.'

'Okay.' I sift warm sand through my fingers and wait for him to begin.

'Our community has been calling sharks for generations,' Noah says, 'and we use deep sea obsidian for our ceremonies . . .'

I feel the weight of the necklace.

'But there's another connection to obsidian, a secret tradition tied to shark *puripuri*.'

My skin tingles. *Puripuri* means magic. I've always wanted to learn the shark secrets.

'When *solwara* isn't in balance, sea creatures *singaut*. Sometimes the sea turns milky. Sharks stop coming. When that happens we need a Diver to make an offering.'

A feeling of déjà vu sweeps through my body. I remember the painting in Dad's office and Ray saying that the sea sounded different. I want to tell Noah about the shrieking fish at Abalone Cove, but something stops me.

'You've seen the bleached coral and jellyfish swarms . . .'

I look across to the logging scar and nod.

'The elders tell a story about a twin who comes from somewhere else, like you. They say this Diver will be able to communicate underwater.' Noah hesitates. '*Olgeta* believe that when the reef is dying, this other-place Diver will bring balance. They thought Ray was the one. When he died the community lost hope, but now the elders believe there's another who can dive into the cave.'

'What cave?'

'It's on the far side of the lagoon.'

I remember Mum's photo.

'The cave leads to a hydrothermal vent . . .'

'I saw a TV show about an underwater vent,' I tell Noah. 'Lava was bubbling into the ocean. There were ghost crab and other weird things crawling around steaming chimneys.'

'This cave is similar but it's not just ghost crab living at this vent. The elders say there are hagfish, giant squid and other strange creatures.' Noah pauses then adds, 'They live by a statue of Mano.'

'What's this got to do with me?'

'In the olden days, the *Taim bilong tumbuna*, our community had closer links with the sea. Some people lived on boats and never came ashore. Other villages were built over water like Tefi. Now our clan lives on land, but shark magic still ties us to the ocean. We do *kastam* ceremonies and sharks come, but now something is wrong. Sharks swim around the cave, not *ansaim larung* . . .'

Noah switches to Tok Pisin and I know enough words to guess that he's explaining the importance of keeping tradition.

'I still don't understand what obsidian has to do with sharks swimming around a cave instead of coming when you call?'

'When the other-place Diver takes an offering to the statue, that will stop *puripuri*. Bring back balance.'

Sorcery is a big thing in PNG. Like Mum, villagers can be devout Christians, and still believe in evil *masalai* and *poisen men*. Dad said *puripuri* was just superstition, but for Mum *puripuri* is everywhere.

I stare at Noah. On the surface, my cousin loves his mobile phone and tablet, but I'm pretty sure he agrees with Mum when it comes to sorcery and magic.

'What kind of *puripuri*?' I ask.

'*Wanblut puripuri*.'

That means family sorcery, but for our clan *wanblut puripuri* also covers things like shark callers learning to shape-shift and ancestors being able to travel with sharks. I frown. I still don't understand why sharks would return just because someone dives into a cave, but when I look into Noah's serious eyes, I see how important this is to him. I twirl my bangle, wondering what to say. I don't get it, but the people I love believe this legend and being accepted by them is important to me. I listen as Noah explains that diving into the cave is our clan's most important ceremony, and that laying obsidian on the undersea shark statue is how we honour our ancient link to sharks.

'So the Diver goes through a sea cave and makes an offering,' I say. 'What happens after that?'

'After the Diver leaves a piece of black glass for shark god Mano, he brings back another piece of deep sea obsidian for our land ceremonies – if he returns.'

'If he returns?'

'Some don't,' Noah replies.

I stare out to sea. Sometimes I wish we'd never moved to Australia, then I'd belong fully to one culture and it would be easier to believe. But is using black glass for prayer and shark ceremonies any less weird than praying with holy water? If you believe in something enough, maybe it works.

Noah is still talking. He explains that the elders thought Ray would be the Diver.

'Did Ray know about this?'

'For sure! *Em harim stori*.'

I remember how excited Ray was when he found the sea cave at Abalone Cave and how determined he was to dive into it. Is that why? Did Ray hear the older men talking about this tradition in the men's house when he was little? And if Ray knew, why didn't he tell me?

'The balance has held for a long time,' Noah continues. 'But, now the reef is dying and some parts of the lagoon have an acid-smell.'

‘That’s because of pesticides from the logging.’

‘Maybe, but the callers hear ocean creatures screaming and we’ve had milky seas. We know that’s a sign from the ancestors.’

‘What do you mean “milky seas”?’

‘Sometimes the ocean turns blue-white. Scientists say it’s because of bio shiny-light things.’ He puts his fingers together to show something tiny. ‘*Liklik samting . . .*’

‘Bacteria?’

He nods and tells me that you can see milky seas from satellite photos on the web. ‘Sailors wrote about them long ago. They’re even in Jules Verne’s book, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.’

‘Ray loved that book!’

Noah smiles. ‘Me too.’ He stares at Ray’s ceremonial mask. ‘Milky seas used to be rare, but not now. And when the sea is cloudy, jellyfish come in swarms that smother the reef. *Solwara orait, nogat jellipis*.’

‘It could be the herbicide . . .’ I say, but Noah keeps talking about swarms being linked to the diving legend. I stare across the lagoon, confused about what’s real and what isn’t.

Then Noah describes a deep sea creature that can change into octopus form. *Narakain*, he calls it. I think he means something like shape-shifting.

‘Sounds creepy,’ I say. This must be another folk tale I haven’t heard.

‘*Olgeta* call this *narakain* creature Pyrena. When the sea is milky and sharks ignore Callers, a twin must dive into the cave to face her. You and Ray were the last twins born into our shark calling clan.’

Sweat prickles my forehead. ‘I don’t know anything about milky seas or diving into caves . . .’

‘Last time this happened your parents were so worried, they took you to Western Australia. They wanted Ray far away from the Diving ritual. After you left, *solwara* settled – until Ray’s passing. Now the problems have started again. We need a Diver.’ Noah stares at me. ‘A Diver who is a twin.’

‘The world is full of twins.’

‘Not twins from a shark calling bloodline.’

‘I thought only men could learn shark secrets.’



'Shark callers have always been male, but once there was a female Diver. A long time ago . . .'

I feel my eyes widen.

'You're the only twin and you hear voices. Maybe it's you *solwara* is waiting for, not Ray.'

'How can I be the one? I grew up in the west.'

'There's enough Islander in you to understand.'

The skin below my necklace itches.

*Listen to the ocean.*

Noah frowns. 'You must try, *Kuka*. There's no one else.'

To an outsider, Noah's story would sound crazy. How can milky seawater be caused by some shape-shifting octopus? It doesn't make sense, but I can't shake the feeling that what my cousin says has some truth. I've seen the ghost coral and jellyfish blooms, and Ray heard fish scream. Despite the ceremonies, I know my brother still isn't settled. And if Ray *is* caught up in this imbalance, I'll do anything to help him.

Noah points to the waning moon in the sky. 'Four days till neap tide. If you're the one, that's the best time to enter the cave.'

'And what if I'm not?'

'Only way to find out is to meet the gatekeeper.'

I bite my lip. Four days isn't much time. I remember the mako's black eyes, and for a moment my imagination sees Ray's face shining through them. It feels like the pieces of a puzzle are beginning to fall into place and that all the strange things since Ray's death have been pulling me towards this moment. Maybe it is all linked, but not in the way Noah thinks.

In Australia I'm part of a coast-care action group. I'm good at researching organisations and writing letters. If Noah lends me his laptop, maybe I could find out who owns the logging companies and what kinds of chemicals they use . . .

'Well?' Noah asks.

'I'll meet the gatekeeper if you want me to,' I whisper, 'but I don't think I'm a leader. I always followed Ray.'

My cousin smiles. 'I believe you're the one.'

'You haven't seen me for years. How can you be sure?'

Noah looks into my eyes and touches my shoulder. 'I just know,' he replies softly.

## MAKO III

Pup-heavy Mako follows swirling shark-highway  
sensing little Smoothskin  
*solwara* holds her flesh-smell.

Mako dives  
circling *bikpela* clam  
and OI Granny *tumbuna* spirit  
tumbles towards her  
whispering all-share-memories.

Granny floats alongside Mako  
then climbs aboard  
tickling the pups.

Waiting  
waiting  
all are waiting.

## 6 Learning

*The object of any magick ceremony is to unite the macrocosm and the microcosm.*

Aleister Crowley, Equinox

Aunt Kyrie calls us to lunch. As I pile yam and salad onto my plate, she nods approvingly at the necklace. I tuck the obsidian inside my t-shirt and sit by Mum. She's staring into space again.

'Good lesson?' Auntie Grace asks.

'*Kuka's* doing really well,' Noah says. 'We're learning about dive tables and equalising.'

'And after lunch we're going for an ocean dive,' I add.

Auntie Grace squeezes my hand. 'It's good that you learn quickly.'

Mum lands back on earth long enough to smile. 'Ray would be so proud,' she whispers.

Aunt Kyrie sits on the other side of me. '*Gut ting yu wear tumbuna necklace,*' she whispers. '*Tumas puripuri hia.*'

'What did you say?' Mum asked.

'*Nating,*' Aunt Kyrie fibs, stroking my cheek. 'Just telling *Kuka* how beautiful her freckles are.'

*Puripuri*, the word for magic and sorcery, has nothing to do with freckles, but I play along with my aunt and say nothing. With my fair colouring, I've always been the family novelty on Finsch Island.

'What did you mean about the gatekeeper knowing?' I whisper to Noah. 'Is he one of the elders?'

'The gatekeeper is a cuttlefish.'

'You're joking?'

Noah frowns. It seems he isn't.

'*Kuka*, this is serious. We need a Diver, but if you're not the one, you won't be allowed to enter.'

'Okay, so if I'm not the one, I can read my book and sunbake . . .'

He nods then turns away.

As I watch my cousin walk down the beach, I feel like I've somehow offended him.

\*

Noah says he'll take me to the cave to meet the gatekeeper after one more dive. We go to Billie's Bommie, a smaller island across the lagoon, and practise a walk-in dive.

As we clip our fins, I remember snorkelling here with Dad. It's a happy memory. Whenever he returned from a dive, Dad let Ray and me swim in the shallows, taking turns to buddy breathe, using up the last of the air in his tank. We loved being able to stay underwater without having to come up.

'Ready?' Noah asks.

'Yep.'

We pull on our masks and walk backwards into the sea. Noah goes through a skills check on the sandy bottom at eight metres, then he leads me to the edge of the reef. We circle colonies of orange and red coral. Once I've sorted my buoyancy, Noah lets go of my hand and swims beside me.

He points to a cluster of nudibranchs wriggling along an overhang. Their bright colours are like lollies at a party. We drift over a swarm of garden eels hiding in the sand. Then Noah checks my air gauge.

*Still plenty air. Want to go deeper?*

I signal okay, forgetting for a moment that Noah can hear my thoughts. We sink down to fifteen metres and swim past a Gorgonian coral fan. Its filigree arms shift with the current.

*You need to fold hands over your weight belt. Not flap about . . .*

*Easy for you to say.*

*Sorry.*

*Oops, can you hear all my thoughts?*

*Only underwater. Once you practise, you can block private thoughts.*

Having Noah in my mind feels weird.

*Weird for me too, he says.*

I smile as he points to a Leafy Scorpionfish. Being with Noah is comfortable. Almost like being with Ray, but different . . .

*Kuka, I wish there was time to teach you more about diving and underwater talking, but solwara is humming. Lots of strange messages. There are other things I need to explain.*

As we drift over a grazing sea slug, I tuck the obsidian necklace into my dive suit. A crowd of voices return. Some are muffled, others sound closer. I stop kicking.

*Steady your buoyancy!*

I listen to Noah and refocus on breathing, but I can't stop spinning.

*Orait, swim back now.*

I signal okay and follow my cousin, trying to ignore the voices. Maybe I'm going mad.

*No.* Noah's voice is gentle and I feel his eyes watching from behind his mask. We swim up to ten metres. Noah waits as I float along on my own for a while. I guess he knows I'm struggling to make sense of the things he's told me. Could the obsidian really have protective power? And what about the voices? If I can communicate underwater, maybe other things I don't understand are also possible.

I swim closer to Noah.

*You haven't explained how this affects our reef,* I tell him, focusing hard on communicating.

*No need to shout!* Noah hovers beside me.

I fold my hands over my weight belt and steady my buoyancy.

*The community needs balance on land and also in the ocean. Tumbuna ancestors travelling in shark see problems. They see jellyfish and bleaching, so the ancient ones are not settled. Diving into the cave links us to tradition. Shows tumbuna respect. Restores balance . . .*

Noah is quiet for a moment. He checks my air gauge then continues.

*When the ocean cries out, we mekim ofa to Mano. Also mekim ofa on land – through singsing ceremonies and dance. The 'shark-eye' stone, obsidian, is part of that. Volcano glass is a gateway to darkness. And light. Without obsidian, the ceremonies can't work. Nogat obsidian, nogat kastam.*

We surface and Noah switches to spoken words as if it were as natural as breathing.

‘Our community’s changing,’ he says. ‘Children go away to school. Men work on other islands. They bring back money and new ideas. Some things are great.’ He smiles. ‘I love checking out YouTube videos, even though our wi-fi range is patchy, but some other things aren’t as great.’ Noah looks across the lagoon.

‘Like Jacob selling land to a logging company?’

Noah nods. ‘We need money to keep the clinic stocked, and to pay the health nurse to visit. Every family wants to send their children to school and to buy mosquito nets for their beds. You know how bad malaria is here.’

I nod, remembering the tablets Dad made us take when we were little.

‘Logging companies offer quick money, but if our reef and forests die, no tourists will come. *Kastam* keeps the community strong. Then visitors come to watch our *kastam* ceremonies.’ Noah sighs. ‘Jacob isn’t the only one who’s become greedy. Men who work for loggers are able to buy with cash instead of bartering. They get new fishing nets and radios. When one villager gets western things, others want them too. With better boats, men catch more fish and have money to pay for medicine and school fees. I understand how it happens, but I hope the villagers on Finsch won’t sell our future to a logging company. I want to keep the old ways as well as the new ones.’

I don’t know what to say. I’ve never heard Noah speak like this. I busy myself with rinsing sand out of my dive gear.

As we motor back to the resort, Noah whispers, ‘There used to be ten shark callers. Now there are five. And I’m the only young one.’ He shrugs. ‘*Tumas* change.’

We join the rest of the family to share a fruit platter on the patio and Noah strums the ‘Banana Boat Song’ on his ukulele. Auntie Grace loves the Day-O part.

As I reach for a slice of papaya, the necklace swings against my chest. I tuck it into my shirt and my fingers brush against the shark carved into the obsidian. Sulphur stings my nostrils.

I blink. Everything’s dark. I’m falling into a pit, the same pit I saw the night Ray died, but my brother can’t see me. He’s waiting for someone. Or something.

Mud bubbles over me, filling my nose and oozing into my lungs. I cough until the real world shifts back into focus. I look into my aunt's worried eyes then fall backwards into the pit again.

I see tortured creatures and smell their gamy breath. They're prodding my brother. Tentacles brush my arms and I watch in horror as they slash Ray. His flesh has wasted away. My twin is little more than a shrivelled spark, but still they continue. I hold my breath as his spark flickers.

*'Kuka, yu orait?'*

My uncle's strong voice hauls me upwards. I squint into the bright light.

Mum asks what's wrong but all I can do is shake my head. 'Ray,' I moan, unable to say more.

Mum reckons I have sunstroke. She puts me to bed then sits on the verandah reading. Each time she comes to check on me, I close my eyes, pretending to doze. I need to think.

I spend the next hour wondering what's happening to me. I listen to the generator and watch the fan spin, trying to make sense of everything. By dinnertime I'm still confused, but I'm also hungry. I tell Mum I'm feeling better and we follow the path to the main resort. Noah sits next to me at the table.

'Are you well enough to dive tomorrow?' he asks.

I feel fine, but Mum isn't keen on the idea. 'You need to take it easy,' she says.

'I'm okay. I just forgot to drink enough water.' Mum is always reminding me to drink water, so it's the perfect answer.

'We won't go deep,' Noah promises, 'and I'll keep *Kuka* beside me all the time.'

'You said you want me to get my dive ticket . . .' I add.

Mum doesn't want to let me go, but she also doesn't want me spending time alone. After a bit more persuading she agrees. I twist a strand of hair around my fingers. Misleading Mum makes me feel sick.



## 7 Seeking

*I cannot alone change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.*

Mother Teresa

My alarm buzzes at five-thirty. For a moment I wonder where I am. Then I hear waves tumbling onto the reef. As I change into my bathers, Mum opens her eyes.

‘I’m going for a dive with Noah,’ I whisper.

‘Have fun,’ she mumbles, pulling the sheet over her head.

I gather my gear and join my cousin at the jetty.

‘Morning,’ I call.

‘Morning. How are you feeling?’

‘Excited,’ I say, surprising myself.

‘We should be doing this the traditional way,’ Noah mutters as he unties the motorboat’s mooring ropes, ‘but no *taim*.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Should be sailing to the cave in an outrigger canoe. One that’s been carved by hand and sealed by rubbing coral paint into its belly.’

‘Where would we find a canoe like that?’

Noah stares at me. ‘Every shark caller makes an outrigger as part of their training. I spent half a year on mine. Aaron has one too. Remember, he took you out in it when you and Ray were little?’

I watch Noah fire the motor. My cousin wears modern brands and loves technology, but I realise there’s another Noah, one I hardly know, a shark calling Islander trying to continue the old ways.

‘What?’ he asks.

‘Nothing.’

Noah eases the motorboat from its mooring and soon we’re gliding into the lagoon. Long pairs of clouds float above us.

‘Is it far?’

‘The cave is on the edge of this channel.’ He points to an ocean chart above the wheel and explains that when the tide changes, water from the Bismarck Sea flows into our lagoon then races through a channel into the open waters of the Pacific. ‘In the olden days, Divers used the surge to go into the cave.’

‘Like free-diving?’

He points to the scuba tanks. ‘Timing’s not so important now, but it’s when the guide will be waiting. Besides,’ Noah grins, ‘riding the current is fun!’

Noah studies the water as we cross the lagoon. We pass a smooth trail between the waves. ‘Shark road,’ he whispers.

I stare into the dark water, remembering the eyes of that huge mako. Sharks live up to thirty years. Maybe the same creature is still down there. Circling below us....

‘Is the gatekeeper really a cuttlefish?’

He nods.

‘So you’re going to let a cuttlefish decide whether I should do this dive?’

‘If you’re not the one, the gatekeeper won’t let you pass.’

I roll my eyes. ‘Cuttlefish give me the creeps. Did you know they have green blood?’

Noah’s face is suddenly serious. ‘*Kuka*, whatever creature you meet in the cave, you must be respectful.’

‘Okay.’

‘Your life may depend on it.’

‘Okay, I get it!’

As Noah points to another shark road, I touch the obsidian around my neck. Voices whisper over the waves. The messages are still a jumble, but I’m less scared of them now. If I focus hard, I can even understand some of their words.

Noah drops anchor and I peer into the water, imagining shark eyes staring up at me. Don’t be silly, I tell myself, Noah wouldn’t put me in danger.

‘Ready?’

I hesitate for a moment, then nod.

‘Good, but before we go into the cave, I want to show you one of my favourite places.’

We clip on our tanks and scissor-step off the back of the boat. I follow Noah along the shark road towards a small grotto in the reef. Huge clams nestle in a garden of coral. Their blue lips pucker as we approach. They're even more stunning than the clams we saw yesterday.

*Lukim.*

Noah points and I stare at the coral.

*What?*

*There . . .*

*I can't see anything.*

Noah moves his finger closer and then I see it, a tiny pink seahorse. The animal's tail curves around a branch of coral as it sways on the current. The only flaw in its tricky camouflage is a pair of transparent whirring fins. They remind me of Noah's toe webs.

*What is it?*

*Pygmy seahorse.*

The seahorse is covered in coral-coloured lumps with pale, silver-streaked skin.

*Mum was looking for one to photograph. I wish I had her camera . . .*

*In the old stories, seahorse guide spirits across the ocean.*

*It's so tiny. Like a mini Pegasus.*

Noah taps my arm. *Come on, we better keep moving.*

We swim a few metres further, then Noah hovers over a hole in the reef.

It's the place in my dreams. I'm excited to know that it exists, but if I haven't imagined this, then does that mean everything else is real too? My breath quickens and Noah swims beside me.

*I've never swum in the dark! I mind-yell.*

*It's only ten metres down to the cave entry, so this first drop gets plenty of light, but if it makes you feel better, we can use my torch to check the crevices. He flicks it on. I told you, Kuka, the community would never forgive me if anything happened to you. Noah grins. I'd never forgive me, either.*

My regulator burbles as I steady my breath.

*I'm right beside you.*

*Okay.*

I deflate my buoyancy vest and we drift down. The hole widens into a wide chute that's about four metres across.

*There's a rope,* Noah tells me, pointing to the side of the chute. *The Diver follows it down to the beginning of the cave. On the way back, he holds onto the rope for a decompression safety stop while the nitrogen in his blood settles.*

*Why would the Diver need a safety stop if it's only ten metres?*

*The cave entry is ten metres. After that no one knows how deep it gets ...*

I shudder and Noah takes my hand.

*Come on, let's see if the gatekeeper recognises you.*

*The cuttlefish?*

*That's right.*

It's probably not so bad, I think, remembering the small cuttlebones that wash onto the sand at Abalone Cove.

Then I look down.

This cuttlefish is huge.

It scurries forwards from a ledge, dancing as it changes colour. The creature's tentacles open and close. Noah reaches past them to stroke its forehead. A tentacle flicks towards me. Noah keeps stroking. I stay back.

The cuttlefish stops swelling and Noah turns to me.

*Come closer.*

I wait for the gatekeeper's colour to settle. When it's a quiet yellowy-brown, I swim towards it. I'm less than a metre away when a flash of wild electric blue ripples across its bulbous body.

*I've never seen cuttlefish ripple,* Noah mind-yells. *You are the one!* he adds, as patterns of colour flash across the creature's swaying body. *I heard the story when I was a boy, but wasn't sure that it was true . . .*

There's a new tone of respect in my cousin's voice.

*The ripples mean that the cuttlefish will let us pass,* Noah tells me.

I feel both terrified and proud.

The cephalopod sentry drifts above the rock ledge and quivers in front of me. Its tentacles touch my forehead. I stifle a scream. Noah nods as I force myself to float in front of the cuttlefish.

*You're doing well . . .*

The cuttlefish curls its tentacles. It seems to want me to follow.

The sentry leads us deeper. We drift down until we come to a gap in the rock, the cave entrance.

Fleshy strands writhe around the dark entry like the mythical snakes of Medusa. Each tentacle ends in a mussel-like shell, with feathery tendrils.

*Look out, Noah warns. Goose barnacles – a poisonous kind. Don't brush against them.* Then he points to circular outlines in the sand. *Stingrays guard the entrance against intruders.*

*If I dive, how would I get past them?*

*Gatekeeper has accepted you, Kuka, so you're not an intruder.*

*Smarty-pants.*

Harim yu, Kuka!

*Good!*

I refocus on my breathing. This feels totally weird, but if diving into the cave was my brother's destiny, then maybe it's where I'll find Ray, or whatever it was he was searching for at Abalone Cove. I peer into the entrance. There's so much I don't know, but the gatekeeper has accepted me. That's a start . . .

I stare at my hands, expecting to see flashes of cuttlefish blue. It seems incredible. A week ago I was hiding in school toilets. Now I'm hanging out with cuttlefish.

*We used to see stingray at Abalone Cove, I tell Noah as we hover over the circles in the sand. Ray was really good at finding them.*

*Maybe they tried to protect him.*

*If they did, they missed that blue-ringed octopus.*

*Octopus puripuri is powerful magic.* He points into the cave. *If you dive, the guide will be waiting to lead you further.*

*What kind of guide?*

*An anglerfish.*

*With one of those lures on its head?*

Em nau!

*What happens then?*

*The elders say the guide leads the Diver to the first air pocket.*

*Divers used to have to free-dive. Noah taps my tank. Now, you don't need to worry.*

*How could anyone hold their breath for that long?*

*There are air pockets in the cave. And Divers learn to hyperventilate. Like those guys in Big Blue.*

*What's that?*

*My favourite movie. Noah checks my air and helps me inflate my vest. As we rise, I see the cuttlefish quietly camouflaged on a ledge.*

*See you, I think.*

*The cuttlefish raises a tentacle. A stream of bubbles explode from Noah's mask, and I know he's laughing.*

*Don't tell me it understood?*

*Noah's eyes smile from behind his mask. Inside the cave, you'll understand other sea creatures. But they'll also understand you. Nidim lukaut long.*

*We wait a few metres below the surface to re-regulate the nitrogen in our blood. Noah holds my arm as I steady my buoyancy. His hand is warm and, for a moment, confidence washes through my body.*

\*

*We surface and climb onto the boat. I try to make sense of the cuttlefish's behaviour and what it means. Even above water, Noah seems to be able to read my thoughts.*

*'You are the one, Kuka.'*

*A deep intuition tells me he's right.*

*'If I could take your place, I would.'*

I unclip my dive vest. Being chosen by the cuttlefish makes the diving ritual feel real, but if I am the one, I need to know a lot more. I ask Noah to tell me what else the Diver does in the cave.

'It's better if Aaron tells,' Noah says, starting the engine, 'and if we hurry back, the breakfast buffet will still be open.'

Uncle Aaron is waiting at the jetty. So are some of the island children, home after a week in Kavieng. They wave and do bombies into the water as we approach.

*'Moning,'* they squeal.

I smile and wave back. Ray and I spent hours jumping off the jetty when we were little.

Uncle Aaron grabs a rope to help Noah secure the boat. *'Em?'* he asks.

*'She's the one,'* Noah replies.

Uncle Aaron takes my arm to steady me, and before I can figure out whether he's proud or sad, Uncle Aaron suggests we talk more after breakfast.

*'And Kuka . . .'*

*'Yes?'*

*'Mobeta yu don't tell Olivia.'*

\*

I've only been gone two hours, but it feels longer. As I walk to our bungalow, I wonder whether hiding something this important from Mum is right.

'How was the dive?' she asks.

'Great.' I hang my towel on the verandah and step under the shower. 'We saw a pygmy seahorse.'

'You lucky thing. Where did Noah take you?'

I turn the shower full blast and pretend I can't hear her asking for more details.

Mum taps on the bathroom door and calls, 'I'll talk to you later. I promised Auntie Grace that I'd work on the graphics for the new pamphlet.'

## MAKO IV

Mako circles mystery-cave  
eyes dilating  
scenting little Smoothskin.

Inside-belly-pups  
nip and push;  
almost time . . .

Mako dives deeper  
her liver oil shifting  
adjusting buoyancy.

She turns towards distant pupping waters  
snapping mackerel  
chasing krill.

One last birth migration  
before *kastam* ceremony.



## 8 Recognising

*Somewhere help is waiting and the beaters are driving me there.*

Franz Kafka

Before Uncle Aaron and I have a chance to talk, I see Mum arguing with someone in the office. Suddenly Mum strides away. I hurry after her.

‘What’s wrong?’

‘That man makes me so mad!’

‘Who is he?’

‘Another cousin.’

I look back at the man. He looks vaguely familiar.

‘Do you remember your grandmother?’ Mum asks.

Granny’s beautiful dark eyes come to mind. ‘A little . . .’

‘Remember how I told you that your Granny Audrey had a twin?’

‘Yes, she was called Ruth, and that’s where you got your middle name.’

‘That’s right. Well, that man is Ruth’s oldest son, Saul. He used to be my favourite cousin but he’s changed . . .’

‘What did Uncle Saul want?’

‘To sell land to the loggers.’ Mum shakes her head. ‘For new fishing boats!’

‘What!’

‘Don’t worry, *Kuka*, he won’t be able to. The land isn’t Saul’s to sell.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘The land on Finsch is owned by women.’

‘I know that, but why is Saul arguing with you?’

‘Because the land from here to Tefi belongs to me and Kyrie.’ She smiles. ‘And to you after we’re gone.’

\*

My thoughts whirl as I walk along the track to the Ancestor House. I know our clan is matrilineal, but Mum never told me she owned land. Or that one day I would.

I open the gate and step into the enclosure. A rectangular stone stands in place of the bamboo wall that was burnt for Ray. I touch the charred earth and gaze at my brother's ceremonial mask.

'Everything is changing, Ray. I don't know what to do.'

The cowry eyes stare back at me.

Then I notice Uncle Aaron sitting under a tree carving a storyboard. 'Is your mama *orait?*' he asks.

'I think so . . .' I sit beside my uncle and he strokes my cheek.

Looking into Uncle Aaron's face is like looking at a crumpled old map. His deep brown eyes are safe harbours beneath wild bushy brows.

Uncle Aaron points to the statue by the gate and asks if I know what it is.

'Mano, the shark god.'

My uncle is quiet for a moment, then he says, '*Yu harim tumbuna?*'

I touch the necklace and nod.

'That's good.'

As Uncle Aaron carves, he tells me more about the lagoon. He explains that in the *Taim bilong tumbuna* a volcano erupted and dissolved minerals gushed from the core of the earth into the ocean. He says that strange creatures spawned in this mix and that now they live by a vent in a deep trench under the lagoon.

I remember the piglet-sized eels I saw on TV and the viperfish and vampire squid. They looked too weird to be true, but I suppose the shape of a hammerhead would be hard to believe if you'd never seen one . . .

Uncle Aaron explains how our *tumbuna* travel with angel shark and goblin shark along the ocean highways down to this deep trench. He says the community has always known strange creatures live near the vent. Then, in the 1970s, scientists began finding the creatures too.

'Science *pela toktok* acidity. *Toktok* coral bleach. *Tumas* chemical. *Tumas* logging. No good for *solwara*, no good for our reef.'

Uncle Aaron points to the statue of Mano.

'I'm shark caller, *Kuka*. Sharks swim to me along shark roads. I hear *tumbuna* voices when I shake coconut shell *larung*. Science is part, but so are old stories. Not seeing doesn't mean not true.'

I think about my brother and his uncanny intuition, and know my uncle is right. Modern science can't explain everything.

Uncle Aaron points across the lagoon. 'Science *pela* found Megamouth in 1976, but we always knew he was there. *Nau tumas* jellyfish. *Tumas* thorny crown. *Nidim* Diver. *Nidim* deep sea obsidian . . .'

'But if the loggers' chemicals are causing acidity and coral bleach, how will bringing back obsidian make a difference?'

'Obsidian gives community hope,' Uncle Aaron replies. 'To make *kastam* ceremonies, we need obsidian. Twin must Dive, *mekim ofa*. But only twins from shark calling family can Dive.'

'Why?'

'Always *bin*.' He stares out to sea. 'Cuttlefish ripples, but doesn't explain.'

'And if there are no twins . . .'

Uncle Aaron shrugs. '*Tumas* chemical,' he mutters, looking across at the logging scar.

'Shouldn't the Diver know the shark calling secrets?' I ask. 'What about the other shark callers?'

'All too old now, but you have shark caller blood, *Kuka*.'

I twist my bangle. Slivers of volcanic glass catch the light. 'Noah said you'd explain more about diving into the cave before I decide.'

My uncle draws a map in the sand and uses tiny shells to outline a tunnel that leads through the cave. He marks places where there are air pockets then circles one chamber with a huge wall of obsidian. My mind sees it shimmer. Uncle Aaron explains how generations of Divers have chipped chunks from this wall to take deeper as an offering to Mano.

'Shark statue holds power,' he says, 'but also danger.'

I remember the glittering shark effigy at the edge of Ray's vision.

'What kind of danger?'

'*Narakain* creature.'

'Noah told me about a strange octopus . . .'

'I'd give my life to protect you, *Kuka*, or go in your place, but I'm not the one. You're a strong swimmer and I'm a clan elder. I have to ask you to try.'

I watch the broad wings of a sea eagle glide over gentle waves and wonder what my friends at home would think. Lou would probably smile and roll her eyes if I tried to explain that rituals are part of everyday life here, but Felicia would love that we believe everything has spirit. There are ceremonies for each leaf and tree and bird. I sigh. People see sharks swim to the *larung* as they paddle over shark roads. They see starfish and jellies damaging their reef and believe it's linked to sorcery. I reckon it's linked to logging, but maybe there's room for both.

'Easier to understand if you grow up here,' Uncle Aaron whispers. 'On Finsch, *puripuri* is part of life.'

That's true. The necklace feels warm on my chest, but my western side keeps questioning. There are so many reasons *not* to do this, but if diving helps keep the clan strong, then it seems selfish to not at least consider it.

Uncle Aaron tells me about the last twin who dived several generations ago. He says a guide met the Diver at the cave entrance and led him to the obsidian wall. The Diver's twin was able to communicate with his brother in the beginning. After that, he couldn't hear his thoughts.

'*Planti kambek*, but not that Diver.'

'Did he drown?'

'Diving into the cave to touch Mano is an honour, *Kuka*. Deep pride to be the chosen one. Our pity is for twin that stays behind. *Tumas wori* when other half goes...'

I blink to hide my tears, seeing for the first time how desperately my parents tried to protect my brother from his shark calling heritage. I thought no one could hurt as much as I do. But what must Mum be feeling? Grieving for Ray and also knowing the hopes of her community died with him?

I remember the villagers' glances. They're probably wondering whether I will be able to help. There's no other twin.

'Does Mum know you're asking me to do this?'

My uncle shakes his head. I look into his wise face and, suddenly, the pain of being strong is too much. Tears fill my eyes.

‘Ray tried to dive into an ocean cave before he died,’ I sob. ‘And now I keep dreaming that he’s trapped in some creepy underworld.’

Uncle Aaron doesn’t speak, but I feel his strength. He holds my hand and explains how a deep sense of peace comes over the diving twin as they swim through the cave.

‘When people die, we make carvings. Spirits enter and move on. They become part of the ocean and join with the sky at sunset and dawn. Maybe Ray *was* chosen twin, but elders still feel his confusion.’

‘What’s happened to him?’

‘*Mi no* understand.’ Uncle Aaron sighs. ‘*Samting* shift. You and him caught up somehow. *Olgeta* have no story to show this magic.’

I remember the blazing light at the end of the tunnel. ‘In my dream Ray’s calling me.’

Uncle Aaron nods.

It’s a relief that my uncle understands, but frightening to know my fears aren’t crazy. That Ray might be in some horrible in-between place. And if Uncle Aaron is telling me shark caller secrets, I know I’m already in way over my head.

‘Everything keeps linking back to that cave.’

My uncle points to the bangle he gave me years before. ‘Always *bin* link. *Taim yupela pikinini, yumi go rot bilong sak . . .*’

When I tell him I’ve always remembered that morning in the lagoon, Uncle Aaron smiles.

‘Knew then your life was tied to old ways,’ he says. ‘You are brave girl from shark calling family.’ Uncle Aaron touches the obsidian. ‘Don’t know why it’s you, *Kuka*. Noah tried to go in your place. *Mi* also. Gatekeeper won’t allow.’

I close my eyes, remembering the goose barnacles and stingrays guarding the entrance. Raspy whispers fill my mind.

**The community needs you.**

Uncle Aaron moves into the shade and clears a new patch of sand, ready to draw again. ‘*Harim narapela stori?*’

I smile. I’m always ready to hear Uncle Aaron’s stories. I stretch my legs in the warm sand and wait for him to begin.

The story he tells is about a girl who lived on Finsch Island many generations ago. Uncle Aaron says it was before the Japanese invaded, and before the first missionaries built their churches. 'Way back,' he says.

Uncle Aaron says the girl's name was Esther and she was the best swimmer in the village. She was also a brave free-diver. As a child, Esther learnt the ancient secret of shape-shifting; it takes me a while to understand, but my uncle's sand pictures help .

..

'The girl was a twin,' he says. 'Her brother was steady. He learnt shark calling secrets and followed *kastam*. He was quiet and thoughtful, but Esther was fiery and headstrong.'

Uncle Aaron tells me the twins' parents died before they were adults. After their memorial plates were burnt, the girl became solemn. When her brother was out fishing, Esther walked alone for hours. She preferred swimming and crab hunting to weaving baskets. The other women gossiped. They said she spoke with bad *masalai*, bad spirits.

One day the brother was late returning. The moon was rising when, at last, his conch shell was heard. I smile at that part of Uncle Aaron's story, remembering the times Ray and I sat waiting on a hill to hear the shark callers' conch signalling their return.

Eventually the brother rounded the point and paddled onto the beach, but the clan could see something was wrong. His lips were blue and he had a strange shaking sickness. The caller's twin rushed to him, but in her hurry Esther pushed aside his coconut rattle and bumped his canoe.

Uncle Aaron frowns and says this broke ancient *kastam*. He tells me the girl must have known it was forbidden for a woman to touch shark calling objects, but that she was careless. I look at the canoes on the beach. Even now, women aren't allowed to go near *larung* or shark clubs.

'Esther's twin was sick,' I say. 'Of course she rushed to him.'

'Village healers gave the boy herbs,' Uncle Aaron continues. 'They said magic words until sun *kamap*, but *tumas puripuri*. Young shark caller died and his sister was blamed.'

'That's so unfair.'

My uncle pats my hand. 'You know it's forbidden for women to touch shark calling tools.'

I roll my eyes.

Uncle Aaron smiles and continues. He tells me how the olden-day elders decided that, as punishment, the girl must live apart for two moon cycles. He says Esther was so grief-stricken and angry that she refused. Instead of leaving the beach, Esther turned into a lizard and slept on the sand beside her brother's canoe.

'A lizard?' I ask.

'She was able to shape-shift, remember?'

'That's right.'

Uncle Aaron describes how Esther waited by the canoe for two nights. Then on the third morning, when the men came to collect her brother's things for his burning ceremony, the girl changed back into human form. Before the men could reach her, Esther took her brother's canoe and paddled to the obsidian cave. One caller saw her enter, but no one saw her return. After she disappeared, the sea became milky. It took a long time to clear.

'Callers say the girl's spirit *stap* in cave. Become bad *masalai*.'

Uncle Aaron looks across the lagoon and tells me that Esther is now known as Pyrena – the fiery one.

'Pyrena? Isn't that the *narakain* Noah told me about – the octopus shape-shifter?'

'*Em nau!*'

Hearing the story gives me goosebumps. 'What does Pyrena look like?' I ask.

'As a girl, her eyes were different colours; one brown, *narapela* black. In the cave she can become anything. Elders warn the twin who dives to *lukaut long*.'

'Does everyone know about this?' I ask.

Uncle Aaron looks solemn as he rubs out the sand picture. He shakes his head. 'Pyrena's story is *just* for shark callers.'

I raise my eyebrows. Shark calling is a totally male business. The day before men hunt, women are not even allowed to walk past their canoes, for fear of jinxing things. The elders must be desperate if they're considering sending me into the cave.

'You are from shark family,' Uncle Aaron says.

I gaze at Ray's mask and his words echo through my mind.

**The community needs you.**

Sweat slides into my eyes, making me blink. 'I should talk to Mum about all this.'

'If Olivia *harim yupela*, she'll put you on next plane. *Go bek* Australia.' I frown, but my uncle holds my gaze. 'Olivia knew Ray was chosen. Even though your *papamama* hid him in Australia, Ray died. Same time he would have dived. Maybe coincidence. Maybe fate. Either way, *Kuka*, without twin the link is broken and we lose *kastam bilong sak*. Without *kastam* clan links are broken.'

'I have so many questions . . .'

'*Orait*.'

'Don't you need both twins?'

'If you Dive, Noah will watch on surface.'

'Does the ceremony work if it's a cousin and not a twin?'

'Hope so.'

I remember Mum brushing hair from my face after we arrived. 'I'm so glad you're a girl,' she'd whispered before tiptoeing out of the room.

I stare out to sea and feel as if the blood in my veins is pulling me in different directions. My Australian side doubts, but I'm Islander enough to know you can't fight destiny. If I don't do this, perhaps I'll also have some freak accident. Then Mum will still have lost us both.

'What else should I know?'

'Before the twin loses communication, he sees a deep sea anglerfish with a glowing head light. This is the guide.'

I think about the weird fish in my dream the night we arrived. 'How long can one fish live?'

'Cave holds *puripuri* we don't understand. Last Diver no *kambek*, so guide left obsidian by cave entrance.'

'How can an anglerfish carry a piece of rock?'

'Always *bin* that way. If Diver no *kambek*, waiting twin swims down. Collects obsidian from guide.'

'Why don't both twins go into the cave?'



'Only one is allowed.'

I remember how the cuttlefish touched my forehead. 'I may be the one, but cuttlefish still freak me out.'

'Must be respectful, *Kuka*, to any creature.'

I try to psych myself up to the possibility of meeting things worse than cuttlefish. 'If I dive and something goes wrong, Mum will have no one.'

'Olivia is shark caller daughter. *Bilong* community. It's the way we live. Different in Australia?'

I nod and understand that, if I'm going to do this, I need to trust. 'What else do I need to know?'

'Shark statue is close to the vent.'

'Which is home to weird creatures like the *narakain* octopus?'

A shadow crosses Uncle Aaron's face and I shiver despite the midday heat.

'Diving twin takes shell offering and obsidian chipped from cave wall. Takes gifts deeper to Mano. *Mekim ofa*. Elders say undersea shark god is carved from a mountain of black glass. *Oltaim* glittering through *solwara*.'

Uncle Aaron closes his eyes and begins chanting in an eerie voice.

*Harim tumbuna*

*Sak sak sak*

*Harim olupela*

*Sak sak sak*

*Harim pikinini*

*Sak sak sak*

*Olgeta harim*

*Sak sak sak*

*Puripuri ples*

*Puripuri gel*

*Puripuri rock*

*Puripuri sel*

*Taim bilong tumbuna*

*Taim bilong nau*

*Tok bilong tumbuna*

*Tok bilong nau*

He opens his eyes, stares across the bay, then continues speaking in his normal voice.

‘After diving twin honours Mano, he chips deep sea obsidian from rocks at the vent. *Kambek* through cave into air. *Kambek* home. Then we have obsidian for *kastam* ceremonies.’ Uncle Aaron stands up. ‘*Inap,*’ he says. ‘Aunt Kyrie *kukim kokonas pai. Lukim redi nau . . .*’

We walk back to the resort and look for my aunt and her coconut pie.

\*

The family are sitting on woven mats in the coconut grove behind the kitchen. It’s the quiet time between the end of the breakfast buffet and the arrival of the first boat from the mainland. I flop onto the sand and close my eyes, enjoying the smell of Aunt Kyrie’s pie and freshly roasted coffee.

‘You’re quiet,’ Mum says. Before I can answer she whispers, ‘Don’t worry about those loggers on Dugong Island. I won’t let them take our land.’

Auntie Grace saves me from answering by offering me some pie and asking Mum how the website is coming along. As they chat I notice the kitchen ladies and the gardener sneaking glances at me.

‘Is it my imagination, or are the villagers watching me?’ I ask Noah between mouthfuls of pie.

‘*Lukim yu,*’ he replies.

‘Why?’

‘You know why . . .’

I chew self-consciously, amazed that I didn’t notice them staring before. I guess I’ve been lost in memories of Ray. As I gaze around, it’s as if I’m seeing the community for the first time since coming back. I smile at Mary as she clears plates. Mary is one of Mum’s second cousins and she loved spoiling Ray and me when we were little.

'I've got something for you,' Mary whispers. 'Come with me . . .'

I follow her into the kitchen and Mary gives me a parcel wrapped in a sheet of *tapa* cloth.

'My mama made it for you,' she says, patting my shoulder.

I unfold the *tapa* and find a basket woven with a beautiful stingray pattern. It reminds me of my brother.

Mary squeezes my hand. 'We share your pain, *Kuka*.'

I try to speak, but there are no words. I think about the abandoned school, the empty medical clinic, and the village children sleeping without mosquito nets. I've seen mosquito nets online for less than twenty dollars, but not many villagers can afford that. Tourist money brings essentials that many PNG communities can only dream of. I don't fully understand the diving tradition, but I do know that if our customs change and logging continues, then the reef will die and more services will disappear.

After dinner, Noah and I wander down to the jetty in the soft evening air. Noah takes his ukulele. As I dangle my legs he plays a reggae tune.

'That's great,' I tell him. 'You should make a YouTube video.'

Noah laughs. 'I already did, but the talent scouts haven't found me yet!'

'Let's put it on Facebook and see if we can make it go viral.'

'*Em nau!*'

We listen to the ocean and Noah strums a nursery rhyme that I remember from childhood. It's about a turtle in the moonlight. I smile and hum along.

A breeze rustles through the coconut fronds and I shiver. 'Remember those spooky stories you used to tell me and Ray, about mako battling giant octopus in deep trenches?'

Noah nods.

'They were just stories, right?'

'Kind of . . .'

I lean against a jetty pylon as Noah retells them the way he used to, as harmless bedtime stories.

\*

I go to sleep early, but my dreams are peppered with chattering fish and shark-headed ancestors, all swimming through a milk-white sea. At dawn I creep out of our cottage to watch the sun rise over the lagoon. Somewhere across the water is the strange cave. I close my eyes and patterns swirl behind my eyelids. Suddenly I'm back in that bright tunnel with my brother.

'Ray!'

The veil between worlds feels flimsy as I watch him float towards the light, then sink back into the sulphurous pit. My brother's mouth opens in a scream.

I clutch the obsidian necklace and open my eyes. The world becomes normal. I rush to the photo shop where Mum is working and stretch my arms around her.

'Hey, what's all this?'

I want to explain, but if I do Mum will panic. 'I just felt like a hug.'

Mum holds me tight. 'I love you,' she says.

Tears fill my eyes. 'I love you, too.'

'Everything will be okay,' Mum says. 'I've sent a message to Tefi to arrange a meeting with the women. I want to hear what Saul's wife and her aunties think about all this logging business.'

I smile and sit beside Mum.

'Want to see some photos?' she asks. As I nod, Mum opens a computer file and brightly spotted nudibranchs fill the screen. 'I took these this morning. Do you like them?'

'They're great.' And they are. Mum is such a good photographer. I'm proud of her.

As the parade of sea slugs flashes by, I glance at the proofs beside the keyboard. On top of one pile is the photo showing a shadow hovering over the cave. Images of giant squid and octopus fill my mind and suddenly I know that I have to dive. The ritual is linked to Ray and I need to help him. Diving might not stop people selling land to loggers, or stop the chemical runoff into our beautiful lagoon, but continuing the custom will give my clan hope.

When Mum's slideshow ends, I run to find Uncle Aaron and tell him I've decided to dive.

## 9 Preparing

*The only way out is through.*

J.K. Rowling

Some of the villagers give me small gifts when Mum isn't looking. I hide their seed necklaces and good luck shells under my bed. Then Noah and I go for two more dives. He takes thick gloves and a bag. As I practise my buoyancy, Noah collects crown-of-thorns starfish. In the evening, he suggests that we walk down to the jetty.

'Why, are our tanks and dive equipment here?' I ask.

'I thought we could try a night dive.'

'Because . . .?'

'There won't be much light in the cave. Diving in shadow for the first time is spooky.'

'Won't I be taking a torch?'

'The battery might fade.'

We buckle our vests and wait for clouds to cross the moon. At last Noah pulls on his mask.

'Ready?'

I stare into the dark water. It's only eight metres deep, but at night I can't see the bottom.

'Don't worry about sharks, *Kuka*. We hardly ever see *tumbuna* this close to shore.'

Noah hands me a waterproof torch and shows me how to clip it onto my vest. Sinking into black water isn't something I want to do, but Noah's right. If I'm going to swim into a dark cave, I need practice.

'Come alongside the jetty. Maybe we'll see batfish.'

The water is inky. I bite into my regulator to stop a wave of panic.

'*Yu orait?*'

'Kind of . . .'

'Only eight metres.'

'And no ancestors?'

'No *tumbuna*.'

We deflate our jackets and Noah waits until my buoyancy settles. *See the coral on the pylons, his mind says.*

We swim side by side and I begin to relax.

*Okay, now turn off the torch.*

The dark water is spooky. I'm glad Noah is next to me.

*Can I turn it on now?*

There's no answer. I flick the switch. A thin beam of light shines over the coral. Three batfish fly past. Otherwise I'm alone.

*Noah!*

A shadow moves. *It's only me!*

*I thought you were beside me.*

*I was. Now I'm over here.*

I turn.

*Keep your breathing steady, Noah says.*

*Did you scare me on purpose?*

*Maybe . . .*

*Jerk.*

Noah laughs. *And Aunt Kyrie thinks you have such nice manners . . .*

*Okay, stop being a pain. What's the next thing I need to know?*

*Need not to panic.*

*I just learnt that!*

*Also lainim be nice to cousin!*

Bubbles escape my regulator as I laugh.

*Also need to navigate.*

Dad taught me the basics of navigating underwater, so that sounds okay.

*Not so easy in the dark, Noah replies, following my thoughts. Need to control your breathing, because that affects buoyancy.*

*I know.*

*Can't flap about. One hand needs to hold the torch to see your compass. Use your other hand to check bearings.* Noah points to the luminous compass on my dive console. *Same as at Billy's, except you can't see*

*much. Take a bearing. Then every twenty fin kicks, check that you're still heading in the right direction.*

*You make it sound easy.*

*No problem once you get the hang of it. Orait, I'll go thirty fin kicks north, then ten east. Noah gives me a thumbs up. You try to find me.*

It doesn't seem hard, but as soon as Noah leaves, I feel horribly alone. My torch lights a shadowy circle of water. Everything beyond is black.

*Don't panic.* I tell myself. *One, two, three . . .* I count each kick to thirty. Then I turn and kick ten times more.

*Are you there?*

*Really close, but now I won't answer. You have to find me.*

The second try is easier, and by the third time I'm less scared.

*Em nau!* Noah says. *You're ready.*

*When will I dive?*

*Haptumora, when the tide is highest.*

*Only one more day to prepare.*

'You'll be fine,' Noah reassures me as we climb onto the jetty. 'Listen to your heart and let the ancestors guide you.'

'What do you mean?'

He doesn't answer, but as we walk back, Noah sings a strange chant about shark callers swimming down to the vent to face their enemies.

*Callers*

*Callers*

*Through the ages.*

*Shake your rattles. Heed the sages.*

*Mako*

*Mako*

*Across the sea.*

*Slash the tentacles. Set us free.*

He repeats the chorus until I feel like slashing him.

Just focus on diving into the cave, I tell myself. An image of me dropping confidently into a dark tunnel fills my mind. Maybe I *can* do it . . .



## MAKO V

Mako crisscrosses lagoon  
passing Smoothskin-beach  
passing light-flash-jetty.

Chasing batfish  
hunting squid  
slashing jellies  
she is hunger.

Mako's snout-pores  
sense the smallest heartbeat  
of the tiniest fish.

Mako finds little Smoothskin  
hears blood rush  
frightened breath.

Circling little Smoothskin  
until moon-tide pulls  
and watery voices *singaut*.

Mako's birthing migration begins  
updownupdown diving  
saving energy for pushing-time.

All around *so/wara* is change  
acid-smell  
surface-water-slick  
milky-sea  
ghost-nets haunting deep-water.

Mako follows shark roads

searching for clean-water  
pectoral flying  
dorsal tracking  
riding smooth-currents.

## 10 Descending

*How inappropriate to call this planet 'Earth', when it is clearly 'Ocean'.*

Arthur C. Clarke

I stay in bed till mid-morning trying to hold onto sleep, hoping to find Ray.

I don't always have nightmares. Sometimes my dreams are warm, golden memories of snorkelling at Abalone Cove, or of Ray and me playing with our kelpie when we were little. Whenever Ray threw a frisbee, Gus flew high into the air to catch it. I've never seen a dog jump higher.

I love being in that fuzzy halfway place between sleep and waking. But no matter how hard I try, I can't stay there. As soon as I *know* it's not real, the dream vanishes, and when I wake, there's nothing warm or fuzzy about being a solo twin.

I stretch out beneath the mosquito net.

'Are you okay?' Mum asks. She reaches under the net to feel my forehead.

'You're not sick?'

'No, just sleepy.' It's nice having her notice things again.

'Want something to eat?'

'Mmm, I'll get up soon. What have you been doing?'

'I went for an early dive,' she says. 'Since then, I've been downloading photos.'

'Any good ones?'

'I took some close-ups of blue starfish and a few interesting shots of batfish. I was looking for pygmy seahorse, but they're too well camouflaged. I'll have to ask Noah to come diving with me. They were probably right under my nose.'

After a late breakfast I tie a sarong over my bathers and sit by the pool. Noah seems to understand that I need time alone. I stare at the pages of my book, thinking about the cave and whether I'll be able to find the vent. Then I spend the rest of the morning trying to get on the Internet to send emails to my friends. In the end I give up and write more postcards.

In the afternoon Mum and I walk into the rainforest. It's cool and dark. Birds sing in the canopy and I recognise some of their calls from childhood. Our footsteps

surprise a cuscus. Its big googly eyes stare down at us for a moment. As it climbs higher into its tree, I wonder what happened to the forest animals on Dugong Island.

‘How could anyone sell their forest to loggers?’

Mum sighs. ‘Money,’ she replies.

Knowing that Mum and Aunt Kyrie have responsibility over so much land feels weird. We come to a small clearing and Mum shows me where Granny Audrey’s bungalow used to be. As we return to the resort, Mum tells stories about our clan. Later she shows me some of the old family photos. I stare at Granny Audrey. Mum’s mum died when Ray and I were three, but her black eyes still feel familiar.

\*

Noah tells me that he’d like to leave early in the morning.

‘What time?’

‘Aunt Kyrie will wake you before dawn and I’ll be waiting at the pier.’

Mum says she’s happy that I’m going diving instead of hanging around the pool. If only she knew the full story.

Later in the afternoon Uncle Aaron calls me aside to talk more about the cave. He explains that there are two ways to find air in the tunnel. The first way is through tiny cracks in the rocks. They work like mini chimneys.

‘How do I find them?’

‘You need to look carefully for circle carvings around little holes,’ he says.

The second way is easier. There are air pockets along the tunnel. That’s where Divers are able to surface and rest.

‘How can there be air pockets in an underwater cave?’

Uncle Aaron asks me to bring him a bucket of water. Then he half fills a glass and turns it upside down. A fat air bubble floats at the top of the upturned glass. ‘*Longpela taim, cave was tidal, trapped air.*’

I was never much good at science but even I can understand this.

The last thing Uncle Aaron tells me is that if the dive becomes too hard, I should come straight back.

‘*Nambawan ting yu stay safe, Kuka.*’

\*

I don't sleep well. After checking my watch for what feels like the hundredth time, I get up and dress quietly. Before I leave, I stand beside Mum's bed listening to her peaceful breathing. As she rolls over in her sleep I tuck a note saying, *I love you*, beside her pillow and creep out of the bungalow.

Aunt Kyrie hears my footsteps before I knock at her door. 'Come in,' she calls. 'I'm glad you're early. Need to give you herbs.'

As she rubs strong-smelling leaves into my skin, I ask, 'Why didn't you ever marry, Aunt Kyrie?'

'Too valuable,' she laughs. 'Not enough pigs in New Ireland for my bride price!'

'True, but is there another reason?'

'Never met the right man, not like your mama.' Aunt Kyrie pauses. 'And if I marry, everything of me becomes my husband's. *Em hai prais*.'

'That didn't happen with Mum.'

'Olivia married a foreigner . . .' Aunt Kyrie ruffles my hair. 'Besides,' she says, 'I'm good with herbs and I tame wild birds. *Planti man* nervous.'

'They think you do sorcery?'

Aunt Kyrie's eyes twinkle. 'Maybe. Granny Audrey passed on all her best skills to me.'

'Would you ever sell the land?'

'Of course not!' Aunt Kyrie frowns as if I've slapped her. 'And you mustn't, either.'

'Don't worry,' I reply, 'I'd never sell. And if you teach me Granny's secrets, the local guys can be scared of me too.'

Aunt Kyrie laughs. '*Orait*,' she says, holding up a leaf, '*nem bilong dispela i buga*.'

I wrinkle my nose and repeat the name for her. The leaves remind me of something Mum used to cook with.

'Don't worry about your mama. We'll watch out for her till you *kambek*.'

'What if I don't come back?'

'You will,' she says firmly.

There's a soft tap on the door. My uncle and Auntie Grace join us. Uncle Aaron tells me that while I'm gone he'll be sitting in his hut reciting the names of ancestor Divers. He wants me to focus on my own journey, but to remember that he'll also be channelling the wisdom of the old ones.

'Use their energy.'

I nod.

'Here,' Auntie Grace says, handing me a length of shell money. 'To honour the statue.'

I take the strand of shells threaded onto bush string. Traditional life revolves around earning as many strings of shell money as you can. Then, after you die, the shells are given away at your funeral. The more shell strings, the better. As I lift the strand over my head I notice triangular shapes tied between the shells.

'Shark teeth,' Auntie Grace whispers. 'Very sharp. Maybe useful.'

We walk to the jetty and Uncle Aaron holds my hand as I step into the boat.

'Ready?' Noah asks.

I gaze at the mother-of-pearl colours warming the sky, so like the morning when I was six.

'We love you, *Kuka*,' Auntie Grace says. 'Be strong.'

'Be safe,' Aunt Kyrie adds.

Noah fires the engine and a vision of Ray fills my mind. Flecks of light glint through the darkness around him. I imagine him hearing the faraway clattering of our uncle's *larung* and, for a moment, I see Ray's spark flicker.

'I'm on my way,' I whisper.

The foul creatures retreat and I know that somehow the shrivelled remnant of Ray has dared to hope.

## MAKO VI

Tall sea mounts  
deep-troughs  
guide the returning mother.

Long-time journey  
snatch-feeding  
mackerel and squid.

Mako's pectorals are wings  
generating lift as she flies through *solwara*.

Old Mako finds calm-water  
resting under mangrove-roots  
seeks safest crevice.

Tall roots hide birthing mother  
waves lap *diwai*  
moon-tide pulling.

Predators patrol lagoon-edge  
belly-sheltered-pups  
must soon swim alone.

Wriggle-free-tails  
three small sharklings push free  
umbilical sacs trailing.

Sacs will fall  
leaving belly button scars  
on little pup tummies.

Mako sees sharklings hide

then *kambek* voice calls  
hurry, hurry.

Mako turns.



## 11 Entering

*It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters in the end.*

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

'Anything else I should know?' I ask Noah as we speed across the lagoon.

'The anglerfish will be your guide,' he says. 'You need to trust it.'

'Okay.'

'There could be dangers in the cave, electric eels, lionfish.' Seeing the fear on my face, he adds, 'Don't worry, the guide will lead you past them. They're only there to stop the wrong one from entering.'

'Will you swim to the entrance with me?'

'I need to stay on the boat. Someone has to keep an eye on the sharks.'

'Sharks?'

'They'll guard the cave until you return.'

I stare at my cousin. 'You didn't say anything about sharks!'

'They're part of the custom.'

'Great, so after I get past the cave creatures, take the shell and obsidian to Mano, there'll be sharks circling when I swim back?'

'It's probably better if you think of them as ancestors not sharks.'

'So what's to stop these "ancestors" from eating me as I come up?'

'I'm a shark caller . . .'

'So you'll be waiting for me on the surface?'

'Of course.'

'How long will you wait?'

He smiles. 'As long as it takes.'

'You can't wait forever.'

'I'll wait till I know.'

I bite my lip. 'Know whether I'll be coming back or not?'

'You'll come back, *Kuka*. And when you look up and see our big-tooth ancestors, remember, I'm on the other side.'

'You're not joking. I really have to swim through a pack of sharks?'

'Not a pack, just a few . . .'

'Maybe I should stay at the vent. They say drowning is a gentle death. Probably nicer than being the main course of a feeding frenzy!'

'You do what has to be done in the cave,' Noah says. 'I'll sort out the sharks – promise!'

'But how . . .'

'Trust.' He takes my hand. 'Let the ancestors give you strength.'

I think about Ray trapped in some hellish in-between place and try to gather my courage. I focus on my family then remember the cuttlefish's wild rippling.

'Use the air pockets in the cave, and when your air supply is low come back. Keep in contact through mind-talk if you can.'

'But if you aren't in the water, how can we mind-talk?'

'My fingers will be in, or my foot. It's enough.'

I remember the first time I heard Noah's underwater voice. He was in the boat, but one hand was in the water holding the anchor chain.

'Concentrate,' Noah says as he slows the outboard motor. He anchors the boat near the rocky atoll and studies the water. 'You can do this, *Kuka*.'

My legs are trembling. There's so much I want to say, but I have no idea where to begin.

'I wish I could go in your place . . .'

Noah says.

'Thanks, but we both know it has to be me.'

'Do you have the shell money?'

I show him the strand in my pocket.

'And you're wearing the obsidian necklace?'

'Yes.'

'*Kuka* . . .'

'I know. I'll be careful.'

I clip on my fins and we gaze at each other in silence. Noah's cinnamon-coloured eyes remind me of Ray. That gives me strength. I pull my mask over my eyes, check my regulator and step off the platform at the back of the boat. I'm frightened, but also impatient to begin.

'I'll be here,' Noah calls. 'As long as it takes . . .'

I raise my hand in a silent farewell, sink down and swallow to clear my ears. Then I focus on my breathing.

*Concentrate.*

I flail about for a moment, worried that my buoyancy jacket will snag on the rocks. Then I flick on Noah's torch and follow the rope to the ledge where the cuttlefish is resting. It hovers above the rocks as I pass, undulating its purplish fin fringe, watching me descend through wide, curving pupils.

Further down I see the anglerfish waiting at the entrance in front of the writhing goose barnacles. She's a frightening sight. Rows of irregular teeth crisscross her gaping mouth and hanging beneath her chin is a shaggy, seaweed-shaped beard.

The fish swims towards my mask. Her bulging eyes make me shiver, but something about her is familiar. I just can't work out what.

I feel the strange fish reaching into my mind. Then a deep burbling hums in my ears. It seems to mean something like, *You're here.*

Fish thoughts fill my mind, slowing my focus. I try to reply, but it's like answering through mud.

*The one.* Her lure flashes. *And female.*

I feel her surprise.

She bobs to the cuttlefish then waits by the entrance. I peer into the cave and fight a wave of claustrophobia.

The anglerfish darts back and forth. Her mind prepares mine with images of spitting eels and hidden stingrays. The she warns me to follow closely.

*Raise fins.*

I steady my breath and shine my torch into the darkness.

*Narrow. Cave. Swim.*

My mind sifts through a flood of fish mind-talk, trying to focus on the important messages.

*High ledge. Stretch. Find air.*

Then the anglerfish raises her lamp. Without waiting for a reply, she swims into the darkness. I glance up at the round patch of sky. I can't see Noah, but I sense his strength.

*Follow the guide. And remember, I'm here waiting . . .*

I hesitate.

*Be brave, Kuka.*

I don't feel brave, but I'm determined in a way I've never been before. *Tell Mum I love her.*

I straighten my mask, take a deep, burbling breath and follow the anglerfish. She flashes her lamp as I focus on keeping my legs high. I can see the outlines of rays hidden in the sand and I know that if I mess up my buoyancy, I'll drift onto them.

*Breathe*, I tell myself.

Bright lights puncture the cave walls. Electric eels surround us. They dart from rock crevices, mouths hissing. I back away. One fin scrapes the sand, causing a flurry of rays. They raise their barbs as the anglerfish hovers beside me.

*I am Sephone*. Her long glistening fangs overlap, but somehow she seems to be smiling.

*My name is Isabel.*

*You are female?*

I nod.

Her fins whirl wildly.

I take a deep breath and my buoyancy settles.

Suddenly an enormous eel shoots out. Its jaws snap. My mask shifts. I gag as water seeps into my nose.

The eel sways then slithers into my hair.

I scream. My mouth fills with seawater.

*I can't breathe.*

*Back*, Sephone growls, and the snaky creature slinks into a crevice.

*Steady*, I hear Noah's voice.

Every cell in my body wants to swim back.

The anglerfish dips beside my mask, clicking softly. I feel her mind reaching out. Fishy chirps fill my thoughts. I struggle to clear my mask. Then I adjust my mouthpiece and swim on.

The cave is weird and otherworldly. We swim past drowned stalactites and round molten formations. Then I see the ledge. I clutch a high rock and scramble into the air pocket. My hands shake as I pull off my mask. The few minutes from the entrance feel like a lifetime. I sit on the ledge gulping mouthfuls of musty air. How many ancestors have sat here before me, I wonder. Then I duck my head back into the water.

*Is this the inner cave?*

Sprays of bubble burst from the anglerfish's jaws. My mind races as I try to interpret. I feel her slowing her thoughts for me.

*We have entered. Collect air.*

I look around, trying to control my panic and breathe deeply. Ray feels closer here and I realise that it doesn't matter whether I believe in the ritual. The important thing is that doing it connects my brother and the clan to the old ways.

Sephone hovers below the air pocket. Her googly eyes stare up at me. I take another breath and dip my head back in the water.

*Sorry . . . I'm ready now.*

*I hear your heart. And brother-longing. You want to save him?*

*I've come to make an offering. To protect the reef for my clan.*

*Brother haunts your mind . . .*

*I also want to help him.*

*All links between.* She stretches her lure. *Other Divers are male.*

*Yes.*

She opens her huge jaws and I feel a weird growling. I focus my mind on explaining that once there was another female diver, but that just makes Sephone dart around my legs.

*Once.* Bubbles splutter from her ferocious mouth. *None since.*

I see my nervous reflection in Sephone's protruding eyes. Her thoughts flicker through my mind like an untuned radio. Ideas and words drift in waves as she stares into my mask. Then, suddenly, one image becomes clear.

*To gain your goal you may have to sacrifice.*

*I will sacrifice anything for Ray.*

*Anything may be everything.* She circles my feet and I feel her questioning whether I'll be strong enough to continue. *Fins. Show.*

*I beg your pardon?*

Sephone jiggles her lamp. *Your fins.*

Noah's voice whispers. *Take off your dive boots . . .*

I pull off my flippers and unzip my rubber booties.

Sephone skims back and forth in front of my feet. *Stretch.*

I open my toes.

*No fins!*

I realise that she expected to see webbing. *It's been cut away.*

*Cut!*

*Where I live, it's odd. I was embarrassed.*

I feel her puzzled mind struggle to interpret embarrassed. Thoughts jumble. Her lure probes my memories. I squirm as she finally understands.

*Embarrassed of fins!*

I flinch, knowing that earning the trust of this fish is the key to reaching the shark god and finding my brother.

*Not a good start . . .*

I lift my chin and take a breath of stale air. My family believe I can do this. I have to at least try. I plunge my face into the water and focus on speaking slowly and respectfully.

*You are right. This isn't a good start. My webbing has been cut and I am female. I know that's unusual.* I raise my head, take another breath and continue. *But I'm strong and have vowed to try. If you lead me, I will do my best.*

The anglerfish makes a gurgling sound. *Well said, female. Some fail. Maybe you won't.*

I smile at the fish and lean back onto the ledge. The string of shell money tumbles from my pocket into the water. Sephone catches it on one long tooth. *Vent keeper loves shell money.*

*It's an offering for the shark god.*

*How many?*

*Just this one string.*

*Keep it hidden.*

I lift the necklace carefully off her fang and tuck it inside my dive suit pocket.

*Thank you.*

She gurgles again. *Better words than last twin.* Sephone swims around my half-submerged tank. *Time past, only strongest enter. Now you bring giant gills.*

I nod again, and as I wait for her instructions I check the air gauge on my handset. It shows we're still at ten metres, but the compass is spinning. I have 200 bar of air, hopefully it'll be enough. Noah left an emergency tank on the rope, but the deeper I dive, the faster I'll guzzle oxygen.

Sephone raises her lure. *Begin . . .*

I pull on my mask and lower my body into the water.

*Leave fins.*

I'm too afraid to ask what she means, but Sephone hears my fear. She swims around my flippers and dive boots.

*No need.*

I place them on the ledge.

*Breathe.*

I take a deep breath and follow. Beyond the air pocket I glimpse curtains of kelp, like dangling cloths in a carwash. I can't see a way in.

My torch is fading. I turn it off and wait for my eyes to adjust. Sephone is waiting in front of the thick seaweed. I swim closer and watch tiny crabs crawling over each finger of kelp. We push through. The crabs crackle as ribbons of slime slither over my skin. I fight my horror and think of Ray.

*Your brother waits . . .*

*My brother died.*

The anglerfish looks as sympathetic as one can with a mouthful of fang. *Gone from air world. Here, brother is not dead.*

I stare after her bobbing light. *Is my brother alive?*

*Twin wanders in-between, waiting.*

Sephone slips through another clutch of seaweed, and I notice a strange little fish hanging limply from her tail. The anglerfish cackles. *Don't mind my mate. He can't go anywhere.*

I remember a gruesome story Noah once told us about the parasitic way a male anglerfish attaches itself to a female. He said that after the male hooks onto the female, their bloodstreams fuse and he's stuck there for life. Then his eyes and digestive system degenerate until all that's left are his testicles.

'Like a redback spider,' Ray had added. 'They eat their mate.'

I watch the dangling male, and shudder. Then, not wanting to offend Sephone, I try to blank my mind. A stream of bubbles trickles into my face as if the anglerfish is laughing at a private joke.



MAKO VII

Voices summon  
and pup-free-Mako returns  
obeying ancient instinct.

Sharks gather  
hammerhead nurse white-tip  
patrolling mystery-cave-entrance.

Caller shaking *kokonas* rattle  
all-shark-circle  
guarding.

Ol' granny *tumbuna* returns  
waiting  
waiting.

*Larung* clatters  
sharks nudge  
bumping jolting prodding  
cold blood flowing fast.

Eyes staring  
teeth ready.

*Kastam* holds  
no frenzy.

Shake your rattle, Smoothskin.

## 12 Trusting

*The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.*

Mark Twain

As we swim deeper, Sephone's lamp becomes hypnotic. Soon, time loses all meaning. The anglerfish waits for me to surface at two more air pockets. As I look around I see ancient carvings scratched into the rocky walls of the cave. They show sharks battling massive squid and octopus.

After another short swim we reach a wider chamber. The darkness lightens. I haul myself out of the water and collapse onto coarse sand between the rocks. This air pocket smells mustier than the others. I wonder how deep we are. Sephone hovers in the water near my feet as I pull off my mask. I hear her gurgle and look down. Fine skin connects the space between my toes.

*My webbing!* I touch the translucent skin.

*Fins reformed in tunnel.*

I gaze around at the glistening cave walls. *Is there obsidian here?*

*Lava river once flowed through.*

*My uncle said there was an obsidian wall . . .*

*Look.*

I turn.

*High.*

Darker veins shine in the thin light.

*Noah*, my mind cries. *I made it to the first obsidian.* He probably can't hear, but trying to make contact gives me a burst of courage. I lower my hand into the water.

*Does this come from here?*

Sephone skims around my bangle. *Same.*

An image of an ancestor chipping obsidian fills my mind. *But I thought the last Diver didn't come back . . .*

Her lure bobs.

*Then who carried out the obsidian?*

Sephone opens her jaws. I picture black glass behind her sharp teeth and remember Noah saying that if a Diver travels this far but doesn't return from the vent, then the anglerfish will take his chipped obsidian to the entrance.

I reach beneath my dive suit for the necklace Noah gave me. *Is this obsidian also from here?*

*She swims closer. Deeper. Long-ago ancestor mined that.*

A metal pickaxe with etched carvings is tucked on a ledge. Sephone's lure bobs above it. *Chip two blows.*

I unbuckle my vest and shrug off my buoyancy jacket. Then I scramble over rocks along the wall, peering closely at the obsidian.

*Lava has pools and currents.*

My mind swirls.

*Choose carefully.*

I trace my finger over a seam of obsidian, imagining the smooth rock as it once was, a river of lava.

*Choose carefully.*

I think of Mum and wait for some sign. A small bump catches the light. It seems a good place. I grip the bone handle of the pickaxe and tap. A chunk of ancient lava falls away and drops beside my feet. It's as if the black glass was waiting for me. I chip again. Another slice falls.

*Well chosen. You listened to the rock.*

I tuck one piece of obsidian into the pocket of my dive suit next to Aunt Kyrie's shell money necklace and put the other piece by the edge of the water.

*If you don't come back, I take this to entrance.*

*Can you reach?*

Sephone stretches her lure, bobbing it over the black rock. I feel her thoughts gather pace. Strange clicks and chirps become a stream of humming traffic. She's urging me on.

*How many chambers are there?*

Her mind replies with images of rock-cave labyrinths.

*My cousin said time is different here.*

*Air time means nothing to darkness creatures. Before stories began, lava gushed into solwara. Deep creatures flock to the warmth.*

*Is my brother with them?*

*Not for me to tell.*

*But do you know?*

The fish snaps her jaws. *More curious than others. Beware.*

I exhale, remembering Noah told me controlling breath was the most important thing.

*He knows ancient wisdom . . .*

I lift my tank and jacket, ready to clip it on.

*Leave strange gills.*

I peer ahead. *Is it far to the next air pocket? I'm not trained in hyperventilation.*

She darts to and fro, her light flashing.

I place my dive equipment in the shallows near the second piece of obsidian. I'll have to trust that it isn't too long to the next air pocket.

*Swim.*

I take a huge breath and follow Sephone's light. The water is brackish. Bioluminescent creatures slither past. I panic and exhale a stream of bubbles.

Sephone hovers by a circle carved into the rock wall. I remember Uncle Aaron's words and press my mouth against the rock. Then I hold my nose and inhale. A trickle of musty air is enough to clear my head. It gives me strength to go on.

I kick hard, following Sephone until at last she stops at another air pocket. As I surface, a blast of sulphur stings my nose. I cling to a rock, gasping, and see more circle carvings. The old fish hovers beside me. This chamber is smaller than the last and it smells terrible. I pinch my nose and put my mouth against the rock carvings. I inhale and find a faint trickle of fresh air.

*Brother waits beyond.*

*Beyond where?*

*Second gateway.*

I stare at the rock face, searching for a gap. There is nowhere else a gateway could be.

Sephone stretches her lure. At last, in the gloomy light, I see a narrow ledge halfway up the wall.

*I'll never fit through there.*

Images of ancestors gather in her mind and I know that men much larger than me have entered. Just looking at the crevice makes me cringe, but if others have gone further, I must be able to fit.

*Trust.*

I close my eyes and picture Noah waiting on the boat. For a moment I hope that when I open my eyes this won't be real, that Ray, Noah and I will be in the dive boat sharing biscuits and cocoa after a snorkel, like we used to. Ray was always the one rushing about, trying to be first. Maybe this isn't real. Maybe Ray bumped my head as we scrambled onto the boat, and when I open my eyes I'll come to and this nightmare will end. Maybe . . .

Sephone nudges my toes. I look up again and try to find the strength Uncle Aaron promised me.

Nothing.

I take a deep breath.

Warm energy surrounds me. I have no idea how I'll squeeze through the gap behind the ledge, but when I remember the ancestors I feel less alone.

Sephone flutters past my feet and I stretch my toes. The translucent skin looks delicate but feels strong.

*I'm ready.*

*Keep obsidian close. Move quick. In-between creatures feed on your light. Most important: When you hear brother, do not look.*

*Not look?*

*Do not gaze upon him.*

*Why not?*

A stream of bubbles escapes from Sephone's jaws. *Tell you not to.*

*Right,* I mutter. *Don't look.* I hesitate for a moment, then my mind whispers. *What if I do?*

Sephone's lamp jiggles and again she reminds me of someone. *Twin eyes hypnotise.*

I swallow. *Okay, I'll remember.*

She brushes my foot with her tail. *Go.*

I begin the climb, hoping my brother can sense that I'm near, and also hoping that after I offer my obsidian to the shark god, I can somehow help him.

MAKO VIII

Sun quadrant shifting  
*raun* moon  
ocean-skin cools.

Far below  
crustaceans drift  
upwards, upwards  
evening-rise begins.

Oily Smoothskin flesh  
glazing top-layer  
rhythm changing  
young shark caller is tiring.

Sharks patrol  
hammerhead nudging Mako  
testing strength.

*Singaut tumbuna!*

Mako hears  
distant whale song  
haunting ancestral call.

Currents whirl  
Mako moves with them.

To stop is to sink  
to sink is to die.

## 13 Transforming

*It is not down on any map; true places never are.*

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

The crevice is high above the floor of the cave. My regrown webbing strengthens my grip on the slimy rock face. I feel for footholds and climb upwards, startling a cloud of tiny bats. They crowd the air pocket.

I reach the crevice and peer inside, holding my nose to block the smell of bat roosts. The crevice is darker than anything I could ever imagine. I hesitate. Sephone hovers in the stream.

*Go!*

I lean into the clammy darkness and slide along the cold surface, worming my way into the hole. Scuttling creatures flee.

'Breathe slowly,' I whisper, trying to lessen my terror.

I remember diving with Noah in dark water by the jetty. Then I think about Ray. Am I crawling towards the hellish place I saw in my dreams? I imagine Mum sleeping in the bungalow. If only she was here to read the signs and tell me what to do.

Terrifying images crowd my mind. I crawl on blindly. The glow from Sephone's lure dwindles to a pinprick of light.

*Breathe . . .*

Then the air feels different, colder, more hostile. My scraping echoes as I enter a new chamber. I hear splashing. My imagination conjures an army of foul creatures.

Soft luminescence shimmers over the wet rock then lights the chamber. A monstrous octopus leaves the water and slides towards me. I press back against the cold wall. There is nowhere to hide. I choke back my screams.

I tell myself that I liked snorkelling above the octopus in Abalone Cove. But Luska wasn't twice my size.

The massive octopus flicks a tentacle, thick as my neck. It slaps the wall beside me. I give in to the terror clutching my throat and my scream ricochets over dripping rock. The octopus slurps and a deep rasping voice fills my mind.

*No others can hear. We are the only ones . . .*



My scream turns into sobs.

*Your noise will bring shadow creatures.*

Dreadful images fill my mind. I steady my breath, forcing myself to face the octopus. Its tentacle arms curl as I try to stop trembling.

*Why are you here?*

*I am a twin from a shark calling family. I am here to help my clan.*

*Your brother?*

*I need to go to him.*

*What else?*

*I want to honour Mano and heal our reef.*

*To heal, you must claim.*

My fear rages into impatience. *Then I claim it! For my community and my ancestors who have lived by it and looked after it.*

The octopus growls. My outburst surprises me, but it's too late to back down.

*You are female.*

Yes.

*Male twins from shark calling bloodline make this claim.*

*I am from the shark calling bloodline and I am a twin.*

*You are female.*

It's like talking in riddles. I swallow my anger, remembering what Noah told me about cave creatures understanding my thoughts . . .

*Why does that matter?*

*It is the way.*

*Another Diver was female.*

The octopus looks around. Its colour fades to white. It seems suddenly afraid. *I cannot remember.*

I fill my mind with the girl in Uncle Aaron's story, and the creature stops. I've read that octopi are smart, but this one seems pretty dense.

Giant arms slap the wall.

And I remember too late that it can read my thoughts.

*A female cannot claim.*

So it's come to this, I think. I've survived the journey through the cave and squeezed across a claustrophobic rock face. Now I'm facing a mass of wobbling octopus. Surely I have as much right to honour Mano as any male before me.

Sephone told me to use my wits. I need to concentrate. Maybe this is a trick. I wish I knew more of the ancient lore. I stand tall and stare at the octopus. It glides closer, arms curling and unfurling.

*Think*, I tell myself, but then I panic, realising the octopus will know whatever I think. I fill my mind with an image of Uncle Aaron. He knows everything about our reef and ancient *puripuri*. I try to imagine he's here with me. I close my eyes and focus on seeing Uncle Aaron in my mind. Then I picture myself sitting beside him in his hut. I know he's there, chanting the names of the ancestors.

I feel the octopus wavering.

A jumble of memories fills my mind. I see sharks milling by the cave entrance as an ancestor dives past the cuttlefish. I see a younger Sephone growling a welcome. I see a stream of ancestors chipping obsidian. One by one, they travel deeper into the cave.

The octopus seems wary.

I see Divers crawling towards the rock crevice. Many fall. At last, one gnarled ancestor slides into the octopus cave. Then the image fades.

*What happens next?* I ask the ancestor.

There's no answer.

*Please, I need your help!*

The ancestor's face appears in my mind. **You are female**, it wheezes.

*And I'm dealing with a giant octopus!*

The old man image grins. **You are feisty – like I was.**

*Then help me.*

**You must recite the third Shark Caller chant.**

*But I don't know it.*

The ancestor looks sad.

*Can't you give me a hint?*

The image transforms and I see the jaws of an enormous mako. I remember Noah humming a chant that night we dived by the pier and I try to recall the words, but octopus impatience fills my mind.

*You are wasting my time.*

*And there's so much else you could be doing . . .*

The octopus roars and I remember – too late again – that it can hear my thoughts. I open my eyes as the monster raises a mighty arm. Fear triggers my memory. The words Noah chanted tumble from my mouth.

*Callers*

*Callers*

*Through the ages.*

*Shake your rattles. Heed the sages.*

*Mako*

*Mako*

*Across the sea.*

*Slash the tentacles. Set us free.*

The octopus splashes the water in fury then withdraws its arm. *Continue. If you have the courage to go further.*

Its huge mantle makes a greedy sucking noise. I remember whenever Ray wanted me to do something, like racing him to the far side of Abalone Cover or diving for shellfish, he called my bluff by saying I wouldn't be able to do it. I clench my jaw.

*Tell me what I must do, Octopus, and I will be the judge!*

*To go further you must enter my mouth. You must do so willingly.*

I feel the colour drain from my face. *You mean I should die?*

*All I say is what you must do.*

*You're going to eat me?*

*If I wanted to do that, I would have done so already.*

The octopus lifts my body. Huge suckers squeeze. Stars explode behind my eyelids. I feel dizzy, about to black out, when from far away I hear a rattle.

*Be brave, Kuka. The community needs you.*

I hear another voice.

*Ray is waiting . . .*

*All right*, a feeble mouse voice answers. I barely recognise it as mine. *I'll do as you say.*

The octopus slurps.

I stop struggling and let the monster draw me close to its bulbous jelly mantle. Then I shut my eyes, desperate to picture anything but this horror. I imagine my mother's face.

*Mum*, I cry.

*Kuka!*

The octopus holds me poised above its pulsating mantle. I open my eyes as its deep voice fills my mind.

*Your choice.*

That makes it worse. To be devoured is bad enough, but to go willingly . . . I imagine my family hoping for success. Then I think of Ray. Is he really waiting somewhere beyond? I'm paralysed with fear.

*Will it hurt?*

The creature's three hearts hold no compassion. I close my eyes and clutch the obsidian necklace.

*Okay, please do it quickly.*

My body swings down. Sticky secretions cover me. I gag. Fleshy mucus drips down my throat and into my lungs. I struggle as my skin tingles. My chest tightens and I feel a terrible stinging flood through me. I splutter. I'm still alive, but my breath feels different, as if I've entered another realm. Then I hear distant voices.

**Welcome to the in-between.**

**Beware Pyrena**

**Her tentacle arms . . .**

**. . . will trick you.**

**Beware!**

**Let us take you into the light.**

The voices belong to my ancestors. The long-dead twins are calling me.

I rest one hand over the shells and obsidian in my pocket and reach out with the other. Am I inside the octopus, or have I entered another chamber? I stare into the darkness and wriggle through a sticky veil. I taste saltwater and choke as it fills my throat. It feels like my lungs are collapsing. I give in to the deep sea pressure and a rasping sound fills me. I'm breathing underwater. How can that be?

Before I can understand, lava bubbles ooze through cracks in the cave wall. They light the darkness and I see hundreds of egg strings behind the massive octopus. When they hatch, this cave will be full of probing octopus beaks. I shudder and swim onwards. My arms are heavy. I'm moving in slow motion. Then an icy current catches me. It drags me into an ancient lava tube. I tumble deeper until the stream spews onto the ocean floor.

I've arrived at the vent.

## 14 Acknowledging

*That which is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below.*

Ancient magician Hermes

I hear bubbling and crackling. An eerie orange glow shows magma oozing from a vent onto the ocean floor, hardening as it meets the sand. I look further and see a circus of fantastical creatures. Millions of jellies squabble over the skeleton of a whale. Behind them, starfish feast on another carcass.

This is the ocean's graveyard.

I huddle behind a rock, not sure what to do. My strange shallow water-breath fills my ears. It feels like the massive water pressure has squeezed all purpose from me. I peer ahead. Rising from the centre of an outcrop of obsidian is a massive, glittering statue of Mano.

The shark god's pectorals are adorned with cowry shell trinkets. On the sand around the effigy I see strings of shell money. Are those necklaces from other Divers? I drift closer, ready to add my offerings. Some instinct makes me turn.

A horde of flashing red wingtips jet towards me – vampire squid. They snatch my shell necklace. As it drifts onto the sand, they circle me, spitting clouds of bioluminescence. I try to escape, but their slime holds hundreds of blue lights. It dazzles me. I clutch the precious obsidian. They have my strand of shells, but not my obsidian. I can still make an offering. As their slime settles, my breath slows. Images fade in and out. Blackness overwhelms me.

It feels like an eternity before I come to my senses.

Then I wish I hadn't.

Hovering before me is a creature with glimmering blue rings. Smaller than the tiniest vampire squid, and not much longer than my hand, but far more deadly. The most terrible creature of all. In the turquoise glow I see her slitted octopus eyes. One is darker than the other.

*You have come.*

I stare into the creature's mismatched pupils and know this is Pyrena, the shape-shifter.

Eight puckered arms twitch as my mind babbles in terror.

*I brought obsidian to honour Mano.*

Two arms clutch my wrist. Her suckers squeeze. The poisonous embrace loosens my thoughts and I ask, *Are you the girl who dived into the cave?*

The suckers tighten.

*You once lived in the air . . .*

*Long ago. Her strange eyes glare. Now outcast.*

*The punishment was unfair.*

*I broke kastam.*

*If my brother was hurt, I'd push aside anything to help him . . .*

Pyrena jets above my face and flicks another arm across my cheek. The pain stuns me but still my mind asks, *Why did you dive into the cave?*

Pictures fill my brain. I see the outcast girl paddling across the lagoon. Shark callers try to stop her. They shout as she dives into the cave. My mind sparkles with images of black glass and I realise Pyrena wanted obsidian, the community's most precious magic. Maybe she hoped that bringing back obsidian would change things.

*I was the strongest swimmer, the best Diver. But female.*

Before Pyrena can block her thoughts I see a vision of the girl diving, but there's no gatekeeper's lamp to guide her. Everything is darkness. Stingray guardians chase her through the cave. I feel her terror.

My mind watches the girl swim on, climbing into rocky air pockets and free-diving along tunnels. I see her exhaustion and feel her weaken. Then, as she flails on the point of death, the girl begins shape-shifting; into fish form, then eel, then starfish until, at last, she settles as octopus.

My totem is osprey, her mind whispers. I long for air and sun . . . Pyrena's arms tighten. Her suckers lacerate my dive suit.

*I came to offer obsidian, I moan.*

She shape-shifts and doubles her size. *Shark callers are my enemy. I will not let you honour their god.*

*They're your clan too.*

Her suckers squeeze the very essence of me. I have to think of a plan, but I also need to block my thoughts.

I stare at the massive statue of Mano. It's less than ten metres away. I'm desperate to find Ray, but I have to stay calm. I must hold my thoughts close until I make my offering.

*Yes, your brother, she hisses. The key. The reason I called you.*

*It was my choice to come . . .*

*My choice. You are bait. My way to return.*

A blur of images race through my mind. I see Pyrena overwhelm me with her poison. Then I see her shape-shift into my skin. My mind watches her return through the octopus cave. She crawls through the crevice and swims into the tunnel. Moving upwards until at last she pushes through the circling sharks to Noah. I shrink in horror as I realise that while Pyrena roams above in my skin, I'm left behind, chained to her underworld.

Her octopus mind interrupts my thoughts. *For one to shine, there must be darkness. I tried to merge with other Divers. Their skins were too tall, too wide, too weak. Yours looks just right. Maybe you're the one I've been waiting for.*

I shiver as her thoughts continue.

*A female the same age I was. We could be twins . . .*

*My twin is Ray!*

Pyrena shape-shifts into a hag version of myself. I see suckers cover my glowing limbs and my eyes are cruel. *It's my turn to shine. You will be the one who remains when I return to air.*

As she shape-shifts again, I take my chance and lunge forward, sinking to the sand in front of Mano. *Help me*, I beg. Then I toss my obsidian.

My offering drifts towards the glittering shark god, but falls short.

*To feel air I need human skin . . .*

*Think*, I tell myself as Pyrena slides closer.

*Yours will fit nicely.* The octopus contorts again. For a brief moment she's a diving osprey.

My mind is filled with Pyrena's bird's eye view of my mother staring across the lagoon.



*If you don't return, she has no one. But I could go in your place . . .*

Pyrena is in Noah's boat, holding my cousin's hand. He thinks it's me.

*I will taste the air while you remain here.*

*You could never fool my family!* my mind growls.

Pyrena laughs. *It would be easy. We are linked, whether you want it or not.*

*No!* I crawl across the sand to Mano. My family believe this statue holds power, perhaps it can somehow save me.

Pyrena blocks my path. The osprey form is gone and her eight arms curl like frenzied eel. As she raises them I feel her mind summoning the squid, but not just vampire squid. I shrink in terror as I realise what accompanies them.

MAKO IX

Granny *tumbuna* shrieks  
Mako leaps into air.

White-tip lunging  
grey nurse gnashing  
hammerhead tail-thrash  
all jaws ready.

Young Shark-wisdom stares  
fearful eyes  
chant falters.

To stop is to sink  
to sink is to die  
shake your rattle, Smoothskin.

## 15 Seeing

*After all, it is no more surprising to me to be born twice than it is to be born once; everything in nature is resurrection.*

Voltaire

Giant squid circle me. Their arms stretch into the darkness. Each mantle is twice as large as me and their feeding tentacles flick like stockwhips. As the squid move closer I see my terrified reflection in their monster eyes. Suddenly I'm tangled in lashing tentacles. Webbed creatures slither from rock crevices, prodding and pecking. I whimper, willing it to end. After an eternity Pyrena waves them away.

*Soon your brother joins the Divers who didn't return.*

*No! I cry.*

She shape-shifts into a larger octopus form and sprays a cloud of ink. Her black muck camouflages me.

I crawl back to the obsidian god. As the ink clears I see a flickering chain on the ocean floor, circling Mano like a string of beads. Each bead holds a face. A wizened image.

*Pyrena laughs. Meet your ancestors, the ones whose skins didn't fit.*

I stare at the trapped faces. There are seven beads and each bead matches the face of a webbed creature. The faces contort as I search for my brother. The eighth faceless bead contains no features, only shadow, but the face looks like Ray. A shrivelled spark glimmers inside it.

I reach for the bead, but a mass of starfish blocks me. Their prickly mouths nip my hands and feet.

*How can I save my brother?*

*Give me your skin. Then he can cross over.*

Monstrous images whizz through my mind.

*Death or in-between. One or other. Choose his fate.* She flicks the chain of beads and ancestor mouths scream. *When you die, old magic shifts.* Pyrena's mantle hovers above me. Join the failed ancestors who came before you, last twin.

I reel at her offal stench.

*Or make a deal. All shark calling twins pay a price to offer obsidian. Some give their life. They continue on to the light. Some return to the air with bites in their souls. Other skinless ones remain. They are the ones you see. To gain something precious, you must give something of value.*

She turns one bead and I stare in horror at the tormented ancestral face.

*Your shark callers believe each Diver helps solwara, but this quest is my design. I send jelly swarms and starfish to cover your reef.*

*Why?*

*Revenge.*

Of course, but I feel there's another reason.

Pyrena blocks her thoughts. I concentrate, seeking a way through the tricks of her mind until, at last, snippets of thought come to me.

Maybe she's right. Maybe I am her equal. Pyrena's hidden mind is filled with longing for birds and air. I see how each Diver gives her hope. She waits in the darkness, and each offering brings a link to the sky and freedom. Pyrena tries to block me, but I see a girl searching for someone. I feel her despair and realise that she waits here for her brother. Each time a Diver appears she hopes it will be him, that he's returning to her in a new body.

For a moment I see past the horror Pyrena has become. I glimpse the grief-stricken twin and recognise her desperation.

*When he finds me, we will link arms and cross over together. But my brother never comes, she murmurs. Just other shark twins. Other brothers.*

For a moment, I almost feel sorry for Pyrena. *Almost.* Then I see grotesque images of her feeding on the trembling strength of the trapped Divers while she waits.

*My brother does not come, so I must go to him. To feel air and sky. With your skin I can go back. A girl of shark blood. I will taste air, then die and follow my twin. I know he's waiting . . .*

I look past Pyrena and see my offering on the sand. The obsidian chunk is near my shell necklace, almost touching the statue. If I move closer, perhaps I can nudge them onto Mano's fins . . .

Before I can block my thoughts, Pyrena transforms into her smaller form. Blue rings flash as her mind burns into mine.

*More cunning than the last . . .*

*Think*, I tell myself, trying to crawl forward, whilst blocking images from my mind. It's like trying to scramble up a mountain of sand. Whenever I lose concentration, I slip backwards. Blocking Pyrena and thinking in this hopeless place exhausts me. There seems no way out and for a moment I feel it would be a relief to stop fighting. Then I hear Sephone's voice.

*Keep your wits. Outsmart her . . .*

I'm prepared to die for Ray, but I can't let this creature back into the community. Her venom would destroy the reef.

I focus my thoughts, blocking everything from my mind except my brother. Here it seems there are worse things than dying. Before I offer the obsidian, I have to work out a way to save him from this halfway hell.

I squint into the darkness and see a strange watery curtain. It billows in a current behind the statue. Hagfish and other vent creatures dart back and forth in front of it.

Pyrena slides towards the curtain. Her form dissolves then reforms as shadow on the other side.

*Come through*, she taunts. *Your twin is waiting.*

16     **Deciding**

*Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome.*

Isaac Asimov

Pyrena's glowing rings remind me that a snorkeller saw a blue-ringed octopus the day Ray died. I feel her mind chuckle.

*My arms reach beyond these waters. I sent the octopus to nip your brother. And here he is!*

I tremble as a burning current flows through the veil.

**Look away,** my brother warns.

I remember Sephone's advice and stare at the sand.

**How did you get here, Izzy?**

I can barely reply for the joy of hearing my brother. *It's a long story, but, Ray, I have to see you.*

**No.**

It's torture to do as he asks.

**You must leave.**

*I came to help.*

**You don't understand, Sis, I'm trapped.**

*What can I do?*

**Let me go.**

*What do you mean?*

**Look towards the far side of Mano. There's a crevice . . .**

I turn and see that the darkness behind the obsidian shark god seems less black. Or is that a distortion of the swirling curtain?

**The crevice opens into a tunnel. It leads to a place impossible to describe. I glimpsed it when you called me back.**

*I called you back?*

**Don't you remember? When I was dying, you said, 'I won't let you go.'**

I remember my confusion that night and the brilliance of the tunnel.

**Your need made me hesitate. That gave Pyrena time to stop me from crossing over.**

*I don't understand.*

**The other side is so close. It's like I'm pushing against the skin of a bubble.**

**The light draws me on, but I'm trapped.**

*Why can't you move through?*

**Your need gives Pyrena power to keep me.**

*My need? I'm stricken with guilt. Is this my fault?*

**Pyrena is using me as bait. If I wasn't here, you wouldn't have come.**

*I made this journey for you.*

**I know. And so does she. Pyrena understands a twin bond. Why else would you face these horrors? You're so brave, Izzy, Pyrena knew you'd find me.**

*We can go back together.*

**I can't return but, Izzy, you need to.**

*Once I've worked out how to help you.*

**Let me go. I'm ready.**

*Don't you know what that means?*

**That I'll leave this terrible in-between. I'll slip through to the brightness and return to what we came from, our other state. Once I'm free, I'll be part of something bigger. A resting place before the next cycle.**

Ray's need for freedom hurts more than anything. How can he be ready to leave me? To stop being part of two?

*You're my twin. I can never stop loving you.*

**I'm not asking that, but I can't return. We can no longer be two halves. You need to accept that.**

*I could follow you . . .*

**It's not your time.**

*Does being my twin mean so little?*

**Izzy. Ray's voice is gentle. We will be together, but not yet.**

Pyrena darts through the curtain. By the eerie glow of the vent, I see her shape-shift into an eel, a nautilus and then a bizarre two-headed turtle. I watch one head

become mine. The other is Ray. His pointed head turns away from me. Then the turtle opens both beaks, snaps erratically and shape-shifts again.

**You need to stand alone,** he whispers.

*I don't want to!*

**Think of Mum . . .**

The curtain ripples and suddenly I see him. A shocking deformed shadow of what he once was.

*Ray . . .*

**Don't turn!**

*What's happened to you?*

**Don't look at me. This in-between holds terrible things.** His voice trembles.

**And it's cold, so bitterly cold.**

Seeing him this way terrifies me. *I'm so sorry, what can I do to release you?*

**Only you can know.**

Let go, my heart pounds. But I can't.

I stare at Ray's gaunt, skeletal reflection. His hair hangs in clumps. Black slime drips from his monstrous body. The image hypnotises me.

**Look away, Ray moans, or we'll both be lost.**

I take a slow, rasping breath and force myself to stare at the ocean floor.

**I'm not afraid,** his mind whispers.

*All right, I'll set you free. If that's what you want.*

**Izzy, do you think I want to leave you?**

I sniff.

**We're linked forever, by love and the genes we shared. If I stay, I will become the eighth bead in that chain.**

I shudder.

**I don't know what lies ahead,** he continues, **but I long for the warmth of it.**

**I've been so cold . . . and the creatures here, well, you've seen some of them.**

*Ray, I can't say goodbye forever.*

**You don't have to.** I feel a flicker of warmth in my brother's voice. **That's one thing I do know. Whatever lies beyond, you'll follow. In another shape and time.**

*Pyrena wants to keep me.*



**I can block the creatures until you're safe.**

*Enough!* Pyrena changes colour as she jets across the sand. Blue to brown to red. Water gushes from her mantle. Suckers clutch me.

**There's a way,** Ray whispers as she drags me back. **Your journey isn't over. I see lovely things ahead, but you must escape.**

Pyrena nips my shoulder and her poison scorches. For a moment all I hear is pain. Then Ray's mind reaches me again.

**I understand if you can't let go. Perhaps I'd be the same, but please, leave while you have the chance.**

Pyrena's arms slither across my chest. *She goes nowhere! And she must choose. What will it be, twin? Your brother or yourself?*

**Go back,** Ray whispers. **Think of the community.**

*I have to free you.*

**Izzy, I want you to choose the reef. Go back. Take the obsidian . . .**

I peer through the water. *How will a chunk of rock change anything?*

**The elders fill obsidian carvings with *puripuri*. Their magic weaves us to the ocean. I don't know how the *puripuri* works, but the shark callers do. Make a difference, Izzy. Help our family honour the old ways. Give your offering, then take back the obsidian.**

I stare at the webbed creatures standing guard around the glittering shark god.

**If you stay,** Ray continues, **your warmth will send them into a frenzy. The ancestors hate what they've become, but they have no choice. And if I join them, I'll also be powerless. Pyrena will use me to hurt you.**

Pyrena shape-shifts from one frightening vision to another. Beyond her, I see an army of angel sharks, hiding in the sand. They seem to be waiting.

*If I return without freeing you, my life will be empty . . .*

**Others love you.** I know Ray wants to say more, but there's no time.

Soft hissing fills my mind.

*Choose!* Pyrena roars.

Choose! another voice echoes. It sounds like Noah.

Suddenly Ray moans. **They're coming!**

I hesitate, but the terror in my brother's voice gives me no choice. I have to set things right.

**Don't you see, Izzy? If you die, there are no more twins. Pyrena will take your skin. Then the reef has no chance. She'll masquerade as you and cause havoc. Izzy, you have to go!**

I should follow Ray's advice, clear my mind and find a way back. I'm risking everything, but it's my fault Ray's trapped. If it means saving my brother, I'll accept the shame of failing the community.

I focus on what Ray told me, that my need imprisons him. If I can let go of that, maybe I can still set him free. But how? Uncle Aaron didn't give instructions for this.

*Think of nothing*, I tell myself.

Ray's reflection falters. I focus all my energy on blocking Pyrena and imagine a blank space around me. Then I block Ray and the horrors.

The hissing becomes a savage roar. It jolts my concentration. Gaping jaws fill my mind. I panic, remembering the stinging juices of the octopus. Ray's image floods back.

**It's too late for me. Save yourself.**

*Not until you're free . . .*

**You are so stubborn!**

I clench my fists, and in some far corner of my mind I hear the steady rattle of coconut.

*Help me, Noah!*

The shaking grows louder. I close my eyes to concentrate and I feel my cousin's strength.

*Focus on nothing!* I tell myself.

The rattle becomes deafening and my mind sees rows of pointed teeth. The angel sharks! They're on my side.

*We are no longer part of two. I love you so much, Ray, that I let you go.*

My twin tries to warn me again, but his voice sounds distant.

*Follow the sharks*, I tell him. *Let them show you the way.*

I feel him hesitate.

*I am just one. I set you free.*

Wild currents swirl around the statue. Bioluminescence spangles the water, stunning me. Strings of shell money rise and the ocean shudders as a vacuum bursts through the crevice.

It's done. My brother has crossed over. A terrible emptiness chills me.

Nothing matters now. I let the current toss me. It tumbles me towards Mano. I collapse against the great mako, not caring whether I live or die. As I fall, a chunk of obsidian loosens. It falls onto my lap.

Savage laughter burns my mind.

*Set free by the love of a twin. You are full of surprises. But it's not over.* Pyrena flicks an arm over my face. *You've only glimpsed what my horrors are capable of.*

As I sprawl across the shark god, I hear a faraway whisper.

**This is not forever, Izzy, we'll meet again.**

My brother's voice is peaceful. He's found his way into the light. For a moment, joy washes over me.

Perhaps that's what maddens them.

The chain of ancestors floats up from the sand. I watch in terror as each tortured face contorts, then twists into a monstrous larger shape. They slide closer. I moan as a horde of frenzied creatures surround me. Beaks and snouts snuffle over my belly. Webbed claws slash, dripping black slime.

**A willing substitute for the boy.**

I huddle on the ocean floor. *If you are my ancestors, have pity.*

**We can't . . .**

MAKO X

Slow voice  
jerky arms  
wobble rhythm  
young Smoothskin is exhaustion.

Rattle and chanting  
since first sun  
now *larung* stops.

Sharks smell weakness.

Ravenous Mako  
body-light without pups  
waiting for frenzy  
waiting to bite  
ready to feast.

Hammerhead circles  
white tip nudges  
*olgeta* waiting.

Smoothskin blinks  
terror eyes stare  
electric field quickening.

But then  
finding rhythm  
*kokonas* rattle  
shaking, shaking  
*singaut tru*.

## 17 Accepting

*It always seems impossible until it is done.*

Nelson Mandela

The webbed creatures surround me. The strange chain binding them to each other unravels as they prod and nip. I curl into a ball, screaming for mercy.

That encourages them.

Sharp-beaked starfish join the pack, feeding on whatever of my warmth remains. I call to Dad and fill my mind with images of Mum, Noah, the aunties, Uncle Aaron and Ray. Especially Ray. But nothing stops their tormenting.

I know I'll never see my loved ones again and that's when I give in. Accepting death or whatever Pyrena plans.

I just want it to be over.

Somehow my acceptance slows them. Their snuffling eases.

I uncurl and face the defiled ancestors.

*Tell me what I must do to end this.*

**You can do nothing. We consume soul-joy and hope-flames until only despair remains. Then you join us.**

Fighting is useless. There are too many. I slump onto the sand beside Aunt Kyrie's shell money necklace. The monsters' festering eyes widen and for a moment I see beneath their distorted appearances to the faces of brave ancestors who came here long before me.

*Even though you destroy me, I feel sorry for you. You once had families that loved you the way I love Ray. I wish I could save you.*

**No one can!**

*Then finish this quickly. Maybe through me you'll find the light Ray spoke of.*

**You cannot give in.**

*There's no more I can do. I have nothing to lose.*

**There is worse.**

*Nothing can be worse than knowing I caused my brother's suffering. And that I can't follow him.*

Mum's face appears in my mind. Ray was right. Leaving Mum would be cowardly. But now she'll never know that I *wanted* to return. If only I could tell her.

*I wish . . .*

The creatures flex their webbing.

**Stop babbling, child. Wishes are useless here.** Their black mouths open.

I force aside my terror and face them. *Tell me why you cannot leave.*

**Pyrena holds us.**

*How?*

**She took our skins to seek her brother.** An oozing claw grasps my wispy hair while the others spit globules of black mucus. **Now we are silt of the sea.** The globules scorch my shrivelled flesh and I try not to sob.

Far behind the ancestors, I see the glow of blue rings as Pyrena jets through her army of squid.

The monsters spit again and black mucus clouds the water. *Her sorcery has trapped you in this underworld, but maybe there's a way out. Perhaps Ray left a door open to the light.*

My pulse slows. I can't believe how calm I am. I once read that before the moment of death, animals accept their fate. In the end, I guess we're animals too. I close my eyes and give in to an overwhelming weariness.

Strange echoes crash. The shapes around me shift. Blackness intensifies. I feel the weight of my obsidian necklace and wait. My fate seems a long time coming.

*Do what you will,* I whimper.

I open my eyes. It makes no difference in the darkness. Sizzling surrounds me. The creatures slither backwards. A squadron of vampire squid return. They jet through the water, wingtips flashing like fireworks.

I trace my finger over the carving on my necklace, then reach for Aunt Kyrie's shell string.

*Help me.*

Clouds of sand suddenly billow from the ocean floor as angel sharks rise up to meet the squid. The enemies gnash and nip and tear. Blood fills the water.

In the confusion I seize my chance. I grip the sharp teeth hidden in the shell necklace and turn to the first ancestor. I grate the tooth over his chain. The binding

dissolves as soon as it feels shark. My eyes meet the ancestor's as he leaps aside, and I recognise the feisty caller who helped me in the octopus cave. The hum of his song fills my mind as I free the next Diver.

Angel sharks thrill to the sound of the ancient mind-song. Their frenzy surges. Pyrena is caught in the maelstrom. She turns but realises too late. I feel her mind scream as I cut the last manacle.

My ancestors are loose but not free of her power. I peer into the gloom as she commands them to continue feasting. One by one, they begin nipping me. Their eyes plead for my understanding as the hellish pain starts again.

I meet their gaze. *I understand.*

My mind focuses on forgiveness. I repeat the word again and again until a blanket of silt rises. As it covers us, I watch the ancestors drift through the murk towards the crevice of light.

*What's happening?* I ask.

There's no answer.

Bubbles of light speck the darkness, spotlighting six ancestors. For a moment I see their strong Islander forms. Then I see Pyrena as a beautiful young woman. She chokes and falls to the ocean floor.

Another massive vacuum sucks the sea. As the silt settles, Pyrena writhes back into octopod shape. Angel sharks swim towards me, savaging a path through the squid. Their ghostly teeth slash the water.

Pyrena sweeps through them, her arms glowing furious blue. *You didn't know?*

*Know what?* I try to block Pyrena's probing, but she's too strong.

*You gave yourself willingly. Ancient lore shifted. You freed them.*

*I don't understand . . .*

*Your pathetic ancestors are gone.*

*Where?*

*Who knows? Travelling shark roads or burning in the light with your brother . . .*

Somehow I've fluked their freedom. I laugh and struggle to sit.

Pyrena slaps me down. *But you're not free. Nor is your reef.* She slides her arms over my obsidian offering.

I clench my fist but she flicks open my hand. The black glass tumbles to the sand. As I scramble to snatch it, I feel her slip into my mind.

*With your skin I could take back enough obsidian for hundreds of kastam ceremonies.*

*You would use it to ruin the reef.*

*All I need is your body . . .*

I wonder why Pyrena doesn't just take it. I'm in her power. Do I have to agree willingly?

Pyrena covers me in a cloud of ink and I know I'm right.

*Either way I keep your offering.*

*That's not fair!*

Her arms curl. *You let yourself be devoured and struggled with the webbed ones. For nothing.*

I remember Ray's light-filled voice and the eyes of my ancestors. *Not for nothing.*

Pyrena's treachery infuriates me, but fury will not lead me back to my family. She holds my future. As I struggle to calm my mind, I feel her trying to decide. I fill my mind with shark images. They give me strength.

*You are the last twin and I need a skin to set me free. The ritual must continue.*

Her arm snaps a plate of volcanic rock. It glows as she holds it before me. I squint into the glassy surface and see an image of my older self hovering over the cave.

*I have learnt to be patient. I will let you return to air. For now. Pyrena's suckered arm lifts the obsidian I loosened. She tosses it to me and points towards the lava tube. Find your way back if you can. But this is not the end. Your clan needs little help destroying its reef. We will meet again.*

As I clutch the precious rock from the shark god, she shape-shifts into the form of a giant squid. *If you survive, tell the shark callers I do not forgive them. They must send another Diver to protect their reef!*

I hear the echo of Ray's voice. **Go back, Izzy. This place oozes despair.**

Pyrena's colour darkens. *Yes, hurry, before I change my mind.*

**Go!** Ray urges.

I swim towards the lava tube. My arms ache as I push upstream. Each time I falter, I hear voices urging me on.



At last I see the dim light of the octopus cave. I swim faster. I'm almost there, but then I stop and tread water. A clutch of freshly hatched octopi block the lava tube. There is no way around the writhing mass. To escape, I have to go through them. I tremble, remembering the stinging mucus of the giant octopus.

*Be brave, Kuka.*

I remember my family and kick myself forward.

The hatchling octopi stings are less painful, but their sticky mucus is just as disgusting. I splutter, desperate to clear my throat. Intense pain fills my chest as I gasp then breathe. The air in the cave is foul, but it's such a relief to inhale again.

I drag myself onto the rocks like some prehistoric creature, and I take a few stumbling steps. My legs feel so heavy.

Slurping sounds echo around the grotto. I see the octopus sleeping in front of an ancestor mound of bones, like a dragon guarding its treasure. I sob, remembering the bite of its juices. As my eyes adjust to the grey light, I scan the rock walls, looking for the crevice. At last I see it high in the sloping granite.

I steady my breathing then grope forward, trying not to scuffle.

*Concentrate, I tell myself. Don't think of anything that could wake it.*

As I reach the wall the massive cephalopod shifts. I panic and, in my hurry, loosen a clutter of rocks.

The octopus changes colour from restful cream to furious red.

I crouch against the wall, so close to safety, but not close enough. I scramble upwards, knowing the octopus can grab me at any moment.

An arm reaches for my body.

I hold out my trochus shell bangle. *If you let me pass, I'll give you this.*

The octopus considers my offering, then flicks a tentacle. I squeeze my uncle's beautiful gift over globs of puckering octopod flesh, hoping it won't notice the inner engraving of its shark enemies.

*Not enough.*

*It's all I have.*

*Shark god obsidian . . .*

I clutch the black rock. I can't give this up.

The octopus snatches my wrist and shakes open my hand.

*I need to take the obsidian back to my family.*

The octopus snickers, and I shudder as it sucks the obsidian deep into its sticky mantle. *Go quickly, female, before I swallow you too.*

I bite back my anger and scramble up the rock face, desperately seeking safety. The rectangular slot is only a little further. I inch along the narrowest, most claustrophobic section, hoping that if the octopus *does* change its mind, I will be safe. Then I feel the tip of a squishy tentacle, probing the rocky crevice. I squeeze under a shelf, pushing myself in as far as possible. The arm slides past. I hold my breath. It searches again then withdraws. I lean into the shadows and listen.

A sucking noise slurps over the rock. The octopus is climbing the wall.

I can't stay where I am.

Then I remember. It can read my thoughts!

I fill my mind with an image of my body shrinking against the crevice. Then I creep higher, still imagining that dark crevice, until it feels like my mind is shouting.

The sliding begins again. I scramble up the final slope and fling myself out of the slot. I yelp as I fall onto a ledge in the second chamber.

I'm safe.

Then two enormous arms squeeze through the opening.

I scream. The octopus is still searching for me.

*Down here . . .*

It's Sephone! She's waiting in the shallow water.

I crouch low as tentacle arms flick around the chamber. Octopus fury echoes off the walls. I tumble, shredding more of my battered dive suit and almost squash poor Sephone.

*Careful!*

*Sephone, I'm so glad to see you!*

*Don't crush me with gladness.*

*The octopus stole my obsidian.*

*Cannot change.*

Then I hear my bangle clatter from the octopus arm onto the cave floor. I look back.

*Still in reach.*

I hesitate, picturing Uncle Aaron's face. The octopus has taken my deep sea obsidian. I won't let it keep the amulet my uncle gave me.

*I'll only be a moment . . .*

I wade across the chamber, ducking the groping arms, and grab my shark bangle. I push it onto my wrist and stumble back to Sephone. Her mind is full of concerned scolding.

*I'm okay . . .*

She brushes my hand. *Danger. Move quickly.*

Sephone darts along the tunnel. I remember the distance to the obsidian cave and take a huge breath. Sephone's lure lights my way. If I can make it to my dive equipment, I might be okay. The anglerfish zips back and forth in front of me. At last I see the glittering wall. I haul my body out of the water.

Sephone circles my battered feet. *So much damage.*

I lean onto a rock and touch the piece of obsidian that I chipped earlier. Sephone holds her lure over it. I place it safely inside my pocket.

*You survive to carry it back.*

*But I lost the other deep sea piece.*

I picture the precious obsidian from the statue of Mano disappearing into the octopus mantle and I groan. Then my eyelids droop.

*Ouch.*

Sephone is nipping my foot. *Cannot sleep.*

*I'm so tired.*

Sephone nips me again.

*Hey!* I yelp and sit up.

*Thin air. Never wake.*

Her words come from so far away . . .

*Leave.* Sephone nips again, deeper this time. I reach down and feel blood.

*Stupid fish, I think, why don't you leave me alone?*

*Because you will die!*

Oops, when will I learn to conceal my thoughts? I hoist my dive vest onto my back and fit my mask. Then I take a deep breath from my regulator. The air from above is so sweet!

I slide into the water and swim after Sephone. We rest at air pockets, but before we reach the final ledge, Sephone leads me into a smaller tunnel. My regulator gauge is nudging red.

*I don't have much air.*

Sephone snaps at my heels and I look up. We're in a tiny cave. I surface and climb onto a low ledge. The air is fresh and water trickles from the ceiling of the cave. I fall into a strange half-sleep.

I don't know how long I rest – five minutes or five hours. In my dream I watch an octopus slink under a rock, but then tentacles appear. I feel suckers clutching me and shudder.

*You are safe.*

I open my eyes. Sephone is hovering by my feet. I gaze at the wise anglerfish.

*You saved my life.*

Sephone's fins whir. *Worth saving.*

I look around. *Where are we?*

*Always questions,* but her fangs appear to be smiling.

*It's peaceful.*

*Cannot stay.*

Fresh water splashes onto my face from the ceiling of the cave.

*I chose Ray over the community.*

*Your brother.*

*Pyrena will keep trying to destroy our reef . . .*

*As she has for generations.*

I shake my head. *I lost the shark obsidian.*

Sephone waggles her lure and swims to where the waterfall pools in a hollowed rock. Her mind tells me that I did all that was asked, more than many Divers.

*Overcame fear. Freed ancestors. Saved twin.* Sephone blows a stream of bubbles. *Enough.* Then she swims beneath the trickling waterfall. *Drink.*

*What is it?*

*Too curious! Water holds puripuri. Must drink before air world return.*

*Why?*

*Forgetting. Sephone clicks her jaws. Saw final journey. Things you shouldn't see. Didn't elders teach?*

I shake my head.

The anglerfish hovers in front of the waterfall. *Drink. Then I guide to gateway.*

*I thought Divers had to return alone?*

*Your journey is not usual.*

The water gives me energy. I bend to take another sip, but my tank bumps the wall, loosening a jumble of rocks and pebble. The water is too muddy to drink.

Bubbles drift from Sephone's jaws. It feels like she's laughing. *Not usual again. Take back memories . . .*

I clutch the chunk of obsidian I chipped from the cave wall. *I lost the deep sea obsidian to the octopus, but at least I have this. It's not the most precious obsidian from Mano, but maybe it will still help my community.*

*And you returned. I do not have to balance obsidian in teeth.*

We swim through the kelp forest, and each time we take a break I check my air gauge. It's half into the red. I try to breathe slowly, but it's no use. My pulse is racing.

*Hurry, Sephone grumbles.*

I rest for a moment on the ledge beside my discarded fins and dive boots. It feels like a lifetime since I watched Sephone scan my toes.

*Cousin tiring. Cannot control ancestor spirits forever.*

An image of Noah fills my mind.

*I'm here!* I mind-call, hoping that he will hear. I reach down to stroke Sephone's scales. *I couldn't have done this without you.*

Sephone's jaws widen. *Braver than many, but not final healer. Journey gives courage. Maybe mother of next Diver . . .*

I shudder. There's no way I'd let a child of mine do this. Then I remember Mum. Suddenly my mind fills with longing for the outside world. Noah said time was different in the cave. Maybe she still doesn't know I've gone. Maybe Uncle Aaron hasn't told her.

*Return. Bring honour to your clan.*

I hesitate, imagining the family's disappointment that I have no deep sea glass from Mano for our ceremonies. *Will I meet you again?*

*Old fish sees back not forward.*

*I will never forget you,* I whisper to Sephone.

The anglerfish brushes my hand.

We swim past eely eyes glinting from rock crevices and over the stingrays. At the entrance her mind whispers a final message.

*You have not failed.*

I watch Sephone swim away, her lamp bobbing softly as her mate dangles limply behind.

*Thank you,* I answer.

\*

I gaze up at the light. Every muscle in my body aches, but I still have to swim to that circle of sunshine. It's less than ten metres, but it feels so far . . .

I check my air. Barely any left. I have no idea how long I've been underwater. It's impossible to guess how much nitrogen my body has absorbed. Dive tables don't cover situations like this.

I need to return slowly. If I rise quickly, my blood will fizz. After everything I've been through, the last thing I need is the bends.

Shadows cross the light, circling slowly. The sharks! I'd forgotten about them.

*Noah,* my mind whispers. *I can't do it . . .*

A faint voice replies, cutting in and out, like static on a radio. *Be brave . . . what . . . do . . . You can . . .*

I swim to the spare oxygen tank and watch the ancestors circling. I gulp oxygen, almost too tired to be frightened. *Almost.* Five minutes pass, enough time to go on.

A hammerhead patrols the entrance, blocking the light. Then a mako. I remember the black shark eyes from my childhood. Ancestors or not, these guys look hungry. I search for one last burst of courage, but I'm so tired. I just want to sleep. My hand lets go of the rope and I drift downwards.

Sephone hovers near the cave entrance. *Go back.*

Noah's voice joins Sephone's. *Swim through, Kuka. They will let you pass. I must keep chanting. Can't break this puripuri. But I'm here, just behind them. Swim through. I won't let them hurt you.*

I picture Noah maintaining his vigil in the boat. He must be exhausted. I refocus on the light.

*Be brave, Kuka, swim through.*

I stare at the sky, imagining sunshine on my cold skin.

*Go back to air, Sephone urges.*

Then I see something pink bobbing in and out of the rocks. I look closer. A herd of pygmy seahorses swims towards my mask. They dip their tiny bodies.

*Up, up, they peep.*

They must have sneaked past the sharks. Seahorses avoid deep water, so their bravery touches my heart. If they can do it, then surely I can too.

I nod to the seahorses and kick with all my might.

*Be brave, Kuka.*

I close my eyes, keeping images of Noah and the seahorses firmly in my mind. I feel the sharks around me.

*Steady, I tell myself. Don't splash . . .*

The sharks nudge me. Sandpaper skin scrapes my arms.

I open my eyes, terrified to see, but more terrified not to.

Massive creatures circle me. Sharks of all shapes and sizes. Their razor teeth so close to my face.

A hammerhead eye stares into mine. I stifle a scream, then I see a face. Uncle Aaron? How can that be?

My head bobs through the surface. I see the boat. My cousin is there, shaking the coconut rattle in the water. I gulp sweet fresh air and swim towards him. Noah reaches down. He hauls me in.

'Pull up your feet!'

As I flop onto the floor of the boat, Noah wraps a blanket around my shoulders. His voice continues chanting, but his eyes look proud.

I lie there gasping. I'm safe. And so is Ray. I smile then close my eyes in pain. How can I tell my cousin I failed the community? That I wasn't able to give an offering to the shark god? And worse, that I lost my sliver of deep sea obsidian to the giant octopus?

Noah lets the chant ease as he turns the boat for home. The sharks move away until only one large mako is left. I watch its enormous gills open and close, then I notice its fin bleeding.

'Go now,' Noah whispers.

The mako turns away and I imagine tentacles grabbing the shark. I shake my head, trying to clear the frightening image.

'You did it!' Noah says to me.

'No . . .' I'm embarrassed by my sudden tears.

He hands me a thermos of tea. 'Rest,' he says. 'There'll be time to talk when we get back.'

Noah guns the motor. As we race across the still lagoon, an enormous sea eagle follows us home. Its broad white breast feels like a protective barrier between the horrors of the cave and Noah's small, speeding boat.



MAKO XI

Fine oil water-slick  
bubbles *kamup*  
Mako gills inhale change;  
feel little Smoothskin power;  
smell deep otherness.

Watch her scramble into boat  
splashing  
splashing  
splashing.

Little Smoothskin is safe  
Granny *tumbuna singaut tru*  
ancient ties shifting.

Then  
from below  
tentacles.

Probing  
flicking  
poisonous enemy-clutch.

Mako dives  
too late  
mighty kraken drags old sandpaperskin  
downdowndown.

Fin-rip  
beak-snap  
colossal squid battling ancient enemy.

Mako flails  
old wounds splitting  
blood pouring.

To stop is to sink  
to sink is to die  
Mako stops.

Shredded flesh drifts along shark highway  
drifting down to gloomy-trench ocean-floor  
squid-treachery.

*Tumbuna* whisper  
calling old sandpaperskin  
*kamdaun, kamdaun.*

Mako soul cross-over  
back to light  
changing again . . .

## 18     Uniting

*In the end only three things matter: how much you loved, how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go of things not meant for you.*

Buddha

A lone figure is waiting on the jetty.

Mum holds one hand over her eyes, squinting into the sun. *'Kuka!'* she calls across the water.

I use the last of my energy to wave. Mum runs to the end of the jetty. As we dock, she reaches out and I fall into her arms.

Mum holds me close. Her warmth flows into me.

I see Uncle Aaron and the aunties hurrying down the beach. Then all is black. The next thing I know, I'm tucked in bed. Mum is stroking my forehead.

*'Sleep,'* she whispers. *'Sleep now, my brave shark princess.'*

\*

I wake in the evening as dusky shadows pattern the walls. Mum is reading by my bed. She smiles and puts down her book. *'How do you feel?'*

*'Like I've been to hell and back.'*

Mum frowns.

*'Just kidding!'*

*'Kuka, that's not funny. Your father and I tried so hard to keep you safe.'* Tears fill her eyes as she untangles a knot in my hair. *'When we saw what was happening, we took you and Ray far away. But the prophecy followed . . .'* She sighs and I know she's thinking about my brother.

*'Mum, Ray is at peace. I helped him cross over. He's somewhere better.'* My voice drops to a whisper. *'I wanted to follow him.'*

Mum puts a finger to my lips. *'They say that happens. It's why some twins stay. I was so worried I'd lose you.'*

I try to return Mum's hug, but I'm too weak. I point to my dive suit. It's hanging in the shower. 'Can you bring it to me?'

'It's still wet . . .'

'That's okay.'

She passes me the suit and I reach inside the pocket. My hand curls around the obsidian. It's not from Mano, but it's still precious. I feel the rough edges where I chipped it from the wall and I remember Sephone's kindness. Then I hand it to Mum. 'This is for you.'

She takes the rock and squeezes my hand so tight that it hurts. 'I'll call the others,' Mum says. 'They've been waiting for you to wake. Noah sat on the verandah until Uncle Aaron made him go and rest. And your father rang.' Mum grins. 'He said he was walking on the beach and heard you calling.'

'Dad heard me?'

Mum nods. 'That's when I really started worrying!'

Poor Dad. He's the one who has trouble believing island stories and intuition. If this is weird for Mum and me, how crazy must it be for him?

'He's on his way,' Mum says. 'When I told him what happened, Chloe pulled some strings with her travel mates. She booked him on the first plane out. If all goes well, he arrives tomorrow.'

'Dad's coming here?'

Mum smiles, and I feel mean for the way I've treated Chloe. If Dad can't be happy with Mum, then why shouldn't he try again with Chloe?

I take a deep breath. 'If you help me, I can get up.'

'Are you sure?'

'I want to be outside, in fresh air.' I touch my hair. 'But first I need to wash away this slime.'

Mum helps me into the shower. As I scrub my feet, I see that I have a permanent reminder of my journey. I stroke the transparent webbing between my toes. There's no way this skin will ever be cut away.

Mum helps me dress, then combs my hair and ties wet strands into a ponytail.

I stare at my face in the mirror. A strange, freckled ghost stares back. I look so pale, but there's a new strength in my eyes that I've never seen before. It's as if layers of a younger Izzy were peeled away and left behind in the cave.

\*

The family are waiting for me in a quiet corner of the garden. I hear Noah strumming his ukulele quietly as we approach. Uncle Aaron drapes a rug around my shoulders and we sit together while Auntie Grace mixes up a huge fruit smoothie.

'Drink this,' she says.

I take a sip and blink. It's laced with something strong.

'Drink it all,' Auntie Grace orders.

I do as I'm told. The mixture warms my belly. My family wait for me to speak, but it's hard to know where to begin, even with Mum holding my hand and Noah sitting close, lending me his strength.

'You swam into the cave,' he prompts. 'Bravely ...'

'Not so bravely,' I mutter, remembering my conversation with Ray. My throat chokes up.

'*Planti taim,*' Uncle Aaron whispers, placing his gnarly hand over mine.

Once started, the story comes out in a jumble of words. When I reach the part about making that terrible decision, my voice drops to a whisper. I tell them how I risked the community to free Ray.

'Perhaps that was wrong, but ... I'd do the same again.'

'Did what was right, *Kuka,*' Uncle Aaron says. 'Otherwise, Ray may be stuck in that place forever.'

'What happened after Ray crossed over?' Auntie Grace asks.

'Pyrena's creatures turned on me.' I shudder, not wanting to remember. 'They were our ancestors. She made them into monsters. It's too horrible to describe, but I managed to break their chains,' I smile at Auntie Grace, 'with your shark teeth. Then the anglerfish led me back through the cave and I swam through the sharks to Noah.'

I slump against Mum. 'I still don't know how I did that. Noah was amazing. He kept them circling, even that huge mako, until I was safely inside the boat.'

Uncle Aaron nods at Noah. 'Chip off old block,' he mutters.

His words remind me of the lost chip of obsidian. 'I tried to help the reef, but she was stronger, and then the octopus . . .'

Uncle Aaron takes my chin in his weather-bitten hands and tells me I've done more than many Divers before me. 'We ask *tumas*, *Kuka*. We are selfish ones. *Nau yu kambek. Yu helpim planti.*'

'But ...'

'No buts, *olgeta* proud.'

Aunt Kyrie hugs me. 'No one could ask more. *Stori bilong yu*. Can't change.'

She sounds just like Sephone. My aunt stares into my eyes and I suddenly realise who Sephone reminded me of.

*Everything is linked*, Sephone told me.

There's so much more I want to do. Perhaps I can start a coast-care group here on Finsch, and then, when I'm back in Australia, I'll ask my friends to help me fundraise for mosquito nets.

I yawn. So much to do, but not tonight. I lean back, enjoying the tropical breeze on my skin. Looking up at the stars I know that, given the chance, I'd make the same choice. Ray is free, out there with the brightest stars in the heavens. I don't regret my decision, but a wave of pain sweeps through my body. I flinch as I remember those last moments by the vent.

'*Inap!*' Uncle Aaron commands.

I look into his wise eyes. He's right. The diving tradition is safe. Pyrena still lurks in the shadows, but I can't change that. For now, perhaps, there can be balance. Ray believed it was enough. He saw further than I can. Did he also know that I'm going to finish school and honour his wishes to care for the ocean? Maybe I'll become a marine biologist and specialise in sharks. Then, one day, if the traditions hold and the land comes into my care, I will do everything I can to protect it.

'*Kuka*,' Uncle Aaron says in a serious tone, '*samting* else.'

My warm feeling vanishes. What now?

'I've spoken to other callers. *Olgeta* make first-time decision.'

I wait while he clears his throat. 'Never *bin gel* caller. Maybe *nau* is *taim*.'

A tingle of excitement flutters through my belly.

'The community is proud,' Uncle Aaron says. 'You more than passed normal initiation. *Olgeta tokim yu* begin training.'

'Training?'

'*Kuka*, we want you to become a shark caller.'

I turn to Noah.

'It's not easy,' he warns.

'Nor was going into the cave!'

Noah laughs.

'Well?' Uncle Aaron asks. Will you *kambek*?

I look at Mum.

'We could come back in the Christmas holidays. It's your decision,' she says, but I can see she's bursting with pride.

'I'd love to,' I whisper, 'but there has to be one condition.'

My uncle's smile droops. 'What?'

'As long as I don't have to swim with that huge mako!'

Uncle Aaron grins. '*Tumbuna* happy with that.'

'So, it's a deal?'

He kisses my forehead then holds out his hand. 'It's a deal, *Kuka*. Training begins next summer . . .'

## After

I'm not sure which calming herbs Auntie Grace put into my fruit smoothie, but they worked. I slept through an entire day. And when I woke in the balmy evening air, there was a wonderful surprise waiting.

'Dad!'

I blinked, thinking that I was dreaming again, but then Dad kissed my forehead. As he wrapped his big hairy arms around me, I smelt his familiar soap and knew I was safe.

'G'day, Izz, I hear you've had a bit of an adventure . . .'

'How did you get here?'

'Four planes, a truck and one ferry; the usual.'

I laughed. 'And Chloe?'

'She was glad that she could help.'

'I'm sorry I've been so mean to her.'

'That's okay, Chloe looks little, but she has big shoulders.'

I must have looked confused.

'She understands this is hard for you,' Dad added.

I didn't know what to say, but my stomach did. It suddenly growled. We both laughed.

'That's good timing,' Dad said. 'The community has organised a feast in your honour, and before you go out, I should warn you, there's a herd of pigs roasting.'

\*

The feast was fabulous. As well as plate-loads of pork, there was fish and yam and fruit. My aunts had baked all my favourites.

I watched my family laughing together and saw that something *had* changed. It was hard to say what exactly. Everyone just looked more happy and relaxed. Everyone except Uncle Saul. He looked sheepish. Whenever Uncle Saul spoke, his wife and the aunts glared at him. Unlike Jacob on Dugong Island, I knew there was no way he'd be selling our land to loggers.



After the singing and dancing, the elders called me over. They looked fierce in their traditional headdresses and face paint. I swallowed, then took a deep breath as Noah put down his ukulele and pushed me forward.

The oldest shark caller, Soloman, stood up as I approached. He spat betel nut onto the sand then raised a conch shell to his lips. As a deep blast rang out, everyone turned to watch.

Soloman lifted a traditional necklace and placed it over my head. I touched the dark chunk of obsidian threaded between smaller shells and knew where it was from. A long-ago Diver had risked his life to bring this treasure from the vent. As I held the glassy rock, I heard familiar whispers, and this time I knew the voices. They belonged to my ancestors, and Ray was with them.

I stared across the lagoon as they spoke, knowing that Ray and those brave Divers were at peace.

‘Don’t worry,’ I whispered to them. ‘I have returned safely and our family will make sure we keep the traditions safe.’

## MAKO XII

Hide and seek sharklings  
darting under mangrove roots  
blue scales flashing  
umbilical sacs trailing.

Jumping calm-water swell  
snapping molluscs  
twisting tails slapping shadows.

Dusk  
evening rise  
krill floating into safe-water-nursery  
hungry pups snapping.

Moonlight play  
wondrous luminescence  
and voices  
calling, calling.

Pups turn  
thrill to a larger knowing  
and unknowing  
the oneness of the ocean.

## Tok Pisin Glossary

<i>ansaim</i>	answer
<i>apinun</i>	afternoon
<i>bikpela</i>	big
<i>bilong</i>	belong (to)
<i>bilong yu</i>	your
<i>bilum</i>	woven bag
<i>bin</i>	was/did
<i>buai</i>	betel nut
<i>dispela</i>	this
<i>diwai</i>	tree roots
<i>em</i>	he/she/it
<i>Em hai prais</i>	That's a high price
<i>Em harim stori</i>	he/she hear story
<i>Em nau!</i>	Great!
<i>gel</i>	girl
<i>go bek</i>	return
<i>gut</i>	good
<i>hai</i>	high
<i>haptumora</i>	day after tomorrow
<i>harim</i>	listen/hear
<i>Haus Tumbuna</i>	spirit house
<i>helpim</i>	help
<i>hia</i>	here
<i>holim</i>	hold
<i>inap</i>	enough
<i>kamap</i>	come up
<i>kamaut</i>	come out
<i>kambek</i>	come back
<i>kamdaun</i>	come down
<i>kanu</i>	canoe

<i>kasaman</i>	shark caller's lasso
<i>kastam</i>	custom
<i>kokonas</i>	coconut
<i>kuka</i>	crab
<i>kukim</i>	to cook
<i>laikim</i>	want
<i>lainim</i>	learn
<i>laplap</i>	sarong
<i>larung</i>	a rattle made of halved coconut shells
<i>liklik</i>	little
<i>longpela</i>	long
<i>longpela taim</i>	long ago
<i>lukaut long</i>	Be careful
<i>lukim</i>	see
<i>mama</i>	mother
<i>manki</i>	boy
<i>masalai</i>	spirit
<i>mekim</i>	do
<i>mi</i>	I/myself
<i>mo</i>	more
<i>mobeta</i>	better
<i>moning</i>	morning
<i>nais</i>	nice
<i>nambawan</i>	best
<i>narakain</i>	shape-shifter
<i>narapela</i>	another
<i>nating</i>	nothing
<i>nau</i>	now
<i>nem bilong dispela i buga</i>	the name of this is buga
<i>nidim</i>	need
<i>no ansaim singaut</i>	don't answer a call

<i>nogat</i>	don't/don't have
<i>nogat wari</i>	don't worry
<i>nogut</i>	bad
<i>ofa</i>	offer
<i>olgeta</i>	everybody/all
<i>olpela</i>	things
<i>olsem</i>	like/that
<i>oltaim</i>	always
<i>orait</i>	okay/all right
<i>pai</i>	pie
<i>paia</i>	fire
<i>papamama</i>	parents
<i>pela</i>	person
<i>pikinini</i>	baby
<i>planti</i>	plenty
<i>poisen men</i>	bad people
<i>prais</i>	price
<i>puripuri</i>	sorcery
<i>raun</i>	round
<i>redi</i>	ready
<i>rot</i>	road
<i>rot bilong sak</i>	shark road
<i>sak</i>	shark
<i>samting</i>	something
<i>sel</i>	shell
<i>sel bilong kokonas</i>	coconut shell
<i>silva</i>	silver
<i>singaut</i>	call
<i>singsing</i>	festival
<i>solwara</i>	sea/ocean
<i>stap</i>	stay
<i>ston</i>	stone

<i>stori</i>	story
<i>taim</i>	time
<i>taim bilong nau</i>	now
<i>taim bilong tumbuna</i>	long ago
<i>takim</i>	take
<i>tapa</i>	bark cloth
<i>that em</i>	that's it
<i>ting</i>	thing
<i>tok bilong nau</i>	current talk
<i>tok bilong tumbuna</i>	traditions of ancestors
<i>tokim</i>	tell/told
<i>Tok Pisin</i>	the lingua franca of PNG
<i>toktok</i>	talk
<i>tru</i>	true
<i>tumas</i>	very/too much
<i>tumbuna</i>	ancestors
<i>tumora</i>	tomorrow
<i>wanblut</i>	relative (blood)
<i>wari</i>	problems/worry
<i>welkam</i>	welcome
<i>wokim</i>	make
<i>yu</i>	you
<i>yumi</i>	we
<i>Yu orait</i>	Are you all right/okay
<i>yupela</i>	you

## **The Dog with Seven Names**

My earliest memories are of being shoved and trampled by little paws. I was the runt, the last pup of our litter, and I struggled to reach my mother's warm milk. When I rolled out of our birthing box onto the verandah, I was too weak to climb back in. Wings flapped around my still-closed eyes. I felt pecking and smelt the sharp scent of blood...

If it wasn't for Elsie I might not have survived. She found me, shooed away the crows and held me close. Elsie's dad was Boss of the cattle station. He was a big man. My brothers and I soon learnt to smell his anger and stay clear of his hard boots. My mother was his favourite dog, but the Boss had no time for a runty pup.

'Weaklings don't survive in the Pilbara,' he snarled whenever I got in his way.

My mother was an Australian terrier, not your average cattle dog, but she was a better herder than any kelpie or heeler. The Boss boasted that Mother was fearless; she wasn't afraid to get amongst a mob of angry cattle. Mother was also old and she'd had many pups before us. Our mouths and paws exhausted her. Mother died soon after my eyes opened on a day called Melbourne Cup, while the humans were cheering for their favourite horses. The Boss blamed us. He kicked our box off the verandah and the crows flapped closer. My brothers scurried under the verandah. I was slower.

Elsie saved me again. She whispered words of love into my tiny ears and trickled milk onto my tongue. My life hung in the balance, but Elsie was patient. She was sure I'd live, because the horse winner, Rivette, was a small female like me. Elsie was like that, she loved looking for connections between things.

'Be brave,' she told me, 'remember Rivette, the first mare to win the Cup.'

Station life was hard, but I knew nothing else. My brothers grew strong. They were soon taken by stockmen who'd seen my mother's herding skill. Our father was a wild dingo, but the stockmen didn't care. They said dingo blood would make us tough.

'Take the little one too,' the Boss urged, but no one wanted me. No one except Elsie.



Elsie's mother complained that 1939 was a difficult year, what with the drought and War (whatever that was). The Boss said there was no money for extras. Not even at Christmas. Maybe that's why he gave in to Elsie's pleading.

On Christmas morning the Boss lifted me by the scruff of the neck and dumped me on a scrap of rug in an old kerosene tin. He carried me in from the outside kennel and tucked me under a strange sparkly tree. When Elsie saw me, she danced and I smelt her joy.

'Now that you're mine, I can give you a name,' she whispered as she hugged me to her chest. 'I'll call you Princess.'

While my brothers chased cattle, Elsie wheeled me about in a doll's pram, brushed my fur and tied ribbons around my neck. Sitting still in a pram wasn't easy, but I knew that if I managed it, Elsie would give me treats from the pantry. The Boss growled when he saw me wearing bonnets, but he let Elsie spoil me. Like me, she had three brothers and life was tough for a girl on a station.

'That's not ladylike,' the Missus scolded whenever Elsie galloped her horse around the stockyards, or when she raced her brothers to lasso poddy calves, or lay in the dirt making sketches of me. Elsie's mother wanted her to stay inside and read, to practise hymns on a cranky piano and pick at her needlework. Each morning Elsie did as she was told. She stayed out of the sun and practised being a lady. But after the midday meal Elsie belonged to me.

We loped around the homestead shrieking, barking and having the best adventures. Elsie taught me to dance on my hind legs and to spin in circles chasing my tail until she fell against an ant hill laughing. In the evenings, as the family gathered around their radio box, Elsie and I curled on a mat together. She tickled my ears and I licked her chin.

At night I lay on a rug beside Elsie's bed. She sang me lullabies and smiled into my golden eyes. Elsie said the colour came from my dingo father and that golden eyes meant I'd be able to see things differently. At first I didn't understand, but as I grew older, sometimes I did see things differently, things that Elsie, and even the other dogs didn't see.

One time I sensed shadowy figures around a campfire. Men were stamping on the dusty ground and singing. Another time I brushed against a big old tree and wispy

faces of long ago hunters called out to me. Their dogs wagged their tails, then when I blinked, they all disappeared.

\*

Life with Elsie was perfect, but as I grew into my paws, a thing called War kept creeping closer. Each evening the humans listened to voices in the radio talk about War. Afterwards the family spoke in hushed voices. I lay beside Elsie and shivered, wondering what War could be.

One night Elsie's oldest brother stuck a sheet of paper onto the wall. Elsie told me it was a map. She pointed to a dot that showed where our cattle station was. It looked very small. How could the family, dogs, stockmen and cattle be in a dot that was smaller than a flea?

Oldest brother had a box of coloured pins. As the radio voices spoke about War, he moved the pins back and forth in the far corner of the map. The pins were a long way from our station dot. No one smelt very worried.

Then the radio voice talked about a *Battle of Britain* and I heard the humans' hearts beat faster. Another night the voice spoke about a *Blitz*.

'That's it,' Oldest brother said, putting down his pins. 'I'm joining the army.'

The Boss jumped up and shook his son's hand. The Missus spilt her tea and left the room. Elsie told me that 'joining the army' meant her brother was leaving the station and going away to War. The 'Army' were the people he would be with.

Like the map, it was confusing.

Before he went, Oldest brother rode into town. He came back with thick clothes and heavy boots. I remember the intoxicating cow smell of the boots and being smacked for weeing on them.

Elsie sketched her brother in his new clothes. She smiled but I sensed her sadness. It was like the waiting-time-clouds that built up before the first big rain came. Elsie's mother couldn't stop crying. Her tears smelt of pride and worry at the same time. Oldest brother was a brave stockman and he was strong, but War sounded dangerous. As he waved goodbye, I wondered what would happen to him.

\*

Humans have a lot of words for where the sun is and isn't. Morning, afternoon, evening, daytime, night time. They have other words for longer times; weeks, years, months and also exciting times like birthdays. The most special time for everyone on the station was Christmas.

Christmas was the season of strong winds and bright yellow flowers. Elsie loved flowers. She put them into jam jars with old washing up water. Then she sketched them. Christmas was also the time when the station people cooked extra food and gave each other presents. Best of all, it was the time when Elsie was allowed to spend all day with me. Elsie told me she loved Christmas because it was the day I became her Princess. I licked her cheek and felt warm inside.

I was too little to remember much about my first puppy Christmas, except for the scent of the kerosene tin and the happy sound of Elsie's dancing feet. I remember the next Christmas better. It was the year the humans called 1940. I was fully grown, although that wasn't very big. Elsie spoilt me with dried liver snacks and a leather collar that one of the stockmen had made. The collar smelt delicious, but I wasn't allowed to chew it.

Elsie had taken over the job of moving Oldest brother's pins. Every evening she shifted them back and forth on the big map. When Elsie had a birthday, one of the stockmen, Dave, gave her another map. This one was smaller. There was just one big shape instead of lots of different ones. Elsie said it was a map of Australia. She pushed her shiniest pin into the place where our station was. This new dot was bigger than a flea but smaller than a tick. Elsie showed me the same Australia shape on Oldest brother's map.

'See, it's the same,' she said.

I turned my head, feeling confused as I looked back and forth.

Then Elsie pointed to the space around Australia.

'It's all water,' she said. 'Huge oceans of water, Princess!'

I barked. The most water we saw was after summer storms when the river came down. Besides Christmas, it was my favourite time. The river began as a trickle soaking into the dry earth, but soon Elsie and I had to jump aside as the trickle became

a racing river. The foaming water brought rocks and branches, beetles and snakes and sometimes even a drowned calf to crash into shrubs along the edges of the wide banks. After the water slowed, it left a string of pools for Elsie and me to play in. Elsie said that the ocean on her map never dried up. It was too confusing. I chased my tail until Elsie laughed and kissed me.

Seasons changed. Paper daisies, candle bush and mulla mulla flowers bloomed then faded. New calves grew big enough to muster and the river pools dried. Christmas came again.

As well as being a time of treats and presents, Christmas was also the time when I chased fat rainy-season lizards and heard rumbling sounds in the sky. Elsie called the rumbles thunder. She shushed me when I barked at the dark clouds.

‘Be brave, Princess, remember Rivette.’

But I couldn’t help growling. Whenever I heard crackles and booms in the sky, my golden eyes saw fire. Huge frightening flames of fire. They weren’t flames that could be smelt or heard, so Elsie didn’t understand. I didn’t understand either, but the booming made my heart beat faster, the way Elsie’s did when the radio voices spoke about War.

\*

I stopped growing, but Elsie didn’t. As her legs grew longer, Elsie sat in a chair, not the dust, when she sketched me, but she still loved to gallop around the stockyard and lasso poddies. Elsie had another birthday and we both ate fruit cake. Elsie said she was twelve years old and that I was almost three. She used my toes to try to teach me numbers and counting made sense until ‘four’. After that I became muddled.

The rainy season rumbled in again. I chased lizards and tried not to bark at the sky. After morning lessons, Elsie made paper chains for her Christmas tree and folded Santa hats for me. When she wasn’t looking I loved to lick the floury gluepot. It was tasty in a sticky, salty kind of way.

New Year’s Eve came after Christmas. It was a fun, noisy time. We behaved ourselves, so Elsie and I were allowed to stay up late. While the humans cheered the

end of 1940, Elsie slipped me chunks of warm damper. I stretched my paws and listened to the stockmen sing *Auld Lang Syne* around the campfire.

When the song finished the Boss checked his watch. Then everyone started counting backwards. Elsie did this when we played hide and seek. It made my head spin, but I knew from the rise of her voice when it was 'one' and time to hunt.

I wagged my tail as the humans yelled, 'four, three, two, *one...*' then I jumped up, ready to seek. But no one was hiding.

'Happy New Year, Princess,' Elsie shouted.

She kissed me before she kissed anyone else. That made me very happy and I danced on my back legs for her. After Elsie hugged the rest of the family, the adults settled down to gaze into the campfire. As the coals crackled, they told stories about better times; times before the War. Elsie's mother sighed and wondered where Oldest brother was.

'Let's pray the fighting ends in 1941,' the Missus whispered.

Her sad voice gave me tingles. The men raised their mugs and nodded, but Elsie's middle brother frowned.

I knew his secret. I'd seen Middle brother marching back and forth behind the shed when he thought no one was looking. He held the rabbit gun over one shoulder, aimed it at tin cans and yelled, 'Bang, bang.' I'd seen Oldest brother do the same thing before he joined the Army.

Life went on and Elsie's pins moved closer to our station. Every day the Boss grumbled about the drought. Elsie and I kept out of his way. The rumbling sky season changed to first frog-call time, but we didn't hear many frogs singing. Then one night the radio voice spoke about a ship called *Sydney*. War had smashed it and hundreds of men were missing. I'd seen ships in Elsie's school books. War must be huge, I thought if it can break up a ship.

Another night the radio voice spoke about a place called *Pearl Harbour*. The humans became even more nervy. Middle brother put bullets into the rabbit gun and made louder banging noises as he shot cans behind the shed. Another stockman left. The Boss became angrier. I cowered as he kicked the red dust and complained that War had taken his best workers.

When the radio voice spoke about somewhere called *Singapore* a dark waiting-for-rain mood settled over the family. The voice said Singapore had fallen. How can a place fall I wondered. Elsie pushed a pin into a little dot in the ocean just above Australia. The humans were restless. Whenever I licked someone, I could taste fear in their sweat. I growled at the radio. If the owner of that voice came near my Elsie, I would bite him hard.

After Singapore fell down, there was talk of evacuation and I wondered what that meant. The family gathered around the radio to listen to the new Prime Minister. I liked Mister Curtin's voice. He sounded safe. As I rested my nose on Elsie's warm foot, Mister Curtin said,

Every Australian has a duty. I call you to your duty. With the fall of Singapore the battle for Australia has opened. There must not be a man or woman in this Commonwealth going to bed to-night without having related his or her working time to purposes of helping defend Australia. Playtime must be put aside, hours given to sport and leisure must be given to war.

I felt Elsie shiver.

'Aren't I allowed to play anymore?' she asked.

'Of course not, stupid,' Middle brother said. 'We all need to do our bit now.' I bristled, but Elsie wasn't angry. She just smelt sad.

The next day Middle brother and an older stockman packed kitbags. They said they were going to 'fight the Japs'. Third Brother kicked a stone around the dust. He was angry but I didn't know why. The Missus clung to Elsie.

Whenever I heard the humans talk about War, I imagined a giant shadow-creature gobbling everything in its path. But I had no words to explain that to Elsie. For a human, Elsie was better than most at sensing moods. She must have guessed that War confused me. Or maybe I was the only one left that Elsie could talk to, because one morning Elsie drew pictures for me in the dust. She explained that War was when people fought each other for land, or when they thought it was the right thing to do.

The lines in the dirt reminded me of kelpies and heelers peeing on their territory to threaten other dogs, but I couldn't explain that to Elsie without words.

\*

War had taken so many people away from our station, but one day it brought someone to us. A nervous smelling stranger came with a letter from the War. He gave it to the Boss. No one spoke as the Boss opened the letter and read the words:

'We deeply regret to inform you...'

The Missus fell into a chair. I crept closer to Elsie, nuzzling her leg, trying to lick away her fear. Elsie held me close and whispered that the letter was from the Army. Oldest brother was missing.

'Maybe the Japs have captured him,' Third brother said.

Elsie's mother began sobbing and the Boss clipped Third brother's ear.

While the family rested through the heat of the afternoon, I watched the Boss squash the sad-news-letter into a ball. He threw it onto the floor and muttered bad words that Elsie wasn't allowed to say. They weren't ladylike.

After the Boss left the room I slunk over to the crackly paper. It held strange smells. I sniffed and my eyes saw huge flames. People were running and screaming...

I growled then blinked and the flames disappeared. Elsie was right, my golden eyes *did* see things differently. I wished I could tell her, but that would make her worry even more.

Every day Elsie's mother wrote letters to her missing son. She didn't notice that Elsie sat outside combing my fur instead of reading lessons or practising the piano. After the letter from the Army, the Missus kept talking about 'moving south to Geraldton'. She covered furniture with sheets and packed away books. Elsie put a pin on Geraldton and we huddled together as her mother made radio calls to the Red Cross.

'Someone must know where he is,' she told the Boss.

He didn't answer.

The next War word was *Darwin*. The radio voice said it had been bombed. Elsie showed me Darwin on the map and added a pin. Darwin was closer than Singapore. On the radio, a different voice said:

*... the shock was the extent of the raid, the number of machines employed on such a little place as Darwin. The Japs, they came over there and they started bombing the moment they arrived. There was practically no warning. When I say no warning, they came in from a direction that, well ... we really ... none of us expected them to come from...*

*Of course the siren went and I like everyone else thought, oh well, right I'll take shelter...*

Elsie held me close and I felt her shiver.

*In a matter of, I'd say less than a minute, I heard the bombs crashing... As each bomb falls, and they're big bombs I can assure you, there's a sort of a nasty tremor in the earth. What really the worst part of it's when the bombing is on, it isn't so much as where the last bomb is dropped. You don't think much about that. What you're thinking about is where the next one is going to come ...*

The words made no sense to me, but the frightened voices of the humans made me tremble. The next morning the Boss pulled on the boots I'd seen him hide in the shed. They were like the ones I'd peed on, but this time I knew better. Elsie's mother shouted at the Boss.

'You're too old to fight.'

The Boss slammed the screen door and stomped onto the verandah. I was frightened. Before she died, my old mother had taught me to trust my instincts. They told me that something very bad was about to happen.

And it did.



The worst thing possible.

Elsie's family took Elsie away and I had to stay behind.

They were going south, Elsie told me. *Evacuating*. I'd learnt to hate that word.

Elsie pleaded with the Boss to let me go with them, but he shook his head.

'Your grandmother has no room for a dog.'

'But Princess is tiny...'

'With your Aunt Beryl and her twins, there'll be barely enough room for you!'

'Princess could stay outside.'

'Ration coupons don't cover dog food. And the roads down south will be busy.

Finding Princess a place on another station will be safer.'

'How can the north-west be safer for Princess, if it's not safe for us?'

The Boss ignored Elsie's question.

'She might learn to herd cattle,' he said, 'and become useful like her mother.

Then after the war we can get her back.'

'Princess is a house dog,' Elsie yelled. 'She's never worked cattle. She'll hate being away from me.'

Elsie cried and begged, but the Boss held his jaw tight. I knew tears would make no difference. When Elsie ran to our secret hideout behind the bougainvillea bush, I followed.

'It's not fair!' Elsie sobbed.

I stayed as still as I could while Elsie's tears fell onto my fur. The Boss soon found us. He tied a rope onto my collar and dragged me towards his stockmen. The Boss gave one of the men some money to take me. The man was Dave. He was kind, but he wasn't Elsie.

Elsie clung to me. We howled, but it made no difference.

Dave looked awkward. He promised Elsie that he'd take good care of me and that he'd find me a nice home. I watched Elsie wipe her tears, trying to be brave.

'Be strong,' she whispered into my drooping ears. 'Remember Rivette.'

Then Elsie's family climbed into their big old truck and drove away. I blinked as dust whirled up from the track, stinging my eyes.

The Japanese were coming. Everyone was talking about them. The air smelt of fear and excitement. Dave and his mate, Stan, couldn't wait to fight. They wanted to 'give the Japs what for'. They said it would serve them right for what they'd done to Darwin.

Dave had promised Elsie's father that before signing up, he and Stan would take a big mob of cattle to Port Hedland. Their plan was to load the stock onto a ship called *Koolama* and then find a recruiting office to join the Army. The *Koolama* ship would take the cattle south. I didn't know what would happen to me. I tried not to fret. Maybe the Boss would change his mind. Maybe he and Elsie would be waiting for me in Port Hedland. I imagined myself leaping into Elsie's arms and snuggling my nose against her soft neck...

The first days of droving were hard. Elsie was right, I was a pet not a station dog, but Dave was kind. When my paws bled, he made a sling for me beside his saddlebag. Swinging against Dave's horse made me giddy, but after a few days I got used to it. Once my pads toughened up I ran behind the cattle with Stan's dog, Diesel. The job of herding came naturally to me. I enjoyed nipping cattle hooves. Dave ruffled the fur on my head and told me I was a quick learner.

'Good work, Dog,' he said. 'In time, you'll be as clever as yer mum!'

After nights on a rug beside Elsie's bed, sleeping under the wide sky and gazing at stars was exciting. My golden eyes saw old shadows and I felt the warm breath of the land. But I would have given it up in a heartbeat for Elsie. Until now, we'd been together every day of my life. I missed everything about Elsie. I missed the way Elsie's eyes sparkled when she smiled at me and I missed her sweet soapy smell. I especially missed the treats she hid in her pockets.

Life was different out droving, but I wasn't lonely. Dave, Diesel, Stan and I settled into what Dave called the daily humdrum. We left camp at first light, followed dry rivers and passed abandoned homesteads, pushing the cattle towards the setting sun. Cattle dogs can be mean, but Diesel wasn't. When the day's work was done, and the men began cooking their dinner, we followed rabbit trails then flopped in the dust side by side.

One midday, we stopped for a break at an old bloodwood tree. Dave gathered twigs for a fire to boil the billy while Stan wheeled his horse around to gather straggling poddies. I circled the tree's wide trunk, sniffing the ground. Something felt wrong, but I didn't know what. I watched my new owner scoop a hollow in the dirt. He covered it with twigs and leaves, then set a fire and poured two cups of our precious water into the billy. When he noticed me panting Dave poured a capful into my bowl. I lapped gratefully.

The sun was high. I flopped in the dust beside the bloodwood trunk to spread my paws. I'd already learnt that shade was a rare treat for a drover's dog. Sometimes I could rest in the shadow of a cow, but that was risky.

The ground was hot, even in the shade, and my paws were sore. I licked them, then wriggled, making a small willy-willy until Dave yelled, 'Sit still, Dog.'

I stopped squirming but couldn't settle. Something was definitely wrong. I cocked my ears, listening to the rustle of cattle and the tired snorting of Dave's horse. There were no strange sounds, but I still sensed danger.

Dave put a match to the leaves. He coaxed a wisp of flame and as the flame crackled, he hummed a marching tune.

I growled.

'What's wrong, girl?'

A loud crack answered.

There was no time for Dave to jump. Cockatoos screeched as a thick branch fell, pinning him to the ground. Dave's gelding bolted. My first instinct was to run with the horse, back to the comfort of the station, but Elsie was gone. I was Dave's dog now. He was my human and he was trapped.

I ran around the tree barking.

Stan heard the commotion. He turned his horse and galloped back.

'Dave,' he called. 'What happened?'

There was no answer.

Then he saw the branch.

I smelled the drover's fear and my legs trembled. Be brave, I thought.  
Remember Rivette.

Diesel crouched beside me. I licked his chin. Diesel was a wise old dog. He'd know what to do. But Diesel did nothing.

I listened to blood race through Dave's veins. His heart was pumping fast. I crept closer, nosing the branch. Blood covered Dave's arm. It smelt like the lucky pennies he liked to jingle in his pocket.

Stan knelt beside Dave.

'Jeez, mate, are you alright?'

Dave's eyes were shut.

Stan wrapped his arms around the branch and tried to move it. Dave stirred.

'Stan,' he gasped.

'Don't worry, we'll soon sort this out.'

Stan's face was pale and his hands shook as he grabbed the branch to try again.

'It's too heavy,' Dave groaned, 'Ride for help.'

'I'm not leaving you here alone.'

'Dog will stay.'

I felt Stan hesitate. He watched me licking Dave's arm.

'Ride back to that homestead we passed,' Dave whispered.

'It was abandoned...'

'There'll be a radio. Call the flying doctor.'

'But...'

I sensed Stan's confusion.

'It's me only chance. Go. Maybe the doc can fly in before dark.'

Stan flung off his hat and scratched his thin hair.

'Hurry,' Dave murmured.

Stan moved a water bag and lantern next to his mate. Then he stamped out the campfire and stared at me.

'Stay,' he said. 'Look after him, Dog.'

I watched Stan run to his horse and swing into the saddle on Nellie's back.

Diesel glanced at me, barked once, then loped after his master.

\*

As Nellie galloped away, droplets of Stan's sweat swirled back in the clouds of rising dust. I heard the mob's panic but ignored their silly mooing. With no stockwhips or dogs to bully them, the cattle soon settled. As they regrouped, small desert noises began again. I heard lizards scuttle through the underbrush and my paws itched to catch one, but Stan had told me to stay. I curled against Dave and did as I was told. We hadn't been together long, but Dave was my person. When he suffered, I suffered too.

I pressed my small body against Dave's skin. He felt clammy. I'd once seen a station bitch lick her pups into life, and I licked Dave's salty skin the same way. After a while his arm became warmer. I stepped around Dave's swollen legs and began licking the other arm. Streaks of blood had pooled near his hand. I snapped at the flies trying to settle there. Dave groaned.

'Dog,' he called.

I shuffled closer to his face.

'Sit down, Dog.'

I curled against Dave's shoulder and felt him relax. Leaning against his skin seemed to steady his breathing. I stretched my legs, trying to warm more of Dave's body, but it was no use, I was too small. I rested my nose on his wet arm instead.

As we lay there, I thought of Elsie and wondered what she'd want me to do. 'Be still,' a voice told me, so I did my best not to wriggle.

The sun moved across the sky. Dave's skin became colder. Parrots swooped in the bloodwood tree, pecking at the fresh sap and insects. The birds squawked and squabbled, shrieking news of the fallen branch. My whiskers twitched. I wanted to run around the tree barking. Chasing parrots was one of my favourite things, but Dave needed me to be still. I glared at the birds instead. They kept squawking.

When the parrots finally flew away I lapped water from the billy and went to squat behind the tree. Then I returned to Dave. The tree's shadow had become a long line pointing after Stan. Where was the other stockman? Should I try to find him?

'Stay,' Stan had told me and so I stayed.

As the red dirt cooled, I heard a faraway rumbling. I looked into the sky and saw a silvery glint pass overhead. It was an aeroplane. I'd seen one at Elsie's station when Third brother fell off the water tank. Was this the same plane?

Ants gathered on a leaf near Dave's blood. As they moved back and forth, I remembered hide and seek games with Elsie and the feel of her hand on my ears...

Dave shivered, then his breath became raspy. I was frightened and let out a small howl. I couldn't help it. A dingo answered. Other creatures stirred. I smelt a wallaby mother with her joey. My stomach growled as Dave's breathing changed again. It would soon be night. I whimpered and licked his face.

\*

At last I heard Nellie's hooves. Diesel ran to meet me. He sniffed Dave then circled the branch and peed on the outer leaves. I nosed the air. Stan and Diesel weren't alone. There was another man. Sharp smells clung to the stranger's clothes. He walked towards Dave. I barked, warning him to stay back.

'It's okay,' Stan said. 'Doc's here to help.'

When Third brother fell from the water tank, an aeroplane person had come to help. He was also called Doc. This Doc smelt like the other one, but he was younger. Other Doc fixed Third Brother's leg, but had to wait for a storm to pass before he could fly out. While he was waiting, Other Doc checked everyone's ears and eyes and throats. He even checked me.

The Missus said she didn't want me to have pups, so Other Doc did something to my belly. I don't know what because I was asleep. When I woke my belly fur was gone and I had a line of tight stitches. Elsie's spoiling helped me forget the pain.

I growled a soft warning as this Doc took strange things from his bag and began prodding Dave. Stan held me in his arms as Doc lifted Dave's eyelids. I watched Doc press two fingers onto Dave's neck and listened to his gravelly breathing. Then he filled a syringe. It was smaller than the ones the Boss used on cattle, but it still looked dangerous. I bristled.

Doc pushed the needle into Dave's arm and said, 'That'll help with the pain.'

Dave's eyelids flickered. He looked up.

'You made it.'

Stan nodded. 'The doc's here now. You'll soon be right.'

'Thanks mate.'

'No worries, cobber. Once the herd is sorted, you can buy me a drink in Hedland.'

I squirmed in Stan's arms but he held me tight. I imagined Elsie's voice telling me to settle, and as I calmed, Stan put me down.

The injection worked quickly. Soon Dave's breathing was easier. When the men weren't looking I had a good sniff of Doc's bag. It smelt like a box in Elsie's kitchen. That box held bottles which the Missus called medicine. I took another sniff and decided Doc's bag was safe. I curled against Dave's feet, watching Doc in the fading light. His hands looked gentle.

Stan lit the lantern then cut branches from the far side of the tree. When he had two long sticks, he wrapped them together with a blanket to make a bed. Stan dragged the bed to Doc.

'Ready when you are, Doc.'

The other man waited. I sensed that Doc was uncomfortable, like I was when the Boss was angry and I'd done something wrong. Doc took a deep breath. When he spoke his voice was steady, but the things he said were strange.

'Dave's chest and stomach are badly crushed...'

'Let's get him out then.'

I heard Doc swallow.

'Crush injuries are complicated,' he said. 'After so many hours with damaged muscles, there's been limited blood flow to Dave's tissues. Some cells have started to die. Once we move that branch, toxins will rush into Dave's bloodstream...'

'And?' Stan looked confused.

Doc said, 'Without intravenous fluids Dave will develop acute renal failure.'

'Meaning?'

'His kidneys won't work.'

I watched Stan frown at the doctor. I didn't know what any of this meant but my instincts told me it was bad.

'You don't know Dave. He's strong as a Mallee bull...'

'Dave's injuries are severe. After so many hours of crush, he'd be battling to survive renal failure. If we were in hospital, he'd have a chance. I could begin a drip and we could give him blood, but even then...'

'What if we ease the branch slowly?'

'The blood will surge as soon as the weight is removed.'

'There must be something you can do.'

'I can make him comfortable.'

'But we're going to fight the Japs. We've been planning it for weeks. As soon as we get this mob in, we're off to do our bit.'

'I'm sorry.'

Stan kicked the dirt. I jumped up and growled, standing guard over Dave. Stan strode into the darkness. Diesel followed, his tail drooping. I heard Stan throwing rocks. When he came back I cowered.

'Are you sure there's nothing we can do?'

Doc shook his head.

Stan sank to his knees, holding the lantern next to his mate. Dave stirred. His eyes opened and I nuzzled his cheek. Dave stared up at Stan and I felt something shift in Dave. He knew.

'It's not good is it?'

Stan took a deep breath.

'You always had a hopeless poker face!'

Stan sighed. 'Can't teach an old dog new tricks.'

I licked Dave's ear.

'Just tell me the truth,' he said.

'If we shift the tree, we'll do more damage to ya innards.'

'And if you don't lift it?'

Stan looked away.

'Not a good choice, hey.'

'I can give you pain relief,' Doc said. 'You won't feel anything.'

'Right, well that's something.'

Stan wiped his eyes. 'Jeez, Dave, I'm sorry. Maybe if I'd ridden faster...'

'Nothing you could have done.' Dave paused. 'What about the cattle?'

'They'll be right. I spoke to Everett on the radio. He'll try and find someone to help.'



‘Sorry to bail on you,’ Dave groaned. ‘If Smokey comes back, you keep him. You always liked that horse ...’

The men were quiet for a moment then Dave whispered, ‘Darn shame we can’t sign up together. You’ll have to give it to the enemy from both of us!’

‘You can count on that.’

‘Is there anyone you want me to contact?’ Doc asked.

‘Nah.’ Dave closed his eyes, ‘I’ve always been a loner.’ Then he looked at me.

‘What about the dog?’

‘I’ll look after her,’ Stan offered.

‘You’ll be fighting Japs.’

Dave turned his head to the other man ‘Take me dog, Doc. I promised the station girl I’d find her a home. The terrier’s small but she’s a bright little thing and brave as anything.’

Doc hesitated and my ears drooped. I could tell he didn’t want me.

‘Please,’ Dave muttered, ‘I promised the girl...’

Doc looked into Dave’s pleading eyes. I felt a moment of understanding pass between them, then Doc nodded.

‘I’ll make sure she finds a good home.’

‘Thanks, Doc.’

I wanted to tell Doc that I’d had a good home. If only he could find Elsie for me, but Dave didn’t say Elsie’s name and I had no words.

Dave looked at me.

‘Thanks for staying by me, Dog.’

I licked his face. Dave smiled for a moment, then groaned as his arm shook.

He turned to Stan. ‘Thanks for riding back.’

Stan nodded and wiped his eyes.

I whimpered. I’d smelt death before and knew Dave was dying. His feet were already cold and lifeless. I snuggled against them, trying to give him comfort. Diesel hunkered down beside me.

After a while Dave whispered, ‘I’m ready.’

Stan tied me to the bloodwood tree as Doc filled the syringe. Once Dave was sleeping, they lifted the branch. I howled as Dave's life left his body. My keening startled a dingo and the evening air was suddenly filled with the wild dog's call.

\*

Stan ripped Dave's shirt into strips and used it to tie Dave onto the branch bed. He strapped that onto Nellie's saddle. Once that was done, Stan relit the fire and balanced his billy over the flames. I was glad Stan hadn't seen me lap water from it.

I heard the water bubble. Stan tossed a handful of tea and a gum leaf into the billy. The familiar smell settled my jitters and I crept over to curl against Dave's body. The men shared a piece of fruit cake. I drooled, remembering how Elsie used to slip me crumbs from the Christmas table. It seemed forever ago. Stan took some dried beef from his saddlebag. He threw it to Diesel and me. I gnawed quickly before Diesel could grab my share. Be brave, I thought as I gulped the meat, remember Rivette.

The men waited by the fire until moonrise. Then they threw tea leaves onto the coals and we began walking. I was glad to leave the bloodwood tree and its musty smell of death.

The earth was cool under my paws. As we walked Doc spoke about the attack on Darwin. He said there'd been two raids with dozens of Japanese aeroplanes. Elsie's mother used to say the word dozens when she was cooking biscuits, so I knew it was much more than four.

'How many were killed?' Stan asked.

'First report was fifteen people, but Saturday's paper listed nineteen. No one knows how many were injured. There's also talk of a hospital ship being attacked.'

'Mongrels,' Stan muttered. 'The sooner I get to Hedland the better.'

Doc nodded. 'The other flying doctors have joined the RAAF,' he said, 'but if I leave there'll be no doctor in the north-west.'

'Where's Doc Vickers?'

'In Perth. He's Commanding Officer of the Military Hospital.'

'Jeez, that'll keep him busy.'

'Too right. We're all busy now. I'm the only non-army doctor from Broome to Carnarvon.'

'Fair dinkum?'

'When John Flynn started the Inland Mission his rule was, "One man, one job." But that was before the war. Being pilot, engineer and doctor means I can do three jobs. That frees up others, but some days my hands long to take the controls of a Spitfire.'

'Dave and I were sure as hell grateful you aren't fighting overseas,' Stan said. 'Someone needs to stay back to look after the home front.'

'I wish I could have done more for your mate.'

'You gave him a peaceful death, Doc, that's more than many blokes get in wartime ...' Stan stroked his whiskers then giddeyuped the mare. As I padded along behind, I heard him mutter, 'One doctor from Broome to Carnarvon, strewth!'

'I'm Mining Warden and Magistrate too,' Doc muttered, 'but that's a whole other story...'

My nose quivered. Something was following us. I sniffed the darkness. It was Dave's horse. He left the shadows and trotted towards Stan.

'G'day, Smokey.'

Stan stroked the horse's sweaty neck and spoke softly, the way Elsie used to when I was restless. After a while Smokey's snorting eased. He tossed his mane and I heard his big heart settle.

'Why don't you ride him, Doc.'

The tall man hesitated for a moment, then swung into Dave's empty saddle.

\*

Nellie was first to smell the station wells. She nickered and quickened her steps. Diesel and I left the men and ran ahead. There was no sound of dogs or humans at the homestead. Stan and Doc carried Dave to a table in the kitchen, even though there was a place for dead humans on a hill behind the house. Diesel and I had explored it a few days earlier. The bones we'd smelt were deep in the ground and very old. There

was a place like that at Elsie's homestead with two big mounds and another tiny one. I didn't like going near it. The place made me nervous.

'I'll help you dig a grave in the morning,' Doc offered.

Stan shook his head.

'If you're the only doctor for thousands of miles, then I reckon there's plenty of other things you'll need to be doing back in town.'

Doc sighed.

'Matron will be expecting me for hospital rounds after breakfast,' he said, 'but we could start digging at first light...'

'I remember your Matron from when me tonsils came out last winter. She liked everything to run tickety-boo, and she's not one to be kept waiting.' Stan tapped Doc on the arm. 'Don't you worry about the grave, Doc. You get on back to Matron and I'll find a peaceful spot for Dave. I'd rather say goodbye on me own anyway.'

'Are you sure?'

Stan nodded. He went into a bedroom and came back with a sheet to put over Dave's body then he uncovered a radio set and started pedalling.

'I'll send a message to Hedland while you get a cuppa going,' Stan said.

Doc set a fire in the stove and filled a kettle.

The radio crackle hurt my ears. A man began speaking.

'G'day Everett,' Stan replied. 'Doc saw Dave ...'

'How is he?'

'Dave didn't make it.'

'I'm sorry,' said the Everett voice.

There was a crackly silence, then Doc walked across the room and said, 'I'll fly back at first light.' Then he put down the handset and the men settled on the verandah with a cup of tea and canned beans from the pantry.

While they ate, I sniffed the room. It held the scents of four different people, all long gone, and also a cat. Animal smells on the verandah were fresher. I smelt the place where a fox had crouched the night before. A smear of blood showed where she'd caught a rat. I raised my nose in the direction the fox had dragged her kill. Maybe she'd return tonight. I could hear more rats scuttling behind the kitchen wall.

I turned around a few times then settled down under the table holding Dave's body. His skin smelt bad, but something of Dave lingered. I still felt him in the air. It was a soft presence. I huddled in Dave's death shadow, wishing Elsie was here to whisper soft words into my ears. Dave was my link to Elsie. How could I find her without him?

As I rested my head on my paws, I listened to the other men speak. Every now and then Stan shifted and his breath changed as he peered at his mate's still body.

'I'll bet things are different in Port Hedland ...' Stan said.

My ears pricked up. Hedland was where we were taking the cattle.

'Hedland's become a military garrison,' Doc said. His face smiled at the old drover, but I smelt his exhaustion.

'I heard there are over one hundred soldiers in town.'

'More now. As well as Yank pilots and Dutch evacuees. Most of the women and children have gone south and those that haven't are nervy – except Matron.' Doc smiled. 'Matron says that even if we're bombed, she'll stay to look after the patients. It's brave of her. Every day there are fresh rumours, especially since that article about the pearlers.'

'What article was that?'

'A newspaper fellow reckons the Japs working on pearl luggers have been making secret maps.' Doc shook his head. 'I don't believe it. I removed a Japanese bloke's appendix last year and he was more worried about an invasion than me. As soon as he was fit enough, the army put him in the Broome jail and then I heard they sent him to a camp in Victoria.' Doc sighed. 'All the old pearl divers are locked up now.'

'Where they should be,' Stan muttered. 'Ya can't trust em, Doc.'

'Maybe, but this fellow was born in Broome, so was his father. Seemed to me that he was stuck between two worlds.'

'I served with the 10<sup>th</sup> Light Horse in the Great War,' Stan said, 'and a Jap ship, the *Ibuki*, escorted us from Fremantle to the Middle East. They were our allies then, and we were glad of their ship's protection, but things have changed since 1914.'

The men talked about another long ago War. They used strange words I hadn't heard, so I soon lost interest. I dozed beside Dave's body instead, remembering the

day he promised Elsie that he'd find me a nice home. If Doc took me to Hedland, maybe Elsie could still find me.

My ears lifted. There were voices outside. I growled, but Stan didn't notice.

Doc was saying, 'He copped a lungful of gas and that was the end of his war.'

'Did he make it home?'

'Yes, but his health was ruined.'

I growled again. This time Doc turned.

'What's the dog's name?' he asked.

'The station girl called her something fancy, but Dave just called her Dog. She seemed happy to answer to that.

'I'm not sure I can keep her,' Doc said. 'My wife is busy with our new baby and I'm in the air every second day.'

'Couldn't she go in the plane with you?'

'She'd have to sit very still.'

'She didn't move from Dave's side all day...'

'That's true.' Doc watched me guarding Dave's body. 'Whatever happens, I'll keep my promise and do my best to find her a good home.'

'Won't be easy,' Stan muttered. 'No one wants a dog at the moment. The men who've joined the army gave away their cattle dogs. Or shot them.'

'That seems a bit rough.'

Stan leant down to pat Diesel's head and said, 'We're all making hard choices now ...'

Doc frowned.

'I might be able to leave her in one of the remote communities.'

'She's the kind of dog that needs one person to love, Doc. I'd rather bury her with Dave than send her somewhere you're not sure about.'

I trembled. Would Stan really do that to me?

'It's a pity,' Stan continued. 'Her mum was a cracker, a pedigree something or other, and a great herder. Dave said the father was dingo, but apart from the eyes, I can't see it. She's a good rabbitier though,' Stan continued, 'and not afraid to get amongst the cattle.' He sighed. 'Look, Doc, I know Dave made a promise to the girl,

and now you've promised to find her a good home, but Dave wouldn't have wanted the dog going to just anyone.'

But he'd want me to live, I thought, wishing I had words to tell them.

'If you can't keep the dog, then maybe it's better if I shoot her.'

I slunk into a corner. I knew about shooting. When an animal was sick or couldn't keep up with the herd, a stockman took it aside with a gun. Once the mob passed, there'd be a click then a bang and the animal would be dead. Sometimes the stockmen even ate the animal.

I scratched a flea and tried to stop shaking. I didn't want to be eaten.

I crouched lower. Maybe I could creep past the men and run into the darkness. But if I did that, how could I get to Hedland and find Elsie?

Before I could move I heard voices again and smelt dogs outside. I howled. Diesel leapt up and ran into the yard. As Stan reached for his gun, two men stepped out of the darkness.

'G'day boss,' a soft voice called.

Stan put down his rifle.

'Hello Bernie,' I heard Stan's relieved breath, 'How's your family?'

'Not bad,' Bernie replied. 'We heard the plane earlier and followed it to the airstrip. Then we saw your fire. Is everything alright? We promised the station Missus that we'd keep an eye on the homestead...'

'There's been an accident,' Stan said. 'This is the doctor.'

Bernie shook hands then pointed to his friend.

'That's Jarli,' he said.

The men perched on the verandah step. While Doc made a fresh pot of tea Stan told them about Dave's accident.

'Sorry,' Bernie said. 'Dave was a good bloke.'

No one spoke for a moment, then Stan said, 'I don't s'pose you fellows could help me drive the cattle to Hedland?'

Jarli and Bernie talked together with different kind of words. As they spoke my mind saw glowing campfires and a pale dog loping alongside a tall, bare-chested man. They were hunting kangaroo. My nose quivered and I felt long ago paws stepping on dirt ...

'Okay,' Jarli said. 'We'll come back at first light.'

'Do you need a good dog?' Doc asked pointing to me.

Bernie shook his head. 'We've got dogs.'

'Top kelpies,' Jarli added with a smile.

I heard Doc sigh as the men left.

'Shooting the dog doesn't seem right,' he told Stan. 'I guess I'll take her back to Hedland in the plane. There must be someone who'll give her a home.'

Stan smiled. 'You'd be saving me a bullet,' he said. 'And by jingo, I hate shooting a good dog.'

I put my nose onto my paws, breathed deeply and closed my eyes.

\*

The men were dozing when the radio crackled. I pricked my ears. A voice was calling. It was the man they called Everett, not the *Pearl Harbour* voice.

'Dingo Plains, come in, Dingo Plains.'

Stan hurried to the radio and began pedalling.

'This is Dingo Plains...'

'Hello Stan. Is Doc there? I need to speak to him?'

'I'm here, Everett.'

'Doc, urgent assistance is needed at Willoughby Station. A girl has gashed her leg. They say it's pretty bad.'

'What's happened?'

'She was on the wrong side of a steer, and she's only six years old. The Willoughby blokes reckon their runway is in good condition and they've cleared stock from the airstrip. Can you attend? Over.'

Doc turned to Stan.

'Can you organise enough light for a night take-off?'

Stan checked the cupboards and came back carrying lanterns.

'Okay,' Doc told Everett. 'I should be able to leave within the hour. Please tell Willoughby to light their flares.'

'Roger that.'



Doc grabbed his sharp-smelling bag while Stan ran outside calling Bernie and Jarli, asking them to help him with the lanterns.

I was suddenly alone.

I sniffed and looked around. I didn't want to leave Dave, even though his body no longer smelt like Dave, but my stomach grumbled. I went onto the verandah and licked crumbs from underneath the men's chairs. Doc had dropped some soft beans. They were delicious. I snuffled for more, but there weren't any. I returned to Dave, but the body on the stretcher was just an empty shell now. I trotted to the edge of the verandah.

'Dog,' Stan shouted. 'C'mon...'

I looked at Dave one last time then stepped into the clear night. The air was thick with insect calls. I followed Diesel and Stan to a long track of dirt where Doc's aeroplane shone in the moonlight. The men had lit small fires along each side of the airstrip. Bernie and Jim stood at one end holding lanterns. Their kelpies crouched in the dust behind them.

I watched Doc climb onto the bottom wing of his plane and step into a hole up on top. He pulled a cap onto his head, then reached down to shake Stan's hand.

'Good luck getting that mob of cattle to Hedland. If you have time, stop by the hospital for a cuppa.'

Stan nodded. 'Thanks for coming, Doc.' He leant down and lifted me into the air. 'Hey, don't forget the dog.'

Stan passed me over the wing and Doc tucked me into his jacket.

'Stay,' Doc said. Then he closed the zipper.

I wriggled, but Doc held me close. I was too tired to fight so I rested against him. I was used to Doc's scent, but his jacket held other interesting smells, strange things that I didn't know...

From inside the jacket I heard Doc call, 'Okay, spin the propeller.'

There was a click, then the engine roared.

'It's alright,' Doc whispered, stroking my ears.

As we began moving, I peeped out. The plane was bumping towards the end of the airstrip. Doc turned the plane and waved to Stan. Then I felt his feet pushing

pedals. We whizzed along the airstrip. Doc pulled a metal stick. The front of the plane lifted and we climbed into the sky. I trembled, but Doc smelt calm.

‘It’s alright,’ he said.

The plane tilted. We circled the airstrip and I saw Stan. He was tiny. Looking up, I saw clouds racing past the moon. I strained to hear familiar sounds, but all I could hear was the droning of the engine. The only familiar scent was an oily machine smell that I’d known on the station. I tried to peer over the edge, but Doc’s gloved hand held me back. He was staring ahead. Concentrating. Like Elsie used to do when she had to finish her sewing.

‘Settle, Dog,’ he murmured.

A rush of cold wind tickled my ears, then swept along my back. I shivered and buried my nose in Doc’s warm stomach. I must have dozed because I woke to the sound of humming. Elsie often hummed, so for me it was a happy sound. I wriggled and looked up at Doc.

He stroked my head with one gloved hand while I snuffed cold air. The night was clear and I felt Doc’s joy at being in the sky. Like Elsie’s joy when we ran around the sheds together. Then Doc began singing. His voice was deep and sure. As we flew into the darkness, I gave a short accompanying howl. Doc laughed. Being in the sky was amazing.

Doc’s song grew louder. It was a warm friendly rumble in his chest, right next to my ear. He was singing a throaty human howl to the moon. I rearranged my legs and gave another companionable yowl. Doc laughed again.

‘You’re a sweet little thing,’ he said. ‘I wish I could keep you. You’d be good company ...’

I yawned. No one could replace Elsie, but until I found her, being Doc’s friend would have to do. I blinked at the stars. They felt closer here. So did Elsie. I snuggled deeper into Doc’s jacket and drifted back to sleep.

I woke and it was dark. My paws were squashed. Where was I?

'Hello,' Doc said as I poked my nose out of his warm jacket. 'Did you sleep well?'

We were still in the air. I licked Doc's chin and he scratched my ears. Then I wriggled, trying to get out. Doc pushed me back.

'Not long to go,' he muttered. 'We should see Willoughby's flares soon.'

It was the cold, grey time before sunrise. My whiskers twitched in the chilly air. A small map covered Doc's knees. It crackled as I squirmed.

'Keep still,' Doc said.

I tried but being in the sky was too exciting.

I felt Doc's feet working the pedals. He pushed levers, shone a torch onto the map and peered ahead while I watched darkness fade.

'Look, there are the flares.'

Doc pointed, but I could only see inside the plane, or if I looked up, a long wing above us. Doc moved the stick in front of him and we dropped closer to the ground. Familiar scents tickled my nose. I smelt horses, cattle and smoke. Then I heard human voices. They were calling out to us.

As the plane circled the airstrip, I saw a row of lights. People were gathered around a truck. Doc's body braced as our wheels touched the ground, so I braced too. We sped along the airstrip. Then the plane slowed. Doc loosened his zipper and at last I was able to stretch.

'Thanks for coming, Doc!' a big man yelled.

The fires along the airstrip made strange shadows across his face.

Doc waited for the wing fans to stop turning, then he climbed out. When I tried to follow, Doc told me to stay. I whimpered. I really needed to pee.

'Stay,' he repeated.

I rested my paws on the little window and looked out. A girl lay on the back of a truck. She was moaning. Even from the plane, I could smell her fear and pain.

'Hello,' Doc said. 'What's your name?'

'Beth.'

Doc unwrapped Beth's bandages and cleaned her leg. The sticky odour of blood was strong.

'You're being very brave,' Doc told her. 'How old are you?'

'Nearly seven.'

She held up more than four fingers.

'Really?'

Doc smiled a pretend smile at Beth as he rewrapped the bandage, but the rest of his body was tense.

'Will she be alright?' the woman asked.

'It's a deep gash and I can see bone. I'll need to take Beth to Hedland as soon as possible. We'll give her a tetanus injection, stitch the wound and keep her at the hospital for a couple of days.'

'What about the raids?' the woman asked. 'We're packed ready to leave at first light...'

Doc stepped away from the girl and lowered his voice. Although he sounded calm, I could smell Doc's uneasiness. 'With good care, Beth should make a full recovery, but if her leg becomes infected, there might be complications.'

'What kind of complications, Doc?'

'If the wound turns septic, Beth could lose her leg. We'll need to keep her at the hospital to make sure everything is fine.'

How could a child lose a leg, I wondered. The woman began crying, so I knew there must be a way. I felt a strange moment of terror and licked my own front leg.

'I should have been watching her,' the woman cried, 'but we're evacuating and there's the baby and the toddler to mind...' Two smaller children sat in the front of the truck. Their eyes were wide and frightened. '... We should have left weeks ago.'

I sensed that the woman was going to faint, the way Elsie's mother used to on very hot days, but the man put an arm around her.

'Calm down, Grace,' he said. 'Everything will be alright.'

The man turned back to Doc. 'We trust you to do what's best. If you think Beth needs to be in hospital, then that's what we'll do. Grace, you and the little ones can leave for Geraldton at first light. I'll finish moving the stock then ride Blaze into Hedland and wait with Beth until she's able to be moved.'

I pricked up my ears, did he say Geraldton? I looked at the big horse standing by the truck. Blaze reminded me of Dave's horse. And that reminded me of Elsie and the cattle station. Maybe Beth's mother would see Elsie in Geraldton. I barked, wishing I could use their language to explain, but the girl was crying and Grace didn't hear me.

'Once Beth is out of danger I can arrange an airlift,' Doc said. 'It should only be a few days.'

The woman wrapped her shawl closer and looked from her husband to Doc. Her tears glinted in the lamplight.

'How will I get to Geraldton on my own? The Japs are coming ...'

Doc took her hand and spoke quietly.

'You need to be brave, Grace, for Beth's sake and for your other children. Japanese reconnaissance planes have been seen along the coast, but not over any inland areas. The Geraldton track is in good condition. I flew over it last week. I'm sure you'll be safe.'

'What about my babies? I can't watch them if I'm driving...'

Beth's father spoke to a tall dark man standing on one side.

'Ernie, would you go with the Missus to drive the truck?'

'Sure Boss,' he said. 'I'll look after them.'

'Thank you,' the man whispered. 'I'll ride Blaze into Hedland and then find a way to get Beth to Geraldton. Then I'll organise a lift back for you, or you could stay down south if you like...'

'I'll come back,' Ernie said.

'Righteo,' Doc said, 'now that's decided, let's lift this stretcher onto the plane and get Beth to hospital.'

The girl clutched her father.

'I don't want to go on my own.'

'You need to be brave, Beth.'

'Please don't leave me,' the child sobbed.

'It's only a short flight into town,' Doc murmured, 'and your daddy will meet you at hospital as soon as he can. Once I've fixed your leg, you can both go south on another plane. You might even get to Geraldton before your brother and sister.'

‘Come on, Beth,’ her father said, untangling the girls’ arms. ‘We all need to be strong at the moment.’

Beth’s father helped Doc carry the little girl to the plane, then the mother grabbed Doc’s hand.

‘Thank you, Doctor,’ she whispered. ‘I’m sorry I’m in such a state, I don’t know what we’d have done without you. And please, if you ever see Reverend Flynn, can you tell him that the people of the north-west think he’s a saint.’

‘Righteo, Grace,’ her husband said.

He looked embarrassed, but I didn’t know who Reverend Flynn was or what a saint was, so I didn’t know why.

‘I’ll send your message on the radio,’ Doc told her. ‘The Reverend will be glad to hear it.’

The man handed Doc a parcel.

‘You must be hungry, Doc. Here’s some damper and jam. I wish we had more to give you...’

‘Damper is my favourite breakfast,’ Doc said. ‘Thank you.’

My mouth watered. I loved damper and I was so hungry.

Beth was still whimpering as they opened a little door between the two wings. The men lifted her stretcher into the plane. Grace tucked a rug around her daughter and Doc tried to settle the girl but Beth was terrified.

‘Don’t leave me,’ she shouted.

I barked again and Beth’s mother stepped back in surprise.

‘Who’s this?’

I wagged my tail.

‘It’s a long story.’ Doc began. ‘Does Beth like dogs?’

‘She loves them.’

Doc stepped onto the lower wing and lifted me into his arms.

‘Beth,’ he whispered to the trembling child. ‘This little dog has lost her family. She’s frightened and I need someone to look after her in the cabin as we fly back to Hedland. Do you think you could help?’

The girl looked at me. I looked at her.

Beth held out her arms. Doc passed me to the girl. I licked her hand and she stopped crying. Then I snuggled next to the leg that wasn't hurt.

The quivering woman stroked my ears.

'Bless you, little dog,' Grace whispered. She reached into her bag and gave me a big chunk of damper. I gobbled it down. It was warm and sweet and delicious.

Doc checked that Beth was safely strapped onto the bed, then he ruffled my fur and told me to 'be good'. I stared into his eyes. We both knew that wasn't necessary.

'I'll see you in town, Beth,' the man called. 'Be brave.'

Remember Rivette, I thought, but I had no words to tell Beth, so I licked her hand instead.

Doc climbed into the hole on top of the aeroplane. Then I heard him flick buttons and push pedals. Beth's father spun the propeller and Doc yelled, 'Stand clear.'

The little girl clutched my collar as we rumbled along the airstrip. Her squeezing fingers pinched, but I kept still. Once we were in the air, Beth loosened her grip. I put my head on her lap, enjoying the rumble of the engine. Being in the sky, surrounded by beams of early sunlight was better than anything on earth. And much nicer when I wasn't squashed inside Doc's jacket.

After the plane stopped climbing, Doc shouted, 'Are you okay?'

I gave a short cheerful yip while Beth continued whispering sweet words into my ears. I sighed. Beth used the same soap as my Elsie. She smelt of home and knew where best to tickle a dog's tummy.

I heard Doc humming and understood how hard it would be for him to push his pedals, read the map and watch the little girl. If Beth hadn't settled she might bump the door handle and maybe even fall out...

'What's the doggie's name?' Beth called.

'Pardon?'

'What's the dog's name?' she shouted above the noise of the engine.

Doc hesitated, then said, 'She doesn't have one.'

The girl frowned.

'You can name her if you like.'

'Really?'

Beth ruffled my ears. She muttered several names, but none were Princess. After a while she smiled.

'I know,' she yelled. 'We could call her Flynn, after the Reverend, my mother would like that. Can Flynn be a girl's name too?'

'I don't see why not.'

'Do you like that name?' Beth asked me.

I wagged my tail.

'She likes Flynn,' Beth called.

'Then Flynn it is,' Doc agreed. 'It's a perfect name.'

I kept watch over Beth and soon she was dozing. The medicine had calmed her. Or maybe it was my soft licking.

'Good work, Flynn,' Doc said. 'Maybe you *will* be handy to have around...'

He turned back to the controls. The steady beat of the engine was peaceful. I watched the first glow of daylight touch the edge of the sky and sprawled beside Beth, wondering what a Reverend was and why the little girl had named me after one. I missed not having Elsie's calm voice explaining strange words to me.

Beth was still sleeping when the engine noise changed. Behind us, the sky was lighter and as Doc lowered the plane, I saw long shadows spread over the land below. I raised my nose. The air felt warmer and in the distance I could see a strange shining blanket. Doc dipped the plane towards it. The shining blanket looked like the station dam in the wet season. Was this what Elsie meant about water surrounding Australia?

'Can you see the ocean?' Doc called to us. I woofed. 'And those houses are Port Hedland.'

I wagged my tail. Port Hedland – the place where Elsie could find me.

Beth clutched me as the aeroplane wheels bounced onto the dusty airstrip. She held the top of her leg and whimpered, so I licked her little hand, showing Beth that everything was be okay.

\*

Doc rumbled to a stop at a spinifex shack on the airstrip. A man was waiting.

'Hello Fred,' Doc called.



Fred opened the door and helped Doc lift Beth out of the plane. I sprang out too. The ground was hot under my paws. I hurried behind the plane's tail to squat while the men put Beth onto the back of a truck.

'Flynn,' she called, looking around for me.

I ran across and jumped up beside her.

'Who's this?' Fred asked as he climbed into the truck.

'It's a long story,' Doc replied.

Port Hedland smelt strange. The air was salty and there were new bird sounds. We drove along a bumpy track. It widened as we reached houses. Some buildings were so close together that they touched. Beth and I stared at everything.

'Have you been to town before?' Fred asked.

Beth shook her head.

'Mum says Port Hedland isn't safe,' she whispered, holding me tight. 'The Japanese are coming.'

'Not yet,' Fred replied. 'You'll be safe at our hospital, especially with this little terrier to guard you. What's your dog's name?'

'Flynn, after the Reverend,' little Beth replied. 'But she's not mine...'

'Well,' the man said, 'it looks like you're very good friends.'

Beth nodded then cried in pain as the truck hit a ditch. I nuzzled her hand.

'Nearly there,' Doc said.

We stopped outside a long building and a tall woman came down from the verandah to meet us.

'Hello Matron,' Doc called.

'Hello ...' Matron's voice changed when she saw me. 'Who's this?'

'It's Beth,' Doc replied.

'I know who Beth is.' Matron glared at him. 'Why is there a dog with her?'

'It's Flynn,' Beth whispered. 'Her family evacuated and she needs a home. I've called her Flynn, after the Reverend John Flynn. He began the Flying Doctor Service. My mother says he's a saint. Do you like that name?'

Matron's mouth frowned but her eyes were smiling.

'Yes I do like that name,' Matron said, stroking Beth's shiny forehead. 'And your mother is right. Reverend Flynn is a visionary, but we need to keep your leg clean and dogs are riddled with germs.'

Beth clung to me.

'Flynn is looking after me...'

'That's my job now,' Matron said.

I bristled and Beth began crying.

'I want Flynn.'

I tried to follow Beth's stretcher, but Matron blocked me.

'No you don't,' she said. 'I won't have dirty station dogs on my nice clean floors.' Then she turned her attention to Doc. 'Fleas and germs, Doctor, what were you thinking?'

'How about Flynn waits outside while I fix your leg,' he asked Beth. 'Then you can see her when I've finished.'

Beth stopped crying and nodded. Matron raised her eyebrows, but didn't argue.

'Doctor is right,' she agreed. 'Flynn will be safe in the yard and Cook might have a soup bone in the cool box. Do you think Flynn would like a bone?'

'Yes.' Beth lay back on her stretcher and blew me kisses as they carried her inside.

'Looks like you're left with me,' Fred muttered. 'Come on, let's find Lee Wah.'

Fred led me behind the building to a sandy yard that reeked of cat pee.

'Stay,' Fred said.

I re-marked the territory as best I could while I waited. The yard was bare, but along one side I saw a bougainvillea bush like the one on Elsie's station. I squeezed into a cool space beneath the scratchy branches and lay my head on my paws, remembering happy times in Elsie's hideout.

A small man came out of the building.

'Dog, he called. 'Here doggy dog.'

The man put a pan of water in the middle of the yard. Then he perched on his feet near the building and waited. It looked like he was ready to wait a long time. I poked my nose out of the shade. The man smelt strange, but I was thirsty.

I crept closer. When I reached the pan I drank quickly. The man smiled.

‘Hello Doggy...’

He had a strange sing-song voice, but the energy around his body glimmered kindly.

‘I’m Lee Wah,’ he said, holding out his hand for me to sniff. ‘What’s your name?’

I wagged my tail and licked his hand. It tasted spicy.

‘You got lucky gold eyes,’ he said.

I let him scratch my ears, then Lee Wah went back into the building. A few minutes later he came back with a huge bone.

‘Gengi,’ he called. ‘Hey, Golden eyes, come and get it.’

I scampered across the yard and took the bone from Lee Wah’s hand. Then I crept back to hide behind the bougainvillea. There were juicy scraps of meat on the bone. I gnawed as much as I could then searched for somewhere to bury the rest. I found a sandy place and by the time I’d finished digging, Lee Wah had gone inside. There was no one else around. I lifted my nose and took a deep sniff. The air was like the fish the Missus had once brought home, but this smell was stronger.

The ground was too hot for standing still. I scampered under the building and tried to make sense of the strange new hospital sounds. Then I slept through the midday heat. Doc came to find me when the sun was low in the sky.

‘Flynn,’ he called.

I crawled out from under the building and went to him, glad that the ground was cooler under my paws.

‘That’s a good place to hide,’ he said, perching on the bottom step.

Doc lit a pipe and told me that Beth was fine. I rested my nose on his boot. Doc had washed and changed his clothes. I smelt the hands of a woman on his shirt and also a sweet milky smell that reminded me of my mother.

Doc and I sat together, listening to birds squabble over places to roost. After a while I heard footsteps and smelt the man called Fred. He wheeled a bed onto the verandah. Beth was lying on it. Doc checked Beth’s leg and shone a torch into her eyes. Then he pressed the long tube around his neck onto her chest.

‘All good,’ he muttered.

I wagged my tail.

Matron called Doc and he went inside. Beth was alone on the verandah. I put one paw on the bottom step, then another. Soon I was next to her bed. I woofed softly.

'Flynn!' she squealed.

I licked Beth's hand and she told me how frightened she'd been.

'But I'm doing my best to be brave...' Beth whispered.

She told me stories about her family, just like Elsie used to. When at last the little girl fell asleep, I nudged her hand under the net covering her bed and stood guard, snapping at any mosquitoes that buzzed around her.

Then I heard footsteps. It was Matron. She stared at me. I snapped another mosquito. Matron smoothed Beth's sheets, rearranged the netting, then turned on one black shoe and strode away. I stretched out beneath Beth's bed. When Doc came back, Beth woke and asked, 'Where's Flynn?'

Doc pointed under the bed.

'She's been watching over you while you slept.'

'What about Matron?'

'Matron and Flynn have come to a truce.'

'What's a truce?'

'It's like soldiers in the war coming to an agreement. But with Matron and Flynn, they're just pretending they can't see each other...'

Beth giggled and the jingly sound made my tail thump on the floorboards.

'I can see her *and* hear her,' Beth said.

Doc laughed.

'I can too,' he said, stroking my ears.

\*

Fred reckoned Matron was stricter than the Army whose soldiers filled Port Hedland's dusty streets. She loved rules and made sure everyone obeyed them – even Doc. I soon learnt that it was best to keep out of Matron's way. She had a special soap called carbolic. It smelt horrible.

Matron said that if I was going to stay then I must have regular scrubs with carbolic. After the first bath I ran to find something to roll in - even cat pee would smell nicer than carbolic. But after I rolled in the dirt, Fred grabbed me and dragged me back to be washed again. After a while I understood that I had to put up with the soap, and also that the carbolic stopped my fleas - they must have hated the smell even more than me. When Fred scrubbed me, I stopped wriggling and soon smelt like a princess again. A soapy kind of princess...

Beth slept on the verandah where white lattice blocked the moonlight, but let in the sea breeze. Each night I crept up the steps to be near my little friend. As I guarded Beth, my ears twitched at the strange new sounds. Beth was tucked safely under a mosquito net, but she tossed and wriggled under the crackly sheets.

There was a worried feeling at the hospital, like the one at Elsie's station before the family evacuated. Whenever she woke, Beth whispered, 'I'm frightened, Flynn.'

Her little hand hung down from the sheets searching for my head and I made sure I was always near enough for Beth to reach me.

Matron changed Beth's bandages two times a day. After her evening medicine, the nurses brought Beth a warm drink and an Arrowroot biscuit. Beth always gave me some of her biscuit, just like Elsie used to.

During the day aeroplanes buzzed over the town. Women, children and babies came to the hospital. They were leaving northern towns called Derby, Wyndham and Broome to travel to Geraldton and then onto a place called Perth.

Every day more people came. Some spoke with strange, gruff-sounding words. Matron said they were Dutch. The Dutch people were also evacuating, but they'd left a place called Java. I wished Elsie was here to show me all the places on her map.

Doc gave the Dutch children medicine and checked their eyes, ears and chest. Matron learnt some of the gruff words and tried to make the ladies comfortable while Lee Wah made tea and sandwiches. The women stared into space as they ate. They smelt tired and frightened. After a few hours Fred took the women and their children back to the airstrip. The sound of so many aeroplanes terrified Beth, even though I stayed by her side.

'Don't fret,' Matron said. 'Your father will be here soon.'

'What if the planes are Japanese bombers?' Beth whispered after Matron had left.

But none of them were. Fred knew about planes. As they circled the town, he taught me which ones belonged to the Air Force and the Army and which ones were evacuation planes. Fred explained which plane was a Swallow, a Dragon or Lodestar.

'And there are also flying boats that can land on water as well as the land,' he said.

I watched the ocean but never saw any of them.

Fred also knew the pilots. He waved to Jimmy Woods when he swooped the hospital in his Electra. If they had no passengers, sometimes the pilots landed on the beach for fun. We all gathered on the verandah to watch.

Soon my ears knew which planes were arriving long before anyone saw them. When Fred saw me watching the sky, he learnt to stop what he was doing and watch with me. Then he'd call, 'Don't worry everyone, that's just Jimmy,' or, 'Look out, here comes Len ...'

While Beth and the other patients rested through the hot afternoons, Doc let me follow him down the path to his home. I met his mate and her milky-smelling baby. The baby gurgled at me and tried to pull my ears. Other days, Fred took me for a walk past Doc's house to cool off in the ocean.

Fred laughed when I sniffed and tasted the waves. They were more salty than the cow lick on Elsie's station. I'd never seen so much water. Fred threw a stick into the waves and yelled, 'Fetch,' I shook my fur. That ocean went all around Australia and I wasn't going any further than my paws!

Some days Doc and I walked onto a bridge that stretched over the water. Doc called it a jetty. It was made of wood with metal tracks along the middle. Sometimes ships were tied to its side. The ships were much bigger than the ones in Elsie's schoolbooks.

At the far end of the jetty I often saw an old man throwing string into the water while naked boys jumped back and forth across the tracks. One day, one of the boys fell into the ocean. I barked until the old man threw a tyre kind of thing from the jetty into the water. The boy grabbed it and splashed back to safety. As I leant over to watch, Doc said, 'Don't fall in Flynn, or I'll have to throw a lifebuoy to you too.'

I was with little Beth when her father arrived.

'Daddy,' she cried.

He hugged her tight then asked Doc about her leg.

'It's healing nicely,' Doc said. 'She won't lose it.'

'Thanks Doc,' he mumbled, wiping his eyes. 'We're in your debt.' Beth's father looked around and added, 'Struth, you're busy!'

'Run off our feet,' Doc agreed. 'In the past two weeks, thousands of evacuees have come through Hedland from northern towns and the Dutch East Indies. We've had at least five thousand, but our radio man, Everett reckons it's closer to eight thousand. Thank goodness they don't all need medical help. Our supplies are dangerously low...'

Beth's father shook his head. 'I've never seen so many people!'

'They don't stay long, usually just a few hours. There's a plane going to Geraldton later today. We don't have child-size crutches, but if you're able to carry Beth, I can get you onto it.'

Geraldton! I wagged my tail. Was that where all the aeroplanes were going?

Beth's father lifted his daughter into his arms.

'The sooner we leave the better, Doc.'

I nuzzled Beth's soft hands, feeling sad and happy at the same time. Sad that Beth didn't need to clutch me anymore, but happy that her leg was getting better.

'I wish we had some way to repay you,' Beth's father said.

Doc pointed to me.

'I don't suppose you need a dog?'

I stood still and waited for the man's answer. If they took me to Geraldton, Elsie might find me. But what if she'd evacuated to the place called Perth? I looked up at Doc. I loved Beth, but wasn't unhappy at the hospital. I liked the interesting smells and Lee Wah's treats. I liked the way Matron did the same things at the same time each day. Most of all I liked Doc. I felt safe with him. When everyone else was frightened, Doc was always calm.

'The dog's been wonderful with our girl,' Beth's father said, 'and I'm grateful, but once my wife and children are safe in Perth, I'll be signing up for the Militia. Grace will have her hands full with three children. She couldn't manage a dog as well ...'

‘That’s alright,’ Doc replied. ‘The patients love Flynn. She has a knack of knowing what they need. I’m just worried that we might have to evacuate suddenly.’

I nudged Doc, trying to tell him that I could evacuate too. Doc patted my head, then took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Beth’s father. ‘Maybe you could drop this in Geraldton when you refuel. The mail is shocking at the moment and I’d like to be sure it arrives safely.’

I nosed the letter in Doc’s hand, wanting to rub paw prints all over it in case Elsie saw them.

‘Of course,’ Beth’s father said and he put the letter in his pocket.

\*

After Beth and the other evacuees had left for the airstrip, Doc sat in the yard with a cup of tea. I crouched beside him wondering why everyone I loved kept leaving me. The only patients on the verandah now were old Jock and his mate, Bluey. They were both asleep. I lay beside Doc and rolled onto my back. If I stared at him long enough, maybe Doc would tickle my tummy.

Doc missed my signal and opened his newspaper instead.

‘Listen to this, Flynn,’ he said.

*One effect of the fall of Singapore has been a very marked acceleration of air raid precautions work in and around Perth. With local government authorities now co-operating freely there is beginning to be some evidence of an awakening consciousness that what has happened in Darwin may very well and very soon happen in Perth.*

Doc looked at me and added, ‘Or here in Hedland!’

I wagged my tail. The words meant nothing to me, but I liked being included. Doc often shared his newspapers.



'Listen to this Matron,' he'd say, but it was too hard to stop Matron, so Doc read to me instead. I loved hearing him tell the news; just as I'd loved listening to Elsie tell me stories.

Doc flicked the pages and kept reading.

*Three blackouts have been held since the middle of January and these unquestionably have done much to bring home to the public the necessity for taking these precautions seriously... A correspondent elsewhere in this issue urges the authorities to give Perth some practice in daylight air raid exercises, and since most of the destructive Japanese raids so far in this war have been daylight raids the advice is sound and opportune and no time should be lost in giving effect to it. An orderly populace which knows where to go and what to do in an emergency will fare better in the event of an attack than a disorganised, frightened rabble.*

Doc took a deep breath and scratched my belly at last.

'It's true,' he said. 'I don't want to scare Old Jock and Bluey, but I suppose we should have an air raid practice at the hospital. Goodness knows what Matron will say.'

Matron liked the idea. She found a shiny whistle and played air raid games until she smelt content. Although Doc was the alpha, Matron was Boss inside the hospital. I kept out of her way and went to visit Doc's wife until the whistling stopped. Doc's wife always had a kind word for me and sometimes she saved me scraps of damper. It was peaceful lying under her verandah, listening to Doc's baby gurgle and plop onto its padded bottom.

\*

My life in Port Hedland settled into a routine. Before dawn, I circled the yard making sure that no cats or rats had tried to sneak in. At sun-up when Lee Wah came out to water his little garden, I followed him around. Then I flopped outside the kitchen while

he made breakfast for the patients. If Lee Wah was in a good mood, sometimes he gave me meat scraps.

Port Hedland was busy. Men wearing soldier clothes like Elsie's brothers dug long ditches and marched through the dusty streets. Some of the men were kind. They called me to come over for a pat. Others threw rocks at me.

During the day I stayed close to the hospital, unless someone took me to play in the water at Pretty Pool. If Doc evacuated I didn't want to be left behind. At night I roamed the streets of Hedland, sniffing buildings in case Elsie was near. Aeroplanes never came after dark so that was the best time to search for Elsie.

I waited until after dinner, just in case there was leftover mutton. Then I trotted along the beach to check all was well at Doc's house. Some nights when the baby cried, I stopped to listen to Doc's wife hum the little one to sleep, the way Elsie used to hum to me.

Next I wandered along the jetty, watching the moon shine in the sky and in the water at the same time. I never got tired of doing that.

When the moon went behind a cloud, or if the mosquitoes were especially annoying, I sniffed around the shops and houses instead of the beach. Elsie hadn't been in any of them.

Port Hedland was full of interesting sounds as well as smells. In the big hotel soldiers laughed and shouted. Some threw bottles, so I hurried past. Other dogs barked, warning me to keep away from their homes, and I did. After roaming the streets and finding no trace of Elsie, I went back to the hospital and slept. In my dreams I saw Elsie and knew that she missed me. My instincts whispered that if I walked with the ocean on one side and the morning sun on the other, then one day I would find her. Once I did begin walking, but without water I couldn't go very far.

Early one morning as I left the jetty, tiny shelled creatures flipper-scrambled across the beach, racing each other to the water. Seagulls squawked, swooping down to snap at them. I nosed one of the creatures and licked it, wondering how it would taste. Not good. I left the creatures to the gulls.

When Doc wasn't flying, he came to the hospital after breakfast to check Matron's patients and do what he called, surgery, in a small, sharp-smelling room. He

also went to the smaller Native Hospital to help the ladies whose time had come to become mothers. I followed and he seemed to like chatting to me as he walked.

The humans separated themselves into different hospitals. I wasn't sure why, but it had something to do with their skin. Back on Elsie's station, dogs of all type lived in the kennel yard. They were prized for how well they worked, not by what they looked like. My mother had light coloured fur and she was smaller than the blueys, but the Boss said she could run with the best of them. Humans were different ...

The people at the Native Hospital loved me. While Doc worked inside, I sat outside the hospital with the aunties. They patted me and admired my golden dingo eyes. One day a young boy sat with us. There were screams coming from inside the hospital and I felt the boy's fear.

'Don't you worry,' one auntie told him, 'your mamma will be fine.'

The auntie's words didn't change the boy's fear. His heartbeat was fast and I heard him swallow a whimper. I licked his arm then started to dance. I danced in circles on my hind legs until at last the boy smiled. When the boy's father came along, he asked, 'Who's this special fellow?'

'Doc calls him Flynn,' the aunties said.

The tall man smiled and threw a stick for me. We played until at last a baby cried and all the aunties smiled.

There was one more hospital. It was further down the road on the way out of town. This hospital was for people with the darkest skin of all. The building was behind a wire fence and the ground around it smelt heavy, as if it many tears had fallen there. Doc called this sad place, the Lock Hospital. I didn't like going there.

\*

Doc let me go with him when he flew his plane. We went to places called, Warrawagine, Marble Bar, Pardoo and Roebourne. Before taking off, I nudged Doc as he checked the wings and engine. I was always impatient to be in the cooler sky air.

'The plane's name is John Flynn,' Doc told me as he tapped its wheels. 'She's named after the Reverend, like you. And she's a Fox Moth.'

I wagged my tail, but didn't think the plane looked like either a moth or a fox. And I still didn't know what a reverend was. Humans are strange the way they give names to things. I'd been Princess, Dog and Flynn. Soon I'd have another name.

After a day of flying, when the patients were settled, Doc sat in the yard reading his newspaper. Lee Wah brought tea for Doc as he stretched his feet and turned the crackly pages.

'Hey, Flynn, listen to this!'

*The RAAF says that at about noon yesterday enemy aircraft made a reconnaissance flight in the Darwin area at a great height, but no bombs were dropped.*

Doc frowned. 'I hope the enemy is not planning another raid on Darwin...'

I heard a distant rumble and looked to the sky. It was the plane they called Electra. Doc watched me point my nose upwards and his body stiffened. When he saw the aeroplane, Doc relaxed and waved to the pilot. The plane dipped its wings.

'More evacuees,' Doc sighed, putting down his paper. 'Lucky the last lot are on their way to Geraldton.' He drank the rest of his tea and tickled my ear. 'Your little Beth will be there now.'

With my Elsie, I thought, rolling onto my back as Doc hurried into the hospital.

I was chasing parrots when Everett ran across the yard from his radio hut into the hospital.

'The Japanese have attacked Broome,' he shouted. 'Zeroes strafed flying boats in Roebuck Bay and Jimmy's flying some of the injured to Hedland. A planeload of women and children is on the way. They're badly burnt...'

There was a moment of silence. I could have heard a flea jump. Then the humans sprang into action. Matron bellowed orders.

'Molly, prepare the operating theatre. Edith, tell Lee Wah to boil the copper and sterilise Doc's instruments. Fred, we'll need to ration the water. Can you ask Sergeant Vince to bring all the water bags his men can spare.'

Molly, Edith and Fred ran to follow Matron's instructions. I kept out of the way, sensing trouble.

Jock and Bluey, the old-timers on the verandah, called for someone to stop and tell them what was going on.

'Broome's been bombed,' Fred yelled. 'The Japs attacked Dutch flying boats. They were packed with evacuees. Women and kiddies have been shot and burnt. Broome hospital can't cope so they're coming here. Some are flying. Others are travelling overland on trucks.'

Jock shook his head. 'Those tracks around eighty mile beach will be boggy.'

'They'll have trouble getting through at this time of year,' Bluey agreed.

'They must be desperate enough to give it a go...'

From my hiding place, I heard an aeroplane circle the town. It was Jimmy's Electra.

'Send trucks to the airstrip,' Doc shouted. 'I'll follow on the motorbike.'

Fred ran to one of the trucks. I watched his dust trail rise into the air as he sped away. I stayed hidden under the hospital.

The bombing news spread quickly. Soldiers brought mattresses and netting. Beds were dragged across the floor above. The soldiers left then came back with water bags. Nurse Molly's shoes click-clacked over the floorboards as she moved patients to

the far end of the verandah. I heard trucks rumbling down the road and ran to the front gate, ready to bark. A terrible smell stopped me.

People were packed head to toe in the back of each truck, crying in pain.

'Quick,' Matron yelled.

I slunk under the oleander bush as Molly ran to help Fred carry bodies into the yard. Doc moved between them. I watched him check each person then call instructions to Matron. Broken, bleeding patients filled the hospital. Some were tiny babies.

Soon there were no spare beds. Jock and Bluey gave up their mattresses and sat stiffly on chairs. Fred spread clean sheets on the verandah floor. The patients who weren't screaming stared into space. Their expressions raised my hackles. I hid behind the bushes and trembled.

Part of me wanted to flee. *Keep the ocean to one side*, my instincts screamed, *run to Elsie*. But I was too frightened to move. I cowered in the shadows with my head between my paws, trying to block the awful cries.

There were so many hurt people. I smelt burnt skin and terror. My golden eyes saw strange flames dancing over water and I blinked until the firestorm went away. From my hiding place, I watched the nurses treat one patient then run to another. I saw Fred empty bloody buckets into a pit in the yard. Doc was in the midst of the madness, striding between the verandah and the operating room. I smelt Doc's fear but he was acting brave. I heard Doc taking big breaths of air and watched his hands opening and closing as he hurried past. I trembled, trying to understand.

Jimmy's Electra circled the hospital again, dipping its wings before landing. Fred drove to the airstrip and brought back more bleeding strangers. The Electra left, then returned with other patients. Another pilot staggered into the hospital. His name was Jack. He'd flown from Broome with more evacuees.

'Did you see the bombing?' Bluey asked.

Jack shuddered.

'There were nine Zeroes, in three units of three. The enemy strafed all of the flying boats that were refuelling in Roebuck Bay and more at the airfield. I was lucky, I'd just taken off. One of the fighter planes saw me. He fired but missed me by a few

inches. I couldn't shoot back. I'm weak with dengue fever and could barely steer the plane.'

'How did you get away?'

'I flew low, hugging the mangroves. The enemy pilot turned, ready to have another go at me, then he suddenly broke away. I didn't wait to see where he was going. As soon as I gained altitude I headed south for Hedland.' Jack put his head into his hands. 'Those boats were crowded with families. The pilots must have seen the women and children jumping into the ocean, but they kept firing.'

As Jack slumped to the floor, I scampered back to the bougainvillea.

All day planes circled overhead. The one Fred called Lodestar brought more frightened people. Some said they had travelled underneath the plane in a baggage compartment. They shook as they talked about their journey. At last the aeroplanes stopped. The smell of death and dying didn't.

The sky was darkening when Fred whistled for me and whispered, 'You're needed, Flynn.'

Something about Fred's voice frightened me. I didn't want to leave my hiding place, but he coaxed me out with a piece of mutton.

'Here, Flynn, have another piece,' he said. 'I'll bet you haven't eaten today.'

I gobbled the food. Then Fred led me to the verandah. A boy was there. His wails made me shiver. Even Dave's pain, trapped under the bloodwood branch, did not sound like this.

Doc was trying to give the child an injection, but whenever anyone came near, the boy thrashed his legs and screamed louder. Fred's hands shook as he held my collar. When he led me closer, I saw a face with oozing, blackened skin and a nose and mouth that looked all wrong. The boy's skin was dripping onto the floor.

'There now, Hendrik,' Matron soothed, 'you're safe here.'

The boy kept calling a strange word, '*Moeder, Moeder, Moeder*'.

The verandah was slippery with blood. Hendrik's kicking made more flow. I saw shadowy figures and felt the boy's life force weakening.

'We're losing him ...'

'Hold up Flynn,' Matron urged. 'It's worth a try.'

Fred scooped me into his arms and held me beside the bed.

'Look,' he told the boy. 'This is our hospital dog. His name is Flynn. Do you have a dog at home, Hendrik? Can you see his golden eyes? Aren't they interesting?'

For a moment the boy stared into my eyes. And I saw terrible things. Boats on fire. Broken aeroplanes. A woman was screaming as she held a baby above burning waves. Then she began sinking. I wanted to look away, but the boy needed me. He stared into my eyes, gasping until slowly his thrashing eased.

'That's it, Flynn,' Matron whispered. 'Work your magic...'

I felt Hendrik's pain as Fred spoke. He was gabbling, saying anything to distract the boy, telling him how Doc had found me and how I'd helped little Beth. I could see Hendrik cling to Fred's voice, the way the boy on the jetty had hung onto the lifebuoy. As Hendrik listened I looked into his eyes. Imagining hide and seek games on sunny days. Imagining Elsie and Christmas treats. Imagining hope.

'*Engel*,' the boy whispered.

He stopped struggling and Doc pushed an injection into his arm. Hendrik's breathing eased and his eyes closed.

'Well done,' Matron cried.

I turned away. Dogs rarely make eye contact. Eye staring is something that only pack leaders do. Unless you need to threaten, it's safer to look aside, but Elsie was right about my golden eyes. They'd seen the horror in Hendrik's eyes that no one else saw. The flames were like the fire I sensed in thunder but these flames were so much worse. My instincts told me they were real, and that I needed to help.

Fred carried me outside.

'Good dog,' he whispered.

I stumbled away from the blood and the pain, down the steps to curl against a verandah post. From there I watched Matron blink tears as she cut clothes from Hendrik's burnt skin. She smoothed ointment over his wounds, then covered his skin with wet cloth and wrapped him in bandages.

When Matron noticed me staring, she murmured, 'You saved him, Flynn.'

\*



For three days Doc, Matron and the nurses barely slept. A sour smell settled over the hospital. There were bodies in beds, on the verandah, on the floor in every room, and even some in the yard. Doc spent all night in the operating room. His face was pale and exhausted. All the while I stayed with Hendrik. One side of his face and body was burnt, but his other side wasn't. Hendrik's wounds smelt dead, but his life spark flickered. As people hurried back and forth, I lay under his bed on the verandah. When the boy whimpered, I woofed, letting Hendrik know he wasn't alone. It seemed to help. Matron told Molly that she didn't think he'd live, but Hendrik was strong. I knew he would.

Each time Hendrik woke he screamed. The only thing that settled him was Fred holding me beside the bed.

*'Engel,'* he whispered. *'Niet gaan.'*

While Fred talked I looked into Hendrik's eyes and imagined happy things for him. But when the woman and baby appeared, I looked away.

Fred couldn't hold me for long, the hospital was too busy and hand-washing water was precious, but a few moments watching me, was usually enough to help Hendrik sleep.

Whenever he heard planes Hendrik screamed. And there were a lot of planes.

*'Engel,'* he whispered curling his weak fingers over my fur.

I licked Hendrik's good arm until he stopped trembling. As I listened to the boy moan, I wondered about his family.

*'Moeder,'* he cried. *'Moeder...'*

Was the woman in the sea his mother? And if that woman in Hendrik's eyes was his mother, then where was she now?

On Day Three, Doc told Matron that he believed Hendrik would live. My instincts agreed.

\*

More evacuees arrived.

*'Broome Hospital can't cope,'* Everett said.

*'Nor can we,'* Fred muttered.

Every room was full. So was the verandah. Matron complained that even the morgue was full. I'd never seen what was in that morgue room, but the smell reminded me of the way Dave smelt at the homestead.

Patients that were well enough to travel south were sent on whatever plane could take them. The ones who were too sick to travel, rested wherever they could. I heard patients cry for the women and little children who were trapped inside their flying boats, and they cried for those who'd drowned trying to swim to shore. Fred said that our patients were the lucky ones. They didn't seem lucky to me.

Lee Wah cooked and cooked, but there wasn't enough food. Soldiers brought soup and carted water to top up Lee Wah's water bags. All day he kept re-filling a huge pot of tea. As I lay under Hendrik's bed I heard patients whispering about the Japs, how they'd attacked Wyndham and Broome on the same day. They said our soldiers weren't ready for them, and they worried about where the enemy would strike next.

Each time a newspaper arrived, people crowded around Fred. Like Doc, he knew how to untangle the marks on the crackly paper, so Fred read aloud for the patients.

*Western Australia to-day for the first time in its history tasted the actual violence of war on its own soil when Japanese planes attacked Broome and Wyndham. Aerodromes and aircraft were the objectives of the raiders and some damage was caused at both towns.*

*These raids show the growing seriousness of the war as it affects Australia. The bombing attacks on our own soil bring the war nearer to the Australian citizens. Three of our towns in the north have now been attacked by the Japanese and we must be prepared for further attacks.*

Fred looked up and took a deep breath.

'Go on,' Jock said, and I smelt the old man's fear and excitement. 'Keep reading.'

*These attacks should make us all the more determined to put every ounce of our energy into the war effort, to which everyone in Australia should make his maximum contribution.*

'Hear, hear,' Bluey called. I heard his old heart thumping faster as Fred closed one newspaper and opened another. Other patients held their breath, waiting for him to continue.

*News that Broome and Wyndham had been attacked by the enemy brought the war to our back door. The Darwin bombings seemed uncomfortably close, but with raiders at Broome and Wyndham, our own State territory had been actually violated.*

Hendrik was too sick to listen. The only time he spoke to another human was when Matron came to change his bandages.

'I'm sorry,' she told Hendrik, as she peeled cloth from his skin. 'This will hurt.'

'Moeder,' he whimpered. 'Kom en vind me.'

When no one answered, Hendrik reached for my fur with his good hand.

'Engel,' he cried. 'Waar is Moeder?'

I stayed as still as I could and let Hendrik feel my warmth. I would have done anything to help him find his mother.

\*

When Fred wasn't helping Matron, he drove patients to and from the airport. That's where Fred got the newspapers. The next afternoon he read:

*... it is revealed that Allied planes went up to meet  
Broome's six raiders, one of which was brought down.  
Broome, it is further revealed, suffered some casualties.*

'Some,' Fred snorted looking around. 'That's the understatement of the year!'

The newspaper word marks told about things I didn't understand. While Fred read, I scratched my belly or snapped at sandflies, but when he spoke about the Japanese being wasps, my ears pricked up.

*"They just darted back and forth like a lot of wasps..."*

One day Elsie had bumped into a wasp nest. The flying creatures attacked her even while I barked and jumped at them. I remembered the nasty droning sound of the wasps as Fred kept reading.

*"... I didn't realise it was an enemy raid until I saw smoke  
and flame spurt from the flying boats on the water. At  
first, when I saw them come in low, I thought the planes  
were going to land..."*

Elsie's arm had swelled up. Those wasps were frightening but they were smaller than my nose. How could Japanese planes be that tiny? None of the patients stopped Fred to ask, so I had to keep wondering ...

*"... I did not hear any air-raid warning," said Mr Litster,  
"but someone told me afterwards that some sort of  
whistle had been sounded. Standing in front of my camp  
overlooking the harbour and about half a mile from the  
action, I saw the whole thing. It did not seem to me to  
last more than about 10 minutes..."*

*"I saw no opposition put up at all."*

*"The enemy raiders did not go near the town; nor did they attack any of the local craft in the harbour," Mr Litster said. After they had got their objectives in the harbour they just went on to the aerodrome and did what they had to do there, then got right away. He had seen men diving overboard from flying boats moored in the harbour. Two Qantas machines which had just taken on passengers and were ready to take off were also attacked."*

*Mr Litster said he had heard no bombs dropped but there was one big explosion when one of the flying boats managed to get up off the water and was then shot down. The enemy planes were all fighters and carried extra "belly" petrol tanks...*

One patient began crying. I wondered whether I should creep over and nuzzle the woman's foot, or would that upset her more?

'I saw that plane go down,' she whispered.

Fred closed the newspaper.

'I'm sorry, love,' he said. 'I didn't think...'

'No, please keep reading.' The woman wiped her eyes. 'We need to know.'

A strange mood settled over the verandah. As Fred continued in a much softer voice, I sniffed the air, trying to understand the jumbling emotions, but it was too confusing. I slunk down the stairs. The humans' fear and sorrow was heavy, I needed to feel the earth under my paws.

*Next day Mr Litster was evacuated to Perth by air. He was told on the trip that had the raid occurred one day later there would have been plenty of anti-aircraft guns to oppose the raiders. The trouble was that the AA gun emplacements had only just been completed and the*

*cement had not had time to set. Another day would have done it.*

*Of the 26 years Mr. Litster has lived at Broome, 16 were spent in active pearling operations, in which he still has interests. Some of the Japanese, he said, know every yard of the north-west coast and far better than any white man.*

‘Bloody Japs,’ Fred growled. ‘Pardon the language, ladies, but some people reckon they’ve been making maps under our noses for years.’

‘Rubbish,’ Everett muttered, as he hurried past on his way to the radio hut.

I smelt Everett’s anger and stared at him, remembering Doc’s words about the Japanese man who didn’t want Australia to be invaded, but not understanding the connection. Then I heard other footsteps and flattened my ears.

It was Matron with her *keep out of my way* footsteps. I woofed softly but Fred didn’t hear. Matron stepped onto the verandah and frowned at Fred. He dropped the newspaper and hurried back to his work. Then Matron walked to Hendrik’s bed, muttering some of the strange words she’d learnt.

‘*Het spijt me,*’ Matron said. ‘I’m sorry, Hendrik. I need to change your bandages.’

I smelt the boy’s panic. Matron was gentle with Hendrik, but he screamed every time she treated his wounds. The young nurse, Molly tried to calm him, but she gagged at the terrible smell and had to move aside. Matron glared at Molly’s trembling hands. I licked Molly’s leg from under the bed. Hendrik’s rotting skin made my nose quiver too. She took a deep breath and tried again.

Matron spooned medicine into Hendrik’s mouth and his screams settled into quiet sobbing. Once he was asleep I went to visit Lee Wah’s kitchen. I didn’t like the stink of vegetables bubbling on the stove, but it helped clear the sharp hospital smells from my nose. Lee Wah slipped me some damper, then I went back to Hendrik. He heard the tap tap of my claws on the verandah.

‘*Engel,*’ he whimpered, and I licked his healthy arm.

When Matron finished her rounds, she took a moment to perch on the steps with a cup of tea. From my hiding place I heard her sigh as she eased off her shoes. Matron's feet smelt strong, but I didn't mind. I crept closer and nuzzled her toes. Matron laughed.

'That's where you got to is it?'

I woofed. I'd been listening to a rat scratching inside the wall. Matron kept setting traps in the wrong places and I wanted to catch it for her.

'I don't suppose you've eaten much during the past three days,' Matron said, slipping me half her biscuit.

I swallowed the treat then laid my head across Matron's foot. She seemed pleased with the contact. Matron stroked my ears and said I'd been a good dog. We listened to the night birds until Matron finished her tea. Then she hurried back to the patients.

\*

I stayed by Hendrik for four days. Sometimes his hand squeezed me so hard that it hurt. Remember Rivette, I thought, remember Rivette. Other times when Hendrik sobbed, the tears on his hand dripped onto my nose. I tried to stay still. It wasn't easy.

When Hendrik was well enough to turn his head, he peered over the side of the bed at me. Once his lopsided face even smiled, but then the images returned. The things in Hendrik's eyes terrified me. There was smoke, fire and always the woman in the water calling his name.

'*Moeder*,' Hendrik answered. '*Moeder*.'

When Hendrik turned his worried eyes to me, I nuzzled the small parts of him that weren't hurt or oozing. Hendrik must have once had a dog because he knew just where to tickle me. As his wounds blackened, he stared into my eyes and I tried to be that dog for him. After the first day, when Matron changed his dressings I stood steady, letting him grip my fur as hard as he needed. And I remembered Rivette...

'*Dankjewel Engel*,' he whispered.

I was under Hendrik's bed when Fred told a new patient about Gus Winckel. I'd already heard Gus's story, but I pricked my ears to listen again. The evacuees loved talking about the brave airman.

'Well,' Fred began. 'Gus is a Dutch Air Force officer. Just a young fellow, but brave as anything. He was on the Broome airstrip, cleaning a machine gun when the Zeroes attacked. They say Gus grabbed a belt of ammo, raced out and stood on the tarmac shooting at the enemy planes. There was nowhere to mount the machine gun, so Gus rested the gun barrel on his forearm and fired from the hip.' Fred whistled and I sat up. 'The barrel would have been scorching hot,' Fred continued, 'but Gus didn't stop shooting until he winged one of those Jap planes.'

'What happened?' Jock asked. 'Did it crash?'

'The plane was trailing a cloud of black smoke and Gus thinks he saw flames.'

'That's one less Zero that will come back...'

Fred nodded. 'Broome Hospital treated Gus for third degree burns, and you know better than me how painful that is.' The patients nodded as Fred added, 'I hear that people in Broome have taken to calling Gus, Wild Bill.'

Everyone laughed and I thumped my tail on the floorboards. Hendrik's small hand reached down to touch my nose. I licked his fingers.

Fred's other favourite story was about Jimmy Woods. People gathered around whenever Jimmy's name was spoken. They loved hearing about his lucky escape.

'Jimmy has been marvellous,' Fred said, 'ferrying the wounded between Broome and Hedland...' He paused, making sure everyone was listening. 'And Jim must be the luckiest bloke alive!'

'Why's that?'

'Well, Fred said, 'he and Alf Towers left Wyndham in the Lockheed Electra just a few minutes *before* the first raid and then they landed in Broome just a few minutes *after* the Japs strafed the harbour. Jimmy missed both raids by minutes. It was pure chance. And when he did get to Broome, he was in the right place to help. Jimmy loaded the ten-seat Electra with more than twenty women and children and brought them here to safety. Then he went back for more wounded.'

'He saved me,' a woman called.

I looked across at her pale face as another lady nodded.



‘And my family ...’

The Dutch women loved Jimmy. One day the famous pilot stopped at the hospital between flights to speak with Doc. Jimmy’s voice was tired but I sensed a determined energy around him. He didn’t stay long. There were more patients to transfer, but he ruffled my ears as he left and said, ‘So this is the wonderful Flynn I’ve been hearing about ...’

I wagged my tail and Jimmy grinned.

While the evacuees waited for pilots to fly them away from Port Hedland, they shared their own stories. From under Hendrik’s bed I heard how Harold Mathieson and a young man named Charlie D’Antoine steered a little boat called *Nicol Bay* between burning planes and sharks to collect survivors and bodies. One patient said Charlie dived into the burning water to save a woman and her baby. I also heard about people drowning as they fought the strong currents, trying to swim to shore.

‘I guess they didn’t understand our huge tides,’ Jock muttered.

Late one night Matron sat beside Jopie, one of the women who spoke our words and also the words of the evacuees. Matron asked Jopie if she knew anything about Hendrik’s parents.

‘His father was one of the Dutch pilots,’ Jopie whispered. ‘He left Java with our group of flying boats, but at Broome he didn’t get out of his burning plane.’ Jopie swallowed, and I felt a cloud of sadness around her. ‘As my children and I were pulled into a boat, I saw Hendrik and his mother jump through the flames. She was trying to hold his baby sister above the water, but it was too much for her.’ I heard Jopie’s voice waver and I wriggled closer, putting my head on her foot as she continued her story. ‘She shouted for Hendrik to swim ahead to a boat, and he did, *Godzijdank*. If it weren’t for that man, Harold Mathieson, Hendrik would also have gone under. He saved so many.’

‘Does Hendrik have family in Australia?’

‘I don’t know. His mother was shy. She kept to herself with the new baby. I never met other family members...’

‘Is there any chance that his mother survived?’

Jopie shuddered. As she shook her head, I felt waves of terror and sadness. My ears flattened and I huddled against her leg.

‘There were sharks and burning fuel...’ Jopie wiped tears from her cheeks. ‘I pray she drowned quickly.’

I watched Matron squeeze Jopie’s hand, then she said, ‘No one knows which town will be bombed next, but staying in Hedland is no longer safe. Lieutenant Taplin has ordered the evacuation of the town. As soon as Hendrik is strong enough, he needs to make the journey south ...’

‘Hendrik can travel with my family.’

Matron sighed. ‘Thank you. I was hoping you’d say that. Our equipment is basic and supplies are dangerously low. I’ll feel relieved once he’s out of harm’s way and being cared for properly in Perth. After everything Hendrik’s been through, he might not survive the terror of another raid.’

Jopie nodded. ‘My children and I have been luckier than most. My husband fought the Japanese Zeroes twice and he has also been spared. Three of the women who boarded the flying boat with us are dead,’ she whispered. ‘The least I can do is help Hendrik.’ Jopie held up her bandaged hands. ‘And once these heal, I can change his dressings. I don’t have proper training, but I know basic nursing.’

‘You’ll be able to use your hands soon,’ Matron said. ‘There’ll be some scarring, but thankfully your burns aren’t deep ...’

Jopie looked across at Hendrik.

‘A few scars on my hands will not bother me,’ she whispered.

\*

Doc agreed it would be best for Hendrik to go south with the woman with bandaged hands. Jopie sat with Hendrik for a long time, speaking in their strange throaty language. I didn’t know the words, but I guessed what they were talking about. By now I knew the fearful smell of evacuation.

At last Hendrik nodded and whispered, ‘*Kan ik de hond met me mee?*’

I didn’t understand the words, but Hendrik’s eyes told me what he was asking. He wanted to take me with him. I wagged my tail, but the woman put her hand on Hendrik’s shoulder and shook her head. Her eyes were sad.

*'Alsjeblieft,'* Hendrik pleaded, gripping my fur with surprising strength. I kept still.

*'Het spijt me,'* the woman replied.

*'Ik heb mijn engel,'* Hendrik whispered and tears filled his eyes.

They spoke for a few moments then Jopie told Matron that Hendrik wanted to take me with them. I barked.

*'But with three children of my own and Hendrik, it's not possible...'* she said.

Matron nodded. *'Don't worry, Hendrik,'* she said. *'We'll look after your Engel.'*

Matron turned back to Jopie and asked, *'Do you know what that means?'*

Jopie smiled. *'Engel means Angel,'* she said. *'Your Flynn has become Hendrik's guardian angel.'*

\*

Jimmy Woods and the other pilots transferred the last of our evacuees.

*'They're going to Geraldton and Perth,'* Fred told me.

As Fred loaded the women and children onto trucks, I thought of Elsie. I wanted her to know I was safe and these people might see her. Since I had no words to explain, I began dancing, just like Elsie had taught me. Round and round and round I twirled, until the patients cheered.

*'What has got into you, Flynn?'* Doc laughed.

I woofed and kept spinning. Maybe someone would tell Elsie about the dancing dog at Port Hedland. If they did, Elsie would surely know it was me.

After the Broome evacuees left, Matron ordered a clean-up. The nurses scrubbed the floor while Fred whacked mattresses and spread bedding in the sun. Lee Wah worked in his garden, picking tomatoes and planting seeds in little rows. I snuffled through the loosened earth searching for bugs. Whenever Lee Wah took his vegetables into town I followed. He swapped vegies for meat and butter and I liked watching supplies change hands.

Lee Wah and Fred were masters of swapping. They called it bartering, but since the bombing in Broome, Lee Wah often came home empty-handed.

'Bloody War,' he muttered, kicking stones along the road. 'Bloody Japs.'

Everyone in town smelt frightened and every day, Bluey and Jock grumbled that the rest of Australia didn't understand what was happening in the north. Even Mr Curtin, with his safe voice had said,

*Rumours to the effect that the Broome raid resulted in a heavy  
loss of life are utterly untrue...*

'Should be telling the truth,' Lee Wah muttered as he stirred mutton stew for dinner.

Fred told me Lee Wah was grumpy because there was no more rice, but I knew that wasn't true. Lee Wah had a bag of rice hidden under a floorboard. Each night, after the patients finished dinner, Lee Wah cooked a handful. He ate it with sharp-smelling vegetables. Once I gobbled a vegetable that fell onto the floor. My mouth tingled and Lee Wah laughed when I ran outside to drink water.

\*

Every day aeroplanes circled the town. I heard other Fox Moths as well as the ones called Electra and Lodestar. Their pilots came to the hospital. They spoke with Doc and called the names of patients waiting for flights. Evacuees came and left. Everyone said

the enemy would strike again soon. Soldiers had strung barbed wire along the beach and they shouted at me when I came too close. I stopped roaming the town at night.

After the Dutch women left, Doc began flying local ladies inland. He took them to homesteads that hadn't been abandoned or to another hospital at Marble Bar. I loved going with them.

One day two different pilots came to visit Doc. They were dressed like soldiers, but their clothes were fresh-smelling, not dusty. The pilots said they'd come to take Doc's plane. Doc's heart thudded and I watched his hands open and close behind his back.

'That's impossible. I'm the only civilian doctor for thousands of miles and I'm in the air every second day. This week I've performed three urgent operations in Marble Bar and Wyndham, as well as delivering a baby out past Warrawagine.'

'I'm sorry Doctor, I have my orders. The RAAF takes priority.'

'Without a plane, my patients will die.'

'Without your plane, soldiers will die.'

I watched Doc puff his chest, trying to stand taller, like a top dog would as he faced the shorter strangers. Doc argued, but it made no difference. The other pilots took Fox Moth.

Doc stormed around the hospital using the bad words Elsie's brothers sometimes said. I scurried out of his way and huddled behind the door of Lee Wah's kitchen.

Doc said he'd write a letter to the Prime Minister.

'It's outrageous, Flynn,' he muttered as his pen scratched back and forth on the paper. 'They want me to evacuate the hospital, but how can I move patients inland without a plane?'

A few days later Broome was bombed again and Fred said that a Dutch aeroplane had been shot down at a place called Carnot Bay. Doc made calls and wrote another letter.

Then everything changed again.

\*

The day before the big wind I was jittery. Something felt wrong. The feeling was different to the fear I'd had before Elsie's family left and it was different to the jumpy feeling I'd had before the branch fell on Dave.

I wasn't the only creature who noticed. The change was clear to the birds. Long before the first drops of rain fell, a squall of parrots screeched in a tree outside the hospital. Between squawks, they filled their beaks with seeds and insects, then flew inland in one massive flock.

The ants sensed change also. They climbed the walls, moving their eggs higher. Nurse Molly brushed some down, until Matron called her to empty bedpans. Lee Wah stared at the sky. He was like Elsie, always looking for connections between things.

'Barometer dropping ...' he muttered.

Doc, Matron and the nurses kept bustling about with their jobs. Fred rubbed his aching joints and grumbled, while I paced around the yard sniffing the air. A big storm was coming. When I heard a frog call I knew rain was very close. I should have been happy, I love rain, but this storm felt dangerous. When the cats disappeared before sunset my instincts whispered, *run!*

But which way should I go?

*Run to Elsie, the voice inside me said, follow the ocean.*

But the soldiers had blocked the ocean.

Lee Wah came outside to look at the sky and mutter some of the words that no one else understood. I'd learnt to guess a few meanings, but these words were new.

Lee Wah held my muzzle for a moment and said, 'Look out, Gengi, cyclone is coming.'

He covered his vegetable garden with an old sheet. Then he rolled big rocks around the edges of it. As the rain started, Lee Wah ran to tie rope around the banging doors. Matron closed the wooden shutters, but the wind shook them open again. I heard Fred nail them closed. Lee Wah called me into the kitchen but I didn't want to be inside. I huddled under the hospital instead. Elsie's face filled my mind as the sky darkened.

The air kept closing in. My legs twitched. I needed to run. When I saw the hospital rat scurry across the yard, I followed. Not to catch it, but because the rat seemed to know what to do. And I didn't.

The gassy-smelling lights went out. I heard Bluey yell for help, but I fled; away from the ocean into the darkness.

*'Run'* the voice said. And I did. *Keep the ocean to one side*, the voice whispered. But the danger was coming from the ocean. I needed to go inland to escape.

The rat skittered across the paddocks and I heard it scuttle between some rocks. Where to now?

Rain splattered my back. I kept running. The drops became bigger. My fur was soaked. The wind yowled like cats under a full moon. Gusts and willy-willys pulled me. I had to find shelter or I'd be blown away. The rain blinded me. I ran on, until I found two big rocks. They made a small overhang. I squeezed underneath, pushing my nose into the earth.

The storm was a beast, angrier than any shorthorn Dave or Stan had wrangled. It bit and lashed my back. I lay between the rocks trembling as the beast's breath raged. At last the savage wind dropped. Nothing moved and the strange stillness filled me with terror. Then the wind returned. It ripped fence posts from the ground and flung them through the air. One crashed against me and I smelt blood. I cowered against the rocks. Blood pooled beneath my front legs. Remember Rivette, I thought, but the memory of that horse gave me no courage at all. As I drifted into a deeper darkness I remembered Hendrik's bravery instead, and Fred's story of Gus Winckel holding his burning gun.

When my eyes opened it was early daylight. Blood covered my nose. I couldn't see properly. The wind was strong but no longer terrifying. I poked my head to one side. An eagle was circling. Some injured animal must be close to death.

The earth was steaming. I edged backwards, out of my sticky puddle of blood and limped away from the rocks. The eagle followed. I staggered past broken trees and fences.

*Find the ocean*, Elsie's voice whispered.

The way I'd been going felt wrong. I turned back then hobbled forward. Elsie was waiting. Mist blurred my eyes. I fell. Huge wings menaced me. I crawled on. When I came to a road, I collapsed. The eagle swooped. Its sharp claws pinched my back, lifting me. I twisted. Fresh pain gave me a burst of energy. I snapped at the claws,

wriggling and turning. The claws loosened their grip. I fell again. More blood dripped over my face, blinding me as I limped forward.

The eagle's shadow blocked the sun and I took my chance to escape. I had to find Elsie. I hobbled blindly then yelped as a curl of fencing wire caught me. The barbs dug into my flesh. Each time I moved, they bit harder.

The eagle hopped around the wire, its hooked beak ready to gouge. I saw its clever eyes checking the wire as wind gusts flicked sharp edges. The eagle watched for a long time. Then it screeched and flew away. There were easier meals than me.

I lay in the wire, gashed and bleeding, but safe from the bird. The rain eased then stopped. I panted in the steamy heat, surrounded by pools of water that I couldn't reach.

At last I heard an engine. A car rattled closer then stopped. I smelt someone familiar.

'What you doing out here dog?'

It was the man from the Native Hospital. I'd played with his boy while Doc was inside. I whimpered as the man bent beside me.

'Poor fella,' the man crooned. 'You're in a bad way.' He held my muzzle and squeezed a few drops of water onto my tongue. 'There now, little Flynn. It's okay, stay still. I'll try and cut you free...'

The barbed wire ripped my legs and face as he untangled me. Wriggling made it worse, so I tried to keep still. When I was free, the man wrapped me in his shirt and carried me to his car. Then we drove towards the sea.

\*

The man took me to the back of the hospital and called Lee Wah.

'Ai, ai, ai,' Lee Wah shouted. His voice was frantic.

I heard Matron and Doc running towards me. Doc frowned as he examined my wounds. Then he gave me an injection like the one he'd given Dave. I struggled then everything went black.

Unlike Dave, I woke up.



I smelt Matron's soapy freshness before I opened my eyes. She was rubbing medicine over my fur.

'Look who's back with us,' Matron said as I stretched my battered body. 'There now you poor little mite, stay still or your stitches will open, and if that happens, Doc will be cross.'

I'd never known Matron's hands could be so gentle. I licked her arm then tried to lick my wounds, but Matron held my muzzle.

'No you don't!'

She stroked my ears and I fell asleep again.

The next time I woke it was dark. I sniffed the air. I was alone. I sniffed again. There were delicious smells. Mutton and damper. I was in Lee Wah's kitchen. That was strange. I wasn't usually allowed past the door.

I didn't want to get in trouble, so I tried to stand. My legs wobbled, they were too weak. I lifted my head instead. A sheet covered me and I was in a strange kind of pen, like the cage the Boss once made for a bitch in heat. I peered around. Lee Wah's Coolgardie safe was beside my cage and there was meat inside. I drooled. My belly was empty.

I blinked and shook my head. Everything was fuzzy. I blinked again. Only one eye was working. I wriggled out of the sheet and started licking off Matron's medicine. Then I stopped and stared. My front leg was missing.

I stretched my toes. I could feel my leg but I couldn't see it.

I howled.

Lee Wah hurried in from his room next door.

'Hey, Gengi, everything's alright.'

He sat on the floor stroking my ears and belly until I fell asleep again.

In the morning I saw that it wasn't a bad dream. My front leg *was* missing. I remembered little Beth and whimpered as I understood that it really was possible to lose a leg.

Lee Wah fed me soft pieces of mutton and crooned words in his kind voice. I couldn't get up so he changed the newspaper under me when I dirtied it. I waited to be scolded but Lee Wah smiled and said, 'No problem, Gengi.'

I stayed in my pen in the darkest corner of Lee Wah's kitchen. Every morning Doc came to check my wounds and Matron changed the dressings. Fred sat beside my cage when he had time between jobs. No one had made such a fuss of me since Elsie.

When they'd all gone, Lee Wah fed me treats and whispered, 'You still have three legs, Gengi. You'll be alright.'

One night when Lee Wah finished cleaning his saucepans, he carried me into the yard, put an old cloth under my belly and helped me stand. I fell over. Lee Wah lifted me again and then again. At last, when I was able to wobble alone for a moment, Lee Wah gave me a treat.

The next day we did it again. Lee Wah held me steady while I tried to hop on three legs. I thought about Beth as I stumbled and was glad that Doc had been able to save her leg. Balancing on three was tricky. Standing on one leg would be impossible.

Every day we practised. Lee Wah stayed near me and slowly I became stronger. Doc said I would have scars and a limp, but that soon I'd be walking well. Doc guessed from the marks on my eyelid that a bird had pecked me. I could only see blurry shapes from the damaged eye. Doc shone a light into it and said there wasn't any medicine to fix my blindness.

'Sorry, Gengi,' Lee Wah said afterwards. 'Can't do anything about your broken eye. But one golden eye is better than two normal ones. Golden eye still brings you good luck.'

While I was stuck in the cage, Lee Wah spoilt me with meaty scraps, but when I tried to chew off my bandages, he smacked my nose and said, 'No, Gengi. Doc saved you. Don't spoil his work.'

My balance was wonky, but Lee Wah was patient. He showed me how to change my weight. Soon I was able to hobble about on my own. After a while I could even run short distances. My fear of birds took longer to heal. I stopped chasing parrots and whenever I heard wings, I cringed and curled into a ball.

Lee Wah hung shiny paper above his vegetable garden to scare away birds. Every morning he scattered tea leaves around his plants then watered them carefully. Sometimes he waved a good luck statue over the garden. The cyclone had ripped branches from trees and shrubs, but Lee Wah's vegetables had survived.

'They're tough,' he said. 'Like me.'

'And battered,' Fred joked, tickling my ears. 'Like you, Gengi-Flynn.'

While my wounds healed, I heard Doc storming around. He was waiting for a reply from the Prime Minister.

'Doc misses his wings like you're missing your leg,' Fred muttered.

Doc told anyone who'd listen that his remote patients needed treatment. One day I heard him shout into the radio that, 'If there's an emergency, someone will die.'

'And with War coming closer,' Matron said. 'An emergency is likely.'

Lee Wah's kitchen was peaceful. I loved to rest on the floor listening to him chat while he cooked.

'Cyclone flooded everything while you sleep,' he told me. 'Lots of wreck everywhere. Too many rotting fish on town beach. And the hospital almost blew away. You must have known, eh Gengi!'

Fred brought some of the washed-up fish for Lee Wah's garden. He said it would be a bonza fertiliser. When Matron found out, she made Fred bury the fish. By then the smell was so bad that even I didn't want to dig them up.

In the evenings I snapped at mosquitoes while Fred and Lee Wah shared stories about other cyclones.

'Good thing the surge wasn't as bad as '39,' Fred said. 'Remember when that hotel fridge bobbed down the main street?'

Lee Wah nodded. 'Like a big cork...'

'And then after the rain stopped, that old bloke found a cask of beer, miles inland...'

'And said the beer still tasted okay. Terrible time, but hey Fred, some of it was funny.'

The air in Lee Wah's kitchen was thick with interesting smells, and not just of the lamb broth and watery vegetables that he cooked most afternoons for the patients. Every morning Lee Wah made soft warm damper. Sometimes he gave me a crust.

'What you think, Gengi, Too much salt?'

I wagged my tail. His damper always tasted good to me.

As Lee Wah cooked he shared stories about the old days, before War, when he baked for stockmen on a cattle station. Lee Wah's drover mates had gone away to fight but Lee Wah wasn't allowed.

'Wrong colour, wrong eyes,' he muttered.

I looked into Lee Wah's kind eyes and didn't understand. Why wouldn't the Army take him because of his eyes?

\*

While soldiers fixed Port Hedland's broken buildings, tiny leaves appeared on the bare trees. I couldn't forget the eagle's claws, but after a while I stopped trembling and watching the sky.

Some nights, when I couldn't stop shaking, I crept back to the kitchen. Lee Wah let me doze by the door while he and Fred told jokes. It felt like Fred and Lee Wah had been mates for a long time. In the evenings they played a game called Rummy with their cards, or a clicketty-clack game that Lee Wah called mah-jong. Money changed back and forth as they swapped tiles or cards. I loved listening to them laugh and swear. The best fun was watching Fred jump if he heard Matron's footsteps.

Whenever she came for a fresh pot of tea, the men hid their coins and pretended to be cleaning knives and forks and plates. I learnt to give a soft woof when I heard Matron coming. If I barked early enough, Lee Wah gave me a scraping of mutton fat after she'd gone.

Some nights, Lee Wah and I sat together in the yard. He pointed to the stars and taught me their names in different languages. Lee Wah sighed.

'Much more shiny in the bush,' he said, 'away from town.'

Lee Wah told me that he missed watching the moon rise above a campfire. Between droving stories, Lee Wah cursed the Japanese. He hated them even more than Elsie's brothers did.

'Bloody War. Bloody Japs,' he muttered. 'Everything's changed now, Gengi. Not enough meat. Not enough butter. Too many soldiers...'

One day I heard Fred yelling. I hopped to the front of the hospital and saw Fred standing between Lee Wah and a soldier. Even from a distance, I could smell the soldier's sour hotel breath. The man was waving a knife at Lee Wah.

I growled at the soldier and hopped closer.

'Why isn't he locked up with the other Japs?' the man shouted.

'He's Chinese, you drongo,' Fred hissed. 'They're our ally.'

The soldier pulled a face.

'Don't give me that rubbish, mate. He looks like a Jap spy to me...'

'Drop the knife,' Fred warned.

The soldier spat. His spit landed on Lee Wah's feet. It smelt nasty. Before I could nip the soldier, Fred punched his nose. I jumped as the soldier fell backwards into the dust.

'Get up and have a go,' Fred shouted, standing over the man.

Doc pushed open the hospital door.

'What's going on?'

Fred's face changed. He stared at the ground. If Fred had a tail, it would be drooping.

'This bloke was causing trouble,' he muttered.

'And so you decked him?'

'Sorry,' Fred mumbled.

Doc frowned, waved him away and helped the man stand.

'You're drunk, soldier,' Doc snapped. 'Shall we take this up with Lieutenant Taplin?'

The man shook his head.

'Our cook is Chinese Australian,' Doc hissed, 'and I'm Acting Magistrate in town. If I hear that you or any of the other soldiers have bothered him again, there will be trouble. Do you understand?'

The man nodded and staggered back towards town.

My ears flattened as Doc turned to glare at Fred and Lee Wah.

'And I suggest you two get back to your duties!'

They nodded and scurried into the yard. I heard a soft whistle.

'Gengi,' Lee Wah called. 'Come away.'

I hopped to Lee Wah's kitchen. He and Fred brewed a cuppa. They poured a capful of strong-smelling drink into their tea, then clinked the mugs together. Lee Wah took a long sip and they both started laughing. Lee Wah pretended to punch Fred, then Fred pretended to fall to the ground. It was a fun game. I woofed and circled the table.

Doc's letter to the Prime Minister worked. Mister Curtin made the soldiers give back his aeroplane. More than four, but not many, days after the cyclone, Fox Moth returned.

'Doc has wings again,' Fred said. 'Now maybe things can get back to normal...'  
But things didn't.

After the cyclone and 'Broome Massacre' (the humans' name for the burnt patient time), people smelt more frightened than ever. I heard them making plans to evacuate and hated that word even more.

Doc's newspaper told us that Japanese submarines had been seen off the coast. I didn't know what submarines were but they sounded bad. I stayed closer to Doc's leg.

'Don't worry,' Doc said, stroking my ears. 'If a submarine comes, I'll look after you.'

Meanwhile Doc was evacuating more people to Marble Bar in case Japanese bombers came down the coast.

I liked flying to Marble Bar. After climbing into the air, Fox Moth followed the beach while Doc looked for the train-line running across the brown land. Then we followed those tracks into scrubby hills with trees that looked as small as Lee Wah's vegetables.

Some of Doc's patients were frightened. It was my job to keep them calm. Doc lifted me into the cabin between Fox Moth's wings and I nuzzled the people before take-off. In the air, I licked their hands or feet until they settled.

When it was just the two of us, Doc let me travel on top of Fox Moth. That was my favourite place. As we flew, Doc told me stories about the land and about a steam train called Spinifex Flyer.

'She runs across those tracks below,' Doc said.

Sometimes we saw Spinifex Flyer; racing along or stopping at the Shaw River for a drink. When Doc flew low to buzz the train, the people on board waved and cheered. If I barked, they waved harder.

We spent more and more time inland. At first I was glad to fly away from noisy Hedland. While Doc was working inside the hospital, I sniffed each dusty building in town. I couldn't smell Elsie, but two mean dogs smelt me.

I'd grown up with station dogs, so didn't scare easily, but these dogs were nasty. They growled, slipped their chains and chased me. Before the cyclone I'd been a quick runner, with a missing leg, I was slower. I learnt to dart from side to side instead. I scampered back to the Marble Bar Hospital, zigging back and forth with both dogs snapping at my tail. That confused them for a while, then they worked together to herd me. I reached the verandah just in time and squeezed into a tight space under the hospital floorboards.

The owner of the dogs was a grey-faced miner. He laughed when he saw me quick-hopping away from his dogs. The man and his dogs weren't always in town. When they were, the man chained his dogs outside the Ironclad Hotel. Hot chains made the mean dogs even meaner. If I came near, they rattled their collars until they got loose.

When Doc found a gash on my rump, he warned the miner to keep his dogs away, but Doc wasn't always around. Some days he left me behind. I huddled under the hospital where the mean dogs couldn't get me. Sometimes I had to wait hours before I could come out for a drink. There were cockroaches and rats under the hospital. Rats and roaches didn't bother me, but I was lonely without Doc. When he returned, I didn't leave his side.

Doc always took me on flights to Hedland. Things were changing there too. Edith was leaving to nurse soldiers in Perth. Doc flew us back for a goodbye lunch and I saw Matron wipe away a tear. After lunch, Doc and his friend, Len sat on the hospital steps to share the latest news.

'It's a matter of time until the Japs strike again,' Len said.

Doc made a ssh sound and led his friend into the yard. I followed, then rested my nose on my front paw as I listened to Len's plans.

'I need you to fly as many ladies as possible out of Hedland,' Len continued. 'We have to get the women out to cattle stations, away from the coast...'

'When do you want to start the airlifts?'

The sooner the better.'



'What if the women won't go?' Doc asked.

'Tell them they have to.'

I snapped at a mosquito whining around Doc's ankles. He ruffled my fur and whispered, 'Thanks, Flynn.'

The next morning women gathered at the hospital. There were a lot more than four and they were all shapes and sizes. Ladies with babies in their tummies were the first to leave, and as long as my fur didn't make anyone sneeze, I went in the cabin to guard them.

We took the ladies out to Wallareenya. I knew the station Missus there. We'd met when she came into town to see Matron. Missus Kerr had tickled my ears and her hands smelt so good that I danced for her. Then I spun in circles. Missus Kerr laughed and told me that I was 'marvellous'. That made me like her even more.

The trip to Wallareenya wasn't far. We took three big-belly-ladies and a boy on the first ride. I listened to the hearts of babies beating through the women's stretched skin and remembered my own gentle mother. Those warm puppy days felt like forever ago.

Missus Kerr met us at the airstrip and drove us to the Wallareenya homestead in an old truck. While the ladies sipped tea and nibbled pikelets, Doc checked the shearers' mattresses spread on the verandah. He said he wanted to make sure each one was clean. I sniffed the mattresses. They held a rich smell of sweat and mutton fat. I'd be very happy to sleep on one.

Before we left, Doc thanked Missus Kerr and gave her a bag of medicine in case any babies came early.

'Can you manage a few more women?' he asked. 'There are dozens waiting to evacuate.'

'As many as you need, Doc.' If you bring the ladies to me, I'll organise transport to Nullagine or Mulga Downs in our old truck. Then we'll find a way to get them to the railway station at Meekatharra.'

'Will you evacuate too?'

'Maybe, when I know all the mothers are safely on their way...'

'Don't leave it too late,' Doc warned.

Missus Kerr shrugged. 'The stock need water whether or not the Japanese invade, and with the men away, someone has to keep the bores open.' The big woman smiled and patted Doc's arm. 'Don't worry, I'll be alright.' I wagged my tail and Missus Kerr ruffled my ears. 'What about this wee mite?' she asked. 'Shall I keep Flynn here as well?'

My tail stopped wagging. I moved closer to Doc. They both laughed as I sat on his boot.

'Maybe not yet,' Doc replied. 'She keeps my patients calm in the plane.'

Missus Kerr tickled my chin. 'You're a marvellous little dog, Flynn, just marvellous! Stay safe and come back soon to visit me.'

I licked her leg. It was warm and salty.

'C'mon Marvellous,' Doc said as he lifted me into the hole on top of Fox Moth.

The day was clear and our trip back to Hedland was smooth. As Doc dipped Moth's wings, he pointed to dark patterns on the land and told me that they were rivers. I peered down. There was no water glistening.

'They're dry now,' Doc continued, 'but in the Wet, they'll fill quickly.'

I remembered the river coming down on Elsie's station, and woofed, so that Doc would keep talking.

'See the way the river spreads out, Flynn?' I turned and my good eye looked down. 'The blood in your body is like that, with veins and arteries that make the same patterns as those waterways.'

Looking below made me dizzy and Doc was using too many strange words. I leant against him and closed my eyes. Doc scratched my chin and hummed. Now that he had his plane back, Doc smelt peaceful. He let Moth do a few tricks and I howled in delight as she looped back and forth above the shining railway tracks.

Len met us at the airstrip.

'How are the women?' he asked.

'Fine,' Doc replied. 'Mrs Kerr said she can take more, so I'll fly another group out after lunch.'

I stayed close to Doc. I didn't want to be left behind.

Doc barely stopped for a break. When he did, I peered into his eyes and saw memories of burnt arms and legs and faces. I nuzzled his feet, trying to help him

forget. When that didn't work, I rolled onto my back, asking for a tummy tickle. I loved it when I was able to make Doc laugh.

\*

I wasn't in the plane the day Doc crashed.

Fred rushed into the yard, calling Matron. He said Fox Moth had fallen from the sky. Someone had accidentally put water in the petrol...

I ran after Fred, barking as he helped the army doctor carry Doc inside. Blood covered Doc's arms and face. As Matron cleaned Doc's cuts, she said it was a miracle that he'd walked away from the wrecked plane.

'I'm fine,' Doc muttered, but Matron kept fussing.

'Thank goodness you weren't on board, Flynn,' Doc told me when we were alone. 'You've already had enough adventures to last you a lifetime.'

Doc wasn't badly broken but Fox Moth was. She had to go away to be fixed.

'How will I get to my patients?' Doc grumbled as he limped around the hospital. 'What if there's an emergency?'

Fred warned me to keep out of Doc's way.

'He's grumpy when he's grounded,' Fred said, but soon Doc found another plane.

The plane was called Swallow and I liked her better. She was smaller than Fox Moth, which was silly because real swallows are bigger than moths. Flying in Swallow was like being on the back of a bird, a safe bird that could outfly any swooping eagle.

There were two sitting holes on Swallow's back; one for me and one for Doc.

'I hope I can trust you not to wriggle,' Doc said.

I woofed. Elsie had taught me to 'stay' when I was a pup, and I felt important when Doc let me sit in a seat of my own. Whenever Doc took me to the airstrip I danced in circles, but as soon as I was in my special compartment, I held my ears high and sat as still as a cornered rat.

Doc needed to fly to Mount Goldsworthy. A stockman called Lanky had shattered the bones in his arm. Everett said Lanky's mates had strapped the arm as best they could, but that it needed urgent attention.

'They've cleared an airstrip for you, Doc,' he added.

It was a short flight. I leaned on the inside edge of Swallow to balance and enjoyed the feeling of my ears flapping in the breeze. When Swallow drifted through a cloud puff I gave a little howl of joy.

The airstrip was rough and a wind gust tossed Swallow to the side, but Doc landed safely. Our patient was waiting in the shade of a bloodwood tree, surrounded by his mates. I shivered and I sniffed the air. The stockmen smelt of horses, cattle and saltbush. They reminded me of Dave and Stan.

Swallow rolled to a stop and Doc lifted me out of the plane. I hopped towards the men, wagging my tail.

'What's happened to your dog?' a tall man called.

'She was caught in the cyclone,' Doc replied, 'got tangled in a roll of barbed wire. 'What's happened to you, Lanky?'

'I'm settling in a new mare and she's skittish.'

Lanky's mates explained how the tall man had been crushed between his frightened horse and the cattle.

'Ever flown in a Swallow?' Doc asked as he checked Lanky's injuries.

'Never flown in nothing,' Old Lanky muttered, 'and I don't want to! If you set the arm and sew up me cuts, I'll be grateful.'

'You need at least ten stitches...'

'That's okay, Doc, just do your best. The boys are nagging at me, but I don't reckon the arm is as bad as they say.'

'I can see bone, Lanky, and you have a gash on the back of your head. You need to be in hospital so I can keep an eye on you.'

The stockman grunted.

'It's a short flight. I'll strap your arm and Flynn here will keep an eye on you while we're in the air.'

Old Lanky scowled at me.

'Strange looking nurse,' he muttered as a sudden gust blew off his hat.

Lanky's voice was gruff, but not mean. I felt safe with him.

Doc licked a finger and held it in the air.

'I don't like the way this wind is shifting,' he muttered. 'I don't suppose you blokes have something I could use as a wind sock?'

One of the men grinned.

'How about this?'

He held up a roll of the paper humans use to wipe their tail area. A long trail of paper unwound and floated into the air.

'Perfect,' Doc said. 'If you stand on your truck and hold it high, I'll be able to see which way the wind is blowing.'

Doc helped the injured stockman climb into Swallow's front seat. Then he lifted me in. I curled myself around Lanky's big feet. The smell coming from them was impressive. I took a few deep breaths of the man's scent and licked one dusty ankle. Old Lanky growled.

As Swallow rolled down the airstrip I heard the men shout, 'good luck.' Doc eased the aeroplane into the sky and Lanky gave a small moan as we took off. I nuzzled his leathery leg. A rough hand reached down to ruffle my fur. Lanky's grip tightened as Doc spun Swallow in a tight circle. I decided I should jump onto the stockman's lap. He chuckled and scratched my ear.

I closed my eyes, enjoying the cool air. Then I smelt smoke. I raised my nose and peered over the side of Swallow. While we'd been on the ground, a bushfire had started. Flames leapt across the scrubby hills. The plane pitched. Doc was trying to go around the smoke. I felt Lanky's body tense.

'Hold on,' Doc shouted, 'We'll need to fly around this.'

Doc turned Swallow but the smoke was spreading. I peered down again. The flames frightened me. I blinked as they flickered higher. The plane bounced and Lanky's fingers clutched my fur.

'Sorry about the turbulence,' Doc called from behind. 'I'm going to fly higher. I need to get us out of this smoke. Don't worry, we'll climb above 10,000 feet, but only for a few minutes. If you feel breathless, take a few swigs of oxygen. There's a cylinder beside you.'

'What about the dog?'

'If she starts drifting, share the oxygen or blow into her nostrils ...'

'Are you serious?'

Doc didn't answer. He was peering at the smoke and pulling levers.

Lanky reached for the oxygen bottle with his good hand and took a couple of gulps. I pressed my nose into his belly, careful to keep clear of his injuries. Old Lanky seemed happy to have me closer. I felt his heart thudding and he didn't push me away.

As the plane shuddered upwards, the stockman clutched his broken arm.

'We'll have to go higher,' Doc called. 'Use the oxygen. I'll take us lower in a few minutes...'

I began feeling dizzy. Was the plane spinning?

'Keep an eye on the dog,' Doc yelled.

I felt Lanky's gnarly hand grab my muzzle. Then he held a mask over my nose. The dizzy feeling stopped as Lanky and I took turns with the oxygen mask.

Doc flew over the smoke then brought Swallow closer to the ground. I panted, gulping in the sweeter air. Lanky patted my head.

'Me old pearl-diving mates would give me what for, if they knew I'd been buddy-breathing with a ruddy dog,' he chuckled, ruffling my fur. 'You've given me a bonza story to tell around the campfire, little Flynn!'

I wagged my tail, licked his rough cheek and leant against Swallow's belly as Doc swooped roos on the Hedland airstrip before landing.

\*

At the end of each day, after the sand flies settled, and before the mosquitoes began whining, Doc sat in the yard reading his newspaper. Whenever he found an exciting part, Doc clicked his tongue and made strange, impatient noises.

'Listen to this, Flynn...' Doc said.

*The phrase "air strength In the Pacific," which was used glibly and more or less unthinkingly a year ago, has a very real meaning today.*

I nudged Doc's leg as his eyes skimmed the page. Even when I didn't understand the words, I liked listening to him read.

'This article tells about the fighting in the Coral Sea,' Doc muttered. 'Here's an interesting bit ...'

*... the battle stressed the supreme Importance of airpower to the defence of Australia. It proved, in fact, that given sufficient numbers of aircraft of the right type - heavy bombers, medium bombers, dive-bombers, fighters and coast and sea reconnaissance aircraft - and a sufficient number of bases placed with regard to defensive and offensive strategy, Australia could defend her shores without naval assistance but with airpower alone.*

'Ha,' Doc cried, 'I've been saying that for years.'

I rolled over, hoping for a tummy tickle, but Fred left his chores and came to join Doc.

'What's the latest?' he asked.

Doc read more from the newspaper.

*... the air position of this country today compared to what it was even 6 months ago is rather like comparing our war effort of 1914-1918 with our contribution to the Boer War. Very soon it will be like comparing the Second World War with Mafeking. 'We shall need every ounce of our present and potential strength to beat the Sons of Heaven because 5 months of this war have already proved that their country ranks among the great air Powers of the world. They have first-rate planes, excellent pilots, a shrewd directive and an uncommonly good sense of co-operation and tactics. They have known for years the value of air strength in the Pacific.*

'Blind Freddy knew that,' Fred muttered. 'Unlike our leaders ...'

I gnawed a flea bite, wondering who Blind Freddy was as Doc kept reading.

*Their heavy fleet of mobile aircraft-carriers and seaplane tenders-the largest in the world-proves that they have long appreciated the value of a highly mobile sea force capable of striking by air over a wide area.*

Doc nodded to Fred.

*... the days of scoffing at Japan's "military inferiority" have gone and we can now size up our enemy as he is - a relentless, clever, courageous and thoroughly dangerous foe...*

I stopped listening and licked Fred's foot. When was someone going to pat me?

*... And he is employing planes which are of undoubted high quality - apparently concentrating on a minimum number of proven types and mass-producing them on a large scale. He has found an exceptionally good plane in the Mitsubishi Zero...*

'They're jolly impressive,' Fred agreed. 'Those pilots who saw the Zeroes strafe Broome, reckon their manoeuverability is first rate.'

'They certainly gave our Wirraways a run for their money in Rabaul. I wouldn't want to meet a Zero when I'm up in Swallow...'

'Indeed not!'

Doc smoothed the paper and his voice became softer.



*He is a tough enemy and he pins his faith to air power. It is with air power that we shall beat him but we won't do it by underrating his ability or strength.*

'Hear, hear!' Fred called. He shook his fist at the sky. 'What do you think, Flynn?'

I leapt up to bark.

'I think she wants her dinner,' Doc said.

Fred smiled. 'Come on then...'

He led me to the kitchen and gave me a big bowl of scraps.

\*

The place called Darwin was bombed again and the submarines that everyone had worried about went into Sydney Harbour, wherever that was. I wished Elsie was here to show me her map and explain how far away the places were.

Another ship sank and a lot of soldiers died. It was a Japanese ship but there were Australians called POWs on board. The ship was sunk by Americans, even though they were our friends. It didn't make sense and trying to understand made my head spin. The ship was called *Montevideo Maru* and whenever Matron heard those strange sounding words, her eyes filled with tears.

Most of Doc's patients had been moved to Marble Bar, so we spent more time inland. Marble Bar was hotter than a camp oven and I missed Port Hedland's breeze. The inland hospital had a matron called Joan and two nurses, Doreen and Bonnie. They were all kind and Bonnie saved me treats from her lunch.

Some things were the same at Marble Bar, others were different. At Marble Bar I spent most of the day lying under the hospital panting. Then, as the sun set over the spinifex, I came out, shook off the dust and sat with the patients. Marble Bar sizzled through the day, but as the stars came out and the moon rose, the night air became bitter. I huddled in a corner of the verandah shivering until Joan took pity and wrapped me in an old sugar bag. The rough fabric smelt delicious and I snuggled down, trying not to move until dawn.

Some of Doc's patients refused to move inland to Marble Bar - maybe they knew about the flies and freezing nights - so Doc and I still flew between hospitals. Doc was busy at both places. Everyone had questions for him.

'What should we do about Mr Thomson's eye?'

'Can we airlift Mrs Hart before the baby arrives?'

'We've almost run out of iodine.'

'I'm worried about the rations, there's hardly any water.'

'Can you go to the Comet Mine to settle a mining dispute ...'

I learnt that Doc wasn't just a doctor. When we were in Marble Bar, he also went to a big stone building on the hill. Policeman Gordon brought people to Doc. Sometimes they had ropes around their hands. People told stories until Doc made a decision. Then Mr Gordon went away and came back with another roped-person.

The stone building was cool inside. While Doc was busy, I lay by the front door, keeping watch in case the mean dogs escaped their chains.

Most evenings, Doc still found time to read the newspaper. We were in Port Hedland, waiting for the wind to settle, when Doc crackled his newspaper and laughed.

Hey, Fred,' he yelled. 'Have you heard of a fellow called Jack Palmer?'

'I don't think so. Why?'

'Well, *The Daily News* says that a man called Jack Palmer was out hunting dugong, when he fell over a package buried in the sand. He took it into Broome, and now listen to the rest of his story...'

*BROOME, Mon — Pulling out a set of large salt and pepper shakers, an ill clad, middle-aged beachcomber flicked them as if throwing dice and spilled on a table before astonished Lieut-Colonel C. B. Gibson a glittering layer of diamonds said to be worth £300,000.*

I watched Fred's eyes widen and his mouth drop as Doc continued.

*While he was walking down the coast to enlist, he had kicked a paper parcel embedded in the tidal mud. To his amazement the fortune in diamonds cascaded out. It was the amazing climax to a tragic story of the shooting down of a Dutch airliner, perhaps the last to leave Java, by Jap raiders returning from Broome early in March.*

'I remember someone talking about that plane,' Fred said. 'The pilot was heading for Broome then heard about the attack and turned away. When he got the all-clear, he re-routed his Dakota towards Broome, but met the Japs on their way back to Kupang.'

'Rotten luck,' Doc muttered, 'but some of the crew managed to escape.' He tapped the newspaper. 'It says they were shot down over Carnot Bay and that when Jack found the diamonds on the beach, the parcel was so wet that the wrapping was about to fall apart.'

'Imagine that,' Fred sighed. 'A fortune in diamonds swallowed up by the mud!' He whistled softly. I looked up, but Fred was staring into the distance. 'Where are the diamonds now?' he asked.

'Jack gave them to Colonel Gibson and he put them in the Commonwealth Bank.'

'Ha, I bet a few fell into Jack's pocket along the way. Or maybe some are still back there in the mud.' Fred winked at me. 'What do you think, Flynn we could fly you to Carnot Bay so you can sniff out any missing gemstones.'

'I don't think diamonds smell,' Doc said.

'Pity!'

Fred hurried away to the kitchen and I heard him telling the story to Lee Wah.

\*

When Doc and I were at Marble Bar, I missed Lee Wah and Fred. Joan was kind and so were the nurses, but they were too busy to sit with me, or notice the mean dogs sniffing about. I spent a lot of time huddling under the hospital with huge cockroaches.

At last Doc had a reason to fly back to Hedland. An old timer, Jacko had injured his arm. He needed to be with his brother until it healed. The brother wouldn't evacuate, but said he'd take good care of Jacko.

The flight to Hedland was smooth. The old miner's breath was frightening, but he was scratching my ears. All was well. I poked my nose into the air as we flew closer. I didn't want to miss the first sight of the ocean. And maybe Lee Wah had saved a bone for me. My tongue drooled.

When I heard the engine change I knew Doc was getting ready to land. I stood up, even though it was tricky balancing on one leg.

Suddenly the plane dipped. I wobbled and fell onto Jacko's arm. He swore.

'What's wrong?' Jacko grunted.

'Over there.' Doc pointed. 'See the planes!'

Jacko held his hand above his eyes and I smelt his sudden fear.

'Zeroes!'

Their engines sounded different to Fox Moth, Swallow and Electra.

'It's a whole ruddy squadron ...' Jacko muttered.

Suddenly Everett's voice babbled a warning over the radio. Doc jerked the controls.

'We need to get higher,' he shouted. 'With the sun behind us, those Jap pilots might think we're a Spitfire.'

Jacko clutched my chest, squeezing the breath out of me as Swallow dipped and circled. The planes growled closer. I saw clouds puff up from the runway below.

'They're giving the airstrip a pasting!'

Swallow climbed higher. She was straining. My ears hurt.

'Hold on!' Doc called.

There wasn't enough air. I panted and felt Jacko shaking. His old heart was pounding. We needed the oxygen bottle.

Doc swerved down and flew in circles, checking the sky below. At last he yelled, 'They've gone.'

As Swallow flew lower we all gulped air.

'Now sit tight,' Doc said, yanking his levers, 'this will be a rough landing.'

'You're not going down! What if they come back?'

'I'm the only doctor. They'll need me.'

Jacko shivered as Doc did a flyover. Smoke covered the airstrip. Between clouds of dust I saw big holes in the runway.

'Struth,' the miner muttered, still holding me close.

Doc flew over again. Grit prickled my eyes and Jacko coughed as Swallow lined up in front of the airstrip.

'Hold on!' Doc called.

Swallow bounced as we landed heavily and Jacko moaned. I turned to watch Doc steer around the ditches. He was frowning as he gripped the levers. As soon as we stopped, Doc jumped out and ran to help. Jacko and I stayed in the plane.

One man told us shrapnel had hit the back of a soldier's head.

'Killed him,' the bloke muttered, shaking his head. 'It was from a daisy cutter.'

I peered around the smoky airstrip. Elsie liked flowers. I'd seen her pick daisies, but why were Japanese pilots cutting them?

Men ran through the smoke. One of them was Doc. He told us it was too late to help the daisy-cut man, but that other people had wounds that needed stitching.

My nose was battered with smells of panic and fear. The worst was a sizzled flesh smell. It reminded me of Hendrik's wounds and stockmen using the branding iron on cattle. Rivette came to mind, but I shook my coat. After the cyclone I'd stopped thinking about her. The only one I wanted to remember was my Elsie. I whimpered. Would I ever find her again?

Soldiers ran past Swallow. One bellowed orders. Others hurried to do what he said. A man dressed in an apron waved a spoon and shouted swear words at the sky.

'You've filled my porridge with dust,' he yelled.

I needed to pee, but sat as still as I could on Jacko's lap. The injured miner kept looking up at the sky. I couldn't hear any more planes. We were safe for now. I licked Jacko's hand, wishing I could tell him not to worry.

At last Doc came back. He helped Jacko out of the plane. I followed as soon as Doc said I could and ran to Fred who was waiting by his truck. Fred lifted me in and we sped away from the burning airstrip with its bitter smell of rubber.

It was a long time since I'd been at the hospital. I hurried around the yard weeing over all the places cats had sprayed. Then I scampered over to the verandah to

greet new patients. There were just two old men for Matron to look after. They were gentle fellows with cloudy eyes who never seemed to know what was going on. They didn't want to go inland and Fred said they'd slept through the bombing.

After re-marking the yard, I searched for Matron. She was in the morgue room. I tried to nose open the door but Fred shooed me away. He said she was busy with the daisy-cut man. I went to find Lee Wah instead. He *did* have a bone for me. A big bone with meat scraps still attached. I hid behind the bougainvillea to crunch quickly before anything else happened. As I gnawed gristle I thought about Elsie and longed for a quiet place where we could be together. A place where no one was frightened or bleeding, somewhere I could eat slowly.

\*

A few days after the bombing, when Doc's newspapers arrived, he opened his crackly paper and burst out laughing.

'Seems that we're far more important than we know,' he muttered.

'Why's that?' Fred asked.

'Here's how an official radio broadcast from Tokyo describes the raid ...'

*... squadrons of Japanese planes attacked the airport and harbour at Port Hedland, north-western Australia.*

'Well, I suppose three waves of three planes could be called a squadron...'

'Listen,' Doc said. 'It gets better,'

*... Residents of Perth and also Kalgoorlie to a lesser degree will be interested to learn that "Port Hedland next to Broome and Wyndham is the most important town in Western Australia." The Tokio radio said so this morning in a garbled version of the recent raid on Port Hedland.*

'Well that's a first,' Fred chuckled, 'more important than Perth!'

He and Doc laughed until tears ran down their faces. I danced around them, wondering what it all meant.

Part Seven: Joan's Florence      Late August/September 1942 - May 1943

Doc and I still flew to Port Hedland but we slept at Marble Bar. So did Swallow.

There were three women at the Marble Bar hospital; Matron Joan, Bonnie and Doreen. Matron Joan called me Florence Nightingale, or Florence for short, and said I was a *welcome tonic* for the patients. Her voice made it sound like a good thing. When Doc was away, Joan brushed me in the evenings and gave me dinner. The younger nurses, Bonnie and Doreen, reckoned Joan had a soft spot for me.

Insects tormented us day and night at Marble Bar. Tiny ants covered the hospital floorboards and when I hid from the mean dogs, I heard the steady nipping mouths of white ants eating away at the wooden stumps. Flies hummed in a black cloud around the outhouse with its foul smelling thunderbox. At night, mosquitoes and moths circled the hospital's flickering lights, and hidden in every crack were spiders, centipedes or scorpions.

The nurses hated scorpions.

One day a young boy came in from the desert with his family and I learnt why. The boy was called Arunta and his hand was huge. Arunta's father showed Matron two little holes on his skin.

'Scorpion,' he muttered.

Matron Joan said she needed to drain the poison immediately.

'Lucky you got to us in time...'

Matron cut Arunta's hand, gave him medicine and put him to bed. I smelt the boy's fever-sweat and heard his body shaking. While the nurses cared for Arunta, his family set up camp behind the hospital. The father's dog had golden eyes like mine. When the moon was high, we prowled together through the prickly spinifex. Then, after Nurse Doreen fell asleep, I led the desert dog into the hospital. We dozed beneath Arunta's bed until first light.

Arunta's arm swelled all the way to his elbow, but after two days, Matron's medicine worked. The family gave the nurses some bush food, stroked my dusty ears, then walked back into the spinifex.

The air in Marble Bar was so hot that it sometimes hurt to breathe. Each morning, Doc sat on the verandah steps, watching the clouds as he sipped a cup of tea.



Then he stood up and said, 'I'd better get moving,' I watched to see whether Doc packed his lunch. If he did, it meant he was flying. I loved escaping into the cool sky with Doc and Swallow, but Doc didn't always take me. Some days, he said, 'I'm sorry, Flynn, you can't come this time, I'm heading to the leprosarium in Derby.'

I never knew why I couldn't go to that place, but I sensed Doc's sadness every time he said the words ...

\*

Doc and I were staying in Hedland the night the Japanese came back. This time I felt what it was like to be on the ground when their plane dropped bombs.

Matron's old patients were snoring when I heard a strange aeroplane circling the town. Its growling engine wasn't a Zero, but something felt wrong. I jumped up.

Fred was standing in the yard, staring at the dark sky. I nosed his leg and whined.

'I don't like it either,' Fred muttered.

Lee Wah joined us, and Matron, standing apart in her long nightdress. Suddenly the town siren screamed. I howled and heard a strange whistling..

'Take cover,' Fred yelled, throwing himself to the ground.

I darted under the hospital as Matron hurried to her patients. The ground shook and I heard a massive splash on the beach. My ears buzzed. I howled again.

Doc ran into the yard.

'Is everyone alright?' His torch flashed onto our faces.

'All fine,' Matron replied.

The plane had gone, but the siren kept screaming. It made my ears ring.

Later that night, Len came to tell us a bomb had landed by the ocean.

When we returned to Marble Bar, the humans were digging long holes in the ground. They called them air raid shelters. I'm good at digging, so I jumped in to help. I snuffled and pawed the cooler earth, but people shooed me away. I slunk behind a tree to watch.

When the long holes were finished, Policeman Gordon drove his car onto the hill behind the hospital. He blasted his siren and everyone in town ran to their shelters. I joined in. It was great fun, better than any hide and seek game I'd played before.

The days became hotter.

Strangers in army uniforms came to town on the train. They loaded crates and odd-shaped things onto trucks. I sniffed the boxes before the men drove out of Marble Bar into the desert. They smelt like Middle brother's rabbit gun. People whispered that something was happening at a place called Corunna Downs.

'It's a secret,' they said.

More trucks came.

Sometimes the strange men whistled and waved to me. I wagged my tail, watched their dust trails swirl into the air and wondered what they were doing.

\*

All sorts of creatures came to Marble Bar Hospital looking for water. The most frightening was a huge bungarra lizard. I'd seen bungarras on Elsie's station, but none as big as this one. Bungarra ate birds and rabbits that weren't much smaller than me. Whenever I heard the creature rustling about, I hid under the hospital. Bungarra never chased me, but something much smaller almost killed me.

The pain began as an itch. A biting itch. I rolled in the dirt trying to scratch. That made it worse. The sun hurt my eyes, so I crawled into the darkest area under the hospital and lay there shivering as the day became cold, then suddenly hot again.

'Florence, here's your dinner.'

Joan's voice was kind. My tail gave a lazy thump.

'Come out for a cuddle,' she coaxed.

I shifted my swollen leg and looked up.

'Come on, Florence, the patients are waiting for your visit.'

I wanted to creep out to Joan, but I was too tired to move. My body ached. I flopped back into the dust. As my paws twitched, Elsie's face filled my mind. I could almost smell her soap.

I dozed until Joan used a broom handle to push some food and a little bowl of water towards me. I lapped the water and licked the meat, but couldn't eat. I drifted into a restless sleep.

Much later, I woke to the scuttle of cockroaches. They were swarming over Joan's meat. One crawled over my belly. I shook off the roach and lapped more water. My eyes felt blurry. I slept again.

A faraway voice woke me.

'Flynn,' Doc whispered. 'You need to come out.'

My tail thumped again.

Doc was kneeling beside the hospital. Joan crouched beside him. Her face was worried.

'Come on, mate, you can do it. Come out and let me take a look at you.'

I rolled onto my belly. My back was so sore ...

Doc waited. 'C'mon girl.'

I took a deep breath and shuffled towards him. The light was blinding.

'Good girl, Flynn, nearly there ...'

Joan handed Doc a towel. As I reached his arms, Doc wrapped me in the fresh smelling cloth. He carried me into the surgery and lay me on a table. Joan wiped away the dirt as Doc ran his hands over my fur. He stopped at the top of my hind leg and turned to Joan.

'You were right,' he said. 'It's a tick.'

I don't know what happened next. When I woke, I was in a box in a room that smelt of Joan. I licked my paws and belly. They stunk of carbolic and something else. I was hungry. I looked around and wriggled until the box fell over. Joan saw me staggering down the hallway.

'Hello Florence,' she said. 'I'll bet you're hungry.'

My tongue drooled as she poured warm broth into my bowl.

\*

The rainy season rumblings began and heavy air sucked at my chest. Joan's chooks stopped laying. If one did cackle, she ran out to catch the hen's egg before it hit the

ground. Otherwise it cooked. I lay under the Coolgardie safe in the kitchen, panting as water dripped down its side. Joan cut my fur short.

‘There you are, Florence,’ she said. ‘That should help a little.

Doreen and Bonnie found a shiny tree in a cupboard. They decorated it and made paper chains to hang around the hospital. I licked the glue pot and crouched on the verandah, staring across the spinifex. Christmas felt sad without Elsie. Doc put on a strange furry suit and the patients sang songs Elsie had taught me, but I didn’t dance.

The sky rumblings brought rain clouds. When at last the first fat drops fell, I ran outside with the humans, laughing and skittering. Heavy rain washed dusty hollows into creeks. I splashed away my fleas and grime and felt lighter.

The rain also brought flooded outhouses and belly-aches. The nurses were busy spooning castor oil into patients’ mouths. One day Bonnie caught me and held my muzzle while Joan poured some under my tongue too. I shook my head but the bitter taste wouldn’t go away.

More men came on the train then left in trucks. Everyone in Marble Bar was whispering about Corunna Downs.

‘They say operations will start soon,’ Joan told Doc one evening, ‘and the patients are worried we’ll become a target. What if Japanese fighter planes follow the US Liberators back to their airbase?’

Doc sighed and shook his head. ‘All we can do is hope that they don’t ...’

Huge aeroplanes flew over the hospital. Their rumbling engines were louder even than Lodestar. Then one night a group of the big planes flew over Marble Bar nosing up to the stars. I trembled, remembering the Japanese bombers over Hedland.

‘Quick,’ Bonnie called as she heard the planes. ‘The Liberators are on their way....’

Matron Joan and some of the patients hurried outside. I heard Bonnie count the aeroplanes as they flew overhead. There were more than four.

The next morning, as the sky was changing colour, I heard the planes rumbling back. Bonnie was washing her hair at the outside tap. She stopped and I heard her count again.

‘One, two, three, four, five, six, seven ...’

She stood up, flicked back her hair and smiled at me.

'They've all returned safely, Florence, thank goodness for that.' After that Bonnie sat on the verandah steps every evening. She watched the sky as long shadows darkened the spinifex, waiting for the heavy-sounding planes. They always left just after dark and came back in the early morning. When Bonnie counted them returning, she didn't always smile.

Some nights the Corunna men came into town to visit the Ironclad Hotel. On those evenings, Bonnie and Doreen made cakes and pikelets. They took them to the pub and I followed, sniffing for the mean dogs. If it was safe, I sat outside the hotel listening to big Les playing the piano while the nurses and Corunna men sang.

On the way home, Doreen teased Bonnie.

'I reckon that Yankee pilot is sweet on you,' she whispered.

Bonnie laughed.

'Don't be silly,' she said, and I smelt her happiness.

Visits to Port Hedland became further apart. If we stayed there overnight, Doc flew to Marble Bar at first light. One morning, after Doc examined his patients he went to the big stone building on the hill. The mean dogs were tied to the post outside the Ironbark Hotel, so I crawled under the hospital.

When the afternoon cooled, Doc collected his bag and called me.

'C'mon, Flynn,' he said. 'You can come with me this time.'

I scampered out and nuzzled his hand.

Swallow was waiting at the airstrip. As we flew above the heat, I waited for Doc to turn the plane towards Hedland. He didn't. I woofed and wriggled around to look at him.

'We're going somewhere new,' Doc said, 'and it's top secret.'

Secret was when Elsie and I played hide and seek, but Doc wasn't counting backwards and there was nowhere to hide in the plane. I pressed my nose against the little windshield between us. Doc was humming and smiling. It felt like a game ...

'Keep still, Flynn, or you'll fall out!'

I leant into my seat. Being on top of Swallow was exciting. The cool air ruffled my fur and I felt safe being close to Doc. He flew low, following a line of hills and checking the markings on his map. I looked ahead. The ground was shimmering like the ocean, but these watery patterns moved whenever we came closer. I put my head to one side, trying to figure it out.

'We must be close,' Doc muttered. 'Corunna is renowned for heat hazes.' He clicked his tongue. 'That's what makes it the perfect place to hide ...'

The only part which made any sense was the word 'hide'. I wagged my tail and watched the ground for big rocks and bushes. There weren't many. Seeking was going to be easy.

Swallow dipped over another hill and we dropped lower.

'Aha,' Doc cried.

We dropped again and I saw buildings. Men looked up at us and waved their hats as Doc dipped Swallow's wings. Then we lined up in front of a wide flat airstrip.

Most of the runways we landed on were bumpy. Swallow's wheels whizzed along this one.

Doc steered us to one of the buildings. I sniffed and looked around. There were other aeroplanes on a side runway. They were much bigger than our Swallow. More planes huddled behind strange little hills. They were covered in patchy nets but the planes were too big to be very good at hiding. Not like me.

A soldier was waiting for us.

'Lieutenant Hank Baker, United States Air Force, 380<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group,' he called. 'Welcome to Corunna Downs.'

The soldier sliced the air with his arm then held one hand above his eye. Doc jumped out and did the same. They shook hands.

'Call me Hank,' the man said. He had an adventurous Jimmy Woods kind of energy, but with an under-scent of sadness.

'Good to meet you, Hank,' Doc replied. 'Our radio man said your doctor is sick....'

Hank nodded. 'He was airlifted to Darwin with a bad case of dengue this morning. It's rife here, along with everything else. We sure appreciate you coming out to help.'

'No problem. It's an easy trip from Marble Bar.' Doc looked around. 'Quite a setup you've got. I know this area, but even with your coordinates, it was hard finding you.'

The man called Hank grinned, but still smelt sad. 'We like it that way,' he said. 'The Japs know we have a base out here. You've probably heard their radio girl, Tokyo Rose saying, "We will find you Corunna," but so far we're like that needle in a haystack. The ironstone hill and natural heat haze protect us. Some nights, even our own pilots have trouble finding home base.'

'That makes me feel better,' Doc said. 'I was doubting my navigation skills.'

'From what I've heard, there aren't many pilots who know the Pilbara like you!'

Doc smiled. 'Everett said you have a medical problem?'

'Not just one ...'

Doc raised his eyebrows.

'Anything urgent?'

Hank sighed. 'It's mainly dysentery,' he replied. 'We have a water shortage and food taints quickly. There are also men suffering sandy blight and prickly heat. We're hoping you'll be able to stay for a couple of days until HQ find us a replacement doctor.'

'That should be fine,' Doc said. 'There are no serious cases in Marble Bar or Hedland and we've sent our expecting mothers south. I'd be happy to stay for a few days.' Doc stepped onto Swallow's wing and reached for his bag. 'I was told your hospital is well stocked, but I brought supplies just in case.'

'Thanks Doc, we have plenty of medicine, just no one who knows how to dispense it.'

I squirmed, keen to get out of the sun.

'I've also brought our hospital dog,' Doc said. 'The mongrels in town are giving her a hard time. I didn't want to leave her ...'

'I love dogs,' Hank smiled at me and I felt his sadness lift. 'And don't you worry, Sir, my men will treat your pooch like a princess.'

I shivered at the sound of my old name.

'Hello Pooch,' Hank said, holding out a hand for me to sniff. 'Looks like you've been in a war of your own ...'

Doc explained how I was tangled in wire during the cyclone.

Hank clucked his tongue, then whistled and tapped his leg. I hopped towards him. Hank swung me into his arms and I let him. 'Wasn't it Woodrow Wilson who said, "If a dog will not come to you after having looked you in the face, you should go home and examine your conscience."'

I looked into Hank's smiling face and wondered who this clever Woodrow Wilson was.

'Come on Pooch,' Hank said, lowering me gently. 'Let's get you out of this blasted sun. We'll go via the mess hall and I'll ask Cook for a bone.'

We walked towards a long shed and Hank chatted to me in the kind of high-pitched voice people use with puppies. When we stopped, I licked his hand and looked around. All the buildings and aeroplanes were covered in nets. They were like the ones fishermen threw off Hedland jetty, but much bigger.



As Hank led us through prickly scrub towards a tent that smelt like our hospital, he warned Doc to watch out for death adders.

‘There are dozens of them here, as well as other snakes and scorpions...’

I stepped carefully. Elsie had taught me to keep clear of snakes.

While Doc spoke to the nurses, Hank took me to the mess hall. We met Cook, stirring a pot of soup and he promised to save me a bone.

‘C’mon Pooch,’ Hank called. ‘I need to check the gunners over at the AckAck battery. Why don’t you tag along?’

I wagged my tail. AckAck sounded fun, like small dogs barking at frogs.

The camp was huge with round drums of petrol scattered through the spinifex. Hank led me along a row of tents then we walked towards the hill Swallow had flown over.

‘G’day dog,’ soldiers called as we passed. ‘Hello pooch.’

The men stopped work to pat and fuss over me. Hank smiled.

‘They miss their own dogs,’ he whispered, ‘and you remind them of home, Pooch.’

Hank’s words made me feel important. I stood still for the soldiers even though the cracked earth burnt my paws. Then I held my head high as we walked towards the ironstone ridge.

The AckAck Battery was a line of guns that men were able to turn back and forth.

‘These are the guys that keep Corunna safe,’ Hank told me.

The AckAck men grinned, then continued oiling their guns. There was a high viewing platform near the AckAck Battery. Hank carried me to the top of the stairs and we looked across the tents and runways. The camp was bigger than all of Marble Bar.

I saw men worked on aeroplanes, and alongside the runways, trucks drove back and forth. Above it all, strange shimmering patterns danced though the air. Hank and I sat together, watching the camp and quietly enjoying each other’s company.

Doc and I spent three nights at Corunna. While the American soldiers spoiled me, Doc worked in the hospital. I visited him every afternoon to sleep on the soft carpet that lay over the concrete floor. There were two rows of stretcher beds inside

the hospital, with a resting man on most. There was also a curtained off area where Doc did operations. I was not allowed in there.

Every evening at dusk we all gathered outside to watch the mighty Liberators lumber into the air. Hank, Doc and I watched them take off from the viewing platform. The air was oily with fumes and their rumbling roar was louder than any wet-season thunder.

When the Liberators became tiny spots in the sky, we went to the mess hall for dinner. Hank and Doc ate meat from tins. They washed that down with bitter-smelling tea.

‘No wonder everyone’s sick,’ Doc muttered.

During the day, I nuzzled the lonely soldiers and danced for them. In return they taught me new tricks. I learnt to roll on command and jump over crates of bullets. While Doc was operating, Hank took me inside one of the enormous planes. I watched the men loading long metal tubes into its belly. I sniffed one tube. It smelt nasty.

‘Don’t bump that!’ Hank warned. ‘Or we’ll all go up in smoke!’ He laughed and turned to the men. ‘How’s it going, fellas?’

‘All ticketty-boo,’ a soldier replied. ‘Tonight this baby will give the Japanese in Surabaya something to think about.’

A storm lit the sky on our last night at Corunna. Thundering booms echoed around the camp site and jagged light hit the hills then bounced back to the clouds. The silver sheets seemed to tie the sky to the earth. I stared at the weird sight and howled.

Hank held me close to his heart.

‘It’s okay, Pooch,’ he soothed as I trembled. ‘It’s just the ironstone.’

His words made no sense, but Hank’s voice was calm and I sensed he needed the contact as much as me. I nuzzled my face into his chest and thought of Elsie.

Doc and I were back in Hedland, and I was crouching behind the bougainvillea when Matron came outside.

'Flynn,' she called. 'Where are you?

I listened to Matron's footsteps. When they were heavy it meant she was angry, but Matron sat on the bottom step before I could hear her mood.

'Flynn, come here.' She whistled. 'I want to show you something ...'

I left the lizard I was stalking and trotted across the hot yard. Matron tickled my ears as I lay on her shoes and breathed in her starchy smell. Matron's crackly dress reminded me of Elsie's gluepot.

'I know you won't understand,' Matron began, 'and I'm probably crazy for saying this out loud - the air raids must be affecting me - but Flynn, it doesn't seem right *not* to read this to you.'

I licked Matron's ankle.

'I've received a letter. It's from a girl called Elsie ...'

I stared at her.

'The letter is dated late December,' Matron continued, 'six months ago, and by the look of the envelope, it's been on a run-around before finding its way to us.'

Matron opened the envelope and I caught the faint smell of a familiar hand. Could it really be my Elsie?

I nudged Matron's foot.

'Here's what the letter says,' Matron said.

*December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1942*

*Dear Matron of Port Hedland Hospital*

*I hope you don't mind me contacting you, and I do hope you can help me.*

*My name is Elsie Grey. I am fourteen years old and my family used to live on Clancy Downs Station. We evacuated earlier this*

*year but I was not allowed to bring my small terrier with me. My father was worried she'd be a nuisance.*

*Father is away coastwatching now and Mother and I have settled into an old farmhouse on the outskirts of Geraldton. There are gates around the property. Mother says it would be safe for my dog to come and join us - if we are able to find her.*

*Like other families, we've lost loved ones to the war and if you are an animal lover, perhaps you can imagine how worried I've also been about my dog.*

*In January we left my terrier (her name is Princess) in the care of stockman, Dave Frankston. Last month we heard the terrible news that Dave had an accident soon after we left and that he has died. We are very sorry.*

*Mother heard from another stockman, Stan Smith that a flying doctor took the dog and that he agreed to find her a good home. Stan couldn't remember the doctor's name. He said he just called him Doc.*

*Here in Geraldton, I've been learning signalling and I also roll bandages for the Red Cross. Last week one of the Dutch evacuees joined our group. She doesn't speak much English, but she did say that earlier this year, after the massacre in Broome, there was a funny little dog at your hospital that was able to dance; my Princess loved to dance. The woman said the dog was a great comfort to her children and also to a badly burnt child.*

*With so many families leaving the Pilbara, I'd almost given up hope of finding my Princess, but the Dutch woman's story made me wonder whether the dog at your hospital could be my Princess.*

*I have enclosed a sketch that I made the Christmas before last. You can see I'm no artist, but her eyes are an unusual gold colour, so that might help identify Princess.*

Matron looked into my golden eyes - they must have been shining with excitement. She smiled as she continued reading.

*Mother and I will be here in Geraldton until it's safe to return to Clancy Downs. After the good news from Kokoda, hopefully that won't be too much longer...*

*We can be contacted at the address on the envelope or through the Red Cross. As I said, my father is coastwatching, one brother is overseas and another is missing after the Fall of Singapore. My third brother, William is training at the Geraldton Flying School. If you are able to send word with a pilot or evacuee, I'll ask Will to watch out for any mail from Port Hedland.*

*With the recent air raids, I know that you'll have more pressing concerns than my dog, but Princess is very dear to me, and this week, I've been remembering our last Christmas together. If you have any news at all of her whereabouts, I would be so grateful to hear from you.*

*Sincerely Yours  
Elsie Grey*

'Well, your Highness,' Matron said. 'It looks like we've found your family at last.' She tickled my ears. 'But don't think I'll be calling you Princess anytime soon!'

I snuggled against Matron's arm and she chuckled.

'Now I'd better find some clean paper so I can write to your Elsie and let her know you're safe.'

I jumped onto my hind legs and whirled in circles.

'Take care of your cyclone wounds,' Matron warned. 'They've healed nicely, and Doc won't be happy if you undo his good work.'

Her words reminded me that I no longer looked like a princess. I crept under the bougainvillea and stared across the yard towards the sea. Would Elsie still love a broken-down dog with a missing leg and only one eye?

Matron wrote back and soon after that another letter arrived.

*June 10<sup>th</sup> 1943*

*Dear Matron*

*I was so grateful to receive your letter, thank you. I cried with relief to hear that my Princess is alive and safe in your care. I've missed her so much.*

*After all the fear and bad news, how wonderful to know that something from my past has not changed forever.*

*Since my first letter I've mastered signalling and have been inspired by the Women's Land Army to help on a local farm. I'm too young to be a proper Land Girl, but this makes me feel as if I'm doing more to support our boys. At the moment we're planting silverbeet and parsnip. There's an old dog on the farm, so perhaps Princess will be able to come to work with me and help too.*

*My mother sends her thanks and hopes you are safe in Port Hedland.*

*Sincerely Yours*

*Elsie Grey*

I rested my head on Matron's lap as she read, feeling confused. Relief was good, but tears were bad. And what on earth was parsnip? I blinked, wondering if this letter meant that Elsie would come for me. Or would I stay in Hedland until War ended?

In the evening, Matron wrote back.

*June 15<sup>th</sup> 1943*

*Dear Elsie*

*I am sending this letter with Jimmy Woods. He promises to hand deliver it to the Geraldton Flying School.*

*Your Princess is as sweet-natured as ever and everyone at Port Hedland and Marble Bar loves her dearly, but sadly some things have also changed for her.*

*Flynn, as we call her, was badly injured during the cyclone last year. She almost died and to save her life, our doctor had to amputate a leg. Please try not to worry. Your Princess has learnt to get about very well on three legs, but she is of course more cautious now.*

*Flynn/Princess has also lost the use of one eye. We think she was attacked by crows or an eagle when she lay injured after the storm. Since then your Princess has developed a fear of all birds.*

*Although Flynn/Princess has changed physically, her nature is brave and affectionate. As I said, we love her dearly but know she will be missing you. Now that your mother agrees you are able to look after her in Geraldton, I will try to find a way to get her to you. With the attacks on Exmouth she'll be safer in the south and with more talk of a Brisbane Line separating the country, no one knows how long any of us can remain here.*

*Best wishes  
Matron Wellard*

After Matron folded her letter and slid it into an envelope, I paced the yard. Would Elsie still want an injured dog?

*June 27<sup>th</sup> 1943*

*Dear Matron*

*I cried again as I read about poor Princess's injuries. I will love her no matter how changed she is, but I'm so sorry for what she's been through. I should never have let my father separate us.*

*Thank you for everything you've done to help her after the cyclone. Please also thank the doctor.*

*We are thinking of you, and Mother prays every day for your continuing safety.*

*I can't wait to hold Princess in my arms. I'll wait patiently until you find a way to reunite us.*

*Yours, Elsie*

As Matron read Elsie's words my fears disappeared. Three legs and one eye didn't matter. Elsie still loved me. I danced in circles until Matron made me stop. The next morning Matron wrote back. She read her words aloud as her pen raced across the paper.

*July 12<sup>th</sup> 1943*

*Dear Elsie*

*Apologies for this scrawled letter, I am writing in haste ... I have spoken to our doctor and he asked me to tell you that he needs new engine parts for the aeroplane and will fly to Geraldton in the next few weeks.*

*Doctor says he would be delighted to reunite you both. Like me he's been worried about the safety of Flynn/Princess here in the north-west. Doctor says he's not sure when exactly he'll be able to leave but that he hopes to make the trip before the end of the month.*

I wagged and wagged. I didn't know how long it was until 'the end of the month', but surely it wasn't too much longer. Soon I would be with my Elsie.

I heard the distant rumble of a plane engine and looked to the sky. Matron watched me nervously, but I licked her hand. It was the sound of an Electra, not an enemy Zero.

As I settled, her pen moved faster.

*In the meantime I hope that we can all stay safe. Now that our boys have recaptured Wau and Guadalcanal, perhaps we'll*



*see an end to the bombings along our coast. Like you, I have a brother serving overseas. I pray they are both safe.*

*I'd best stop now. One of our old patients needs tending. Please thank your mother for her prayers.*

*Best wishes until next time*

*Jane Wellard*

I stared at Matron. I'd never thought about her having another name. Jane was a short, sensible word. It suited her. I licked Matron's foot, but she shook me off.

'No more lazing about,' Matron Jane said, readjusting her apron. 'There's work to be done, Your Highness.'

As she hurried away I was pleased that Matron's footsteps were soft.

As Doc brought Swallow in to land, I peered over Geraldton. The town was much bigger than Hedland. I saw tall buildings, cars, railway tracks and ships tied to a jetty. Somewhere, amongst all this, was my Elsie. I wriggled with excitement.

The airstrip was busy, with small planes taking off and circling. I raised my nose. The air felt different here. It was warm, but not scorching like Marble Bar. I also smelt the familiar salt of the ocean. I wagged my tail.

As Swallow rolled to a stop, young men in flying suits gathered around us.

'Welcome to Geraldton.'

'How was your flight?'

Doc answered their questions, then said, 'I'm looking for a girl called, Elsie Grey.' He nodded at me. 'I need to return her dog.'

'Elsie helps at the Signals Shed,' a tall fellow answered. 'She asked me to watch out for you.' The fellow pointed to the other side of the runway. 'I could mind your dog or go over and get Elsie for you ...'

'Thank you,' Doc said, 'if you could get her that would be kind. I'd like to spend these last few moments with Flynn. We've flown together for over a year and I'm going to miss her.'

I leant against Doc and listened to his heart as the man drove away in a truck. Its steady beat pulsed sadness, but I also sensed happiness for me.

The other men went back to their aeroplanes and we waited in the shade of a strange, bent-over tree. Matron had scrubbed me with carbolic, but she'd missed one flea. I scratched until Doc told me to stop. His voice was gruff, but I felt his love and knew he wasn't cross.

Doc read aloud from his newspaper, but I was too restless to listen. After so long apart, would Elsie recognise me? And could she really love a broken-down dog with three legs and a wonky eye?

Doc pointed to a line of dots on his newspaper and spoke about someone called Eddie Ward and the 'Brisbane Line', but I wasn't interested in lines. I wanted to be with my Elsie. I wriggled. Why was it taking so long to get her?

My missing leg ached. I bent to lick it, even though I knew my leg wasn't there.

At last we heard the truck's engine. I squinted into the glare.

'I can see two people,' Doc said.

I squirmed.

'One of them is a young woman ...'

The truck stopped in a cloud of dust. I couldn't see Elsie but I smelt her.

I gallop-hopped as fast as I could, then danced in circles.

As Elsie stepped out I leapt into her arms.

'Princess!'

I licked her face. My body had changed and so had Elsie's. She was tall now and smelt like a woman. Elsie stroked the scars on my chest and kissed my broken eye. Her tears fell onto my nose. I shook them away, then nuzzled Elsie's face until she laughed.

'Princess,' Elsie whispered, 'You've found me at last.'

I wish I could say that we all lived happily ever after. For me, being with Elsie was all that mattered, but when Elsie suffered, I suffered too.

The War kept going. In human time, it went for another two years.

War changed Elsie's family forever. Oldest brother died at a place called Changi, and Middle brother came back from Kokoda with a strange smelling illness. Third brother learnt to fly. He refuelled planes at the airstrip and complained about wanting to do more. The War ended before he could go away to fight, and Elsie was glad.

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The Boss returned from coastwatching, meaner than ever. He and the Missus fought. The Boss left and never came back. Elsie and I weren't sad. Third brother, Elsie and Missus stayed in the Geraldton house. Sometimes I missed the sounds and smells of Hedland and the cattle station, but life in Geraldton was peaceful.

Elsie became a nurse. She met a young man, George and when he came to visit, they went for walks. I wasn't invited, but that was alright, my three legs were becoming slower. George brought me biscuits and made a fuss of me. He smelt safe. I didn't mind sharing Elsie with him.

One afternoon I followed George and the family to church. Elsie held flowers and wore a long dress like Matron's (but Elsie's smelt nicer). Elsie kissed my nose then walked into the church beside Middle brother. I had to wait outside.

Elsie came out holding George's arm. Everyone cheered and threw rice. I thought of Lee Wah, knowing he'd click his tongue to see people wasting his favourite food.

Elsie and George had babies who grew into children that loved and spoiled me. I became fat. Sometimes, when I lay on my mat in the late afternoon sun, I remembered the special people in my life. Those who'd loved me enough to give me a name. I remembered Dave, whose last wish passed me safely to Doc, and Lee Wah

who patiently taught me to walk. Then I thought of Beth and Hendrik. I hoped Beth's family had found a safe home and that Hendrik's lopsided face had learnt to smile.

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*Most days now I lie in my basket in the sun. I woof and twitch in my sleep, remembering happy times with Fred, the Matrons and nurses. Most of all I remember Doc and our flights together; taking the big-belly ladies to safety, buddy-breathing with Old Lanky, escaping the Japanese Zeroes, meeting Hank and his enormous Liberators, and then that last exciting-sad flight to find Elsie.*

*As I sleep, I fly through clouds on Swallow's back and memories drift into dreams until someone comes along to tickle my ears. They pat me and I stretch, knowing I've been a very lucky dog. Then I lick their hand, roll over and doze again.*

## **Crafting Animal Characters in Fiction for Young Readers**

## Introduction

This thesis explores the crafting of animal characters in Australian fiction. The first section, consisting of the two creative works, represents my own latest efforts in this area. Because animal characters are usually employed in works for younger readers, I have offered two shorter novels intended for older ('young adult') readers and younger readers ('children') respectively. These creative works are followed by this exegetical essay, which examines the portrayal and crafting of animal characters across the history of Australian fiction and also looks reflectively and critically at my own creative practice. In this way the thesis attempts a comprehensive (but by no means exhaustive) examination of its topic within the space available.

Stories featuring animals played a huge role in shaping my reading experiences from childhood to adulthood. As a small child I worried for Eeyore<sup>1</sup> and roared along with Max's 'Wild Things'.<sup>2</sup> The strange creatures of Dr Seuss fascinated me, and I laughed at the antics of the 'Muddle-headed Wombat',<sup>3</sup> the 'Bottersnikes' and the 'Gumbles'.<sup>4</sup> On rainy days, I loved to sit beside our family record player listening to Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*.<sup>5</sup> 'The Elephant's Child' was my favourite track, and as I listened to the crackly recording, part of me leapt through an imaginary window to Africa, where I sat by the banks of the 'great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River' watching the elephant's child being spanked for its 'satiabile curiosity'.<sup>6</sup> Picture books gave way to chapter books, and as an independent reader my interest in and close connection with animal characters continued to grow. I longed to be Fern sitting quietly in a mid-western barn listening to the conversations of the farm animals.<sup>7</sup> I

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<sup>1</sup> A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 1926, Suffolk, The Chaucer Press, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> M. Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*, New York, Harper & Row, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> R. Park, *The Muddle-headed Wombat*, Sydney, Educational Press, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> S. Wakefield, *Bottersnikes and Gumbles*, Sydney, Collins, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kipling, *Just So Stories for Little Children*, 1902, New York, Signet Classic, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> R. Kipling, *The Elephant's Child*, 1902, New York, Signet Classic, 2010; no page numbers.

<sup>7</sup> E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*, London, Hamish Hamilton Children's Books, 1952.

cried when Ginger died,<sup>8</sup> was shocked by the ferocity of the dogs to which poor Buck was teamed<sup>9</sup> and was inspired by the courage of Reepicheep.<sup>10</sup> As a young adult reader, my English teacher introduced me to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*<sup>11</sup> and the porcine characters gave insights into Russia's past that were unlike anything I'd learnt in Modern History classes.

To this day, I still find comfort in animal stories and my thirty years of working in children's literature as an author, a teacher, a mother and a reviewer has given me a strong anecdotal awareness of children's attraction to this genre. In the course of my writing career I have come to believe that animal characters can often act as a 'buffer' between children and potentially troubling depictions of real life conflicts or tragedies. Commenting on this same issue, author Libby Hathorn states that

[c]hildren are so intuitively and naturally drawn to real-life animals which so easily fill them with the wonder of nature and the wonder of the world we live in, with their first time, fresh experiences. And good books portraying animals seem to do the same. There's an especial connection child to animal in the same way young children are drawn to other young children which I think fairy tales and fables have used knowingly in excellent measure.<sup>12</sup>

It is this 'especial connection' which can allow a child-reader to visit, for example, scenes of suffering and anguish caused by war (as will be discussed later in this work). For my PhD studies, it was therefore only natural for me to want to create fiction with significant animal characters which explore child-animal connections and to look at some of the ways in which other Australian children's authors had addressed similar interests. This exegesis aims to provide a reflective overview of certain aspects of my own writing practice and sets my work within the broader context of Australian fiction for young readers involving animal characters. The work falls into two sections. Part I

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<sup>8</sup> A. Sewell, *Black Beauty*, 1877, London, Purnell and Sons [no date].

<sup>9</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 1952, London, Collins, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> J. London, *Call of the Wild*, 1903, London, Methuen, 1963.

<sup>11</sup> G. Orwell, *Animal Farm*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1945.

<sup>12</sup> Email correspondence between Libby Hathorn and Dianne Wolfer, 21 October 2015.



looks at animal portrayals in Australian fiction for young readers and then considers the way animal characters have been used to explore issues such as environment, history, and war. Part II then provides a reflective critical overview of some aspects of the crafting of animal characters in my own fiction, especially the two works presented here, *The Dog with Seven Names* and *The Shark Caller*.

The portrayal of animal characters has been a feature of western literature for children and young adults since Aesop's fables were shaped into verse by Socrates around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Reflecting on the 'Animal Tales' exhibition at The British Library,<sup>13</sup> Boyd Tonkin states:

The story of animals in literature is the story of literature itself. The oldest human representation of another species that we know survives in a cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. It depicts a wild pig, painted with skill and flair at least 35,000 years ago. No doubt tales of friendly herbivores, scary carnivores, delicious prey and sacred human-animal hybrids circulated around primeval fires as well. At that pre-alphabetic era, no one could write them down. But once the Akkadian myths of ancient Mesopotamia begin to appear on clay tablets around 4,000 years ago, they include, in the Epic of Atrahasis, a version of the Great Flood – animal rescue and all.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Animal Tales: a new British Library exhibition exploring animals on the page, The British Library, <[http://explore.bl.uk/primo\\_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=moreTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=MBSie4656&indx=3&reclids=MBSie4656&reclids=1&elementId=1&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVersion=&dscnt=0&frbrVersion=&tab=website\\_tab&dstmp=1481166055095&mode=Basic&fromLogin=true&vl\(freeText0\)=animal%20tales&vid=BLVU1](http://explore.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/display.do?tabs=moreTab&ct=display&fn=search&doc=MBSie4656&indx=3&reclids=MBSie4656&reclids=1&elementId=1&renderMode=poppedOut&displayMode=full&frbrVersion=&dscnt=0&frbrVersion=&tab=website_tab&dstmp=1481166055095&mode=Basic&fromLogin=true&vl(freeText0)=animal%20tales&vid=BLVU1)> (accessed 10 August 2015).

<sup>14</sup> 'British Library's new show Animal Tales celebrates the best beasts in literature', *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/british-librarys-new-show-animal-tales-celebrates-the-best-beasts-in-literature-10441695.html>> (accessed 7 August 2015).

Since those pre-alphabetic times, storytelling traditions using animal characters have spread across the world: in eastern cultures through the Panchatantra tales and other folk stories, and in the west through mediaeval bestiaries, fairy tales, the stories of the brothers Grimm and the nineteenth century work of Hans Christian Andersen, to mention just a few. The influence of animal motifs continues today with traditional stories being reworked through modern literature, film and dance.

To return to the topic of animal characters in children's literature, it must be acknowledged that the term 'children's literature' can be problematic. Firstly, from a publishing viewpoint, children's literature generally encompasses books aimed at readers aged 0-18. Sub-categories can then include picture books, emerging readers, newly independent readers, middle grade and Young Adult. In recent years the upper boundary of children's literature has been further blurred by the inclusion of another category, 'New Adult', previously referred to by many in the industry as 'crossover'. This added genre extends the YA range to encompass 18-21 year old readers. Adding yet further complication, some titles originally written for children, such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000),<sup>15</sup> have crossed over into an adult readership, effectively creating a reverse 'crossover'. Pullman's views reflect this change in outlook:

I don't know about this business of writing for this audience or that one. It's too like labelling the book as fantasy it shuts out more readers than it includes. If I think of my audience at all, I think of a group that includes adults, children, male, female, old, middle-aged, young everyone who can read. If horses, dogs, cats, or pigeons could read, they'd be welcome to it as well. I don't want to shut anyone out.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1945, the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) has been a significant advocate of Australian children's books. Categories of their annual Book of the Year Awards reflect the aforementioned difficulty in defining the concept and parameters

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<sup>15</sup> P. Pullman, *Northern Lights* (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000).

<sup>16</sup> Random House <<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/author/qa.php#q4>> (accessed 17 July 2014). The website has changed since the Penguin Random House merger.

of children's literature. In 1946, the first Australian Book of the Year Award was presented to Leslie Rees for *The Story of Karrawingi the Emu* (1946). In 1952, a second category, Picture Book of the Year, was added, and by 2014 a further four categories had been incorporated. The current award groupings are as follows: Older Readers, Younger Readers, Early Childhood, Picture Book and the Eve Pownall Award for non-fiction, in addition to the Crichton Award for new illustrators. It is worth noting that throughout the history of the CBCA Book Awards, works featuring animal characters have been prominent.

The CBCA Book Awards remain the most influential factor on sales of Australian children's titles and even with the current groupings it is not unusual for judges to rearrange entries across categories. I therefore acknowledge that the boundaries of children's literature are open to interpretation and that for the purpose of this discussion, I will use this term to refer to books published *primarily* for an audience of children and adolescents aged up to eighteen.

One function on which writers of animal characters seem to agree is that they allow children to feel empathy. Maurice Saxby contends that animal characters can have a 'softening' effect for young readers:

Small children often see something of their own weakness, vulnerability and frailty in stories of dependent pets and animals. Wombats, koalas and other small furry animals are cuddly in the same way as are teddy bears and velveteen rabbits. They can help pre-school and early school-age children feel secure, wanted and loved.<sup>17</sup>

In his review of Thelma Catterwell's *Sebastian Lives in a Hat* (1985), Saxby extends this idea by putting forward the notion that an animal character can act as a 'surrogate'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> M. Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin': Australian Children's Literature 1970-1990*, Gosford, NSW, Ashton Scholastic, 1993, p. 320. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>18</sup> M. Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin'*, p. 248.

for the child reader, allowing a vicarious form of participation in fictional events. Thus Saxby's view is that children identify, in their own vulnerability, with animals. The approach of Ceridwen Dovey, a writer of adult fiction, is comparable; her short stories employ animals as a means to generate empathy in books treating large themes of human society like war. When Dovey was asked what she saw as the major themes in her book, *Only the Animals* (2014), she identified '[t]he ability of animals to take us beyond the pale of normal empathy; human-animal encounters; animal consciousness; the futility and shame of warfare; the inevitable damage we do to other species while destroying one another; the redemptive power of reading and writing.'<sup>19</sup>

Like Saxby and Dovey, I believe animal characters provide useful vehicles for young readers to explore challenging themes and that animals are able 'to take us beyond the pale of normal empathy'. Developing empathy is a valuable learning tool for young readers. When asked about the inspiration behind *Only the Animals*, Dovey spoke about 'compassion fatigue'<sup>20</sup> and stated that

whenever I heard a story about an animal dying in a human conflict, I felt raw grief in a way that shocked me, and that deep emotion always came as a relief, a reminder that I was still capable of empathy. So I thought – if I can tap into that, and write about these huge, horrible conflicts from the perspective of an animal caught up in them, perhaps I can hit a nerve.<sup>21</sup>

This concept of 'raw grief' intrigued me, because I had experienced a similar reaction whilst researching *Light Horse Boy* (2013) reading dozens of accounts of the suffering of horses and animal mascots during WWI. This response is not unusual: since publication of *Light Horse Boy*, I have received ongoing feedback from readers saying they cried whilst reading about the horses. For these readers the death of animals

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<sup>19</sup> *Only the Animals*, Q & A with Ceridwen Dovey, Penguin Books Australia, [website], <<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9781926428581/only-animals/622696/q-ceridwen-dovey>> (accessed 9th September). The website has changed since the Penguin Random House merger.

<sup>20</sup> *Only the Animals*, Q & A with Ceridwen Dovey, <<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9781926428581/only-animals/622696/q-ceridwen-dovey>> (accessed 9th September).

<sup>21</sup> *Only the Animals*, Q & A with Ceridwen Dovey, Penguin Books Australia <<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9781926428581/only-animals/622696/q-ceridwen-dovey>> (accessed 9th September).

appears to spark the 'deep emotion' described by Dovey. Providing young readers with a non-human viewpoint thus allows them to experience this 'deep empathy' and to perhaps learn to develop empathetic responses in real-life situations. In addition, by feeling and reacting to 'deep empathy' via the safe confines of a story, children learn to approach unfamiliar settings with more confidence. Animal characters through Hathorn's 'especial connection' can allow younger readers safe access to intimate and sometimes confronting viewpoints of human character in ways that non-animal characters cannot.

I began my research by assembling a list of relevant Australian works, and was quickly surprised by the extent to which Australian children's writers have employed animal characters. My catalogue begins with Australia's first known children's title, *A Mother's Offering to her Children* (1841) by 'A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales' (Charlotte Barton) and progresses to include a selection of more than 500 books published up to and including 2015. I then turned my attention to finding trends within this compilation, and it became apparent that a large number of Australian children's titles featured native animals. I wondered whether it was possible to determine what qualities or characteristics were linked to specific animals.

For instance, in the Western literary canon, wolves are traditionally 'bad', whilst dogs have long been symbols of loyalty and selflessness.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, a fox often takes the role of the literary trickster such as Reynard the Fox.<sup>23</sup> In many stories, such as C.S Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series (1950-1956),<sup>24</sup> the lion is regal and god-like, displaying qualities of wisdom and leadership.<sup>25</sup> In Europe, these metaphoric understandings have developed over hundreds of years, evolving through repeated character portrayals. By contrast, the Australian literary timeframe is shorter and there has been less time for repeated character trends to occur, however my investigation

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, B.A. Dixon, *Animals, Emotions and Morality: Marking a Boundary*, New York, Prometheus Books, 2008, p.62, or Boria Sax, *The Mythical Zoo: Animals in Myth, Legend and Literature*, New York, Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, 2013, pp.175 and 184. All subsequent page references will be to these editions.

<sup>23</sup> Reynard the Fox, Encyclopaedia Britannica, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Reynard-the-Fox-literary-character>> (accessed 8 December 2016).

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) and *The Last Battle* (1956).

<sup>25</sup> See Boria Sax, *The Mythical Zoo*, pp.32 and 120.

found *emerging* patterns, and indicated that these trends are more evident in certain species, as will be demonstrated in the pages to come.

## Part I: Animal Portrayals in Australian Fiction for Young Readers

To commence my study, I compiled a listing of works featuring animal characters from 1841 until 2015; this constitutes 'Appendix 1'. My aim was not to provide a 'definitive' or comprehensive listing (though I have been as thorough as possible in the task); rather, the intention was to acquaint myself with the material in my field, so that I was reasonably familiar with the context of my work. It quickly became apparent that animal characters have been a constant feature in children's literature since the European settlement of Australia: in almost every year since 1841, at least one title has been published.

Researchers propose different ways of compiling such a listing. Boria Sax, for example, argues against the classification of animals by species and suggests that we should 'define each sort of animal as a tradition, [this] definition includes all of these and more. It also includes stories from myth, legend and literature. Such tales, with the love and fear they may engender, are part of an intimate relationship with human beings that has been built up for many centuries'.<sup>26</sup> More useful for my purposes was work by noted American author, critic, and theorist Ursula K. Le Guin. Her monograph *Cheek by Jowl* (2009) is written in answer to a question Le Guin posed for herself: 'Why do most children respond both to real animals and to stories about them...?'<sup>27</sup> Le Guin sorts animal stories into a taxonomy of what she calls 'Critter Lit':

Her taxonomy plots animal stories on a spectrum from purely animal (all jowl) to purely human (all cheek). At the jowl end, animals are central characters, as in animal biography or autobiography and animal fantasy novels, and the story world is their own. At the cheek

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<sup>26</sup> B. Sax, *The Mythical Zoo: Animals in Myth, Legend and Literature*, pp.14-5.

<sup>27</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, Seattle, Aqueduct Press, 2009, p.50. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

end, animals are stand-ins for people, as in fables, fairy tales, satires, and, of course, most children's picture books...<sup>28</sup>

At the 'jowl' end of Le Guin's spectrum sit realistic animal stories including Jack London's *White Fang* (1906) and Australian Frank Dalby Davison's *Man-Shy* (1931).<sup>29</sup> Her 'Critter Lit' taxonomy then further categorises well-known examples of animal 'autobiography' such as Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and animal novels such as E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952). The mid-range of Le Guin's overview identifies 'the kind of book that might be seen as the typical animal story – tales of the relationship between human and animal. A boy and a dog. A girl and a horse'.<sup>30</sup> Some of the difficulties Le Guin encountered with classification of this mid-range are detailed below:

Many of the books I call animal biographies could be put under this heading too: *White Fang*, *Gay-Neck, Lad*, *Black Beauty*, all have strong emotional bonds with their human owners or others. And in almost all the animal biographies and novels, the world animals live in is controlled by or tremendously influenced by human beings. But still, in those books the animal is at the center of the story.<sup>31</sup>

Le Guin concludes her taxonomy with stories which detail the 'cheek' category – 'the purely human end of my spectrum, where the animal exists mixed with or as a reflection of the human.'<sup>32</sup> As examples Le Guin cites Brian Jacques's *Redwall*, in which

there are no human characters at all. The chief protagonists are mice. A few words, such as 'paw' for hand, are used to remind us that the

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<sup>28</sup> C. Mills, *Ethics And Children's Literature*, [website], <<http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlymtfXzc5NzAzMV9fQU41?sid=b2110c0c-865e-412f-917f-5c53a2820099@sessionmgr4007&vid=0&format=EK&rid=1>>, Farnham: Ashgate, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost, Chapter 9, (accessed 27 November 2015).

<sup>29</sup> A version of this title is also referred to as *Red Heifer, a story of men and cattle*.

<sup>30</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p.86.

<sup>31</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 86.

<sup>32</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 98.



mice have animal bodies, but since they wear clothes, farm with tools, live in a great abbey building, write books and so on, it is hard to keep their animal bodies in view. These are civilised creatures, leading a human not an animal existence.<sup>33</sup>

Le Guin also places Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* in the 'cheek' category because:

animals dress like people, talk like people, go mad over motor-cars like people - and yet there are human beings in the story right along with them. And – here's where the fantasy is wonderfully audacious – the human beings are in the animals' world, not the other way round.<sup>34</sup>

Like Le Guin, I struggled with principles of classification whilst compiling my overview listing. Although I excluded fantasy creatures from my overview/summary, I found that overlaps occurred when these creatures interacted with native animals in books such as Annie R. Rentoul and Grenbry Outhwaite's *Fairyland of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite* (1926), Pixie O'Harris's *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum* (1942) and Robert Ingpen's *The Unchosen Land* (1981). Another title, published in the early 1900s, further complicated this process: J. R. Lockyear's *'Mr Bunyip', or, Mary Somerville's Ramble: A Story for Children* (1871) marked the first appearance (to my knowledge) of a published bunyip story for children. Bunyips are clearly not an animal species, but in Australian children's literature they often take on animal-like characteristics and, like animals, they give young readers a very different viewpoint into our known world; one which combines western and Indigenous storytelling. I therefore concluded that it was worth including bunyips in my listing, however I maintained the exclusion of other fantasy creations (such as elves, trolls, and fairies), as well as excluding teddy bears, dinosaurs and alphabet books, unless they included significant or unusual authorial usage of animals. A broad range of animal portrayals

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<sup>33</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> U. Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 84.

can also be associated with Indigenous stories such as Dick Roughsey's *The Giant Devil-dingo* (1973), Robert Roennfeldt's *Tiddalick, the Frog who Caused a Flood* (1980) and compiler Pamela Lofts' *How the Birds Got Their Colours* (1983), and representative titles of this kind are included in Appendix 1.

After examining a range of books and creating a taxonomy which organizes 'Critter Lit' portrayals from realistic animal depiction through to highly eccentric individualised animal characters such as Toad of Toad Hall,<sup>35</sup> Le Guin's conclusions regarding our shared question both encouraged and perturbed me. Le Guin says of her journey: 'I did find some themes, some threads of guidance, but I can say now, I came out of the jungle of Critter Lit with a peacock's feather and a tiger's whisker and a white rabbit's top hat, but with no answers at all.'<sup>36</sup> My initial response to this admission was to feel that if this esteemed researcher could find 'no answers at all' to her question, then my path would be even more challenging than expected.

With the benefit of time since *Cheek by Jowl* appeared, I contend that Le Guin's taxonomy *does* shed light on her question as to why children 'so often, so reliably, turn for stories to the beings who do not speak?'<sup>37</sup> As Le Guin states:

We are social primates. Human beings need to belong. To belong to one another, first, of course; but because we can see so far and think so cleverly and imagine so much, we aren't satisfied by membership in a family, a tribe, people just like us. Fearful and suspicious as it is, the human mind yet yearns for a greater belonging, a vaster identification. Wilderness scares us because it is unknown, indifferent, dangerous, yet it is an absolute need to us; it is that animal otherness, that strangeness, older and greater than ourselves, that we must join, or rejoin, if we want to stay sane and stay alive.

The child is our closest link to it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> K. Grahame. *The Wind in the Willows*, 1908, London, Methuen, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup> Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 106.

Whilst acknowledging that a definitive answer to this question may still be difficult to pin down, I have been encouraged by the fact that Le Guin was indeed able to ‘find some themes, some threads of guidance’. Like Le Guin, I found certain trends or patterns in the fiction I had surveyed, and these are explored throughout Part I.

#### **I-A: *Trends in Animal Characterisation***

In the course of my survey of animal characters in Australian children’s literature I expected to find a predominance of dog characters as well as titles featuring horses, pigs and cats – and I did. However, I also found higher than expected usage of a wide variety of Australian native animals, birds and marine life. Unfortunately space does not allow me to discuss each and every category, so the following discussion canvasses certain marsupials (wombats, koalas, kangaroos and wallabies) as well as dingoes.

Marsupials such as wombats, koalas, kangaroos/wallabies, possums, bilbies, thylacines and to a lesser degree numbats, appear regularly in Australian children’s literature, but I found that their characterisation differs. Wombats and the similarly shaped koalas are frequently used in likeable roles, quite often as child substitutes, whereas kangaroos, perhaps because of their taller, more adult size, tend to be depicted as characters with more gravity. Possum characters can take on a ‘cuddly’ role, however they have additionally been used in more quirky depictions. Historically there have been fewer examples of numbat characterisation; however a surprising outcome of my research was the large number of bilby characters appearing in books published from the late 1900s onwards. Bilby depictions appear in a variety of ways and some may have been influenced by community actions taken after the 1982 listing of greater bilbies as an endangered species, including an Australian marketing campaign to replace chocolate Easter bunnies with chocolate bilbies<sup>39</sup> and the introduction of Bilby Day (11 September).<sup>40</sup> Whilst other marsupials (bandicoot, quokka, quoll, chudditch and so on) have also been portrayed in Australian fiction for young readers, there were too few instances for me to accurately build a clear pattern

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<sup>39</sup> Reuters, 2012, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-bilby-idUSBRE83502J20120406>> (accessed 10 October 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Save the Bilby Fund <<http://savethebilby.org.au/index.php/stbf-news-events/test>> (accessed 12 October 2016).

of association with certain characteristics. (A future researcher may be able to take on this challenge.)

The following discussion surveys a sampling of marsupials.

### **Wombat**

The wombat character in Mem Fox's *Wombat Divine* (1995) shows the truth of Saxby's comment that '[w]ombats [...] are cuddly in the same way as are teddy bears and velveteen rabbits.'<sup>41</sup> Amidst a wide cast of native animals in Fox's story, the wombat is portrayed as a sweet oddball who steals the Nativity Show limelight. The wombat auditions for each of the Nativity character parts, however 'he was too heavy to be the Archangel Gabriel'<sup>42</sup> and the kangaroos were chosen as kings. At last Wombat lands the perfect role:

"You could be the Baby Jesus!"

"Could I?" asked wombat. "Could I really?"<sup>43</sup>

Wombats in Australian fiction are regularly depicted as similarly bumbling characters with kind hearts. Their round, furry and cuddly looks enable non-threatening characterisation which facilitates an 'especial connection' with the child-reader. Once established as safe characters, wombats can then become a vehicle for authorial crafting whereby the adding of mischief makes them appealing (as well as safe) characters to young readers. A well-known example of this construct is Ruth Park's *Muddle-headed Wombat* (1962), a creature characterised as rambunctious, silly and fun. He wears a jaunty straw hat and jacket and, when upset, uses semi-rude but child-like language to make a point ("You're a hidjus old pollywobble!").<sup>44</sup> Another charmingly stubborn wombat is Mothball, the hero of Jackie French's *Diary of a Wombat* (2002). Like many very young children, Mothball often misbehaves until he gets his own way, as this tongue-in-cheek internal wombat monologue shows:

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<sup>41</sup> Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin': Australian Children's Literature 1970-1990*, p. 320.

<sup>42</sup> M. Fox, *Wombat Divine*, Norwood, SA, Omnibus, 1995. No page numbers. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>43</sup> Fox, *Wombat Divine*, no page numbers.

<sup>44</sup> R. Park, *The Muddle-headed Wombat*, 1962, *The Adventures of The Muddle-headed Wombat*, 1979, p. 4. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

Why would I want carrots when I feel like rolled oats?

Demanded rolled oats instead. Humans failed to understand my simple request. Am constantly amazed how dumb humans can be.

Chewed up one pair of boots, three cardboard boxes, eleven flower pots and a garden chair till they got the message.

Ate rolled oats.<sup>45</sup>

In general, wombat characters tend to be popular with their fellow fictitious creatures and as such they may provide role models for young readers. (For example, in Marcia K. Vaughan's *Wombat Stew* [1984] the bush animals band together to save their friend wombat from being eaten by a dingo.) Another likeable wombat is Garry Fleming's *Bollygum* (1995), a cheerful character with a sensitive side who steps in to help a distressed possum search for his family. Fleming acknowledges that 'Wombat was actually based on a guy a few years older than me who lived in my street. He was quite a shy, misunderstood boy.'<sup>46</sup>

A modern portrayal of the wombat in this kind of 'surrogate' role can be found in Terry Denton's *Wombat and Fox* series (2006-2009). In the first title, *Wombat and Fox: Tales of the City* (2006), 'Wombat and Fox don't go looking for trouble, but the big city is a surprising place and mishaps have a way of changing the course of the day'.<sup>47</sup> Like the Muddle-headed Wombat (and indeed many young readers), Denton's wombat character and his friend are keen to find adventures. In book three, *Wombat and Fox: Thrillseekers* (2009), Fox gives Wombat a notebook and Wombat's first entry is 'a list of WILD + DANGEROUS DEEDS'.<sup>48</sup> The ensuing misadventures on a high-dive tower and rollercoaster would be appealing but possibly forbidden to many children, however young readers experience the fun via Wombat and his friend.

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<sup>45</sup> J. French, *Diary of a Wombat*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 2002. No page numbers.

<sup>46</sup> G. Fleming <<http://bollygum.com.au/2015/08/11/the-inspiration-behind-bollygum/>> (accessed 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Allen and Unwin <<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/childrens-fiction/Wombat-and-Fox-Summer-in-the-City-Terry-Denton-9781741144468>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Allen and Unwin <<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/childrens-fiction/Wombat-and-Fox-Thrillseekers-Terry-Denton-9781741751314>> (accessed 4 November 2016).

An exception to the general pattern of genial or 'child stand-in' wombat portrayals comes in the guise of a minor character in Norman Lindsay's *The Magic Pudding* (1918). Early in the story, a rough-looking fellow is introduced as 'a bulbous, boozy-looking Wombat in an old long-tailed coat, and a hat that marked him down as a man you couldn't trust in the fowl-yard'.<sup>49</sup> In general, though, most wombat characters in Australian children's literature are appealing.

Key words associated with wombats are: warmth, fun, cheerfulness, stubbornness and silliness.

### **Koala**

Koalas share the soft, cuddly appearance of wombats, however their literary treatment is more varied. Koalas have appeared in Australian fiction since the late 1800s and, like wombats, they have often been portrayed in child 'surrogate' roles. Their depiction is usually warm and good-natured, or a bit cheeky.

The 'Native Bear' found in Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899) is portrayed as a gentle creature. Dot the human 'had never seen one so near before, and she loved it at once. It looked so innocent and kind.'<sup>50</sup> Pedley's koala, however, is also rather dim-witted: unable to help Dot, this koala's reaction to extended conversation is simply, 'You make my head feel empty.'<sup>51</sup> Repeated reference to koala characters as 'native bear' is found in early Australian titles including Contance Tisdall's *Australian Nature Stories for Children* (1902) and George Collingridge's *Alice in One Dear Land* (1922), leading me to wonder whether koalas' frequent characterisation as warm and amiable characters had been influenced by connections to teddy bears (an object familiar to the children of settlers). Boria Sax suggests that 'The terror that bears once inspired came to be remembered through a haze of nostalgia, and the teddy bear became a favourite toy of children.'<sup>52</sup> Koala characterisation in Australian children's fiction as sweet 'Native Bears' can perhaps be seen as an extension of Sax's suggestion. In Tisdall's story 'The Native Bear', little Alice sees a koala:

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<sup>49</sup> N. Lindsay, *The Magic Pudding*, 1918, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1963, p.28. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>50</sup> E. Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 1899, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1991, pp. 41-42. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>51</sup> Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> Sax, *The Mythical Zoo: Animals in Myth, Legend and Literature*, p.51.

Sitting on the branch of a blue gum, far out of reach, a dear little native bear.

'Oh papa!' she cried, 'do look at the little bear with an indiarubber nose!'

Her papa looked up, and, sure enough, there was the pretty creature looking straight down at them, and his furry little black nose *did* look as though it were made from indiarubber.<sup>53</sup>

In George Collingridge's *Alice in One Dear Land* (1922), inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865),<sup>54</sup> Alice journeys to a place called 'Sutherland (Australia)' where she meets the Native Bear, 'who journeys with her to Noman's land, a large part of Australia (equating to the contemporary area of most of the Northern Territory and South Australia) which was not taken possession of by the British settlers. She meets the native fauna and learns about settlement history and colonial exploration of the Australian continent.'<sup>55</sup> Further portrayals of wandering koala adventurers will be discussed in the section on Historical Events.

A more robust and cheeky 'child surrogate' koala can be found in Dorothy Wall's *Blinky Bill: The Quaint Little Australian* (1933). Researcher Marcie Muir states that 'Animal stories were becoming the most popular of all books for young children when *Blinky Bill* first appeared, and Australians were just beginning to appreciate the koala whose numbers had been greatly depleted after the slaughter of the animals for their skins during the late 1920s.'<sup>56</sup> *Blinky Bill* has been described as 'the archetypal naughty child'<sup>57</sup> and the 'quintessential larrikin';<sup>58</sup> he is often shown holding a slingshot or a billy, with a knapsack slung over his shoulder – familiar accoutrements for boys and some girls of that era. Although *Blinky Bill* looks sweet, he is also sassy and shows little

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<sup>53</sup> C. Tisdall, (1902). *Australian nature stories for children*, from <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-17981300>> p.50 (accessed 30 October 2016).

<sup>54</sup> National Library of Australia, Papers of George Collingridge, Series 5 *Alice in one dear land* <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.ms-ms9395>> (accessed 30 October 2016).

<sup>55</sup> AustLit <<http://www.austlit.edu.au/austlit/page/C664491>> (accessed 30 October 2016).

<sup>56</sup> M. Muir, *A History of Australian Children's Book Illustration*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1982, p.89.

<sup>57</sup> Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin': Australian Children's Literature 1970-1990*, p. 250.

<sup>58</sup> *Blinky Bill* <<https://www.harpercollins.com/9780730493037/blinky-bill>> (accessed 30 October 2016).

respect for authority: "I'm going!" said naughty Blinky in a bold voice, "and you may come too if you like."<sup>59</sup>

Although sometimes cheeky, for the most part, koalas seem to have been used to characterize good-hearted, non-threatening types. At the far end of this sweetness scale is Grannie Bear in Pixie O'Harris' *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum* (1942). Marmaduke describes Grannie Bear as 'a very old koala' who 'wears a little white bonnet on her head and spectacles on her nose and a small white apron over her blue frock. She's very, very fond of me, and she looks forward to my visiting her. We often have a cup of tea together.'<sup>60</sup> Bunyip Bluegum, who appears in Norman Lindsay's *Magic Pudding* (1918), is good-natured as well as exceptionally urbane and refined: he sets out to see the world in stylish attire, wearing top hat, bow tie and smart shoes. Norman Lindsay described his erudite koala character as 'a very well-bred young fellow, polite in his manners, graceful in his attitudes, and able to converse on a great variety of subjects, having read all the best Australian poets.'<sup>61</sup> Elisabeth MacIntyre's *Mr Koala Bear* (1954) is a further example of refined koala characterisation. Mr Bear is 'elderly, comfortable, kind and fat, and lives alone with an amiable cat.'<sup>62</sup> This piano-playing marsupial's quiet life is disrupted by the unexpected visit of two koala nephews who take on the role of mischievous 'child surrogates' by causing havoc before at last being collected by their mother. Unlike Mr Bear's rowdy nephews, koala Albert Edward in Ida Rentoul Outhwaite's *Sixpence to Spend* (1935) is mostly obedient and well-mannered. Albert Edward has been saving for his mother koala's birthday present and he asks her, "'may I go into the village about something most important?" Mummy said he might, but that he must go and clean his teeth, and wash behind his ears, and put on his best trousers first.'<sup>63</sup> Albert Edward does as he is told, then goes to town, but there he succumbs to temptation and buys treats for *himself* - and so this little koala character resembles ordinary children. By reflecting

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<sup>59</sup> D. Wall, *The Complete Adventures of Blinky Bill*, 1939, North Ryde, NSW, Bluegum Paperbacks/Angus and Robertson, 1985. p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> P. O'Harris, *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum*, 1942, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1987, p.14. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>61</sup> Lindsay, *The Magic Pudding*, p.17.

<sup>62</sup> E. MacIntyre, *Mr Koala Bear*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954, no page numbers.

<sup>63</sup> I. Rentoul Outhwaite, *Sixpence to Spend*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1935, p. 4.



'something of their own weakness, vulnerability and and frailty'<sup>64</sup> he potentially becomes more appealing to young readers.

The koalas in Leslie Rees's *Two-thumbs the Koala* (1953) use human speech but are depicted more realistically as mother-and-child animal characters on the 'jowl' ('purely animal') end of Le Guin's spectrum. This story holds a strong conservation message and readers follow Two-thumbs from his time as cub, through a fire, interaction with humans (both positive and not) to his life as a successful male in a shelter. Departing entirely from the 'child surrogate' portrayal is Mrs Bear, a secondary character in May Gibbs' *Snugglypot and Cuddleprie: Their Adventures Wonderful* (1918). Mrs Bear provides an interesting koala caricature possibly aimed more towards adult readers than children: '[she] was big and fat and rich, and she was one of those people who liked doing things other people didn't do, so that all her neighbours would say "How clever!" and "How strange!"'<sup>65</sup>. May Gibbs' *Tales of Snugglypot and Cuddleprie* depicts koalas as threatening creatures – 'down the tree slid two large Native Bears. They were fighting, and as they hit each other they screamed with rage'<sup>66</sup> – but such a portrayal is unusual.

Key words associated with koala are: warm, good-natured, adventurous, wide-eyed wanderer, ragamuffin, quintessential Australian and larrikin.

### ***Kangaroo and Wallaby***

Like koalas, kangaroos have long been used as fictional characters by Australian writers. Some of the earliest entries in Appendix 1 portray kangaroos as stately characters. Perhaps because of their tall, more adult size, these first kangaroo characters in children's fiction tend to be serious and imposing characters, unlike the rounder and smaller native animals. An early example of this adult-like kangaroo appears in J. Brunton Stephens's "'Marsupial Bill", or, "The Bad Boy, the Good Dog, and the Old Man Kangaroo"' (1878), in which the kangaroo characters in Stephens' story display a respectful solemnity as they gather to pass judgement on bad boy, Bill. 'While illicitly smoking his father's meerschaum, Bill is grabbed by a kangaroo who takes him to court, where he is saved from execution through the intervention of the boss

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<sup>64</sup> M. Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin': Australian Children's Literature 1970-1990*, p. 320.

<sup>65</sup> Gibbs, *Little Ragged Blossom*, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Gibbs, *Tales of Snugglypot and Cuddleprie*, p. 9.

kangaroo's daughter and his own faithful dog.<sup>67</sup> This kangaroo is in effect acting as 'adult surrogate'.

The same role is played by the motherly (and stately) kangaroo in Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899). Dot wanders away from home and finds herself lost in 'the cruel wild bush'.<sup>68</sup> Sobbing, she looks up to see 'a big grey Kangaroo squatting quite close to her'.<sup>69</sup> The kangaroo hops into the scrub and brings back berries which allow Dot to understand and communicate with the bush creatures. As they search for her home, Dot shares many adventures with this kind kangaroo, including watching a corroboree:

It was a terrifying sight to Dot. "Oh, Kangaroo!" she whispered, "they are dreadful, horrid creatures."

"They're just humans," replied the Kangaroo indulgently.

"But white humans are not like that," said Dot.

"All humans are the same underneath; they all kill kangaroos," said the Kangaroo. "Look there! They are playing at killing us in their dance."<sup>70</sup>

In this way, the Kangaroo is able to provide a more balanced and empathetic perspective on societal prejudice of the era. Kangaroo then protects Dot from subsequent attack:

it was brave indeed of the poor Kangaroo to face her enemies, prepared to do battle for the lives of little Dot and herself.

So noble did Dot's Kangaroo look in that desperate moment, standing erect, waiting for her foe, and conquering her naturally frightened nature by a grand effort of courage, that it seemed

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<sup>67</sup> AustLit, Marsupial Bill <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/C636288>> (accessed 10 November 2016).

<sup>68</sup> E. Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 1899, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1991, p.2. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>69</sup> Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, p. 2.

impossible that either dogs or men should be so cruel as to take her life.<sup>71</sup>

All ends well with Kangaroo returning Dot to her family and by happy coincidence finding her lost joey. In the final pages, Dot's parents see the Kangaroo's connection with their girl and realise the error of their previous ways:

To think of all the poor things I have killed," said Dot's father sadly, "I'll never do it again."

'No," said his wife, "we must try and get everyone to be kind to the Bush creatures, and protect them all we can."<sup>72</sup>

In nineteenth century Australian children's fiction, early kangaroo characters were often shown as wise, grand and courageous. Their height and ability to rear on hind legs has been used to great effect to create proud, imposing characters in both *Dot and the Kangaroo* and Constance Tisdall's *Australian Nature Stories for Children* (1902):

Two big kangaroos were in a clear space wrestling with their arms round each another, just as men do.

[...]

"I am called the Great Grey Kangaroo," her new friend went on proudly. "And I am the leader of a mob."

[...]

His tail was as long as his body, and whenever he stood still, he used it to prop himself up.<sup>73</sup>

A similar portrayal occurs in Denis Clark's *Boomer: The Life of a Kangaroo* (1954), when a 'ne'er-do-well' human trains Boomer 'to fight the leader of the kangaroo mob',<sup>74</sup> and

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<sup>71</sup> Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, pp.55-56.

<sup>72</sup> Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, p.104.

<sup>73</sup> C. Tisdall, (1902), *Australian Nature Stories for Children*, Retrieved October 30, 2016, from <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-17981300>> pp. 40-42 (accessed 10 November 2016).

again in Jessie Phillips's *The Story of Wango* (1913) in which a young kangaroo's life becomes intertwined with that of a circus child. Whilst little kangaroo Wango appears as a less threatening 'child surrogate', his father is characterised as 'the largest and strongest of them all, and could leap farthest. He could leap seventy feet in one spring. When he stood upright on his hind legs he was as tall as a man, and his tail was so large and thick that he could sit down on it quite comfortably.'<sup>75</sup> A similar plot to *Boomer* is also evident in both C. K. Thompson's *King of the Ranges: The Saga of a Grey Kangaroo* (1945), where an orphaned joey fights animal rivals to become king, and also in Lydia Susanna Elliott's *Kangaroo Coolaroo* (1950), in which a joey becomes leader of his mob.

Contemporary kangaroo portrayals vary. Whilst proud, powerful characterisations still occur (Claire Saxby's narrative non-fiction *Big Red Kangaroo* [2013]), more recently published titles also include light-hearted kangaroo characterisation. This shift can be observed as far back as Elisabeth MacIntyre's *Ambrose Kangaroo: A Story that Never Ends* (1941), which is said to be Australia's first true picture book.<sup>76</sup> This title exemplifies an interesting change in the characterisation of kangaroos in Australian children's literature. Restless young Ambrose leaves the safety of his mother's pouch, meets a range of fascinating other animals (Albert Platypus, Eloise Lyre Bird...) but is then captured by a farmer. The animal characters wear jaunty outfits, ride bicycles and rest on chaises longues. After Mrs Kangaroo leaps over a fence to save her joey,

Little Ambrose said he was terribly, terribly sorry, and he begged his mother to forgive him. He said he would never be so naughty again.

BUT – the next morning ..... (Turn Back To Page 1)<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> AustLit <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/C670248>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

<sup>75</sup> J. Phillips and B. Le Fanu, 1913, *The story of Wango*, Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-23136651>> (accessed 31 October 2016) p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> S. Prince, *Australian Children's Literature 1830-1950*, <<http://australianchildrensliterature.com/MacIntyre.htm>> (accessed 1 November 2016).

<sup>77</sup> Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-21526334/view?partId=nla.obj-21634260#page/n37/mode/1up>> (accessed 1 November 2016).

This playful new approach to storytelling was the first in a series of titles featuring this cheerful little kangaroo. In subsequent titles, *Ambrose Kangaroo Has a Busy Day* (1944), *Ambrose Kangaroo Goes to Town* (1964) and *Ambrose Kangaroo Delivers the Goods* (1978), word length increased, plot became more detailed and Ambrose's depiction becomes that of cheeky 'child surrogate'.

MacIntyre's relaxed kangaroo characterisation (compared to earlier Australian works) possibly inspired subsequent authors' treatment of this species. Alternatively, it could be argued that this shift in kangaroo characterisation towards humour and caricature may have reflected changes in audience experience, with more readers having less first-hand knowledge of the terrifying demeanour of a full grown male kangaroo. Examples of this more relaxed portrayal continue in Osmer E. White's *The Super-Roo of Mungalongaloo* (1973) and two titles by Jackie French, *The Roo That Won the Melbourne Cup* (1991) and *Josephine Wants to Dance* (2006).

Curiously, an unexpected finding was that many stories with a central kangaroo character used the word kangaroo in the title alongside or accompanied by a 'name'. Although this happened for other species, it seemed more common for kangaroos and a possible reason may lie in the desire to soften the more daunting nature of kangaroos. Examples begin before 1900 with Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899), followed by Walter H. Bone's *Hoppity: Being the Adventures of an Albino Kangaroo* (1933), Dorothy Cottrell's *Chut the Kangaroo* (1936), Elisabeth MacIntyre's *Ambrose Kangaroo* (1941), Lydia Susanna Elliott's *Kangaroo Coolaroo* (1950), Denis Clark's *Boomer: The Life of a Kangaroo* (1954), Evelyn Bartlett's *Dumper the Kangaroo* (1955), Jill Morris's *Rufus the Red Kangaroo* (1970), Pamela Blaski's *Chai, the Kangaroo* (1985), Kevin Gilbert's *Me and Mary Kangaroo* (1994) and Judith Morecroft's *Malu Kangaroo: How the First Children Learnt to Surf* (2007).

Unlike kangaroo portrayals, for wallabies I was unable to find a clear pattern of depiction. In early Australian works wallabies occasionally appear as secondary characters and appear to be less formidable than the kangaroo characters. This is the case in A. L. Purse's *The Isle of Wirrawoo: an Australian fairy tale* (1923). Arthur Ferres produced works featuring both species. 'His Cousin the Wallaby' (1896) takes an environmentally minded approach, whilst *His First Kangaroo: An Australian Story for Boys* (1896) is more of an adventurous boys' own bush story, in which, as the title

suggests, English boy Archie is pitted against a kangaroo: 'Archie fails to kill his 'roo on a kangaroo hunt and is tumbled into the mud, but takes it all "like a man", and graciously thanks Dick for saving his life.'<sup>78</sup> 'His Cousin the Wallaby' (1896) appears, like George Collingridge's *Alice in One Dear Land* (1922), to have been influenced by Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and 'His Cousin the Wallaby' may in turn have influenced Ethel Pedley's *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899).<sup>79</sup>

More recent titles with wallaby characters include Yvonne Morrison's *The Three Wallabies Gruff* (2013), featuring astute wallabies in place of goats outwitting a 'Yowie' rather than a troll, and Margaret Wild's *Bobby Dazzler* (2006), a joyful story about a bouncy wallaby unable to do the splits. More realistic wallaby characterisation can be found in Leslie Rees's *The Story of Shadow the Rock Wallaby* (1948) and Diana Peterson's *Brushtail, the Rock Wallaby* (1975). The pademelon – sometimes referred to as rufous wallaby<sup>80</sup> – is depicted as vulnerable in Noela Young's *Mrs Pademelon's Joey* (1967).

Key words associated with early Kangaroo portrayals are: serious, stately, adult-like, majestic, noble, imposing, regal, stately, proud, leadership, independent, free-spirited and dignified.

### **Possum**

Like koala and wombat characters, possums have been very popular in Australian children's literature, and again they are often used as 'child surrogates'. This is the case with Hush, the invisible possum character in Mem Fox's *Possum Magic* (1983). Hush began life in early drafts as an invisible mouse; when Omnibus Books accepted Fox's manuscript she reports that they asked her to 'make it even more Australian and change the mice to a cuddly Australian animal' and Fox thus 'chose possums. (Australian possums are very soft and cute.)'<sup>81</sup> Enhanced by exquisite illustrations by

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<sup>78</sup> M. Saxby, *Offered to Children: A History of Children's Literature 1841-1941*, Sydney, Scholastic Australia, 1998, p. 117. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>79</sup> A discussion of similarities between these works can be found in Saxby's *Offered to Children: A History of Children's Literature 1841-1941*, pp. 314-318. Overlaps include the inclusion of nonsense verse, a trial scene, and child characters eating food which allows them to understand the language of animals.

<sup>80</sup> Parks & Wildlife Service Tasmania <<http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/index.aspx?base=4863>> (accessed 1 November 2016).

<sup>81</sup> M. Fox <<http://memfox.com/gossip-behind-mems-books/possum-magic-illustrated-by-julie-vivas/>> (accessed 25 October 2016).

Julie Vivas, by mid-2013 sales of *Possum Magic* (1983) had reached almost five million.<sup>82</sup> Hush has created an ‘especial connection’ with generations of young readers.

Possums are central characters in Gina Newton’s *Blossom Possum* (2006), an Australian retelling of the ‘Henny Penny’ folktale, whilst Yvonne Morrison’s *Town Possum, Outback Possum* (2011) was inspired by Aesop’s fable “The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse”. In both cases the possum characters are depicted as cute and quirky. Another endearing possum used in an Australian adaptation is P. Crumble’s picture book (and CD) *Hush Little Possum: An Australian Lullaby* (2015). The possum character in this reworking of the lullaby “Hush Little Baby” shows characteristics of sweetness and vulnerability. In the previously discussed *Bollygum* (1995), wombat helps a lost possum which is crying and also depicted as vulnerable.

A more self-assured possum character appears in Pixie O’Harris’s *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum* (1942) in which Marmaduke introduces human Margaret to a range of Australian animals and fairy folk. After the death of Margaret’s mother and her father’s departure ‘to become a soldier’,<sup>83</sup> Margaret goes to live with her Aunty and Uncle.

Marmaduke the possum was only very small when Margaret first came to Grasstree. He had been accidentally caught in a rabbit trap.

[...]

From the first time she saw him Margaret knew that there was something fairy about him.<sup>84</sup>

Sure enough, Marmaduke speaks to Margaret and soon becomes a human-like friend to her. He takes her on adventures to meet fairy folk and various clothed animals, including the already mentioned white-bonneted Grannie Bear. This friendly and confident possum is portrayed as an ‘almost child-like’ companion for Margaret. A different kind of possum portrayal is found alongside the ‘boozy-looking Wombat’

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<sup>82</sup> M. Fox <<http://memfox.com/gossip-behind-mems-books/possum-magic-illustrated-by-julie-vivas/>> (accessed 25 October 2016).

<sup>83</sup> O’Harris, *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> O’Harris, *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum*, p. 9.

from *The Magic Pudding*, whose companion is ‘a Possum, with one of those sharp, snooting, snouting sort of faces...’.<sup>85</sup>

Key words associated with possums are: cute, small, quirky, sweet and vulnerable.

### **Dingo**

Another Australian animal with an identifiable emerging pattern of characterisation was the dingo. Dingoes are used as secondary characters as well as protagonists. In secondary roles, there is an emerging trend of dingoes being frequently characterised as villains or fox-like tricksters. This is the case in both early and contemporary portrayals. A. L. Purse’s *The Isle of Wirrawoo: an Australian fairy tale* (1923) depicts a frightening wolfish creature threatening both human and animal characters:

Joan [...] ran off after the Wombat, who was hurrying along the stream.

“Don’t leave me,” she cried; “don’t leave me to the Dingo.”

[...]

A short, sharp yelp quite close at hand caused Joan to start with fear. The Wombat too seemed nearly frightened to death. [...] The two quickly went in and the door shut with a bang, just as the Dingo, with a savage snarl, leaped against it.<sup>86</sup>

In later portrayals such as Marcia K. Vaughan’s *Wombat Stew* (1984) and Yvonne Morrison’s *The Cocky Who Cried Dingo* (2010) this anti-hero depiction softens, becoming less terrifying and more playful. In Vaughan’s *Wombat Stew* dingo tries to cook wombat, but is thwarted by the cleverness of the other bush creatures whilst Morrison’s Australian retelling of ‘The Boy who Cried Wolf’ uses native animals as the main characters.

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<sup>85</sup> Lindsay, *The Magic Pudding*, p.3.

<sup>86</sup> A. L. Purse, 1923, *The Isle of Wirrawoo: an Australian fairy tale*, 1923, London, Oxford University Press, 1926, pp. 32-33.



As central characters, dingoes are often used to explore themes of wildness, and as such they can take on one of two roles: either they overlap with dog-like portrayals or they are depicted as loners caught between the two worlds of bushland and encroaching settlement. Jackie French's *Dingo: The Dog who Conquered a Continent* (2012) is an example of the former. A rubbish dog lives in wary proximity of humans, knowing their scraps provide food – but careless dogs are netted and eaten. Frank Dalby Davison's *Dusty* (1946), an example of the latter usage, begins from the perspective of a dingo who 'had lost her mate several months previously through his taking a poison-bait which had been laid, very cleverly, near the rock-pool at which they were accustomed to drink.'<sup>87</sup> The dingo mates with a red kelpie and Dusty, the central character, is one of the resulting pups. Dalby Davison's understated story is finely crafted and does not shy away from harsh realities of the time. Sheep-worker Tom finds the dingo's lair, shoots the mother and kills Dusty's sister pups 'by gripping their hind legs and cracking the backs of their heads against a rock.'<sup>88</sup> Tom takes Dusty to the farm where he trains him to become a sheep-dog. Dusty loves Tom and is a diligent worker, however occasionally, 'A change came over him, small but significant, a slight crouch and a slight drooping of the tail that changed him from a kelpie pup to a rather strangely marked little dingo.'<sup>89</sup> Dusty becomes a champion herder, giving his unassuming owner new status in the rough outback world of sheep farmers where a man is judged by the worth of his dog. But although 'Dusty had accepted the life of a kelpie and distinguished himself in it, his mother was still alive in him. His training had subjected her; but it was her intelligence, equally with his father's, that gave him understanding in the paddocks; and her place in him was increased in those hours when Tom was asking nothing of him.'<sup>90</sup>

Dusty thus symbolises a creature caught between two worlds. He is intelligent, faithful and hard-working, but the urge to roam remains strong:

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<sup>87</sup> F. Dalby Davison, *Dusty*, 1946, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1983, p.3. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>88</sup> Davison, *Dusty*, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Davison, *Dusty*, p. 71.

<sup>90</sup> Davison, *Dusty*, p. 102.

White moonlight on the sleeping homestead would bring him from the shadows of the cart shed to lie in the open, with ears pricked at the silence, eyes alert to the mystery of moon-made shadow, nose sensitive to the midnight breath of dust and leaf. He would lie for a long time, turning back an ear toward the chittering of a possum away in the bush paddock, tilting his head to the faint whisper of migrating wings. He was more aware of the world beyond the world of men and sheep than were the other dogs, more sensitive to it. He was like a person who responds emotionally to the world of earth and greenwood, feeling in it something he cannot name, something beyond the reach of the senses.<sup>91</sup>

Reminiscent of Jack London's *Call of the Wild* (1903), in Dalby Davison's novel the setting is one of human-instigated change. In both books, animals witness raw cruelty, both are survivors in harsh landscapes. Both use canine perspectives to scrutinize human behaviour, cruelty and incompetence. Like London's Buck, Dalby Davison's Dusty also battles a growing urge to embrace the wild.

John Heffernan's *Spud* (1997) and *Chips* (2001) also use canine characters to explore wildness and degrees of animal and human cruelty. Spud, a blue heeler, experiences both kindness and mistreatment at the hands of humans. After a violent beating she flees and

enjoyed her new life. She was free. She could go anywhere.

No more chain. No bashing.<sup>92</sup>

This taste of freedom turns violent when, after mating with a dingo, Spud becomes unnerved by the dingo's sheep-killing frenzy. 'One voice said to join him, drench herself in the frenzy. But another, stronger voice made her stay away.'<sup>93</sup> A pregnant,

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<sup>91</sup> Davison, *Dusty*, p. 103.

<sup>92</sup> J. Heffernan, *Spud*, Hunters Hill, NSW, Margaret Hamilton Books, 1997, p. 78. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>93</sup> Heffernan, *Spud*, p.83.

weakened Spud returns to the farm where the kindness of a girl and her beaten mother is juxtaposed by the cruelty of a man:

It all happened so quickly. The man stepped forward. He grabbed the pups from the girls' hands and, swinging them by their hind legs, smashed their skulls against the ground.<sup>94</sup>

One pup escapes this cruelty, rescued by the woman, and the wild instincts of this surviving half-dingo are explored in *Chips*, the second book in the series:

When it did come, the call was so soft that the young dog could only catch teasing snatches. The slightest sigh. A whisper whipped away by the wind, a broken cry. But it was there, steadily slicing through the night. It grew upon him, clinging, stronger with every moment, making him sit up straight. It made him stand. It made him pace. And in the end it made him turn and face the fence.<sup>95</sup>

Other stories focusing on relationship with humans, in which dingoes straddle human and animal communities, include Elyne Mitchell's *Jinki, Dingo of the Snows* (1970) and Pat Lowe's *Desert Dog* (1997).

Key words associated with Dingo are: loner, traveller, villain and hunter.

## **I-B: Themes**

As mentioned earlier, my explorations of Australian children's literature involving animals produced results as tentative as those of Le Guin. However, like Le Guin, my work left me able to say that 'I did find some themes, some threads of guidance',<sup>96</sup> especially in regard to themes with which my own work deals. As cited earlier, Libby

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<sup>94</sup> Heffernan, *Spud*, p.106.

<sup>95</sup> J. Heffernan, *Chips Overview*, 2001 <<http://www.spudplus.com/chips.htm>> (accessed 4 December 2016).

<sup>96</sup> Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 52.

Hathorn has drawn attention to 'an especial connection child to animal in the same way young children are drawn to other young children', asserting that 'fairy tales and fables' have used this connection 'knowingly' and 'in excellent measure'.<sup>97</sup> My reading and research shows that Australian writers have also employed animal characters 'knowingly' in this way, using animals as a way to introduce children to important social themes and allowing children 'first time' experiences with troubling or confronting issues (such as war, or cruelty to animals). The following discussions examine this use of animal characters in relation to three themes relevant to *The Dog with Seven Names* and *The Shark Caller*: environment, historical events, and war.

### **Environment**

Since the mid-1800s, environmental concern has been an ongoing theme in Australian children's literature featuring animal characters. The first Australian children's book, *A Mother's Offering to her Children* (1841), demonstrates a clear interest in wildlife and conservation. The author, 'A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales' (Charlotte Barton)<sup>98</sup> shapes her 'offering' in the manner of a conversation between a mother and her children. 'Barton is writing for her own children and for other young Australians, which gives her story a sense of immediacy and relevance.'<sup>99</sup> Whilst the content of this first children's title largely concerns shipwrecks and early settlement, there is also mention of native wildlife, and this desire to introduce the young to local animals persists in *Adventures in Australia, or, The Wanderings of Captain Spencer in the Bush and Wilds: Containing Accurate Descriptions of the Natural Productions and Features of the Country* (1851), by English writer and artist Sarah Lee. 'The novel is a Robinsonade, in which Spencer is shipwrecked and crosses the continent from north to south then travels east with his horse Tiger, his dog Gipsy, his parrot Charlie and Kinchela, his Aboriginal mentor. The resourceful Captain undergoes every difficulty and privation

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<sup>97</sup> Email correspondence between Libby Hathorn and Dianne Wolfer, 21 October 2015.

<sup>98</sup> *A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales, A Mother's Offering to Her Children* University of Sydney Library, 2003 <<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozlit/pdf/barmoth.pdf>> (accessed 7 November 2016).

<sup>99</sup> Dinny Culican Ward, *Loved And Lost A Tale In Verse* By Louisa Anne Meredith, AustLit, 2004, <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/0?nodeType=fullText&ftdir=4780076613722820641-brn665473&ftaid=C531648>> (accessed 7 November 2016).

imaginable, all the time observing the remarkable animals, birds, and insects around him, the scientific names of which are provided for the reader.<sup>100</sup>

Louisa Ann Meredith's *Loved and Lost! The True Story of a Short Life: Told in Gossip Verse* (1860), also reflects ecological concern about the Australian environment through the story of a baby Tasmanian parakeet found by Meredith's children.

The Australian bush was a place of mystery and danger for early settlers and use of native animal characters enabled young readers a 'safe' glimpse into this mystery. 'Writers for children tried to find ways to provide a feeling of belonging in the strange, new, un-European landscape of Australia – the bush'<sup>101</sup> and as such authors like Arthur Cawthorne were reworking imported stories in new ways. Cawthorne's delicately-engraved picture book *Who Killed Cockatoo?* (1862) is based on the English nursery rhyme *Who Killed Cock Robin?* and features Australian wildlife in place of the original European creatures: 'Who'll dig his grave? / I, said the Wombat, / My nails for my spade: / I'll dig his grave.'<sup>102</sup> The layout and design of Cawthorne's illustrated book was believed to be 'the first of its kind published in Australia'<sup>103</sup> and the preface to the *Australiana Facsimile Edition* suggests that the book's main purpose was 'to amuse children and to introduce them to Australian birds and animals.'<sup>104</sup> A use of native animals to promote conservation practices in early Australian children's literature can be further demonstrated in didactic stories such as James Brunton Stephens's *Marsupial Bill; or the Bad Boy, the Good Dog, and the Old Man Kangaroo* (1879) –

Strange that, with such instructive things  
From which to pick and choose,  
With moral books and puzzle maps  
That 'teach while they amuse',

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<sup>100</sup> S. Lee, *Adventures in Australia, or, The Wanderings of Captain Spencer in the Bush and Wilds: Containing Accurate Descriptions of the Natural Productions and Features of the Country*, 1851, AustLit <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/C393674>> (accessed 3 December 2016).

<sup>101</sup> Australian children's books, Australian Government <<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-childrens-books>> (accessed 20 November 2015).

<sup>102</sup> W. A. Cawthorne, *Who Killed Cockatoo?*, 1862, Adelaide, State Library of South Australia, Facsimile reprint, 1996, p.6. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>103</sup> Cawthorne, *Who Killed Cockatoo?*, Introduction, no page number.

<sup>104</sup> Cawthorne, *Who Killed Cockatoo?*, Preface, no page number.

Some boys can find no pleasure save  
In killing kangaroos.<sup>105</sup>

– as well as in Constance Tisdall's *Australian Nature Stories* (1902) in which a kookaburra's eggs are being threatened:

One day a naughty boy tried to climb the gum tree to get one of the two pretty eggs, and oh! how frightened Mrs. Jack [a kookaburra] was! She thought the boy would kill her, and yet she would not leave her eggs because of the two dear children lying snugly within them.

[...]

When the boy saw how distressed Mrs. Jack was, he felt quite ashamed. He slid down the trunk of the tree and ran home. But never more did he touch the eggs of the laughing jackass.<sup>106</sup>

Both stories use animal characters to expose human negligence in relation to the Australian environment. In Stephens's story, a respectful solemnity is evident in the portrayal of kangaroos as they gather to pass judgement on bad boy Bill, a symbol of destructive human conduct. A similar concern is echoed in Ethel Pedley's plea for preservation of Australian wildlife in the dedication of *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899): 'To the children of Australia in the hope of enlisting their sympathies for the many beautiful, amiable, and frolicsome creatures of their fair land, whose extinction, through ruthless destruction, is being surely accomplished.'<sup>107</sup>

By the early twentieth century, conservation of Australian bushland and native wildlife had been clearly established as an important theme in children's books using animal characters. Ellis Rowan's *Bill Baillie: His Life and Adventures* (1908) is based on the author's experience of raising a baby bilby given to her during a visit to the West

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<sup>105</sup> J. O'Connor, *Bottersnikes and other Lost Things*, Carlton, Vic, Miegunyah Press, 2009, p. 60.

<sup>106</sup> National Library of Australia, Trove, Tisdall, Constance (1902). *Australian nature stories for children* Retrieved November 8, 2016 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-17981300/view?partId=nla.obj-17995726#page/n11/mode/1up>> p.12 (accessed 8 November 2016).

<sup>107</sup> E. Pedley, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, 1899, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1991, Front pages, no numbers.

Australian goldfields and Jessie Phillips's *The Story of Wango* (1913) gives an animal perspective on ruthless men and their dogs shooting kangaroos:

'I am very much afraid,' murmured the platypus, as he slowly waddled off in search of water, 'that some of us may see the white man and his guns and his dogs sooner than we think, for there are bad times coming to the bush. The streams are nearly dry, and soon there will be no water, save for those who dare to venture to the white man's water-holes.'<sup>108</sup>

Works by Leslie Rees were an important contribution to conservation stories in the 1940s, including *The Story of Karrawingi the Emu* (1946) which was the winner of the inaugural Children's Book Council of Australia book award. Together with previous titles including *Gecko: The Lizard Who Lost His Tail* (1944) and *The Story of Shy the Platypus* (1944), Rees's narratives use stories of animals to raise environmental knowledge and appreciation in young readers:

While the sea spat stinging spray and grasses cringed flat under howling squalls, then Karrawingi was born.

His father it was who had been doing the hatching, or most of it. Very firm about that was old Baramool. At first he had allowed his mate to share equally with him the duty of sitting upon the fourteen olive-green eggs that lay packed together. They were a graceful oval shape, their long ends all running the same way. A pleasing sight they were, lying roundly in the rough nest of a few twigs among the grass stems; and soothing they were to sit upon. Perhaps this is why Baramool grew so jealous.<sup>109</sup>

By combining narrative with ecological details of less known creatures in early titles such as, *The Story of Sarli the Barrier Reef Turtle* (1947) and *The Story of Shadow the*

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<sup>108</sup> J. Phillips, *The Story of Wango*, Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-23136651/view?partId=nla.obj-23251689#page/n15/mode/1up>> (accessed 8 November 2016).

<sup>109</sup> L. Rees, *The Story of Karrawingi the Emu*, Sydney, John Sands, 1946, p.5.

*Rock Wallaby* (1948) and later titles including, *The Story of Russ the Australian Tree Kangaroo* (1964) and *Mokee, the White Possum* (1973), Rees did much towards raising environmental awareness.

Colin Thiele also used animal characters to shine a spotlight on environmental concerns. In *Albatross Two* (1974) a South Australian town is changed forever with the arrival of a giant offshore oil rig. Themes of family conflict and marine pollution are interwoven when Tina, an environmentally minded girl about to release a fairy penguin into the wild, clashes with her brother working on the rig. When an oil spill impacts coastal wildlife, threatened seabirds become a powerful symbol of the effects of human negligence. Thiele's *Pinguo* (1983) is the story of a fairy penguin found injured in the sand dunes by two children who, with adult assistance, nurse Pinguo back to health until the creature can be released. To everyone's surprise he returns to burrow in a nearby yard and raise his chicks. Thiele's most celebrated title, *Storm Boy* (1963), is set in the fragile Coorong wilderness where:

home was the long, long snout of sandhill and scrub that curves away south-eastwards from the Murray Mouth. A wild strip it is, windswept and tussocky, with the flat shallow water of the South Australian Coorong on one side and the endless slam of the Southern Ocean on the other. They call it the Ninety Mile Beach.<sup>110</sup>

*Storm Boy* lives in a shack with his widowed beachcomber father. He adopts an orphaned pelican, Mr Percival, and the two become constant companions. When Mr Percival is shot by irresponsible duck hunters, young readers gain insight and empathy into a problem threatening seabirds.

A deep love of the wild, inaccessible high country around Mt Kosciuszko is communicated via equine characters in Elyne Mitchell's *The Silver Brumby* (1958), giving this title (and others in the series) a distinctive tone in much the same way that Jack London's *Call of the Wild* (1903) allows a sensory understanding of the Canadian Yukon during the 1890s from a canine viewpoint. Both Mitchell and Wild's animal characters must fight not only humans and animals of their own kind to survive; they

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<sup>110</sup> C. Thiele, *Storm Boy*, Adelaide, Rigby, 1963, p. 5.



must also battle extreme environments. “Life and summer are fleeting,” sang the bird. “Snow and dark, and the winter comes. Nothing remains the same.”<sup>111</sup> Although better known for her brumby stories, Mitchell’s understanding of dingoes living in the Snowy Mountains habitat allows readers of *Jinki, Dingo of the Snows* (1970) to explore sensory elements of the Australian high country, including the annual Bogong moth migration, and the humans that hunt them, from a canine perspective:

Up where the granite blocks were black against the moon,  
where the dingo’s howl sounded hollow among the rock caverns,  
there were fluttering clouds rising from the rocks. These strange  
clouds would obscure the stars. They would rise up, and then sink  
down. They were clouds that would divide or suddenly spread and  
thin out into a million wings barely visible even against the Milky  
Way. Moths, a million moths rising from the granite cliffs and  
crannies, the peaks and tors, all the way along the high mountains.<sup>112</sup>

Frank Dalby Davison’s *Dusty: The Story of a Sheep Dog* (1946) recounts the life of a wild dingo/sheep dog pup that becomes tame and then returns to the wild. The story includes confronting details of scalping dingoes and poisoning waterholes, encouraging young readers to confront complexities of land use and environmental issues regarding sheep farms encroaching into bushland. Contemporary authors continue to use native animals as an ongoing environmental plea. Margaret Wild and Ron Brook’s *The Dream of the Thylacine* (2011) has been described as ‘a lament for a lost species, and a celebration of the Australian landscape.’<sup>113</sup> Her thylacine character holds a poignant association for sadness and environmental degradation, whilst Jackie French’s *Fire* (2013), ‘is a moving and sensitive story of a natural disaster as seen through the eyes of a cockatoo.’<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> E. Mitchell, *Silver Brumby’s Daughter*, Goodreads <[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/170001.Elyne\\_Mitchell](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/170001.Elyne_Mitchell)> (accessed 3 December 2016).

<sup>112</sup> E. Mitchell, *Jinki, Dingo of the Snows*, Richmond, Vic, Hutchinson, 1970, p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> Allen and Unwin <<https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/picture-books/The-Dream-of-the-Thylacine-Margaret-Wild-and-Ron-Brooks-9781742373836>> (accessed 30 October 2016).

<sup>114</sup> Boomerang Books <[http://www.boomerangbooks.com.au/Fire/Jackie-French/book\\_9781742838175.htm](http://www.boomerangbooks.com.au/Fire/Jackie-French/book_9781742838175.htm)> (accessed 30 November 2016).

## **Historical Events**

Domestic and native Australian animals have been employed to guide young readers' insights into historical events and societal change. The work of Jackie French particularly exemplifies this use of animal characters, as her *Animal Stars* series (2006-2012) uses an animal narrator in each title to spotlight a moment in Australian history. The species selected are safe and known (excepting perhaps the camel), thus lending familiarity to unfamiliar and possibly challenging content. In five (of six) titles in this series, French offers young readers anthropomorphic windows to Australian history beginning over 5000 years ago with *Dingo: The Dog Who Conquered a Continent* (2012), followed by early European exploration (*The Goat Who Sailed the World* [2006] and *The Camel Who Crossed Australia* [2008]), the penal colony of New South Wales (*The Horse Who Bit a Bushranger* [2010]) and the 1915 events at Gallipoli (*The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded: The Famous Story of Simpson and His Donkey – A True Anzac Legend* [2009]).

In each *Animal Stars* title animal and human characters provide alternating perspectives. *Dingo: The Dog Who Conquered a Continent* concerns the first dingo to arrive in Australia. Regarded by humans as a 'rubbish dog' – a subservient creature at risk of being caught and eaten – this character initially offers a negative view of humans. But when the dingo and a boy are travelling in a canoe which gets caught in a storm and is blown to a new land, the relationship shifts. The stranded boy realises he is at the mercy of the dingo ('This rubbish dog could leap down and tear his throat open'<sup>115</sup>) and when the creature begins licking his leg-wound, 'For a moment he thought the animal was starting to eat him. Then he realised that she was licking him the way a mother dog licked a puppy.'<sup>116</sup> This human/animal relationship begins with mistrust, moves to wary acceptance and finally becomes companionship as the two work together to survive in a strange unknown environment. In contrast the proud goat character in *The Goat Who Sailed the World* has already sailed around the world when the story begins. The Goat provides milk for Captain Cook and thus enjoys status higher than many humans on-board Cook's ship. *The Camel Who Crossed Australia*

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<sup>115</sup> J. French, *Dingo: The Dog Who Conquered a Continent*, Sydney, NSW, Harper Collins, 2012, pp.43-66. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>116</sup> French, *Dingo: The Dog Who Conquered a Continent*, pp.43-66.

gives an historic and sensory insight into Burke and Wills' ill-fated attempt to traverse Australia from south to north. In addition to providing expedition details, the Camel's unusual perspective allows young readers a more intimate insight into camel-handlers, their Muslim faith and the challenges and importance of cameleering in the 1800s. *The Horse Who Bit a Bushranger* follows both human and equine characters from 1830 to 1870, with alternating viewpoints offering insights into aspects of life in the NSW colony, convict experiences and the bushranger Ben Hall.

In addition to the *Animal Stars* series, French has also written works using animal characters to explore other historical events. *Horace the Baker's Horse* (2015) is set in 1919 during the Spanish influenza epidemic and tells the story of a big-hearted cart horse who delivers the bread himself when the baker and his family are too ill to work, thus providing young children with a familiar animal link to this unsettling period in Australian history. *Flood* (2011) deals with the 2010-2011 floods in Queensland. A lone cattle dog bears witness not only to the devastating aftermath of natural disaster but also to 'the great Aussie spirit - and how Australians band together to help each other in times of need.'

The Jackie French body of work is unusual because of its use of animal characters to provide a sustained engagement with moments of Australian history across numerous works. Other writers have more typically 'dipped into' the pool of history on only the odd occasion, but these works have often used animal characters as a means of generating an 'especial connection' with young readers, a connection which helps to 'soften' the exposure to events which might be unsettling or even strongly disturbing. A record of major events and social shifts in Australia's history can be charted through a roll-call of works using animal characters.

Cassandra Gold's *The Mostly True Story of Matthew and Trim* (2005) follows the adventures of Matthew Flinders and his beloved cat, Trim.<sup>117</sup> When the novel was shortlisted for the 2006 NSW Premier's Award, the judges' report noted the work's historical accuracy: 'Cassandra Golds has anchored the tale in real history, sneaking in information so cleverly that readers will learn the dates and facts of Flinders's story

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<sup>117</sup> 'Matthew Flinders' Journeys' <[http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover\\_collections/history\\_nation/terra\\_australis/flinders.html](http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover_collections/history_nation/terra_australis/flinders.html)> (accessed 21 November 2016).

quite painlessly'.<sup>118</sup> Anthony Hill's *Harriet* (2006) takes its title from the name of the Galapagos tortoise given to the Brisbane Zoo in 1860 by Captain John Wickham (first lieutenant of Charles Darwin's *Beagle*).<sup>119</sup> Told 'as a mixture of fact and fiction',<sup>120</sup> the story is able to cover a broad range of Australian history as Harriet lived for 175 years:

And I imagined through their eyes all those amazing people and events Harriet would have known over the past century-and-three-quarters...

Sailing ships ... Captain Wickham ... Brisbane as a small colonial settlement ... Walter Hill (no relation) who laid out the Botanic Gardens ... flood ... the first pineapples ... the first bicycles...

The invention of telephones ... motor cars ... Federation in 1900 ... the Great War ... Depression ... The Second World War ... radios ... television ... the Millenium in 2000...<sup>121</sup>

Other titles exploring moments in early Australian history include Corinne Fenton's *The Dog on the Tucker Box* (2008), in which a faithful dog character is used as a hook for young readers to discover details about the important role played by bullockies in providing supplies to pioneers in isolated settlements (in this case the Gundagai district between 1830-1850).<sup>122</sup> Another title by the same author, *Bob the Railway Dog* (2015), uses a differing canine perspective to offer an unusual glimpse into railway travel in the late 1800s: 'In the early days of the railway, when shiny new tracks were opening vast areas of Australia, there was an adventurous dog who was part of it all. As the tracks were being laid he was there on the train – riding in his

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<sup>118</sup> C. Golds, *The Mostly True Story of Matthew and Trim* <<http://www.cassandragolds.com.au/mostlytruestory.html>> (accessed 14 November 2016).

<sup>119</sup> A. Hill, *Harriet, the amazing life of a Galapagos tortoise* <<http://www.anthonhillbooks.com/Harrietmain.html>> (accessed 21 November 2016).

<sup>120</sup> A. Hill, *Harriet, the amazing life of a Galapagos tortoise* <<http://www.anthonhillbooks.com/Harrietmain.html>> (accessed 21 November 2016).

<sup>121</sup> A. Hill, *Harriet, the amazing life of a Galapagos tortoise* <<http://www.anthonhillbooks.com/Harrietmain.html>> (accessed 21 November 2016).

<sup>122</sup> L. Scarff, 'The Dog on the Tuckerbox' <<http://www.thedogonthetuckerbox.com/>> (accessed 21 November 2016).

favourite spot on top of the Yankee engine. Everyone knew him. He was Bob the Railway Dog'.<sup>123</sup>

Randolph Stow's *Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy* (1967), said to have been inspired by Western Australian bushranger Moondyne Joe,<sup>124</sup> explores a similar period of history to French's *The Horse Who Bit a Bushranger* (the mid-1800s). There are five animal characters in seventeen year old human Midnite's gang; Red Ned (horse), Gyp (sheepdog), Dora (cow), Major (cockatoo), 'as well as a very wise and handsome Siamese cat called Khat.'<sup>125</sup> When Midnite's father dies the animals help him become a bushranger with each animal offering aid linked to their individual character traits. A very different horse character in Glenda Millard's *Lightning Jack* (2012) pays 'homage to Australian legends.'<sup>126</sup> The fantasy adventures of Millard's black stallion character include meetings with Ned Kelly and the ghost of Phar Lap. In contrast to this powerful animal character, Corinne Fenton's *Queenie: One Elephant's Story* (2006) features a gentle giant of an animal – Queenie, the Indian elephant who lived at Melbourne Zoo from around 1905 to 1945. Generations of children paid tuppence to ride on her back and Fenton's character is used to detail Victorian zoo history.

Exploring a similar era, naturalist Brooke Nicholls's *Jacko: The Broadcasting Kookaburra* (1933) was published in the decade following the first Australian public radio broadcast in 1923.<sup>127</sup> In the 1930s it was commonplace for families to gather around a wireless box to listen to news and dramas. Radio was an exciting new way for children to hear stories. This story of Jacko, whose laugh was recorded onto a gramophone record and played on air, mirrored the true story of the famous bird

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<sup>123</sup> C. Fenton, *Bob the Railway Dog*, Walker Books <<http://www.walkerbooks.com.au/Books/Bob-The-Railway-Dog-9781922179890>> (accessed 13 November 2016).

<sup>124</sup> 'History (is) a text demanding to be read', Overland <<https://overland.org.au/2013/04/history-is-a-text-demanding-to-be-read/>> (accessed 20 November 2016).

<sup>125</sup> R. Stow, *Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy*, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1967, p.9.

<sup>126</sup> J. Lawn, Australian Book Review, March 2012 <[http://patriciamullins.com.au/Lightning\\_Jack\\_Reviews.html](http://patriciamullins.com.au/Lightning_Jack_Reviews.html)> (accessed 21 November 2016).

<sup>127</sup> Radio in Australia, Australian Government, 2010 <<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/radio-in-australia>> (accessed 20 November 2016).

(trained by Nicholls),<sup>128</sup> whose voice could be heard at the opening of *Fox Movietone* newsreels from around the 1930s onwards.<sup>129</sup>

Australians' burgeoning interest in travel is reflected in various works from the 1930s. Published two years after the well-publicized London to Melbourne Air Race at a time when flying was becoming more common in Australia, James Martin Pollock's *The Adventures of Joseph* (1936) features a koala named Joseph who, after wandering away from home, hitches a ride with 'an airman who is attempting to fly from Australia to England "faster than anyone else".<sup>130</sup> Joseph visits India, Russia and Lapland before the plane catches fire and Joseph gets lost. The koala appeals to a Mr Pollock for help to get home, and subsequently writes down his adventures, for which Pollock provides the illustrations. Colo, the central character of Sheila Hawkins's *Little Gray Colo: The Adventures of a Koala Bear* (1939), is depicted as a wide-eyed explorer who is sold to 'a famous airman'.<sup>131</sup> Colo travels with the airman to see strange places, including busy London where, 'Everything seemed to be in a hurry and there were no trees at all...'<sup>132</sup> After partaking in various adventures which would probably have seemed exciting to children in an era when aeroplanes were yet to be common, Colo eventually tumbles from a plane to land near his old tree. This story, although socially outdated (and with a somewhat contrived ending), is nonetheless a fascinating window to the growing popularity of air travel in the mid to late 1930s. Sheila Hawkins's book was published in 1939 at a time when air travel encouraged Australians to look beyond their shores.

A differing form of travel is enjoyed by native animal characters in Mem Fox's *Sail Away: The Ballad of Skip and Nell* (1986). Published three years after Australia's historic 1983 victory in the America's Cup,<sup>133</sup> to coincide with the unsuccessful 1986 defence of the Cup in Fremantle, Western Australia, it is the story of a band of Aussie

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<sup>128</sup> Author's note (before story begins, no page number): 'This is the true story of Jacko, the Broadcasting Kookaburra, that so many Australians have heard laughing over the air from the wireless stations of Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane'.

<sup>129</sup> <<http://aso.gov.au/titles/collections/cinesound-movietone-newsreels/>> (accessed 21 November 2016).

<sup>130</sup> *The Adventures of Joseph*, AustLit, 2002 <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.>> (accessed 20 October 2016).

<sup>131</sup> S. Hawkins, *Little Gray Colo: The Adventures of a Koala Bear*, New York, Grosset and Dunlap, 1939, no page numbers. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

<sup>132</sup> Hawkins, *Little Gray Colo: The Adventures of a Koala Bear*, no page numbers.

<sup>133</sup> Australia II, 1983 winner of the America's Cup, Western Australian Museum <<http://museum.wa.gov.au/research/collections/australia-ii/maritime-history-boats-and-watercraft/australia-ii-1983-winner-ame>> (accessed 2 December 2016).

animals who ‘travel round Australia on their way to that boatace way out west.’<sup>134</sup>

Also reflecting the Australian love of sport, Mem Fox’s *Koala Lou* (1987) portrays a small but determined koala participating in the ‘Bush Olympics’, connecting young readers prospectively with human competitive events in the coming 1988 Seoul and Calgary Olympics.

This general exploration of Australian history using native as well as domestic animals continues in more recently published titles. Jesse Blackadder’s *Stay: The Last Dog in Antarctica* (2013) gives voice to a fibreglass dog (a life-size Royal Guide Dogs Tasmania collection box) which was taken to an Antarctic research station in 1991 around the time when dogs were no longer allowed on the continent due to environmental concerns.<sup>135</sup> Blackadder’s story was described as ‘a clever blend of real-life adventure, fictional embellishment and fascinating insights into life — both animal and human — at an Antarctic research station’.<sup>136</sup> Barbara Ker Wilson’s *The Day of the Elephant* (2005) uses an elephant character to create an ‘especial connection’ to soften the potentially confronting theme of the 2004 Asian tsunami; it links to the true story of an elephant whose natural ‘sixth sense’ awareness of the approaching wave saved a group of children.<sup>137</sup>

Current animal reflections also indicate changes in Australian society in the twenty-first century. Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers’ *Way Home* (1994) uses a kitten to drive the plot of a homeless boy finding shelter in an abandoned part of the city. Whilst the boy could be seen as a victim (he dodges bullies, freeway traffic and a street dog), his care and protection of a creature more vulnerable than himself (the kitten) gives him more adult-like status: “‘Guess what, Bestcat? You’re coming home with me to my place.” And he lifts the cat with no name from the top of the fence. He puts it deep inside his zip-up coat.’<sup>138</sup> Homelessness is also a theme in David Miller’s

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<sup>134</sup> Children’s Classics, *Sail Away, The Ballad of Skip and Nell* <<http://childrensclassics.com.au/ccp0-prodshow/sail-away-ballad-skip-nell-mem-fox-kids-books-online.html>> (accessed 3 December 2016).

<sup>135</sup> Huskies worked at the Australian base at Mawson for forty years until 1993 until the introduction of The 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty <<http://www.antarctica.gov.au/about-antarctica/history/transportation/ground-transportation/huskies>> (accessed 28 November 2016).

<sup>136</sup> A. Jones, ‘Review: Stay: the last dog in Antarctica’, Kids Book Review, 2013 <<http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2013/07/review-stay-last-dog-in-antarctica.html>> (accessed 2 December 2016).

<sup>137</sup> <[http://static.harpercollins.com/harperimages/ommove/override/teacher\\_guide\\_elephant.pdf](http://static.harpercollins.com/harperimages/ommove/override/teacher_guide_elephant.pdf)> (accessed 20 November 2016).

<sup>138</sup> L. Hathorn, *Way Home*, Milsons Point, NSW, Random House, 1994, no page numbers.

*Refugees* (2003), the tale of two ducks needing to find a new place to live. Many contemporary young readers live in a multi-cultural society where they are exposed to diverse cultural beliefs, as reflected in Helen Manos' *Samsara Dog* (2006). Recording the recurring different lifetimes of one dog, *Samsara Dog* captures the essence of reincarnation, looking at life and dying from a Buddhist perspective. Children of dissimilar backgrounds are able to connect equally with this dog. He is culturally neutral and thus helps simplify the thematic exploration of a perhaps unfamiliar concept such as samsara.

A different but also challenging theme is explored by John Marsden and Shaun Tan in their allegorical story *The Rabbits* (1998). In this title a feral animal (rabbits) is used to represent colonisers whilst a native species (numbats) is shown as initially welcoming but then despairing first inhabitants. Brooke Collins-Gearing and Diane Osland have argued that:

The narrative constructs dichotomous representations of the 'coloniser' (Rabbits) and 'colonised' (Numbats): strong, weak; modern, ancient; civilised, primitive; centre, peripheral; conqueror, victim. Such binary oppositions are a legacy of pre-Mabo colonialist discourses in Australian children's literature and reveal the text's seemingly neutral colonialist discourses to be rooted in colonialist ideologies and legacies.<sup>139</sup>

However I feel that as an illustrated book for children, *The Rabbits* initiates a challenging conversation about Australian history at an age-appropriate level:

The rabbits came many grandparents ago.

At first we didn't know what to think. They looked a bit like us.

There weren't many of them. Some were friendly.

But our old people warned us. Be careful. They won't understand the right ways. They only know their own country.

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<sup>139</sup> B. Collins-Gearing and D. Osland, 'Who will save us from the Rabbits?: rewriting the past allegorically' <<https://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/227/225>> (accessed 5 November 2016).



More rabbits came...

[...]

... and stole our children.<sup>140</sup>

## **War**

According to author and reviewer Susan Whelan:

There are some topics that are difficult to explain to children because they are so complex. War is one of those topics, but news stories and cultural events such as ANZAC Day often prompt children to ask questions and seek understanding.<sup>141</sup>

It is not surprising that the young would have their own way of detecting the social upheaval created by war (particularly when it is manifested within the family or through human emotion): the war time experience for children would have involved food-rationing and blackouts, the sudden disappearances of family members (who had 'joined up') and locals of foreign extraction (who were interned), and in many cases mothers suddenly going out to work. As the following discussion will show, Australian fiction for younger readers has consistently attempted to guide its readership into an understanding of the issues raised by war, and it has on many occasions used animal characters to open these subjects to children for thought and/or discussion.

Written in the middle of WWI, *The Adventures of 'Chunder Loo'* (1916) by Ernest O'Ferrall featured a Sri Lankan gentleman ('Chunder Loo'), a koala and a fox-terrier dog. This trio travelled the world having adventures together whilst advertising Cobra boot polish. Initially written as a series of newspaper cartoons, 'Chunder Loo' was especially beloved by children, and Lionel (the illustrator) was informed that parents

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<sup>140</sup> J. Marsden, *The Rabbits*, Port Melbourne, Vic, Lothian, 1998, no page numbers.

<sup>141</sup> S. Whelan, 'Book List: Picture Books about War and Conflict' 2014 <<http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2014/04/book-list-picture-books-about-war-and.html>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

often bought *The Bulletin* solely for their children to see what Chunder was doing.<sup>142</sup> In their later adventures the animal characters wear military garb and assist Chunder Loo in fighting enemy soldiers. Such help involves throwing hand grenades, brandishing swords, operating a machine gun and performing sentry duty: "Chunder Loo" / Of Akim Foo, / Does his sentry / Duty too. / Now he must / Relieve the Bear / Who has bravely / Done his share."<sup>143</sup>

Lin MacDonald's collection of stories, *Bud the Monkey, and Other Tales of Soldiers' Pets* (1932) also features animal characters in foreign wartime settings, with a focus on animals adopted by soldiers. Published at a time when the reputation of the 'ANZACs' was being debated and even questioned,<sup>144</sup> MacDonald's book employed animal mascots to illuminate a tender side of the Australian soldiers, counterbalancing their more violent soldierly portrayal with gentle pet-like interactions. Sir Ian Hamilton's<sup>145</sup> introduction to this book reads:

The little band of heroes who had arrested the attention of the World by their devotion and dash at Gallipoli, were after all but flash-in-the-pan adventurers. And now, sixteen years afterwards, taking advantage of the wave of sentiment in favour of peace and disarmament which is - Heaven be praised - sweeping across the world, it is put about that the Diggers were fierce and bloodthirsty fellows and the less fuss made about them the better.

Here is where Major Lin MacDonald's book comes in, and here is what has moved me to write this quite inadequate foreword. The work has been a work of love, showing as it does the real Digger as he became known to the British officers at the Dardanelles:- An adventurer right enough, but an adventurer with a heart of gold; [...] the sort of heart that responds with instant kindness and affection

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<sup>142</sup> Australian War Memorial [Fun in the Trenches] 1915  
<<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTC00030/>> (accessed 6 November 2016).

<sup>143</sup> Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-36718024/view?partId=nla.obj-36720078#page/n52/mode/1up>> p.42.

<sup>144</sup> See <<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/anzac-role-crushing-1919-egypt-revolt>>.

<sup>145</sup> Commander of Gallipoli operations <<https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/dawn/plan/hamilton.asp>> (accessed 15 November 2016).

to any weak, immature, or suffering thing - whether in the shape of bird, beast, or child.<sup>146</sup>

The first story, 'Bud the Monkey', illustrates the author's strategy:

When we first saw him [Bud the monkey], in December, 1914,  
he was a terrified little heap on the bottom of a rowing boat

[...]

The tiny creature, who had lost all fear in the big, gentle hands  
of the Diggers,

[...]

Our nice little chap had the best of time, for his friends the  
saddler and the wheeler-sergeant fixed him up a kennel, with a  
warm, fur rug, and fitted it with a little door that he could close from  
inside. Bud spent one whole day opening and shutting that door, and  
playing hide-and-seek with himself.<sup>147</sup>

During the years of WWI May Gibbs designed postcards, many featuring animals, with patriotic text for families to send to their loved ones. One such card showed a bandaged (but cheerful) kookaburra wearing a jaunty slouch hat with the inscription, 'Are we downhearted?'<sup>148</sup> Another card featured a kangaroo mother and joey tending a campfire above the words 'We'll keep the billy boiling, dear, till you come marching home.'<sup>149</sup> Norman Lindsay meanwhile designed nationalistic posters using native animals. One poster featuring a koala dressed in army uniform bears a close

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<sup>146</sup> Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-9412524/view?partId=nla.obj-20561663#page/n11/mode/1up>> pp. 12-13 (accessed 15 November 2016).

<sup>147</sup> Trove <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-9412524/view?partId=nla.obj-20562361#page/n16/mode/1up>> pp. 17-20 (accessed 16 November 2016).

<sup>148</sup> 'Uncovering May Gibbs' a working title, 2016, Enderslea Farm <<http://www.endersleafarm.com/events/working-title-uncovering-may-gibbs/>> (accessed 18 November 2016).

<sup>149</sup> 'Patriotic postcards', NSW State Library <[http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover\\_collections/society\\_art/gibbs/commercial\\_art/patriotic\\_postcards/index.html#](http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/archive/discover_collections/society_art/gibbs/commercial_art/patriotic_postcards/index.html#)> (accessed 18 November 2016).

resemblance to 'Bunyip Bluegum', the central koala character soon to appear in *The Magic Pudding* (1918).<sup>150</sup>

Duffy, the donkey led by John Simpson Kirkpatrick as he rescued the wounded, is perhaps the best known animal in Australian war history. 'The bravery of this "man with the donkey" soon became the most prominent symbol of Australian courage and tenacity on Gallipoli'<sup>151</sup> and various authors have explored themes of courage, loyalty and loss through the animal connection in the story of Simpson and his donkey. At the realistic 'jowl' end of this spectrum is Mary Small's *Simpson and Duffy* (2001), a gentle retelling of the key events. In contrast to this lifelike animal portrayal, Sonya Hartnett's *The Silver Donkey* (2004) uses an animal symbol (a donkey-shaped charm) as a vehicle for an English deserter to explain aspects of bravery to a small group of French children. The soldier shares evocative donkey stories, one of which centres around Simpson's donkey. In Celeste Walters' *Only a Donkey* (2007) farmyard animals 'look down' on their donkey until they hear the story of Duffy and Simpson.<sup>152</sup> Duffy is central to Peter Stanley's *Simpson's Donkey: A Wartime Journey to Gallipoli and Beyond* (2011): his service of carrying the wounded through gullies to Anzac Cove is used as an emblem of courage and service.

Using a dual human/animal narrative approach, as in her other *Animal Stars* titles, Jackie French alternates perspective between human and animal characters in *The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded: The Famous Story of Simpson and His Donkey – A True Anzac Legend* (2009). In addition to exploring Simpson and Duffy's short time together, this novel details Duffy's harsh earlier life on Lemnos:

Carrying rocks was the worst. Winter was rock-carrying time.

The humans were in their sheepskins, muffled against the cold; even their feet and hands were wrapped in hide. But there was no

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<sup>150</sup> 'National Defence', AWM <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART16026.001>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>151</sup> AWM <<https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/forging/australians/simpson.asp>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>152</sup> AustLit <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/C612462>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

protection for the donkey's hooves, plodding along the muddy track,  
and his body ached under the weight of rocks in the panniers.<sup>153</sup>

Duffy's internal dialogue allows young readers to glimpse smaller details of the harsh realities of a war campaign. The donkey's suffering reflects broader themes of conflict as well as duty and mateship.

The use of animal characters to 'soften' war themes was particularly evident in Australian fiction coinciding with the 100 year commemoration of the beginning of WW1 (1914) and the Anzac landing (1915). Pamela Rushby's *The Horses Didn't Come Home* (2012) depicts the fate of Australian horses that served in the Middle East with soldiers of the Light Horse Regiment. There are three central characters – Laura, her brother Harry and Laura's horse Bunty. The story progresses partly through Harry's letters, which he writes as being from Bunty, thus giving a more light-hearted perspective to military routines. Bunty carries Harry during the historic charge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Light Horse Brigade to capture the wells of Beersheba in 1917. 'The men proudly claimed it was their great-hearted horses that won the day'<sup>154</sup> and Rushby's fictitious retelling of the wartime decision to shoot or leave behind the Walers<sup>155</sup> helps make the horse characters poignant symbols of the futility and harshness of war.

Mark Greenwood's *Midnight: the Story of a Light Horse* (2014) explores the same iconic Battle of Beersheba, following Midnight's life from birth. Like Rushby's book (and most WW1 animal-linked titles) this story ends sadly, however Greenwood's ending is ambiguous enough for very young readers to hope for the best:

Midnight arches her back and hurdles the enemy trench. Guy braces for the bullet. It passes through Midnight, and lodges beside Guy's spine. Night falls. Stretcher-bearers load casualties onto carts. Guy waits his turn. He cries, and lets go of Midnight's reins. Beloved mare beside him. Coal black. Star ablaze. Moonlight in her eyes.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> J. French, *The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded*, Sydney, HarperCollins, 2009, p.10.

<sup>154</sup> 'Dorothy Brooke's Letter to the Morning Post' <<https://www.thebrooke.org/about-brooke/history-brooke/dorothy-brookes-letter-morning-post>> (accessed 2 December 2016).

<sup>155</sup> Waler Horse Society of Australia <<http://www.walerhorse.com/>> (accessed 18 November 2016).

<sup>156</sup> M. Greenwood, *Midnight: The Story of a Light Horse*, Sydney, Walker Books Australia, 2008.

Morris Gleitzman's *Loyal Creatures* (2014) also explores the wartime bond between men and horses against the desert backdrop of the Middle East. Gleitzman uses an animal character to examine themes of bravery, and loyalty in a manner that prompted reviewer Athena Clark to write:

Nothing can prepare young Frank for the horror of war or the grief of friendship lost, but throughout this experience, Frank's trusty companion Daisy, his loyal horse, is steadfast. It's through his conversations with Daisy that Frank reveals his frustrations and fears, and ultimately his incredible courage and resolve.<sup>157</sup>

Mark Wilson's *Digger: the Dog Who Went to War* (2015) is based on the true story of a puppy that was smuggled onto a troopship in 1915.<sup>158</sup> Wilson's story involves as central character an animal which is familiar to most children, thus helping younger readers not only to understand specific details of military history, but to also assist them in making sense of general wartime tragedy.

In my own *Light Horse Boy* (2013) the fate of the Walers is also of central importance and two horse characters progress the story in different ways. Breaker is emblematic of the hundreds of horses from the Australian Light Horse Regiment which were not brought home; Sandy,<sup>159</sup> the favourite charger of Major General Bridges, is the one horse which did return. Both animals are used in this story (as they were in real life) as a point of normality in horrific circumstances. Soldier Jim is able to interact with Breaker and confide in him in ways he cannot with humans: 'As he and Breaker trained, a deep bond developed between them. Soon they'd depend on each other for their lives.'<sup>160</sup> Sandy is used to highlight the common humanity of soldiers; when the

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<sup>157</sup> A. Clarke, *Loyal Creatures by Morris Gleitzman* 2014 <<http://www.readings.com.au/review/loyal-creatures-by-morris-gleitzman>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>158</sup> 'Mounted Skin of 'Driver', a Terrier Dog', Australian War Memorial, circa 1926-1927, <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RELAWM09411/>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

<sup>159</sup> 'Sandy (Major General Sir William Bridges' Horse)', Australian War Memorial <<https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/horses/sandy/>> (accessed 27 October 2016).

<sup>160</sup> D. Wolfer, *Light Horse Boy*, Fremantle, WA, Fremantle Press, 2013, p.12. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

infamous Captain Von Muller (of the *Emden*)<sup>161</sup> is taken on board, Sandy 'whispers to the horses in German.... [...] I guess horses understand kindness in any language.'<sup>162</sup>

The advent of WWII made the early 1940s a time of great upheaval for Australian families. Men 'joined up' and left to fight overseas. Night time blackouts and rationing were introduced. People of German, Italian and Japanese descent were interned. Women abandoned traditional homemaker roles to work for the war effort. In some cases, children were evacuated south or inland. With brothers, uncles and fathers 'joining up' and sometimes disappearing from children's lives forever, 1940 was a year of extraordinary societal change.

Much of the children's literature written in this era represents these concerns. In some cases the phenomenon of a society at war is incidental to the main story presented in animal-related books for young children. Before Margaret meets her possum friend in Pixie O' Harris's *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum* (1942), a brief backstory is given which powerfully reflects the wartime era:<sup>163</sup> 'When Margaret was only five years old her mummy died, and her daddy packed her suitcase and brought her a long way in the train from the large city to Rivervale Station, where Uncle Jim met them in a spring cart, and where daddy kissed her good-bye for a while because he was going away to be a soldier.'<sup>164</sup> Similarly, Gladys Lister's *Grandpuff and Leafy* (1942) is dedicated 'To her Excellency The Lady Gowrie<sup>165</sup> and to every child with a Soldier Daddy.'<sup>166</sup> Platypus characters help to lighten the challenging story of young girl Leafy's attempt to make sense of a confusing time when she is re-acquainted with her returned soldier father:

Leafy had known Soldier Daddy for only a short time. She had known about him and seen pictures of him, but she thought he was a story

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<sup>161</sup> J. M. Taylor, *Karl Friedrich Max von Muller: Captain of the Emden during World War 1*, 2007 <<http://www.historynet.com/karl-friedrich-max-von-muller-captain-of-the-emden-during-world-war-i.htm>> (accessed 30 November 2016).

<sup>162</sup> Wolfer, *Light Horse Boy*, p.31.

<sup>163</sup> O' Harris, *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum*, p.1.

<sup>164</sup> O' Harris, *The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum*, p.1.

<sup>165</sup> Lady Gowrie, wife of Australian Governor General from 1936-1945 was a great supporter of soldiers, women and children <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gowrie-first-earl-of-6441>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>166</sup> G. Lister, *Grandpuff and Leafy*, Sydney, Marchant, 1942, no page numbers. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

book person. None of the people in story book pictures were real, so when Soldier Daddy quite suddenly became a real live person, instead of a picture, and Leafy and all the family went to live in the hotel, instead of at home, everything seemed topsy-turvy.<sup>167</sup>

Dorothy Wall's *Blinky Bill joins the Army* (1940) deals much more directly with the topic of war, as the title suggests. Whilst in earlier titles Blinky's lack of respect for authority led to him being labelled a cheeky larrikin, his activities shifted with the advent of war. Now, 'Ever since the news of the war had reached the bush folk he'd been extra busy drilling his soldiers [bull-ants].'<sup>168</sup> Some soldiers who are looking for a mascot see Blinky drilling his 'army' and ask him to be the mascot for Australian soldiers in Sydney. Not knowing what a mascot is, Blinky Bill at first refuses, but then agrees. The following scene, in which Blinky Bill is training his bull-ants, shows how Wall used this animal character to create an 'especial connection' to soften the fears of children of this time. Obvious parallels with unfolding social changes are evident:

In another second not a soldier was to be seen. They'd disappeared as suddenly as they had come: all but a poor old fellow who had fallen out of the ranks unseen by Blinky or his comrades. Sheltering behind a pebble he rubbed his legs with his mandibles, trying to stop the aching that his swollen joints produced.

Of course he should never have left his home underground; but he was an old soldier and had been a fierce fighter in his youth. It was very hard to sit back now and see the younger fellows go out to fight and not be able to take part in it. So Grandpa Bull-ant had smuggled his way into the company with sad results.<sup>169</sup>

By 1940, most Australian children would have been aware of situations like the one described: an old 'fighter' joining up. Indeed, 'The heaviest recruiting to the AIF

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<sup>167</sup> Lister, *Grandpuff and Leafy*, no page numbers.

<sup>168</sup> Wall, *Blinky Bill joins the Army*, p. 9.

<sup>169</sup> Wall, *Blinky Bill joins the Army*, p. 16.



occured [sic] during the two or three months following the German invasion of France in May 1940.<sup>170</sup> Blinky Bill and his bull-ant soldiers mirror a troubling social situation, and Wall's use of familiar creatures like ants allows children a safe distance through which to process social upheaval.

Whilst a military link is less central to the storyline of Fred J. Nicoll's *Teddy Joins the Navy* (1943), it is nonetheless interesting to note how wartime incidentals, such as wearing uniforms and saluting, influence a storyline which otherwise simply involves animal friends constructing a boat:

By the time Benny got there, Teddy and all his friends had their uniforms on, and went to the Boat. 'Here's *your* uniform, Benny,' said Teddy.

They certainly made a grand show and Teddy told them all to stand up straight and salute.<sup>171</sup>

The setting in Colin Thompson's *The Staircase Cat* (1998) 'is not specifically called World War II', but Thompson asserts that 'it could be, in fact, it could really be about any war. This is because it is a story about the ways in which war, all wars, can disrupt and destroy the lives of ordinary people and their animals.'<sup>172</sup> Oskar is an old cat living in the shell of a bombed-out apartment house with the unsettled ghosts of the men, women and children who once lived in the now deserted rooms. The story shows how the house once was and how Oskar has survived by scavenging, until finally the old caretaker's daughter returns. Like the ghosts, Oskar bears witness to the changes before, after and during conflict. Further towards the 'cheek' end of Le Guin's spectrum, Sonya Hartnett's *The Midnight Zoo* (2010) uses a range of talking animals to explore concepts of humanity in war-ravaged Europe. Two brothers fleeing danger 'stumble across a deserted town reduced to smouldering ruins. But at the end of a

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<sup>170</sup> M. Johnston, *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, Issue 29 – November 1996 [29] <<http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j29/civils/>> (accessed 11 October 2014).

<sup>171</sup> F. J. Nicoll <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-18414544>> *Teddy joins the navy* [Melbourne?]: FJN Production, [194-?], pp.13-14 (accessed Web. 18 November 2016).

<sup>172</sup> A. Baugh, 'The Staircase Cat by Colin Thompson, illustrated by Anna Pignataro', 2011, *The Children's War* <<https://thechildrenswar.blogspot.com.au/2011/03/staircase-cat-by-colin-thompson.html>> (accessed 19 November 2016).

blackened street they find a small green miracle: a zoo filled with animals in need of hope.<sup>173</sup> The talking zoo animals offer their commentary on human behaviour (echoing similar comments, previously mentioned, by Dot's kangaroo):

You claim to be different from the *gadje*, but you aren't.  
Humans are all exactly the same. Each of you lives in a fever of  
selfishness and destruction. You persecute the creatures that you  
fear, yet the species you should fear most is your own.<sup>174</sup>

The animals, like the children, are innocents caught up in an adult-created horror; they are thus neutral storytellers who can reflect human selfishness and the futility of war. Animal cages also feed an exploration of entrapment themes and the concept of freedom. Alison Lester's *Running with Horses* (2009) is also set in war-ravaged Europe and was inspired by a true story. Ten-year-old Nina lives above the stables at Vienna's Royal Academy of Dancing Horses. When war breaks out, Nina and her father flee over the mountains with the stallions and her favourite mare Zelda (an old cab-horse). Nina's beloved Zelda becomes the hero of the story as she leads them from danger.

Krista Bell's *Lofty's Mission* (2007) explores a very different wartime landscape and employs a carrier pigeon to provide insights into Australian army conflict in New Guinea, inviting young readers on 'an imaginative journey into history.'<sup>175</sup> Inspired by the use of WW2 messenger pigeons,<sup>176</sup> Bell's story uses flight to portray themes of danger and renewal, countering and comparing the dangers faced by pigeon Lofty with his pre-war owner's battle with polio.

The trend of using animal characters is less noticeable in regards to an Australian literary response to the Korean and Vietnam wars. The sole title I could find linking a significant animal character to these wars was Lois Krok's *Tien's Mouse* (1998), which deals with the aftermath of war: 'Tien has left all his friends behind in Vietnam. He

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<sup>173</sup> Planning with Kids <<http://planningwithkids.com/2010/08/14/book-review-the-midnight-zoo-by-sonya-hartnett/>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>174</sup> Planning with Kids <<http://planningwithkids.com/2010/08/14/book-review-the-midnight-zoo-by-sonya-hartnett/>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>175</sup> K. Bell, *Lofty's Mission* <<http://kristabell.com/books/loftys-mission/>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

<sup>176</sup> A. Gray, *Animals at War* 2008 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2008/03/12/animals-in-war/>> (accessed 9 November 2016).

feels lost and alone in his new Australian school. He doesn't know what [sic] to make friends with the other children and learn to play their games. Then a little white mouse shows him how.'<sup>177</sup>

The use of animal characters in children's literature relating to the Bosnian and Afghanistan conflicts was more obvious. Published five years after the end of the war in Bosnia,<sup>178</sup> John Heffernan's *My Dog* (2000) follows Alija, the son of a baker, as he and his mother flee their village. Heffernan does not shy away from the horrors of war: villagers are shot and the boy's beautiful mother is abducted by soldiers. The dog character is realistically portrayed, remaining on the 'jowl' end of Le Guin's spectrum and is used as a symbol of goodness and hope. She lightens scenes in which other content is by necessity heavy. As the boy sleeps under a bridge, cold, frightened and hungry: 'My dog slept next to me and licked my face when I hugged her close.'<sup>179</sup> This tender connection between dog and boy allows young readers to access details of this conflict (in which Australian peacekeepers served) without being overwhelmed by content which is wholly negative.

Animal characters appear in a number of significant works exploring modern-day conflicts in Afghanistan. Stephen Dando-Collins' *Caesar the War Dog* (2012) was inspired by the factual experiences of Sarbi, an Australian military dog and Endal, a decorated British dog who cared for his wheelchair-bound master. Dando-Collins has written several 'Caesar' novels, each allowing young readers insights into modern warfare and the shocking consequences of war via Caesar's 'famous nose'. Young readers experience the wartime setting in a deeply sensory way through the dominant senses of two differing protagonists; one human, one animal. Mark Wilson's *The Afghanistan Pup* (2014) similarly employs a puppy to soften the tragedy of war in the story of an Australian soldier helping to rebuild the school of an Afghani girl, and Louis Nowra's *Prince of Afghanistan* (2015) depicts a canine character, Prince, as part of a team parachuted into a remote area of Afghanistan on a rescue mission that goes wrong. The sole surviving soldier and Prince, both badly wounded and grieving their

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<sup>177</sup> AustLit <<http://www.austlit.edu.au.ezproxy.library.uwa.edu.au/austlit/page/C403672>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

<sup>178</sup> Office of the Historian, *The War in Bosnia, 1992-1995* <<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/bosnia>> (accessed 19 November 2016).

<sup>179</sup> J. Heffernan, *My Dog*, Hunters Hill, NSW, Margaret Hamilton Books, 2000.

comrades, must rely on each other to survive. Nowra uses Prince as a non-judgmental confidante for human Mark: '*The great thing about dogs is that they don't answer back, so you can talk to them to your heart's content.*'<sup>180</sup>

Addressing a different conflict, in Josef Gert Vondra's *No-Name Bird* (2000) the central character finds stability and solace by working with his uncle to train their fighting cock, No-Name Bird, when Indonesian troops invade his home in Portugese Timor.

The success of the strategy of using animal characters is probably best attested by the continuing use of this device and the success of so many titles of this kind. However, Susan Stephenson's review of Ruth Starke and Greg Holfield's *An Anzac Tale* (2012) explicitly acknowledges the positive impact of this:

At first I wondered about his decision to portray the characters as animals, but it didn't take long for me to become wholly absorbed in the story, and for the heroes particularly to become very real to me.

[...]

As teachers and parents, I believe it's vital for us to share the ANZAC story with our kids. *An Anzac* [sic] *Tale* puts children into this time and place in Australia's history in a format that's accessible to the majority of them. Senior Primary and Junior High School students, particularly boys, will grab *An Anzac* [sic] *Tale* for sure.<sup>181</sup>

My exploration of context was conducted primarily for my own personal purposes of self-orientation within the field, and it is thus necessarily subjective and limited in its focus. There is rich material here for future research of a more formally scholarly nature. The thematic concern with environment, for example, has undergone many considerable transformations, extending from early writings intended just to

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<sup>180</sup> L. Nowra, *Prince of Afghanistan*, Crows Nest, NSW, Allen and Unwin, p.49.

<sup>181</sup> The Book Chook <<http://www.thebookchook.com/2013/04/childrens-book-review-anzac-tale.html>> (accessed 20 November 2016).

familiarise readers with local fauna, through to works emphasising the need to protect and conserve, to contemporary works which plead for responses to climate change and sustainable human practices. It would also be interesting to further investigate the prevalence and significance of 'transplanted' storytelling (such as Arthur Cawthorne's *Who Killed Cockatoo?* [1862] or James Brunton Stephens' *Marsupial Bill* [1879]), in which well-established overseas storylines are imported to Australia but re-populated with Australian fauna. Attitudes to historical events could also be investigated further, one area of inquiry being the implicit sense of 'ownership' of large public events. From my reading I gained the impression that a writer of the 1930s felt able to assume a universal or consensus interest in certain topics (such as air travel) whereas writers more recently show a greater awareness of social diversity and pluralism which prevents any easy assumptions of consensus. It would also be rewarding to examine the gradual displacement of colonial stereotypes in regard to native animals and to track the emergence of 'new' systems of perception such as Indigenous connections to animals that have emerged in literature. In regard to war as a theme, it would be interesting to explore the contrast between works with an overt 'anti-war' stance and those (such as *Blinky Bill Joins the Army*) with a more overtly 'accepting' or 'patriotic' stance: it may be further illuminating to pursue the hypothesis that 'accepting' is very different from 'endorsing', as I think such research might show the 'anti-war' stance to be pervasively implicit.

## Part II: Crafting Animal Characters in My Writing

Part One surveyed the broad 'context' for my writing by looking at the history and development of animal character portrayals in Australian fiction for younger readers. In Part Two I will reflect critically on my own crafting of animal characters in selected works I have written since 1995.

### ***Voices in the Forest* and 'A Family for Lucky'**

2006 was a crucial year in respect of my interest in using animal characters in my fiction. Following my use of animal characters in two middle grade novels, *Horse Mad* (2005) and *The Kid Whose Mum Kept Possums in Her Bra* (2006), this was the year in which I began to more deeply ponder the issues associated with crafting animal characters in fiction for young readers. I was invited to create a story to be produced in audio form as part of 'Understory - art and nature'. 'Understory' is a nationally unique 1.2 kilometre walk trail leading through pristine bushland in the southwest of Western Australia. Relationships with nature and 'the spirit of place' are explored along the trail through sculpture, story, poetry and music. My brief as the Children's Author was to write a piece of fiction for five to eleven year olds to be listened to (via an MP3 player) as they walked the trail.

Children's writing is more age-specific than many realise, and concepts which appeal to a five year old are very different to the interests of an eight or eleven year old. Story length and format would thus usually differ. To cater for this broader-than-usual target age range, I decided to create five short stories (rather than one longer work) using different animals to reflect the devastating environmental impact of feral cats<sup>182</sup> in the forests surrounding the Art Trail.

Each of the five stories was designed for a site-specific story 'nook' set alongside the trail, which I selected according to the species living there. These listening nooks were marked by boulders on the track featuring an etching of the bird narrator. To link the stories (named *Voices in the Forest*) my submission needed at least one over-

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<sup>182</sup> Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive-species/feral-animals-australia/feral-cats> (accessed 29 August 2016).

arching character. I wanted to create a voice that could speak directly to children and one which could also move easily across the forest trail. I therefore selected a bird as narrator and gave it a distinctly chatty, chirpy voice:

Welcome to the forest. I'm a fantail. A grey fantail. *Rhipidura fuliginosa* is my full name, but no one ever remembers that!

That's my tree. See the tall white karri down the track? My nest is way up high among the branches ...

Come and I'll show you around.<sup>183</sup>

After greeting listeners, Fantail leads children to the next site and introduces each subsequent story. For example when children reach the second nook, located beside a huge fallen log, Fantail says:

Isn't this a great log? It fell during a storm a few years ago. The termites built their nest around its roots. Can you see their muddy looking home? Old Granddaddy Lizard is watching it carefully. He knows that each year something special happens here ...<sup>184</sup> [*Lizard: story 2*]

After listening to the lizard story, Fantail encourages children to look for the third nook, in a part of the forest suitable for phascogale nests:

You found it, well done!

Now if you sit on that bench, or on the big log by the track, you can hear the story of Meg, a very small phascogale who was once very brave...<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Dianne Wolfer, *Voices in the Forest*, in *Understory – art and nature*, Southern Forest Arts, <http://www.understory.com.au/> (accessed 21 August 2016); *Bird: story 1*. All subsequent references will refer to this website.

<sup>184</sup> *Lizard: story 2*.

<sup>185</sup> *Phascogale: story 3*.

I positioned the fourth nook in an area where the tree trunks are fire-scorched:<sup>186</sup>

This part of the jarrah forest is great isn't it? I love the black tree trunks. It makes this area feel spooky. And guess what? There are bats here too.<sup>187</sup>

In addition to selecting a chatty voice for the bird-narrator, I also chose a first person writing style, mainly to provide immediacy but also to set up a 'conversation' with young listeners that could sustain them for a 1.2 kilometre story. As well as Fantail, there is another (villainous) character common to each story: Cat. Fantail introduces Cat in the following way:

I could see that heartless monster slinking along the trail. My chick tried to fly, but his wings weren't strong enough. And the Cat was fast. Too fast. She grabbed him and ran off into the forest.<sup>188</sup>

Cat's infamy grows with each creature's story:

Lizzy looked around. She froze in terror. It was the Cat!

... A mean face stared in at them. The Cat stretched its razor claws deep into the crack, trying to reach them. The lizards scuttled further back. [*Lizard*: story 2]

[...]

A wild-eyed monster was waiting by the trunk of her tree. Meg squeaked in terror. The creature's ears were sharp points and its teeth grinned in the dusky light. [*Phascogale*: story 3]

[...]

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<sup>186</sup> This was long before the devastating 2015 bushfires, during which firefighters were able to save the Art Trail.

<sup>187</sup> *Bat*: story 4.

<sup>188</sup> *Bird*: story 1.



Brother bat's echolocation followed the Cat as she slinked through the shadows stalking frogs in the wetland. He hated it when Cat caught one and the frog's cheerful croaking stopped.<sup>189</sup>

In the last story, as children complete the loop and Fantail leads them to the starting point of the trail, they finally hear Cat's story:

The last story is about the Cat. I won't stay and listen. I know that sharp-toothed monster is lurking around here! And that's my mate calling. He must be wondering where I've been...<sup>190</sup>

As Cat's history unfolds, I wanted young listeners to consider that villains can be multi-dimensional. In addition to Cat's destructive characterisation, I strove to depict a more unconventional role: feral cat as a victim. Creating this balance was challenging (as was the later crafting of the characters Mako and Pyrena in *The Shark Caller*), because animals are not simply known through ecology or biology but also carry certain histories (sometimes very difficult ones due to human interventions) and are endowed with complex, at times conflicting cultural values. In the following (heavily trimmed) extract, children learn that Cat arrived in the forest as a dumped kitten:

Many cold nights ago Cat came to live in the forest.

Before she lived in the forest Cat had a home. A lovely, warm home. She also had a name. Cat's family called her Ebony because her coat was sleek and inky-black.

But now Cat's coat was dirty. No one in the forest called her Ebony.

Before Cat lived here she had a brother and sister. She also had a warm, purring mother. Cat remembered kneading Mother Cat's tummy to release her thick flowing milk. Little Ebony's paws worked

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<sup>189</sup> Bat: story 4.

<sup>190</sup> Cat: story 5.

hard pushing and squeezing Mother Cat's wide belly. There was so much milk. Cat's stomach rumbled as she remembered.

[...]

The tall man put the box in a car. He drove and drove. First the ride was smooth. Then it became bumpier. At last the car stopped. The man put the box on the edge of a dirt track.

[...]

The kittens pushed the box until the cardboard fell apart. Then they looked around. Trees towered over them. Everything was strange. Dark shadows shifted. An owl barked and swooped around them.

The kittens huddled together. Later, when the moon was high, a feral Tomcat crept towards the box. He snarled at the kittens. Cat's brother hissed. The Tomcat snatched him in his mean jaws. Then Tomcat loped away into the forest.

Cat and her sister yowled in terror and sadness for their lost brother. They ran far away from the box and the Tomcat smell. At last, exhausted and bleeding from their paws, the sisters crawled into a hollow log. They huddled against each other and fell asleep.

[...]

Cat's belly was never completely full and she was never warm, but Cat lived. The cold rains soaked her coat. She was always lonely. No one in the forest wanted to be friends with a killer.<sup>191</sup>

This passage goes some way to explain Cat's behaviour; a major aim for me in creating this collection was to address the environmental implications of a growing feral cat population. Thus, in addition to making Cat a multifaceted character and giving her a back-story, I also wanted to push further; to multiply the problem. This led to the creation of what my husband refers to as 'the rape scene':

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<sup>191</sup> *Cat*: story 5.

Then one night the wild Tom returned. Cat was so happy to see another of her kind. She purred and nuzzled the feral cat, blocking the memory of her brother. But the wild cat was rough and savage. He didn't stay long.

Cat crawled back into her log. Her fur was matted and dirty. She licked and licked, but the Tomcat smell remained. Cat felt lonelier than ever. She longed for a family to purr with and to snuggle against on the cold mornings. For many days Cat stayed in her log. She only came out to hunt.

But something had changed. Cat's middle became rounder and she was more hungry than before. Despite her loneliness Cat felt a strange feeling of joy. She sensed that soon something good might come into her solitary life.

Then one day Cat felt a fluttery tickling in her belly. The next day tiny paws pushed against her skin - from the inside! Cat purred.

When it was dark, Cat crept to the edge of the forest. She could see new buildings. She slunk about, searching for somewhere warm and safe. Somewhere a mother cat could hide her kittens. Because Cat knew she would not be alone much longer.<sup>192</sup>

On first listening to the audio my husband was shocked at the inclusion of this passage. He wondered whether it was too explicit for children; however I believe the reality of this scene encourages listeners to consider a challenging issue in an age-appropriate way. The precise meaning will wash over the very youngest listeners, whilst older children will understand what has occurred and hopefully ponder the layers of complexity; the Tom that killed Cat's sibling impregnates Cat, bringing her kittens to love.

On one hand young listeners may be happy that Cat will no longer be alone, however they may also realise the environmental repercussions of this. The ending was thus shaped to allow children to consider how Cat's condition will escalate

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<sup>192</sup> *Cat*: story 5.

problems for the forest creatures. I hope children will ultimately understand that the irresponsible actions of humans are the underlying problem.

The *Voices in the Forest* project involved biological research, and an attempt to teach elements of ecology, but as writing it also had effect through the construction of animal subjectivity. That is, the lived experience of the animal is transmitted by the writer's imagination and received by the child's imagination and the story then becomes a tool of education and helps to develop the child's awareness.

In 2008, two years after *Voices in the Forest*, I was invited to participate in the creation of a collection of children's writing by Singaporean and Australian authors. Stories were to be aimed at readers aged 9-12 in both countries, and the theme of the volume was to be the universal theme of *Family*. Writers were given every freedom to explore this theme in their own way.

I was keen to be involved in this cross-cultural project and the resulting story, "A Family for Lucky", provided a further opportunity to explore my interest in animal portrayals. The need to create a character with which children of both countries could form a connection was a major consideration in my selection of an animal as central character. By using a familiar and well-loved animal I felt that the text could override racial limitations and stereotypes. Lucky, as a character, was culturally 'neutral': children from diverse backgrounds could equally identify with him and, as such, Lucky became a vehicle through which the broad concept of family and belonging could be examined:

Weeks passed. Fluffy dogs came and went. Tall, handsome dogs came and went. Clever dogs came and went. But no one came for Lucky.<sup>193</sup>

This animal perspective provided a connection point for children who, like Lucky, might not feel 'special' or who didn't 'fit in'. Not having to specify cultural characteristics (customs, clothing, and so forth) freed my focus. If I had employed a human as central character, this connection may have been reduced. Once young

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<sup>193</sup> D. Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky' in K. Spillman (ed.), *Near and Dear*, Perth, WA, writingWA, 2014, p.67. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

readers have identified or empathised with Lucky, they can then share his disappointments as humans choose other dogs, via the safe buffer of story:

‘Don't worry,’ Emma whispered. ‘We will find another family. A family just right for you...’<sup>194</sup>

At last an elderly couple, Ruby and John arrive:

‘Hello,’ the old lady said, holding out her hand. ‘My name's Ruby.’

Lucky licked her soft fingers. He sniffed her skin and knew that Ruby wasn't well. A strange protective feeling washed through him. Lucky wanted to help.<sup>195</sup>

From this initial meeting, Lucky is able to lead children beyond limited human perceptions; to employ an animal instinct to ‘sense’ and consider the notion that there may be a deeper problem. Direct sensory descriptions can be both powerful and useful in a short story for young readers with restricted word limit.

As the story moves into the next phase, I was able to ‘show’ rather than ‘tell’ Ruby's fragility through dog actions. ‘Researchers have begun training dogs to recognize the chemical smells produced by cancerous, unhealthy tissues.’<sup>196</sup> As young readers make this leap of understanding with Lucky, I wanted them to become more intimately involved and thus (like Lucky) perhaps protective of Ruby:

Every morning Lucky brought John the newspaper. Then he helped Ruby collect eggs for breakfast. Lucky stayed close. He made sure Ruby didn't bump into any sharp edges or trip over the garden hose.

[...]

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<sup>194</sup> Wolfer, ‘A Family for Lucky’, p.67.

<sup>195</sup> Wolfer, ‘A Family for Lucky’, pp.67-68.

<sup>196</sup> A. Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p.81. All subsequent page references will be to this edition.

Time passed. John and Ruby became slower, but Lucky didn't mind. Dust piled up on the windowsills and John took longer to do jobs in the shed. Ruby's morning stroll was shorter and it took almost an hour to collect the eggs. Weeds grew in the garden, but there were always fresh flowers in a jar on the kitchen table.<sup>197</sup>

This latter sentence shows an uncomplicated aspect of Ruby and her priorities. As the story content becomes more challenging, I used a more direct authorial voice:

Dogs sense things that humans don't always understand. Lucky knew when it was going to happen. He stayed very close to Ruby.<sup>198</sup>

Again young readers are led to a certain point and then encouraged to make a leap of understanding with the author. If this last sentence had employed a human character, I don't think young readers would sense the depth of the tragedy which was about to occur.

When Ruby dies, readers bear witness to her passing via Lucky's unusual sensory description. To ascertain the moment of death, human characters would most likely look for visual clues, but with Lucky we observe this via a different kind of understanding. In addition to the powerful immediacy of sensory narration, this method also shines a spotlight on the intimate reaction of the surviving human:

In the hushed hour before dawn, when the foxes had gone back to their dens, Ruby died peacefully. As a final breath left Ruby's tired body, Lucky closed his eyes. He heard John's gentle snoring falter for just a moment as her essence floated upwards. The air shifted to absorb the change.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky', pp.68-69.

<sup>198</sup> Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky', p.69.

<sup>199</sup> Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky', pp.69-70.

Readers are then able to view John's deterioration in the days that follow Ruby's death, from the intimate perspective of Lucky:

Lucky stayed close to John. People came and went. For a while, the house was busy, but soon the visitors stopped coming. As the house became quiet again, the warm Ruby smell faded, but it never disappeared completely.

Lucky still collected the newspaper but John hardly ever unrolled it. The hens still laid eggs but no one gathered them. The eggs grew warm in the sun. One morning Lucky watched a brown snake slither in and steal them. The hens squawked and stopped laying. John stared into space. Lucky sat beside him.

The kitchen began to smell bad. So did John. Lucky felt helpless, but he stayed on guard, licking John's hand, reminding him when it was time to eat. Sometimes the phone rang, but John stopped answering it.<sup>200</sup> (pp.70-71)

As a pet owner, there are times when my dog is witness to behaviour that is less self-conscious; behaviour I might modify for other humans. Author Steven Rowley says:

I think of how dogs are witnesses. How they are present for our most private moments, how they are there when we think of ourselves as alone. They witness our quarrels, our tears, our struggles, our fears, and all of our secret behaviors that we have to hide from our fellow human beings. They witness without judgement.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky', pp.70-71.

<sup>201</sup> S. Rowley, *Lily and the Octopus*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2016, p.80. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

In a similar way, Lucky's animal presence in the house allows readers to view small details which may not be observed by other humans, Lucky thus becomes a non-biased and non-judgemental narrator. As author Garth Stein writes:

Using a dog as a narrator has limitations and it has advantages.... The advantages are that a dog has special access: people will say things in front of dogs because it is assumed that a dog doesn't understand. Dogs are allowed to witness certain things because they aren't people and have no judgment. I was able to work with this idea a lot in terms of giving the reader a unique viewpoint into the action of the book.<sup>202</sup>

John is taken to a retirement home and Lucky returns to the dogs' shelter. Their unasked-for places of residence makes for an interesting parallel. In the final stage of the story, Lucky and John are reunited:

Lucky sniffed the strange building. There was a warm porridge and vegetable smell mixed with sharp antiseptic. And something else – a Ruby-and-John kind of smell.<sup>203</sup>

In this final segment, Lucky again provides succinct insight into the personalities of a variety of human characters living at the retirement village. He does this by mirroring what they wish to find in him. These passages show how Lucky senses the character of each elderly resident and adapts his behaviour accordingly. These behaviours thus reflect, in a direct and intimate way (for young readers), key aspects of each resident's personality:

The old people called him lots of different names. For Mr Forrester, Lucky was Bluey, the rugged cattle dog. He crouched on Mr Forrester's command, then wheeled about when Mr Forrester

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<sup>202</sup> Garth Stein, [website], <http://www.garthstein.com/works/the-art-of-racing-in-the-rain/faq/> (accessed 25 May 2014).

<sup>203</sup> Wolfer, 'A Family for Lucky', p.73.



whistled. The old ladies laughed and clapped their hands as Mr Forrester blushed.

Although he was no Shih-Tzu, Lucky made himself as small and delicate as possible when he visited Mrs Lim. “Hello my darling Bella,” Mrs Lim cooed as Lucky nibbled the sweet biscuits she saved for him.

Lucky did tricks for Mrs Jones and sat quietly with Mr Collins. He rolled onto his back for Mr Schmidt and shook hands with Mrs Davis.<sup>204</sup>

‘A Family for Lucky’ and *Voices in the Forest* both provided opportunities for me to experiment with animal portrayal in the succinct framework of short story. Animal characterisation within my longer works posed different challenges.

### ***Dolphin Song***

More than ten years before these short works of fiction, my initial experimentation with animal voices occurred during the writing of my first Young Adult novel, *Dolphin Song* (1995). This story, told from both human and dolphin viewpoints, was a response to environmental concerns, particularly the practice of purse-seine netting in the Southern Ocean, and while the choice to employ the voice of different species was largely an intuitive process, I soon realised the numerous benefits of presenting ideas to young readers via uncommon marine perspectives.

In addition to the central human character, Melody, being used as an anchor for teenage readers, the inclusion of dolphin characters – Shara and her calf, Speckle – allowed me to set up a writing framework of alternating human/animal points of view (expressed through use of alternating italic and non-italic fonts), thus enabling readers to gain a broader understanding of key environmental issues from a perspective both above and below the ocean skin. An example of mirrored versions of one scene from different perspectives occurs early in the novel when Shara and her calf first encounter Melody:

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<sup>204</sup> Wolfer, ‘A Family for Lucky’, pp.74-75.

*Shara's first response was to flee to the safety of the herd, but this animal did not seem dangerous. It was already swimming through the waves beside them and Shara paused. She was curious.*

*Although most two-legged animals were clumsy in the water, this one seemed relaxed as it sliced through the waves. Shara kept her distance and watched. Speckle swam close by her side and she nuzzled him reassuringly. The creature was still unaware of the dolphins and Shara sensed a gentleness about it.*

*As the animal swam, Shara studied the way it moved. Two long upper flippers circled its head in a steady rhythm, whilst the neck and face kept turning sideways. Shara also noticed that the two lower flippers were used for balance and steering in a way similar to her own tail. Its middle portion was multi-coloured and long seaweed-like strands flowed from its head. It was a fascinating creature. The dolphins sculled from a safe distance and observed its movements.<sup>205</sup>*

The story then switches focus (and font) to show the same scene from a human (Melody's) point of view. This technique enabled me to introduce one incident from multiple perspectives:

As she swam through the waves, Melody had a strange feeling that she was being watched. She stopped the steady overarm swimming that had become so routine and looked about. There was no one on the beach, perhaps she was mistaken. She swam breaststroke for a few moments, looking often at the shoreline. There was no one there, but the feeling persisted.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Dianne Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, Fremantle, WA, Fremantle Press, 1995, pp.14-15. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

<sup>206</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, p.15.

The story returns to the dolphin viewpoint to observe differing human reactions and to set up an early instance of potential misunderstanding between species. This foreshadows subsequent clashes that occur later in the story:

*The two-legged animal was suddenly fleeing. Shara sensed fear as soon as the creature's steady swimming rhythm changed. The lower flippers had circled under the water, and then, it had cleverly breeched and back-flipped towards the shore. Shara could feel vibrations of panic and was confused. She hadn't meant to frighten it. Shara led her calf towards the land creature and then, as she got closer, leapt high out of the water in a show of friendship, clicking reassuringly. Speckle tried to copy his mother and bellyflopped across a wave. Then they skimmed side by side and circled underwater near the strange animal's long flippers.*

Melody stopped kicking and held her breath. It was a dolphin and its baby, not a shark pack! She laughed out loud. How wonderful to see such a tiny nurseling. Melody studied the dorsal fins just to be sure. The mature animal's fin had a strange kink in it and the baby's was floppy, but yes, they were round, not pointed like a shark's.<sup>207</sup>

Embedding marine viewpoints into the storyline (signposted by italicised font change), enabled me to deconstruct human characters; to view their physicality from a different perspective:

*Shara surfaced to breathe, and saw the awkward bodies of the land animals covered in loose, flapping skin. The sea was choppy and their lower limbs swayed like some graceless seaweed ...*

*All of a sudden, one of the creatures lifted a limb, shaking the end of it so that the tentacle-like parts wriggled.<sup>208</sup>*

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<sup>207</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, p.16.

<sup>208</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, p.67.

Mirrored viewpoints also allowed me draw attention to the (environmentally) intrusive nature of human actions. In the following scene, young readers are encouraged to set aside their dominant sense of sight and feel repercussions of the underwater sound of a speedboat:

*an irritating drumming bounced suddenly off Shara's melon. The noise charged closer, and she sensed a ripple of concern amongst the senior females. Speckle huddled by her side, and Shara swerved to shield her calf as she darted back toward the other cows. Fighting panic, she waited for the instructions of the older dolphins. A moment later, urgent clicks bounced from each melon and they turned together, fleeing towards the open sea.*

[...]

*The boat rushed onwards, full throttle, engine shrieking towards the group. Midwives circled the mothers and calves and paced themselves with the slowest newborns.*

[...]

*As it roared out to sea, the older dolphins clicked crossly. These whizzing things had become a constant hazard to the calves. In the morning they would rejoin the main pod. Although the tiniest newborns were still at risk from shark packs, these shallow waters were no longer safe.<sup>209</sup>*

During the creation of *Dolphin Song* it was important to encourage my readers to consider environmental care of the ocean (as can be seen in the above extract). The use of animal (marine) creatures helped to create a sense of urgency. To achieve immediacy and to capture young readers' attention, I began the story by writing about the birth of a new calf from the mother dolphin's perspective. This intimate opening scene includes unusual characterisation, such as a dolphin's tail-first entry into the world to prevent drowning. By experimenting with alternate perspectives, I hoped to

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<sup>209</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, pp.13-14.

encourage my readers to connect with the dolphin characters and open their minds to consider issues from a range of viewpoints:

*As Shara laboured, she crooned songs of the deep oceans. Her baby wriggled and the midwives' humming quickened. At last, the tail tip appeared and the attendant cows began whistling the song of welcome.*

*As the calf's tail waggled its way out of Shara's body and into the ocean, the humming of the midwives became hypnotic.*

[...]

*They nudged Shara, reminding her to bob up and breathe, and soon the calf's smooth body and head followed the tail. Shara pushed her baby upwards to receive its first breath of air. A new member of the pod was born.<sup>210</sup>*

Looking back on these words from twenty years ago, I would now avoid a humanised term like “hypnotic”. Nevertheless, this scene achieves its main purpose, which is to provide a visual representation of the non-human nature of dolphins and the utterly different conditions under which they are born and live.

Whilst presenting readings at schools and libraries, I have been able to anecdotally measure the success of using animal characters in stories. Younger readers have often asked questions about this birth scene, wanting to know whether it's true that dolphins are born in this way, and if so why. *Dolphin Song* was published in 1995, shortly before home Internet usage was introduced into Australia,<sup>211</sup> and information such as this was not readily available.

As shown in the preceding extracts, I was able to craft my central dolphin character using both factual and imagined details, making Speckle a unique character. Before venturing into further animal characterisation, I wanted to build on the known human perspectives of younger readers, to help them experiment with reading from a

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<sup>210</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, p.10.

<sup>211</sup> ABC News, [website], 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-25/internet-changes-over-20-years/5470442> (accessed 17 August 2016).

different point of view. This is important in children's literature because it helps to develop children's awareness of the world's diversity and differences.

My next objective was to use my characters to alert readers to marine hazards from an animal viewpoint. The first marine hazard involved the afore-mentioned danger of boats in 'the clear waters of the bay.' This sense of threat builds as the novel progresses, reaching the climactic chapter 'Net of Death', in which Speckle's life is threatened:

*The pod often fished alongside tuna. They provided camouflage from hunting shark packs, and a large group often churned up smaller fish that were easy to digest. Shara checked their bearings, then whirled around and headed towards the school.*

*After circling with his mother, Speckle looped over and around the big fish. The tuna changed direction, back and forth to avoid him, and their determination to follow a lead fish provided a game for him, as he tried to separate the group.*

*While Speckle played, Shara snapped up the occasional shrimp that surfaced amongst the school. But suddenly she stopped and listened. There was a rumble overhead. Louder and louder, it came closer, until it was directly above them. The sound was like a monsoonal storm, but they weren't in the tropics, and the sky was too clear for thunder. Surfacing to breathe, Shara saw a shiny thing swooping from the sky. It was blocking the sun and dipping from side to side. As it turned, Shara could see two fin-like objects jutting out from either side of its body, and one huge glassy eye. Waves churned below the terrifying object, surging higher as it lunged closer to the surface.*

*Speckle swam beside his mother and, eyeing the apparition sideways, he saw that it was like that other noisy things they'd seen. But how did it get in the sky? Can they fly too, he wondered.<sup>212</sup>*

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<sup>212</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, pp.104-105.

The helicopter is joined by a fishing boat and in the ensuing confusion, Speckle is snared. I wanted his struggle and painful death to alert teenage readers to the consequences of purse-seine netting, which at the time of writing was still practised in southern waters.

The decision to kill Speckle was questioned by my editor. She wondered whether it was too brutal. I argued that it was necessary; that a happier ending would be a less honest resolution. My concerns regarding the environmentally destructive method of purse-seine netting was a major influence on decisions taken whilst crafting this climactic scene. As with the Cat 'rape' scene, I felt that my instinctual trust of young readers' understanding was validated by their tearful feedback and requests for a sequel. I wanted readers to care deeply about Speckle's fate, and they did. Presenting his untimely (and avoidable) death from an animal viewpoint made the novel more powerful.

During the twenty years which have passed since I wrote *Dolphin Song*, I have honed my craft as an author, and am now able to identify clear shifts in ways I have portrayed animal characters in these earlier works compared to animal representations in my PhD creative works. One major change is the degree to which I select and avoid human terminology when portraying animal thoughts and actions. Even in the early 1990s, I was consciously aiming to avoid words like 'people', instead including more animal-focused words such as 'creatures', 'land-animals', 'unusual beings' and the collective noun 'colony'.

*Like the other pod members, Shara was aware of the colony of two-legged creatures who lived near the bay. The younger dolphins enjoyed flirting for their attention and they often swam close by the shore hoping to see these unusual beings.*<sup>213</sup>

With hindsight, words like 'unusual beings' seem more confusing than 'people'. Another human term used often in this story was 'boat'. Again, as a less-experienced writer I was trying to juggle varying descriptive methods; in some cases the boat is labelled 'boat', as is 'engine', but then later it is called 'thing'. Following editorial

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<sup>213</sup> Wolfer, *Dolphin Song*, pp.12-13.

advice to beware of words/concepts a dolphin could not know, I remember struggling during the writing process with the extent of using human terms. Despite these clearly visible flaws, the novel was successful, being reprinted several times and placing third in the 1996 West Australian Young Readers' Book Awards. If *Dolphin Song* were to be re-published, I would not only edit more tightly for current readers (whose patience with over-descriptive text has reduced in the past twenty years), but I would also work to streamline inconsistencies with human/animal description.

### ***The Shark Caller***

Ursula Le Guin says, "A tale we heard at four years old may have a deep and abiding effect on our mind and spirit, but we aren't likely to be clearly aware of it as adults – unless asked to think about it seriously."<sup>214</sup> My authorial choice to craft stories around animal characters in these earlier works was undoubtedly informed to some extent by a lifelong enjoyment of animal stories, but in consequence my portrayal of animal characters had been largely stereotypical (as exemplified by *Dolphin Song*, which casts sharks in the usual role as villain). The creation of my PhD works *The Dog with Seven Names* and *The Shark Caller* demanded greater experimentation with the crafting of diverse animal characters.

The 'Mako' sections posed the greatest difficulties in the crafting of the animal characters in *The Shark Caller*. In my first draft attempts the mako was male, but part of my experimentation was directed toward making this shark less of a stereotypical predator and more of a rounded, multi-faceted character. Eventually I decided to shift the gender of the shark to female and, additionally, portray the shark as an expectant mother. This gender change allowed me to present an atypical, more nurturing shark character.

Over the very many drafts of my mako scenes, the next challenge was to remove the use of human-like phrases. I wanted to create a sense of the otherworldly and to do my utmost to convey the animal 'otherness' of the sharks. This aspect of the crafting process can be illustrated by three extracts which display the progressional shifts in mako character development.

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<sup>214</sup> Le Guin, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 11.



In the first extract mako is male. The perspective is third person and mako sounds very much like a human narrator with a few added shark characteristics (in this regard, the approach resembles that of *Dolphin Song*):

The man was tiring. His rattle kept the beat and his voice remained strong but the mako felt his mind wandering. He had been chanting for hours, since sunrise and now the shark noticed missed beats and a faltering rhythm. The mako thrashed, ready to charge the Hammerhead, he could wait all night and all the next day. The level of frenzy was worth a day of fasting. Ruined shark callers were tasty on levels beyond the physical.

He was old. This would be the last time he circled above the entrance.

If the moment presented itself he was ready to kill the circling sharks to be the one to bite first. If he died in the effort it would be fitting.

In the next draft the shark is female and a much stronger sensory focus has emerged. Sentences are shorter and the beginnings of a more poetic construction (which helps 'flag' a change in character for young readers) can be detected in this extract:

Mako scents the man's exhaustion.

His rattle holds the beat and his voice is hypnotic, but the man's smell has changed. His blood is slower. Movements are jerky.

[...]

The man's rattle regains the rhythm. His electrical field quickens.

Mako hovers.

After the long migration, she is hungry but this frenzy will be worth a day of fasting. Fallen shark callers are tasty on levels beyond the physical.

In the final extract, which is the version used in the thesis, several further aspects have changed: the language is more sparse in structure, the viewpoint is more animal-like and examples of Tok Pisin phrases have been included. I wanted these sections to be otherworldly and there is a strangeness which clearly differentiates this passage from the human storyline:

MAKO X

Slow voice  
jerky arms  
wobble rhythm  
young Smoothskin is exhaustion.

Rattle and chanting  
since first sun  
now *larung* stops.

Sharks smell weakness.

Ravenous Mako  
body-light without pups  
waiting for frenzy  
waiting to bite  
ready to feast.

[...]

Smoothskin blinks

terror eyes stare  
electric field quickening.

To ensure that mako's separate storyline flowed into and out of the human story, I detached the mako sections, regularly reworking them as a separate process. I needed to do this to ensure consistency and fluidity of voice. The mako chapters thus became a separate but interwoven storyline involving regular examples of atypical characterisation, including the insertion of interesting factual details, in a technique reminiscent of the dolphin birthing scene. In the following passage, for example, young readers discover that some shark pups have navels:

Wriggle-free-tails  
three small sharklings push free  
umbilical sacs trailing.

Sacs will fall  
leaving belly button scars  
on little pup tummies.

Whilst developing diverse animal character voices I also wanted to use the mako scenes to mirror the actions of the humans. (I felt that this would explicitly bring the sharks' world into close relation with that of the humans, yet simultaneously reflect the separateness and otherness of the shark realm.) An example of this occurs in an early draft when Izzy's uncle scatters the ashes of her brother *above the water*, and the mako poem recounts this action from the shark-perspective *below the water*:

MAKO I  
...  
A shadow crosses the shark road.

She hears the splash of a paddle and her tail thrusts, propelling her upwards.

The splashing paddle, a familiar shape, a familiar scent.

But there is no clatter.

No delicious rattling sound.

Just the oil of human flesh glazing the swell.

The mako circles.

A swarm of jellies cross her path.

She slashes the intruders. Clearing the highway.

Her fin breaks the surface.

There is a man in the canoe, and a smaller human.

Her snout peeps.

She senses fear.

The man stands. He lifts a shining object.

Human mist swirls through the water, brushing the shark's sandpaper skin.

Nose cilia taste bone.

Voices whisper as her gills absorb ash.

Evoking another ceremony, and another before that.

The ancestors spin.

The man's dusty offering links generations.

Renewing the custom...

This early draft needed further editing for several reasons. Firstly the sentence structure sounded too 'normal'. I needed sparse and unusual language to help convey the idea of the ocean surface as a meeting point between air and

water, animal and human. I was striving for an otherworldly feeling and wanted to infuse the mako scenes with a sense of weirdness. To do this, I edited many times, paring back pronouns and articles, replacing words like 'man' and 'human' with terms such as 'smoothskin'. I also included strange compound words like 'surface-water' in these mako sections to highlight the difference between above, below, and deep below:

## MAKO II

Long-shadow crosses shark-road  
Mako hears Smoothskin *kanu*  
splash splashing . . .

Tail thrust  
propelling Mako upwards  
dorsal fin breaking surface-water.

Mako's snout tastes air  
smells Smoothskin;  
more than one.

Little Smoothskin is fear  
and something else;  
a thing once known.

Old Smoothskin lifts *silva* can  
whispery voices *singaut*.

Jelly swarm  
clouding, shrouding  
Mako slashes.

Smoothskin-mist swirls through *solwara*  
touching old sandpaperskin  
blood-memories.

Mako's gills filter ash  
nose-cilia brush crushed bone  
Mako tastes the ashy-voice  
then dives down . . .

When discussing what it is to be animal, author Boria Sax asks:

What is it like to be a shark, and hunt prey by their  
electromagnetic fields? Maybe the experience is akin to living in a  
musical world, where everything is better expressed in notes than in  
words.<sup>215</sup>

Experimenting with ways to convey the scent of water/air allowed varied opportunities for me to story-build. Knowing how a shark's sense of smell interweaves with other electromagnetically 'sensed' understandings required a greater leap of authorial imagination than writing about how a land animal may perceive smell; I enjoy swimming but am physically unable to use this sense underwater (nor can my readers).<sup>216</sup> For this reason, as shown in previous examples and the following extract, I felt that the Mako scenes by necessity needed not only to overlap with tactile sensory input –

Mako's snout-pores  
Sense the smallest heartbeat  
Of the tiniest fish.                    [Mako V]

– but also to be presented in conjunction with a sense of the otherworldly:

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<sup>215</sup> B. Sax, *The Mythical Zoo*, New York, Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, 2013, p.16.

<sup>216</sup> The New York Times, 'Adapted to Follow Their Noses Underwater', 2006  
<[http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/26/science/26bubble.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/26/science/26bubble.html?_r=0)> (accessed 19 September 2016).

Mako gills inhale change;  
Feel little Smoothskin power;  
Smell deep otherness. [Mako XI]

Shark characters carry a history of mostly negative associations – especially since the movie *Jaws*. With mako, an apex predator, I was able to rework shark stereotypes and still allow the mako to remain powerful. To a lesser degree, a similar process occurred with Sephone. Whilst researching animal characters, I have found few anglerfish in fiction for young readers other than the anglerfish character in *Finding Nemo*. This anglerfish exhibits expectedly fearsome jaws and the cunning ability to trap unwary smaller fish.

My characterisation of anglerfish Sephone in *The Shark Caller* is different and was developed through successive drafts of the scenes in which she appeared. As these drafts evolved, my chief strategy in crafting Sephone involved using as little dialogue as possible so that Sephone's actions would carry more meaning. However, it was also essential that I make her voice as different as possible to humans. In the earlier drafts, Sephone sounded too human, with speech patterns reminiscent of a mature woman:

**Before we continue, Sephone said. Remember that you passed all that was asked of you. And you returned. That is more than most Divers achieve. You swam through the Tunnel and let your heart guide you in chipping obsidian. Then you overcame fear and willingly entered the octopus mantle. Not many get that far. You saved your brother and finally, you freed the webbed creatures. If you ask me, she muttered, you have done enough.** She clicks her jaws. **You earned the right to claim the reef, obsidian or not!**

*But I chose Ray.*

**You are his twin! Choosing Ray was an extra task. That doesn't count.** She blows a stream of bubbles. **There's no point trawling over dead matter. You chose to return. Not many do. And despite the**

**octopus treachery and stealing of your obsidian, you have bought time for the reef. Here,** she says, swimming beneath the trickling waterfall. **Now you must drink from this.**

By contrast, in the final version, Sephone – while still being kind and to some degree ferociously motherly – is made to behave in a less human manner through shorter, clipped dialogue and a greater focus on her non-human actions:

[Izzy] *I chose Ray over the community.*

[Sephone] **Your brother.**

*Pyrena will keep trying to destroy our reef . . .*

**As she has for generations.**

*I shake my head. I lost the shark obsidian.*

Sephone waggles her lure and swims to where the waterfall pools in a hollowed rock. Her mind tells me that I did all that was asked, more than many Divers. **Overcame fear. Freed ancestors. Saved twin.** Sephone blows a stream of bubbles. **Enough.** Then she swims beneath the trickling waterfall. **Drink.**

*What is it?*

**Too curious! Water holds puripuri. Must drink before air world return.**

*Why?*

**Forgetting.** Sephone clicks her jaws. **Saw final journey. Things you shouldn't see. Didn't elders teach?**

*I shake my head.*

For Pyrena, the villainous, shape-shifting octopus, I needed to craft a different voice again. Pyrena is Izzy's nemesis, the one responsible for her brother's cruel fate. I wanted Pyrena to be a multi-layered character, and so whilst crafting Pyrena I strived to create layers of complexity. Using an octopus suited this purpose.



Octopuses are creepy and smart creatures, renowned for their intelligence, agility and crafty ability to escape tight situations.<sup>217</sup> These were useful qualities to give my antagonist. Pyrena's voice also needed to be distinguishable from the voices of other sea creatures such as Sephone. To achieve this I experimented with blending human-like sentence structure whilst retaining an animal sense:

With your skin I can go back. A girl of shark blood. I will taste air, then die and follow my twin. I know he's waiting....

Like the feral cat in *Voices from the Forest*, Pyrena also is given a backstory that makes her both villain and victim. Her interactions with Izzy in the climactic scene reflect this. Pyrena is mostly ferocious, but readers glimpse occasional wistfulness when she speaks of her lost brother.

Exploring dualities such as this was an important part of the writing process, as was the consideration of different viewpoints, both human and animal, along with intersections between traditional belief, faith and the modern world.

### ***The Dog With Seven Names***

*The Dog with Seven Names* is an historical story set in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions of Western Australia during the war years 1939-1942. It is written for 9-13 year olds, a slightly younger readership than *The Shark Caller*. My central character, a small terrier, is intended to provide a safe vehicle for these readers to explore details of wartime history which are assumed to be unfamiliar to them. My readers may previously not have been aware that northern Australia was heavily bombed between 1941 and 1943, or that children were evacuated from their homes. These are potentially alarming truths for 9-13 year olds, so I wanted my dog character to become a non-threatening window to history. Selecting a known animal, one that would be

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<sup>217</sup> The Scientific American, 'Are Octopuses Smart?', 2009  
<<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/are-octopuses-smart/>> (accessed 10 October 2016).

familiar to many young readers and which may even share their home, was a way to counter-balance the horror of the historical content.

As shown in earlier chapters, dogs carry long associations of courage, love and unflinching loyalty. These character traits were useful in a story exploring upsetting themes. My dog needed to be tough enough to herd cattle, caring enough to protect injured humans, and compact enough to fit comfortably into a small single-engine aeroplane. Selecting a terrier (a known and trusted breed) seemed a fitting choice as narrator; a dog small enough to not frighten young readers and one that could lead them into an exploration of issues associated with this period of great social upheaval.

One aim in writing *The Dog with Seven Names* (hereafter '*The Dog*') was to experiment with fresh ways to portray humans through the eyes of an animal. I wanted to create a novel with a central canine character able to shine a spotlight on the human characters and events, whilst also possessing its own internal conflicts and beliefs. To achieve this I needed to sustain a clear and constant sense of my central animal narrator as I crafted each scene of the story; focusing always on how Dog would perceive humans within a given situation. This involved writing from an entirely different sensory perspective. Again I refer to Boria Sax:

What is it like to be a dog, with a sense of smell 500 times as strong as a human being's? Perhaps the scents must be rather like intense intuitions, precise and yet not quite tangible.<sup>218</sup>

Whilst dogs, like sharks, rely upon an intense sense of smell, the medium through which scent travels to them varies. This meant that my approach to scent in *The Dog* needed to be quite different to that used in the 'Mako' scenes. Dogs have the ability to move their nostrils independently and a dog's sense of smell is said to be 'about 1,000 to 10,000,000 times more sensitive than a human's (depending on the breed)'.<sup>219</sup> Given the highly dominant olfactory sense of my central canine, *The Dog* could in theory have been narrated using a series of scent descriptors. This may have

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<sup>218</sup> B. Sax, *The Mythical Zoo*, New York, Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, 2013, p.16.

<sup>219</sup> Dog Breed Info Centre <<http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/articles/dogsenses.htm>> (accessed 19 September 2016).

been too challenging for the target readership, although past Australian Children's Laureate Jackie French, who is perhaps best known her wombat books, writes that:

Humans need to see our country like wombats. When a wombat 'sees' the land it smells it: smells what has happened weeks, months or even years before, as well as what is there now. To a wombat, history and geography are exactly the same.<sup>220</sup>

I took inspiration from French's words whilst crafting *The Dog*, striving to maintain a focus on sensory writing throughout the story from the earliest scene: 'Elsie's dad was Boss of the cattle station. He was a big man. My brothers and I soon learnt to smell his anger and stay clear of his hard boots.' As the story developed, a sense of smell was not only sustained, but also used to extend reader understandings in subsequent scenes:

A nervous smelling stranger came with a letter from the War. He gave it to the Boss. ... I watched the Boss squash the sad-news-letter into a ball. He threw it onto the floor and muttered bad words that Elsie wasn't allowed to say. After the Boss left the room I slunk over to the crackly paper. It held strange smells. I sniffed and my eyes saw huge flames. People were running and screaming...

[...]

Doc checked the shearers' mattresses spread on the verandah. He said he wanted to make sure each one was clean. I sniffed the mattresses too. They held a rich smell of sweat and mutton fat.

Dog's olfactory sense was included (as French advocates) in world-building passages, infusing the story with historical and geographical information:

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<sup>220</sup> Australian Children's Laureate, 2015 [website] <[https://htawa-au.sslsvc.com/media/StoriesOfPlace\\_FlyerProgram31July\\_HTAWA.pdf](https://htawa-au.sslsvc.com/media/StoriesOfPlace_FlyerProgram31July_HTAWA.pdf)> (accessed 23 October September 2016).

While they ate, I sniffed the room. It held the scents of four different people, all long gone, and also a cat. Animal smells on the verandah were fresher. I smelt the place where a fox had crouched the night before. A smear of blood showed where she'd caught a rat. I raised my nose in the direction the fox had dragged her kill. Maybe she'd return tonight ... I turned a few times then settled down under the table that was holding Dave's body. His skin smelt bad, but something of Dave lingered. I still felt him in the air. It was a soft presence. I huddled in Dave's death shadow, wishing Elsie was here to whisper soft words into my ears.

In further examples, sensory inclusions hint at deeper understandings, building on earlier embedded details. In the next extract readers will realise (via Dog's nose) that the soldier is drunk:

... I heard Fred yelling. I hopped to the front of the hospital and saw Fred standing between Lee Wah and a soldier. Even from a distance, I could smell the soldier's sour hotel breath.

Or later:

I'd never seen what was in that morgue room, but the smell reminded me of the way Dave's skin smelt at the homestead.

[...]

My nose was battered with smells of panic and fear. The worst was a sizzled flesh smell. It reminded me of Hendrik's wounds and stockmen using a branding iron on cattle.

I also made sure that Dog's sensory apprehension of the world was not confined to smell alone, for dogs also rely on their acute sense of hearing.

Alexandra Horowitz explains that:

Dogs hear most of what we hear and then some. They can detect sounds up to 45 kilohertz, much higher than the hair cells of our ears bother to bend to.

[...]

... Dogs can hear the navigational chirping of rats behind your walls and the bodily vibrations of termites within your walls.<sup>221</sup>

Auditory reporting thus became an important construct throughout the writing of *The Dog*.

... Then the radio voice talked about a *Battle of Britain* and I heard the humans' hearts beat faster.

[...]

... I listened to Matron's footsteps. When they were heavy it meant she was angry, but Matron sat on the bottom step before I could hear her mood.

This enhanced hearing also allowed me to foreshadow events such as the appearance of aeroplanes –

As the red dirt cooled, I heard a faraway rumbling. I looked into the sky and saw a silvery glint pass overhead.

– and, further, to distinguish which kind of human/air force the aircraft belonged to:

Soon my ears knew which planes were arriving long before anyone saw them. When Fred saw me watching the sky, he learnt to stop what he was doing and watch with me. Then he'd call, 'Don't worry everyone, that's just Jimmy,' or, 'Look out, here comes Len ...'

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<sup>221</sup> A. Horowitz, *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 93.

Dog's sensory perception is also used as vehicle to depict a more raw, tactile (and perhaps child-like) way of experiencing the harsh beauty of the Pilbara landscape. The following extract shows the physical effects of extreme heat, whilst also using Dog to introduce details of an historic cooling object to children:

The rainy season rumblings began and heavy air sucked at my chest. Joan's chooks stopped laying. If one did cackle, she ran out to catch the hen's egg before it hit the ground. Otherwise it cooked. I lay under the Coolgardie safe in the kitchen, panting as water dripped down its side. Joan cut my fur short.

'There you are, Florence,' she said. 'That should help a little.'

A different problem that arose in the writing of *The Dog* was the challenge of crafting passages in which Dog's role was to convey information about the activities of the humans around him. This problem was most acute in scenes where Dog was the conduit for news about the progress of the war (via radio, newspaper, or word-of-mouth) – but let me first illustrate the problem with a more simple example. Here is the earliest draft of a short scene:

I saw Fred empty bloody buckets into a pit in the yard. Doc was in the midst of the madness, striding between the verandah and the operating room. I stared at him as he hurried past and tried to remember Rivette.

The problem here is that Dog becomes nothing more than a set of reporting eyes, and those eyes are more attuned to human concerns rather than reflecting the perspective of a dog. The revised version attempts to describe Fred's actions but combines this with a better evocation of the canine's perspective:

I saw Fred empty bloody buckets into a pit in the yard. Doc was in the midst of the madness, striding between the verandah and the operating room. I smelt Doc's fear, heard him taking big breaths of air

and watched his hands opening and closing as he hurried past. I trembled, trying to understand.

In the first version of the passage above, Dog at least shows brief flashes of personality (for she senses the ‘madness’ and tries to remember Rivette). In the next example my earliest draft virtually ‘loses the plot’ altogether and Dog is nothing more than a set of ears and eyes:

‘I saw that plane go down,’ she whispered.  
Fred closed the newspaper.  
‘I’m so sorry, love,’ he said. ‘I didn’t think...’  
‘No, please keep reading.’ The woman wiped her eyes. ‘We need to know.’  
Fred continued in a much softer voice.

The revised version still reports the details of the core exchange between the humans, but it then allows Dog to record her own emotional response and reminds us of her sensory apprehension of her environment:

‘I saw that plane go down,’ she whispered.  
Fred closed the newspaper.  
‘I’m sorry, love,’ he said. ‘I didn’t think...’  
‘No, please keep reading.’ The woman wiped her eyes. ‘We need to know.’  
A strange mood settled over the verandah. As Fred continued in a much softer voice, I sniffed the air, trying to understand the jumbling emotions, but it was too confusing. I slunk down the stairs. The humans’ fear and sorrow was heavy, I needed to feel the earth under my paws.

The final example, below, serves to illustrate the difficulty of sustaining Dog’s canine presence in a scene where her primary role is to convey lengthy detailed

information that passes between the humans. The reader needs to understand Hendrik's predicament in detail, so Dog *must* report the full conversation that transpires – but in the earliest draft this information is conveyed at the expense of sustaining any sense of Dog's personality or canine sensory apprehension of the world around her:

Late one night Matron sat beside Jopie, one of the women who spoke our words and also the words of the evacuees [ie, Jopie speaks English and other languages]. Matron asked Jopie if she knew anything about Hendrik's parents.

'His father was one of the Dutch pilots,' Jopie whispered. 'He left Java with our group of flying boats, but at Broome he didn't get out of his burning plane.' Jopie swallowed. 'As my children and I were pulled into a boat, I saw Hendrik and his mother jump through the flames. She was trying to hold his baby sister above the water, but it was too much for her.' The woman's voice wavered. 'She shouted for Hendrik to swim ahead to a boat, and he did, *Godzijdank*. If it weren't for that man, Harold Mattheson, Hendrik would also have gone under. He saved so many.'

'Does Hendrik have family in Australia?'

'I don't know. His mother was shy. She kept to herself with the new baby. I never met other family members...'

'Is there any chance that his mother survived?'

Jopie shuddered and shook her head. 'There were sharks and burning fuel.' She wiped tears from her cheeks. 'I pray she drowned quickly.'

Matron squeezed Jopie's hand then said, 'No one knows which town will be bombed next, but staying in Hedland is no longer safe. Lieutenant Taplin has ordered the evacuation of the town. As soon as Hendrik is strong enough, he needs to make the journey south ...'

'Hendrik can travel with my family.'



Matron sighed with relief. 'Thank you. I was hoping you'd say that. The hospital in Perth can better treat Hendrik. Our equipment is basic and our supplies are dangerously low. I'll feel relieved once he's being cared for properly and out of harm's way. After everything Hendrik's been through, he might not survive the terror of another raid.'

Clearly, this passage needed revision in order to 'restore' Dog as a character-presence in the scene – but at the same time it was important to still convey *all* the information that the humans exchange, for the reader needed a full understanding of their motives and their sense of limited options. My solution was to frequently 'touch base' with Dog's responses, so that the reader was given a greater sense of Dog's involvement in the scene. These amendments need to be seen in context, but the new material is presented in bold:

Late one night Matron sat beside Jopie, one of the women who spoke our words and also the words of the evacuees. Matron asked Jopie if she knew anything about Hendrik's parents.

'His father was one of the Dutch pilots,' Jopie whispered. 'He left Java with our group of flying boats, but at Broome he didn't get out of his burning plane.' Jopie swallowed, **and I felt a cloud of sadness around her.** 'As my children and I were pulled into a boat, I saw Hendrik and his mother jump through the flames. She was trying to hold his baby sister above the water, but it was too much for her.' **I heard Jopie's voice waver and I wriggled closer, putting my head on her foot as she continued her story.** 'She shouted for Hendrik to swim ahead to a boat, and he did, *Godzijdank*. If it weren't for that man, Harold Mathieson, Hendrik would also have gone under. He saved so many.'

'Does Hendrik have family in Australia?'

'I don't know. His mother was shy. She kept to herself with the new baby. I never met other family members...'

'Is there any chance that his mother survived?'

Jopie shuddered. **As she shook her head, I felt waves of terror and sadness. My ears flattened and I huddled against her leg.**

'There were sharks and burning fuel...' Jopie wiped tears from her cheeks. 'I pray she drowned quickly.'

I watched Matron squeeze Jopie's hand, then she said, 'No one knows which town will be bombed next, but staying in Hedland is no longer safe. Lieutenant Taplin has ordered the evacuation of the town. As soon as Hendrik is strong enough, he needs to make the journey south ...'

'Hendrik can travel with my family.'

Matron sighed. 'Thank you. I was hoping you'd say that. Our equipment is basic and supplies are dangerously low. I'll feel relieved once he's out of harm's way and being cared for properly in Perth. After everything Hendrik's been through, he might not survive the terror of another raid.'

In the above, it is interesting to witness how even the smallest adjustment to phrasing can achieve a significant effect: 'Matron squeezed Jopie's hand...' (in the early draft) reduces Dog to a set of reporting eyes, whereas 'I watched Matron squeeze Jopie's hand...' (in the final draft) restores a sense of Dog as a personality.

My account of crafting the presentation of Dog would not be complete without mention of one further strategy. Throughout the story I also endeavoured to use Dog's most dominant sense to create light-hearted asides.

Fred grabbed me and dragged me back to be washed again. After a while I understood that I had to put up with the soap, and also that the carbolic stopped my fleas - they must have hated the smell even more than me. When Fred scrubbed me, I stopped wriggling and soon smelt like a princess again. A soapy kind of princess...

Humour of this kind could help to balance otherwise alarming scenes, such as occur when the human characters witness the Japanese strafing of Port Hedland's airstrip –

Doc helped the injured stockman climb into Swallow's front seat. Then he lifted me in. I curled myself around Lanky's big feet. The smell coming from them was impressive. I took a few deep breaths of the man's scent and licked one dusty ankle. Old Lanky growled.

– or when bombs are being fitted into aircraft –

Hank took me inside one of the enormous planes. I watched the men loading long metal tubes into its belly. I sniffed one tube. It smelt nasty.

'Don't bump that!' Hank warned. 'Or we'll all go up in smoke!'

– and when Elsie's brother has joined the army:

Oldest brother rode into town. He came back with thick clothes and heavy boots. I remember the intoxicating cow smell of the boots and being smacked for weeing on them.

This exegesis has explored the context in which *The Shark Caller* and *The Dog With Seven Names* came to be written. To this end I have looked at the sweep of Australian fiction for young readers using animal characters, particularly in regard to the portrayal of selected Australian native animals and the way animals have been used to introduce various thematic concerns to younger readers. I have also surveyed the crafting of animal characters in my own fiction.

Australian author Geraldine Brooks speaks of the need for this kind of contextual

orientation in her own writing practice (though for Brooks this relates more to finding opportunities for new subject matter):

I need to know what is on the historical record and if there's too much known then it's not for me... What I try to find is some place on the historical record where there is an intriguing fact and there is enough scope for imagination to flesh it out.<sup>222</sup>

I too like to become aware of 'what is on the historical record', but whilst I am as keen as any writer to find something 'intriguing' which imagination can flesh out, I derive a degree of excitement (and perhaps a sense of affirmation about the validity of my work) from knowing that other writers at different times and in different ways have shared the same concerns and challenges. I hope that sense of a larger community of writerly voices permeates this exegesis.

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<sup>222</sup> *Australian Author*, March 2012, p.22.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored various aspects of the crafting of animal characters, not only in relation to my own practice in my fiction, but also in relation to the work of Australian writers of fiction for younger readers. Libby Hathorn is one of many commentators to remark upon the ‘especial connection’ between children and animal characters<sup>223</sup> which can be argued to have persisted (in various forms) from the time of Aesop’s fables to the many present-day works discussed in this exegesis. Particular aspects of this ‘connection’ are suggested by Maurice Saxby’s notion that an animal character can act as a ‘surrogate’<sup>224</sup> for the child reader and Ceridwen Dovey’s belief in ‘[t]he ability of animals to take us beyond the pale of normal empathy.’<sup>225</sup> With these broad notions in mind, this essay has adapted the approach taken in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Cheek by Jowl* (2009) in order to assemble a listing of works of Australian ‘Critter Lit’ for young readers, then to describe the characteristics typically attributed to a range of Australian animals, and finally to trace some dominant themes running through many of these works.

This survey is of course far from exhaustive, but it illustrates the larger literary context in which my own works exist. As outlined above, my personal interest in using animal characters began in 1995 with my first Young Adult novel, *Dolphin Song*, but I only began to ponder the deeper technical issues associated with crafting animal characters in fiction when I undertook the *Voices in the Forest* project. When crafting the two works of fiction submitted here – *The Shark Caller* and *The Dog With Seven Names* – I looked back critically upon my past writing, and the resulting critique is presented here. In addition, I have explored how these two most recent works extend the concerns and tropes of those earliest attempts, for example with Mako in *The Shark Caller* providing a more nuanced exploration of the stereotypically ‘villainous’ animal character represented by Cat in *Voices in the Forest*, or with the sustained and unbroken use of a dog’s perspective in *The Dog With Seven Names* providing an

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<sup>223</sup> Email correspondence between Libby Hathorn and Dianne Wolfer, 21 October 2015.

<sup>224</sup> M. Saxby, *The Proof of The Puddin’*, p. 248.

<sup>225</sup> *Only the Animals*, Q & A with Ceridwen Dovey, Penguin Books Australia, [website], <<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9781926428581/only-animals/622696/q-ceridwen-dovey>> (accessed 9th September). The website has changed since the Penguin Random House merger.

extended (and infinitely more demanding) version of the dolphin-perspective scenes in that earliest work, *Dolphin Song*.

This thesis does not really seek to draw any conclusions; its focus is more upon the journey rather than the destination. In fact, it could even be said that there is no 'destination' for the crafting of animal characters in fiction, for – as the preceding discussion has shown – approaches evolve and mutate in tandem with the changing expectations of readers and with the shifting parade of social issues that preoccupy successive generations. Perhaps the best way in which to finish is to return to the words of Boyd Tonkin's reflection on the The British Library's 2015 'Animal Tales' exhibition:

The story of animals in literature is the story of literature itself. The oldest human representation of another species that we know survives in a cave on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. It depicts a wild pig, painted with skill and flair at least 35,000 years ago....<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> 'British Library's new show Animal Tales celebrates the best beasts in literature', *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/british-librarys-new-show-animal-tales-celebrates-the-best-beasts-in-literature-10441695.html>> (accessed 7 August 2015).

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There follow two appendices to this work. Appendix 1 is my chronological listing of works using Australian animal characters. Appendix 2, which falls into two parts, is a series of notes to accompany *The Dog With Seven Names*. These were initiated for my own writerly purposes and are included primarily as insights into 'the writing process', but they could be offered to potential publishers of *The Dog With Seven Names* as background educational information which might supplement the published book.

## Appendix 1: A Selection of Australian Animal Characters, 1841-2015

Note: this is not necessarily an exhaustive listing, though I regard it as being as comprehensive as possible. The listing of over 500 exemplar titles was compiled primarily for personal creative purposes (as a way of “orienting” myself within a field that was attracting more and more of my writing interest) and is thus offered only as an Appendix.

+ environmental theme  
^ other historical content  
\* war themed

1841+	<i>A Mother's Offering to her Children</i>	A Lady Long Resident in New South Wales [Charlotte Barton]
1851+	<i>Adventures in Australia, or, The Wanderings of Captain Spencer in the Bush and the Wilds: Containing Accurate Descriptions of the Habits of Natives, and the Natural Productions and Features of the Country</i>	Sarah Lee illus. J. S. Prout
1860+	<i>Loved, and Lost! The True Story of a Short Life: Told in Gossip Verse</i>	Louisa Anne Meredith
1862	<i>Who killed Cockatoo?</i>	W. A. Cawthorne illus. Rodney McRae
1871	<i>'Mr Bunyip', or, Mary Somerville's Ramble: a Story for Children</i>	J. R. Lockyear
1873+	"Bertie and the Bullfrogs" appears in <i>The Adelaide Observer</i> no. 14	J. H. Clark
1879+	<i>Marsupial Bill</i>	J. Brunton Stephens illus. J. A. Clarke
1880+	<i>Tasmanian Friends and Foes, Feathered, Furred and Finned: A Family Chronicle of Country Life, Natural History and Veritable Adventure</i>	Louisa Anne Meredith

1882	<i>Coles Funny Picture Book</i>	E. W. Cole
1885	<i>Bunyip Land</i>	George Manville Fenn
1889+	<i>Australian Furs and Feathers</i>	Mary Anne Fitzgerald
1889	<i>The Life and Adventures of the Dog "Oscar"</i>	Mrs. Herbert Hammill
1890	<i>The White Kangaroo: A tale of Colonial Life Founded on Fact</i>	E. Davenport Cleland
1896+	<i>His Cousin the Wallaby and Three Other Australian Stories</i>	Arthur Ferres [John William Kevin]
1896	<i>His First Kangaroo: An Australian Story for Boys</i>	Arthur Ferres [John William Kevin]
1897	<i>Kookaburra (The Laughing Jackass) and the Black Snake</i>	Jonaski Takuma
1899+	<i>Dot and the Kangaroo</i>	Ethel C. Pedley illus. Frank Mahony
1902+	<i>Australian Nature Stories for Children</i>	Constance Tisdall
1904	"Mollie's Bunyip" in <i>Mollie's Adventures</i>	Annie R. Rentoul illus. I. S. Rentoul
1904	"The Opossums' Jealousy" in <i>Fairy Tales from the Land of the Wattle</i>	Olga D. A. Ernst illus. Dorothy Ashley
1907	<i>The Escape of the Mullingong: A Zoological Nightmare</i>	G. E. Farrow illus. Gordon Browne
1908+	<i>Bill Baillie: His Life and Adventures</i>	Ellis Rowan illus. Ellis Rowan and Jack Sommers
1908	<i>The Lady of the Blue Beads: Her Book, Being an Account of Her First Blue Moon Spent on Sun Island</i>	Annie Rentoul illus. Ida Rentoul Outhwaite
1910	<i>Bushland Stories</i>	Amy Eleanor Mack illus. Joyce Dennys and Lionel Lindsay

1910	<i>In the Great Colonial Bush</i>	Edith L. Elias
1913	<i>Kangaroo Kingdom</i>	Florence E. Lord
1913+	<i>The Story of Wango</i>	Jessie Phillips illus. Brinsley Le Fanu
1916*	<i>The Adventures of 'Chunder Loo'</i>	Ernest O'Ferrall illus. Lionel Lindsay
1918	<i>Snugglepot and Cuddlepie: Their Adventures Wonderful</i>	May Gibbs
1918	<i>The Guinea Pig That Wanted a Tail</i>	Annie Osborn illus. Ida Rentoul Outhwaite
1918	<i>The Magic Pudding: Being the Adventures of Bunyip Bluegum and His Friends Bill Barnacle and Sam Sawnoff</i>	Norman Lindsay
1919	<i>The Billibonga Bird</i>	Harold Gaze
1919	<i>The Chewg-Um-Blewg-Um</i>	Harold Gaze
1919	<i>The Simple Jaggajay</i>	Harold Gaze
1920	<i>The Story of Tommy Bear and the Zookies</i>	Dorothy Wall
1921+	<i>Spotty, the Bower Bird and other Nature Stories: Life Histories of Australian Birds and Animals</i>	Edward S. Sorenson
1921	<i>The Crystal Bowl: Australian Nature Stories</i>	J. J. Hall illus. Dorothy Wall
1922	<i>Alice in One Dear Land</i>	George Collingridge
1923	<i>The Isle of Wirrawoo: an Australian fairy tale</i>	A.L. Purse illus. Alan Wright and Anne Anderson
1924	<i>Chucklebud and Wunkydoo</i>	May Gibbs
1925^	<i>Stories Told by "Little Miss Kookaburra" of 3 L.O., Melbourne</i>	Idie [Annie Frost]
1926	<i>Budgerie Bill: An Australian Story for Little</i>	W. J. O'Neill

	<i>Australians</i>	illus. B. E. Minns
1926	<i>Fairyland of Ida Rentoul Outhwaite</i>	Annie R. Rentoul and Grenbry Outhwaite illus. Ida Rentoul Outhwaite
1930	<i>The Australian Fairy Tale of The Three Koala Bears and Little Goldilocks</i>	Published by John Sands with photographs
1931	<i>Buzziwig</i>	Ethel Swinburne illus. Elma Kilgour
1931	<i>Man-Shy</i>	Frank Dalby Davison
1932*	<i>Bud the Monkey, and Other Tales of Soldiers' Pets</i>	Lin MacDonald illus. Angus MacDonald
1932	<i>The Tale of the Little White Fox</i>	H. S. Blake illus. Albert and Kathleen Collins
1933	<i>Blinky Bill, the Quaint Little Australian</i> (first book in the <i>Blinky Bill</i> series)	Dorothy Wall
1933	<i>Hoppity: Being the Adventures of an Albino Kangaroo</i>	Walter H. Bone
1933^	<i>Jacko - The Broadcasting Kookaburra: His Life and Adventures</i>	Brooke Nicholls illus. Dorothy Wall
1934	<i>Blinky Bill Grows Up</i>	Dorothy Wall
1934	<i>The Tale of Bridget and the Bees</i>	Dorothy Wall
1934	<i>Winks: His Book</i>	Dorothy Cottrell
1935	<i>Brownie: the Story of a Naughty Little Rabbit</i>	Dorothy Wall
1935	<i>Sixpence to Spend</i>	Ida Rentoul Outhwaite
1936^	<i>The Adventures of Joseph</i>	James Martin Pollock
1936+	<i>Wilderness Orphan: The Life and Adventures of Chut the kangaroo</i>	Dorothy Cottrell illus. Howard Simon
1937^	<i>A Dog at His Heel: the story of Jock, an Australian</i>	Charles J. Finger



	<i>Sheep Dog, and What Befell Him and His Companions on a Great Drive</i>	illus. Henry C. Pitz
1937	<i>Blinky Bill and Nutsy: Two Little Australians</i>	Dorothy Wall
1938^	<i>Round the World with Billy Bear</i>	W. Lloyd Williams and James Robert Lyall illus. Dick Ovenden
1939	<i>Jessie the Elephant: Her Life Story</i>	W. M. Fleming
1939^	<i>Little Gray Colo: The Adventures of a Koala Bear</i>	Sheila Hawkins
1940*	<i>Blinky Bill Joins the Army</i>	Dorothy Wall
c.1940	<i>Dilly: The Runaway Doll</i>	L. M. Dore
1940	<i>Hookum's Gang, or, The Story of Jimmie and His Elephant</i>	Cedric and Sylvia Weigall-Chase
1940	<i>Kooborr the Koala</i>	Ann Shead and Charles Barrett illus. Joan Kidell-Monroe
[1940-1949]^	<i>The Adventures of Sniff, Snuff and Snickles</i>	Maxine Harden
1940	<i>The Complete Adventures of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie</i>	May Gibbs
1941	<i>Ambrose Kangaroo: A Story that Never Ends</i> (first book in a series about Ambrose Kangaroo)	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1941	<i>Scotty in Gumnut Land</i>	May Gibbs
1942	<i>Australian Alphabet</i>	Hal Missingham
1942	<i>Digit Dick on the Barrier Reef</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1942*	<i>Grandpuff and Leafy</i>	Gladys Lister illus. Joyce Abbott and Gladys Lister
1942	<i>The Adventures of Marmaduke the Possum</i>	Pixie O' Harris
1943	<i>Bobby Rubbernose: A Story About a Little Koala Bear Who Lost Himself and Was Found Again</i>	Timothy Kay

		illus. Rufus Morris
1943	<i>Dinky-di and Koala</i>	Eric Porter
1943*	<i>Teddy joins the Navy</i> (part of <i>Pretty Pat and Troublesome Teddy</i> series)	Fred J. Nicoll
1943	<i>The Comical Adventures Of Oscar and Olga: A Tale of Mice in Mouseland</i>	Paul Buddee illus. C. H. Percival
1943	<i>The Contented Bears</i>	Eric Porter
1944	<i>Ambrose Kangaroo Has a Busy Day</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1944+	<i>Gecko: the Lizard Who Lost His Tail</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1944	<i>Gundy</i>	May Thomas
1944	<i>Introducing Pip and Pepita</i>	Agnes Newberry
1944	<i>The Forgetful Elephant</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1944	<i>The Happy Forest: A Story Book for Boys and Girls</i>	Henry Allen illus. M. Gilbert
1944+	<i>The Story of Shy the Platypus</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1945	<i>Kanga-Bee and Kanga-Bo</i>	Dymphna Cusack illus. Matt Slater-Wigg
1945	<i>King of the Ranges: The Saga of a Grey Kangaroo</i>	C. K. Thompson
1945	<i>The Exciting Adventures of Smookie</i>	W. H. Honey illus. L. G. Jordan
1946	<i>Billie the Beetle</i>	Fred Powis
1946+	<i>Digit Dick and the Tasmanian Devil</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1946+	<i>Dusty: The Story of a Sheep Dog</i>	Frank Dalby Davison
1946	<i>Flop the Platypus</i>	Timothy Kay illus. Rufus Morris

1946	<i>Little Duffy and His Dog</i> (first book in <i>Little Duffy Series</i> )	Kay Druce
1946	<i>Michael the Mallee Chick: in Search of a Mother</i>	Peggy Barnard
1946	<i>Quippy</i>	Olive L. Mason illus. Walter Cunningham
1946	<i>Shopping in Creepyville</i>	F. Temple illus. M. Corrigan
1946+	<i>Silvertail the Lyrebird</i>	Ina Maude Watson illus. Walter Cunningham
1946+	<i>The Story of Karrawingi the Emu</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1947	<i>Smookie &amp; Co.</i>	W. H. Honey illus. Rufus Morris
1947+	<i>The Story of Sarli the Barrier Reef Turtle</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1947	<i>The Vain Red Fox</i>	Franklin Moss illus. Elaine Haxton
1948+	<i>Bluecap and Bimbi</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1948+	<i>Cuthbert and the Dogs</i>	E. L. Spowers
1948	<i>Ponny the Penguin</i>	Veronica Basser illus. Edwina Bell
1948	<i>The Journey of the Stamp Animals</i>	Phyllis Hay
1948+	<i>The Story of Kurri Kurri the Kookaburra</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Patrick Watson
1948+	<i>The Story of Shadow the Rock Wallaby</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1949	<i>Squik the Squirrel</i>	Eve Pownall

		illus. Raymond Johnson
1949	<i>The Koala Family at Home</i>	Lydia Susanna Eliott
1949	<i>Tubby the Little Round Bear</i>	Gladys Lister
1950	<i>Kangaroo Coolaroo</i>	Lydia Susanna Eliott illus. Joyce Horne
1950	<i>Red Emperor</i>	C. K. Thompson
1952+	<i>Digit Dick in Black Swan Land</i>	Leslie Rees
1953	<i>Ajax the Warrior</i> (first in a series of Ajax books)	Mary Elwyn Patchett illus. Eric Tansley
1953	<i>Big Red</i>	Henry G. Lamond
1953+	<i>Two-thumbs: The Story of a Koala</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Margaret Senior
1954	<i>Boomer: The Life of a Kangaroo</i>	Denis Clark
1954	<i>Bush Haven Animals: an Australian Picture Story</i>	Margaret Senior
1954	<i>Mr Koala Bear</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1955	<i>Dumper the Kangaroo</i> (first of two Dumper books)	Evelyn Bartlett illus. Audrey Addison
1955+	<i>The Crooked Snake</i>	Patricia Wrightson illus. Margaret Horder
1956	<i>Wish and the Magic Nut</i>	Peggy Barnard illus. Sheila Hawkins
1957	<i>Fury, Son of the Wilds</i> (companion title to <i>Jago</i> [1966])	Hazel Mary Peel illus. Joan Kiddell-Monroe
1957+	<i>Tiger in the Bush</i>	Nan Chauncy illus. Margaret Horder
1957	<i>The Bunyip Hole</i>	Patricia Wrightson
1958+	<i>The Silver Brumby</i> (first book in the <i>Silver Brumby Series</i> )	Elyne Mitchell illus. Ralph Thomson

1960	<i>Silver Brumby's Daughter</i>	Elyne Mitchell illus. Grace Huxtable
1961	<i>Larry: the story of an Australian seagull</i>	Ina Maude Watson illus. Margaret Senior
1962+	<i>The Feather Star</i>	Patricia Wrightson illus. Noela Young
1962	<i>The Green Bunyip</i> (first in a series of Bunyip books)	Judith Whitlock illus. Leslie Green
1962	<i>The Muddle headed Wombat</i>	Ruth Park illus. Noela Young
1963	<i>Flip, the Flying Possum</i>	Noela Young
1963+	<i>Storm Boy</i>	Colin Thiele illus. John Baily
1964	<i>Ambrose Kangaroo Goes to Town</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1964	<i>Hugh's Zoo</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1964	<i>Pastures of the Blue Crane</i>	Hesba Brinsmead illus. Annette Macarthur Onslow
1964+	<i>The Story of Russ the Australian Tree Kangaroo</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Walter Cunningham
1965	<i>The Year of the Currawong</i>	Eleanor Spence illus. Gareth Floyd
1966	<i>The Golden Lamb</i>	Irene Gough illus. Joy Murray
1966	<i>The Roan Colt of Yamboorah</i> (second book in the <i>Time, Place and Action</i> series)	Reginald L. Ottley illus. David Parry
1966	<i>The Wish Cat</i>	Jean Chapman illus. Noela Young

1966+	<i>Tinka and the Bunyip</i>	Brownie Downing
1967	<i>Bottersnikes and Gumbles</i>	S.A. Wakefield illus. Desmond Digby
1967 <sup>^</sup>	<i>Midnite: The Story of a Wild Colonial Boy</i>	Randolph Stow illus. Ralph Steadman
1967	<i>Mrs Pademelon's Joey</i>	Noela Young
1968	<i>Rosie's Walk</i>	Pat Hutchins
1969+	<i>Blue Fin</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Roger Haldane
1969	<i>John the Mouse Who Learned to Read</i>	Beverley Randell illus. Noela Young
1969	<i>Kangapossam and Crocoroo</i>	David Rankine illus. Jeff Hook
1969	<i>Uhu</i>	Annette Macarthur-Onslow
1970	<i>Gloop the Bunyip</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Helen Sallis
1970+	<i>Jinki, Dingo of the Snows</i>	Elyne Mitchell illus. Michael Cole
1970+	<i>Rufus the Red Kangaroo</i> (part of the <i>Australian Golden Book</i> series)	Jill Morris illus. Rich Richardson
1971+	<i>Rusty the Nimble Numbat</i> (part of the <i>Australian Golden Book</i> series)	Jill Morris illus. Rich Richardson
1971	<i>Windmill at Magpie Creek</i>	Christobel Mattingley
1972	<i>The Monster That Ate Canberra: A Book for the Younger Generations of Canberra</i> (first appearance of the Alexander Bunyip character)	Michael Salmon illus. Peter McKee and Michael Salmon
1973	<i>Mokee, the White Possum</i>	Leslie Rees

		illus. Tony Oliver
1973	<i>The Bunyip of Berkeley's Creek</i>	Jenny Wagner illus. Ron Brooks
1973	<i>The Giant Devil-dingo</i>	Dick Roughsey
1973	<i>The Super-Roo of Mungalongaloo</i>	Osmar E. White illus. Jeff Hook
1974+	<i>Albatross Two</i>	Colin Thiele
1974	<i>Jacky the Laughing Kookaburra</i>	Diana Petersen illus. Rich Richardson
1974+	<i>Magpie Island</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Roger Haldane
1975	<i>A Dog Called George</i>	Margaret Balderson illus. Nikki Jones
1975+	<i>Brushtail, the Rock Wallaby</i>	Diana Peterson illus. Rich Richardson
1975	<i>The Rainbow Serpent</i>	Dick Roughsey
1976+	<i>Lester and Clyde</i>	James Reece
1977	<i>John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat</i>	Jenny Wagner illus. Ron Brooks
1977	<i>Torty Longneck</i>	Noela Young
1978	<i>A Dream of Seas</i>	Lilith Norman illus. Edwina Bell
1978	<i>Ambrose Kangaroo Delivers the Goods</i>	Elisabeth MacIntyre
1978	<i>Aranea: A Story About a Spider</i>	Jenny Wagner illus. Ron Brooks
1978	<i>The Giraffe in Pepperell Street</i>	Robin Klein illus. Gill Tomblin
1978	<i>The Nimbin</i>	Jenny Wagner

		illus. Inga Moore
1978	<i>The Turtle and the Island: Folk Tales from Papua New Guinea</i>	Barbara Ker Wilson illus. Frané Lessac
1980^	<i>Mr Archimedes' Bath</i>	Pamela Allen
1980+	<i>The Dingo Summer</i>	Ivy Baker
1980	<i>There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof Eating Cake</i>	Hazel Edwards illus. Deborah Niland
1980	<i>Tiddalick, the Frog who Caused a Flood</i>	Robert Roennfeldt
1981+	<i>Digit Dick and the Magic Jabiru</i>	Leslie Rees illus. Sandra Laroche
1981+	<i>Night of the Muttonbirds</i>	Mary Small illus. Robert Ingpen
1981	<i>The Unchosen Land</i>	Robert Ingpen
1982	<i>Grug Meets Snoot</i> (part of the <i>Grug</i> series)	Ted Prior
1982	<i>One Woolly Wombat</i>	Rod Trinca illus. Kerry Argent
1982	<i>Who Sank the Boat?</i>	Pamela Allen
1983	<i>Bertie and the Bear</i>	Pamela Allen
1983+	<i>Dunbi the Owl</i>	Daisy Utemorraah and Pamela Lofts illus. Pamela Lofts
1983	<i>How the Birds Got their Colours</i>	Pamela Lofts Compiler; based on a story told by Mary Albert of the Bardi People illus. Pamela Lofts
1983+	<i>Pinquo</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Mary Milton



1983	<i>Possum Magic</i>	Mem Fox illus. Julie Vivas
1983	<i>Simon's Secret</i>	Judith Worthy illus. Lorraine Hannay
1984	<i>Arthur</i> (first in the <i>Arthur Series</i> )	Amanda Graham illus. Donna Gynell
1984	<i>If Wishes Were Horses</i>	Bernadette Kelly
1984	<i>Wombat Stew</i>	Marcia K. Vaughan illus. Pamela Lofts
1985	<i>Arkwright</i>	Mary Steele
1985	<i>Chai, the Kangaroo</i>	Pamela Blashki illus. Clifton Pugh
1985+	<i>Grandfather's Tiger</i>	Mary Small
1985+	<i>Seashores and Shadows</i>	Colin Thiele
1985+	<i>Sebastian Lives in a Hat</i>	Thelma Catterwell illus. Kerry Argent
1985	<i>Selby's Secret</i> (first in the <i>Selby Series</i> )	Duncan Ball illus. Allan Stomann
1985+	<i>The Boy and the Whale</i>	Katherine Scholes illus. David Wong
1986	<i>Animalia</i>	Graeme Base
1986	<i>Creatures in the Beard</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Margaret Power
1986	<i>Crunch the Crocodile</i>	Josephine Croser illus. Carol McLean-Carr
1986+	<i>Farmer Schulz's Ducks</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Mary Milton
1986	<i>Felix and Alexander</i>	Terry Denton

1986	<i>Hattie and the Fox</i>	Mem Fox illus. Patricia Mullins
1986	<i>Pigs might Fly</i>	Emily Rodda illus. Noela Young
1986^	<i>Sail Away: The Ballad of Skip and Nell</i>	Mem Fox illus. Pamela Lofts
1986	<i>Stickybeak</i>	Hazel Edwards illus. Rosemary Wilson
1986	<i>Taronga</i>	Victor Kelleher
1986+	<i>The Great Tasmanian Tiger Hunt</i>	Michael Salmon
1986+	<i>The Lizard of Oz</i>	Mary Small illus. Julia McLeish
1987	<i>A Rabbit Named Harris</i>	Nan Hunt illus. Bettina Ogden
1987	<i>Koala Lou</i>	Mem Fox illus. Pamela Lofts
1987	<i>Kojuro and the Bears</i>	Helen Smith, Translator of original story by Kenji Miyazawa illus. Junko Morimoto
1987	<i>Moon-Dark</i>	Patricia Wrightson illus. Noela Young
1987	<i>Pheasant and Kingfisher</i>	Catherine Berndt illus. Arone Raymond Meeks
1887+	<i>Stranded!</i>	Ann Coleridge illus. Eric David
1987	<i>The 89<sup>th</sup> Kitten</i>	Eleanor Nilsson illus. Linda Arnold

1987	<i>The Monday Sheepdog</i>	Ivy Baker
1988 <sup>^</sup>	<i>Cat Crusoe</i>	Mary Small illus. Edward Crosby
1988	<i>Clackymucky and the Bulldog</i>	Josephine Croser illus. Carol McLean-Carr
1988	<i>Edward the Emu</i>	Sheena Knowles illus. Rod Clement
1988	<i>Hello Barney!</i>	Mary K. Pershall illus. Mark Wilson
1988	<i>The Eleventh Hour: A Curious Mystery</i>	Graeme Base
1988	<i>Who Killed Cockatoo?</i> (see also 1862)	W. A. Cawthorne illus. Rodney McRae
1989	<i>Broome Dog</i>	Mary Small illus. Arthur Boothroyd
1989	<i>The Paw Thing</i> (first title in <i>Singenpoo Series</i> )	Paul Jennings illus. Keith McEwan
1989	<i>Thunderwith</i>	Libby Hathorn
1990	<i>Hector and Maggie</i>	Janet McLean illus. Andrew McLean
1990	<i>My Cat Maisie</i>	Pamela Allen
1990	<i>Roughtail: The Dreaming of the Roughtail Lizard and Other Stories Told by the Kukatja</i>	Gracie Greene and Joe Tramacchi and Lucille Gill illus. Lucille Gill
1990	<i>Scallywag</i>	Jeanette Rowe
1990	<i>The Black Duck</i>	Eleanor Nilsson illus. Rae Dale
1990	<i>The Follow Dog</i>	Sally Odgers illus. Noela Young

1991	<i>Big Dog</i>	Libby Gleeson illus. Armin Greder
1991	<i>Dog In, Cat Out</i>	Gillian Rubenstein illus. Ann James
1991	<i>Oh Kipper!</i>	Janet McLean illus. Andrew McLean
1991	<i>The Roo That Won the Melbourne Cup</i>	Jackie French Illus. Carol McLean-Carr
1991	<i>The Wolf</i>	Margaret Barbalet illus. Jane Tanner
1992	<i>Belinda</i>	Pamela Allen
1992+	<i>Dabu, the Baby Dugong</i>	Selena Solomon illus. Dennis Nona
1992	<i>Looking for Crabs</i>	Bruce Whatley
1992	<i>The Sign of the Seahorse: A Tale of Greed and High Adventure in Two Acts</i>	Graeme Base
1992	<i>The Web</i>	Nette Hilton illus. Kerry Millard
1993	<i>Alexander's Outing</i>	Pamela Allen
1993	<i>Dog Tales</i>	Janet McLean illus. Andrew McLean
1993	<i>Enzo the Wonderfish</i>	Cathy Wilcox
1993	<i>Going Home</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Wayne Harris
1993+	<i>Seal Pup</i> (part of the <i>RSPCA Storybook Series</i> )	Jutta Goetze illus. Marg Towt
1993+	<i>Silver Brumby, Silver Dingo</i>	Elyne Mitchell
1993	<i>Tangles</i>	Errol Broome

		illus. Ann James
1993	<i>The Best Beak in Boonaroo Bay</i>	Narelle Oliver
1993	<i>The Old Man Who Loved to Sing</i>	John Winch
1993	<i>Toby</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Noela Young
1993+	<i>V for Vanishing: An Alphabet of Endangered Animals</i>	Patricia Mullins
1994	<i>Ark in the Park</i>	Wendy Orr illus. Kerry Millard
1994	<i>Brat Cat</i>	Elizabeth Hutchins illus. Margaret Power
1994	<i>Foxspell</i>	Gillian Rubinstein
1994	<i>Me and Mary Kangaroo</i>	Kevin Gilbert
1994	<i>Old Tom</i> (first of several books featuring Old Tom)	Leigh Hobbs
1994	<i>Snap!</i>	Marcia Kay Vaughan illus. Sascha Hutchinson
1994	<i>Switch Cat</i>	Garry Disher illus. Andrew McLean
1994+	<i>The Deliverance of Dancing Bears</i>	Elizabeth Stanley
1994+	<i>The Fisherman and the Theefyspray</i>	Paul Jennings illus. Jane Tanner
1994	<i>The White Guinea-pig</i>	Ursula Dubosarsky
1994	<i>Way Home</i>	Libby Hathorn illus. Gregory Rogers
1994+	<i>Where the Whales Sing</i>	Victor Kelleher illus. Vivienne Goodman
1995+	<i>Bollygum</i>	Garry Fleming
1995+	<i>Brahminy: the story of a boy and a sea eagle</i>	Colin Thiele

		illus. Robert Ingpen
1995+	<i>Dolphin Song</i>	Dianne Wolfer
1995	<i>Graffiti Dog</i>	Eleanor Nilsson
1995	<i>Mongrel</i>	David Rish
1995	<i>Old Pig</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ron Brooks
1995	<i>The Drover's Dog</i>	David Cox
1995+	<i>The Hunt</i>	Narelle Oliver
1995	<i>Walpajirri: the legend of the Easter bilby</i>	Margaret Skeel illus. Jennie Dunstan
1995	<i>Wombat Divine</i>	Mem Fox illus. Kerry Argent
1995+	<i>Yakkinn the Swamp Tortoise: The Most Dangerous Year</i>	Gerald Kuchling and Guundie Kuchling illus. Guundie Kuchling
1996	<i>Big Cat Dreaming</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Anne Spudvilas
1996	<i>Caleb</i>	Gary Crew illus. Steven Woolman
1996	<i>Don't Pat the Wombat</i>	Elizabeth Honey
1996	<i>Edwina the Emu</i>	Sheena Knowles illus. Rod Clement
1996	<i>Infamous</i>	Justin D'Ath
1996	<i>The Bilby in a Trilby</i>	Leonard Lizard illus. Ruby Mabel Durack
1996	<i>The Stray Cat</i>	Steven Paulsen illus. Shaun Tan
1996	<i>Waddle, Giggle, Gargle</i>	Pamela Allen

1997+	<i>Blueback</i>	Tim Winton
1997	<i>Desert Dog</i>	Pat Lowe illus. Jimmy Pike
1997	<i>Josh</i> (part of the <i>Josh Series</i> )	Janet McLean illus. Andrew McLean
1997	<i>Just a little Brown Dog</i>	Sally Morgan illus. Bronwyn Bancroft
1997	<i>Queenie the Bantam</i>	Bob Graham
1997	<i>Spud</i> (book one of the <i>Spud series</i> )	John Heffernan
1997	<i>The Great Escape from City Zoo</i>	Tohby Riddle
1997	<i>The Quicksand Pony</i> (companion title to <i>The Snow Pony</i> [2001])	Alison Lester
1997+	<i>The Wombat who Talked to the Stars: The Journal of a Northern Hairy-nosed Wombat</i>	Jill Morris illus. Sharon Dye
1998	<i>Magnus Maybe</i>	Errol Broome illus. Ann James
1998	<i>My Girragundji</i> (first book in <i>Girragundji Trilogy</i> )	Meme McDonald and Boori Pryor illus. Meme McDonald
1998	<i>Rosie and Tortoise</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ron Brooks
1998	<i>The Bilby and the Bunyip: an Easter Tale</i>	Irena Sibley
1998^	<i>The Rabbits</i>	John Marsden illus. Shaun Tan
1998*	<i>The Staircase Cat</i>	Colin Thompson illus. Anna Pignataro
1998	<i>Tien's Mouse</i>	Lois Krok

		illus. Stanley Wong
1999	<i>Miss Lily's Fabulous Pink Feather Boa</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Kerry Argent
1999	<i>Nim's Island</i>	Wendy Orr illus. Kerry Millard
1999+	<i>Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf</i>	Sonya Hartnett
1999	<i>The Great Bear</i>	Libby Gleeson illus. Armin Greder
1999	<i>The Thousandth Brumby</i> (12 <sup>th</sup> title in the <i>Silver Brumby Series</i> )	Elyne Mitchell
1999	<i>Toad Rage</i> (first title in the <i>Limpy Series</i> )	Morris Gleitzman
2000	<i>Bilby Moon</i>	Margaret Spurling illus. Danny Snell
2000	<i>Dolphins Dance</i>	Jutta Goetze
2000	<i>Fox</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ron Brooks
2000*	<i>My Dog</i>	John Heffernan illus. Andrew McLean
2000	<i>No-Name Bird</i>	Josef Gert Vondra
2000+	<i>Pannikin and Pinta</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Peter Gouldthorpe
2000	<i>The Pocket Dogs</i> (first in several <i>Pocket Dog</i> stories)	Margaret Wild illus. Stephen Michael King
2001+	<i>Baby Bilby, Where do you Sleep?</i>	Narelle Oliver
2001	<i>Chips</i>	John Heffernan
2001+	<i>Forest</i>	Sonya Hartnett



2001	<i>Let's Get a Pup!</i>	Bob Graham
2001	<i>Little White Dogs can't Jump</i>	Rosie Smith illus. Bruce Whatley
2001*	<i>Simpson and Duffy</i>	Mary Small illus. Ester Kasepuu
2001+	<i>The Waterhole</i>	Graeme Base
2001+	<i>Turtle's Song</i>	Alan Brown illus. Kim Michelle Loft
2002	<i>Bear and Chook</i>	Lisa Shanahan illus. Emma Quay
2002	<i>Diary of a Wombat</i> (first of several picture books about Mothball the wombat)	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2002*	<i>In Flanders Fields</i>	Norman Jorgensen illus. Brian Harrison-Lever
2002	<i>Olga the Brolga</i>	Rod Clement
2002	<i>Sister Chick Flies the Way of the Birds</i>	Meme McDonald illus. Shane Nagle
2002+	<i>The Dugong Meadow</i>	Naomi Mairou
2003	<i>Cat and Fish</i>	Joan Grant illus. Neil Curtis
2003	<i>Hooray for Chester</i>	Rina A. Foti illus. Ellen Hickman
2003+	<i>I Saw Nothing: The Extinction of the Thylacine</i>	Gary Crew illus. Mark Wilson
2003	<i>Little Humpty</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ann James

2003	<i>Maui and the Big Fish</i>	Barbara Ker Wilson illus. Frané Lessac
2003	<i>Milli, Jack and the Dancing Cat</i>	Stephen Michael King
2003+	<i>Refugees</i>	David Miller
2003	<i>Reggie: Queen of the Street</i>	Margaret Barbalet illus. Andrew McLean
2003	<i>Shutting the Chooks In</i>	Libby Gleeson illus. Ann James
2003	<i>The Tiger Project</i>	Susanna van Essen
2003	<i>Too Many Pears</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2003	<i>Truck Dogs: A novel in four bites</i>	Graeme Base
2004+	<i>A Home for Bilby</i>	Joanne Crawford illus. Grace Fielding
2004	<i>A Horse Called Elvis</i>	John Heffernan
2004^	<i>Catastrophe Cat</i>	Mary Small
2004+	<i>Eyes in the Night</i>	Jan Ramage illus. Lauren Peterson
2004	<i>Fiona the Pig</i>	Leigh Hobbs
2004	<i>Mr Noah and the Cats</i>	Vashti Farrer illus. Neil Curtis
2004	<i>Pete the Sheep</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2004	<i>Tales from the Waterhole</i>	Bob Graham
2004*	<i>The Silver Donkey</i>	Sonya Hartnett illus. Anne Spudvilas
2004	<i>Where is the Green Sheep</i>	Mem Fox illus. Judy Horacek

2005	<i>Annie's Chair</i>	Deborah Niland
2005	<i>Dog Den Mystery</i> (book one of the <i>Jack Russell, Dog Detective Series</i> )	Darrel Odgers and Sally Odgers
2005	<i>Hunwick's Egg</i>	Mem Fox illus. Pamela Lofts
2005	<i>Kisses for Daddy</i>	Frances Watts illus. David Legge
2005+	<i>Little Fur: The Legend of Little Fur</i> (part of the <i>Little Fur</i> series)	Isobelle Carmody
2005	<i>Rex</i>	Ursula Dubosarsky illus. David MacKintosh
2005^	<i>Run, Hare, Run!: The Story of a Drawing</i>	John Winch
2005^	<i>The Day of the Elephant</i>	Barbara Ker Wilson illus. Frané Lessac
2005^	<i>The Mostly True Story of Matthew and Trim</i>	Cassandra Golds illus. Stephen Axelsen
2005	<i>The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley</i>	Colin Thompson illus. Amy Lissiat
2005	<i>Where's Stripey?</i> (first in a series of books about Stripey)	Wendy Binks
2005	<i>Woolvs in the Sitee</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Anne Spudvilas
2006	<i>Blossom Possum</i>	Gina Newton illus. Kilmeny Niland
2006	<i>Bobby Dazzler</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Janine Dawson
2006	<i>Harriet</i>	Anthony Hill illus. Coral Tulloch

2006	<i>Josephine wants to Dance</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2006	<i>Melly and the Bilby</i>	Stephen Hagan illus. Susan-Zela Bissett
2006^	<i>Queenie: One Elephant's Story</i>	Corinne Fenton illus. Peter Gouldthorpe
2006	<i>Samsara Dog</i>	Helen Manos illus. Julie Vivas
2006^	<i>The Goat Who Sailed the World</i>	Jackie French
2006	<i>The Smallest Bilby and the Midnight Star</i>	Nette Hilton illus. Bruce Whatley
2006	<i>Wombat and Fox: Tales of the City</i>	Terry Denton
2007	<i>Bilby and the Bushfire</i>	Joanne Crawford illus. Grace Fielding
2007	<i>Cat</i>	Mike Bumbleton illus. Craig Smith
2007	<i>Crow and the Waterhole</i>	Ambelin Kwaymullina
2007	<i>Katie and Cleo Move In</i>	Catherine Jinks illus. Andrew McLean
2007	<i>Kenny's Big Adventure</i>	Philip Garside
2007*	<i>Lofty's Mission</i>	Krista Bell illus. David Miller
2007	<i>Lucy Goosey</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Anne James
2007^	<i>Malu Kangaroo: How the First Children Learnt to Surf</i>	Judith Morecroft illus. Bronwyn Bancroft
2007+	<i>Miss Bilby</i>	Colin Thiele illus. Mavis Stucci

2007+	<i>Nautilus: Pearl of the Deep</i>	Jill Morris illus. Lynne Muir
2007*	<i>Only a Donkey</i>	Celeste Walters illus. Patricia Mullins
2007^	<i>Requiem for a Beast</i>	Matt Ottley
2007	<i>Shhh! Little Mouse</i>	Pamela Allen
2007	<i>The Trouble with Dogs!</i>	Bob Graham
2007+	<i>Tyger! Tyger!</i>	Elizabeth Stanley
2008	<i>Captain Congo and the Crocodile King</i>	Ruth Starke illus. Greg Holfeld
2008+	<i>Cat on the Island</i>	Gary Crew illus. Gillian Warden
2008	<i>Emily and the Big, Bad Bunyip</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2008	<i>How to Heal a Broken Wing</i>	Bob Graham
2008	<i>Loongie the Greedy Crocodile</i>	Lucy Dann and Kiefer Dann illus. Bronwyn Houston
2008	<i>Puffling</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Julie Vivas
2008*	<i>Simpson and His Donkey</i>	Mark Greenwood illus. Frané Lessac
2008	<i>Tales from Outer Suburbia</i>	Shaun Tan
2008^	<i>The Camel Who Crossed Australia</i>	Jackie French
2008^	<i>The Dog on the Tuckerbox</i>	Corinne Fenton illus. Peter Goudthorpe
2008	<i>The Smallest Bilby and the Easter Games</i>	Nette Hilton illus. Bruce Whatley

2008	<i>The Two-Hearted Numbat</i>	Ambelin Kwaymullina illus. Ezekiel Kwaymullina
2008	<i>The Very Cranky Bear</i> (first book in the <i>Very Cranky Bear</i> series)	Nick Bland
2008+	<i>Tuart Dwellers</i>	Jan Ramage illus. Ellen Hickman
2009	<i>Bear and Chook by the Sea</i>	Lisa Shanahan illus. Emma Quay
2009	<i>Chester and Gil</i>	Carol Faulkner illus. Ann James
2009	<i>Fearless</i>	Colin Thompson illus. Sarah Davis
2009	<i>Fox and Fine Feathers</i>	Narelle Oliver
2009	<i>Harry &amp; Hopper</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Freya Blackwood
2009+	<i>Journey of the Sea Turtle</i>	Mark Wilson
2009	<i>Kip</i>	Christina Booth
2009	<i>Mr Chicken goes to Paris</i>	Leigh Hobbs
2009	<i>Our Daft Dog Danny</i>	Pamela Allen
2009*	<i>Running with the Horses</i>	Alison Lester
2009*	<i>The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded: The Famous Story of Simpson and His Donkey – A True Anzac Legend</i>	Jackie French
2009	<i>The Terrible Plop</i>	Ursula Dubosarsky illus. Andrew Joyner
2009	<i>Wendy</i>	Gus Gordon
2010+	<i>Baby Bilby and the Wildcat</i>	Lyndall Stavrou illus. Jann Forge

2010	<i>Cowzat</i>	Bruce Atherton illus. Ben Redlich
2010	<i>Duck for a Day</i>	Meg McKinlay illus. Leila Rudge
2010	<i>Feathers for Phoebe</i>	Rod Clement
2010	<i>Hetty's Day Out</i>	Pamela Allen
2010	<i>Just a Dog</i>	Michael Gerard Bauer
2010	<i>Leo the Littlest Seahorse</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Terry Denton
2010	<i>Maudie and Bear</i> (first in the <i>Maudie and Bear</i> series)	Jan Ormerod illus. Freya Blackwood
2010	<i>Mr Badger and the Big Surprise</i> (part of the <i>Mr Badger</i> series)	Leigh Hobbs
2010	<i>My Uncle's Donkey</i>	Tohby Riddle
2010	<i>Noni the Pony</i> (first in the <i>Noni the Pony</i> series)	Alison Lester
2010+	<i>Plato the Platypus (part-time)</i>	Hazel Edwards illus. John Petropoulos
2010	<i>Rufus the Numbat</i>	David Miller
2010	<i>Snug as a Hug</i>	Marcia Kay Vaughan illus. Pamela Lofts
2010+	<i>Stranded</i>	Jan Ramage illus. Mark Wilson
2010	<i>The Cocky Who Cried Dingo</i>	Yvonne Morrison illus. Heath McKenzie
2010^	<i>The Horse Who Bit a Bushranger</i>	Jackie French
2010*	<i>The Midnight Zoo</i>	Sonya Hartnett
2011	<i>Bilby Secrets</i>	Edel Wignall

		illus. Mark Jackson
2011	<i>Come Down, Cat!</i>	Sonya Hartnett illus. Lucia Masciullo
2011	<i>Crow Country</i>	Kate Constable
2011+	<i>Flood</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2011	<i>Mamang</i>	Kim Scott, Iris Woods illus. Jeffrey Farmer, Helen Nelly, Roma Winmar
2011	<i>Mozzie and Midgie</i>	Doug MacLeod illus. Sandy Okalyi
2011	<i>Nervous Nina</i> (part of the <i>Little Mates</i> series)	Susannah McFarlane illus. Lachlan Creagh
2011*	<i>Simpson's Donkey: A Wartime Journey to Gallipoli and Beyond</i>	Peter Stanley illus. Michelle Dawson
2011+	<i>The Dream of the Thylacine</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ron Brooks
2011	<i>Thyla</i>	Kate Gordon
2011	<i>Town Possum, Outback Possum</i>	Yvonne Morrison illus. Heath McKenzie
2011	<i>Warambi</i>	Aleesah Darlison illus. Andrew Plant
2012	<i>Baby Bilby's Question</i>	Sally Morgan illus. Adele Jaunn
2012*	<i>Caesar the War Dog</i> (first book in a series about Caesar)	Stephen Dando-Collins
2012^	<i>Dingo: The Dog Who Conquered a Continent</i>	Jackie French



2012	<i>Herman and Rosie</i>	Gus Gordon
2012	<i>In the Lion</i>	James Foley
2012	<i>Into That Forest</i>	Louis Nowra
2012	<i>Fog a Dox</i>	Bruce Pascoe
2012^	<i>Lightning Jack</i>	Glenda Millard illus. Patricia Mullins
2012	<i>Little Elephants</i>	Graeme Base
2012+	<i>Lyrebird! A True Story</i>	Jackie Kerin illus. Peter Gouldthorpe
2012	<i>Pooka</i>	Carol Chataway illus. Nina Rycroft
2012+	<i>Python</i>	Chris Cheng illus. Mark Jackson
2012	<i>Sam the Cat: A True Story</i>	Sam Bowring illus. Andrew McLean
2012	<i>The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf</i> (first book in the <i>Tribe</i> series)	Ambelin Kwaymullina
2012^	<i>The Girl from Snowy River</i>	Jackie French
2012*	<i>The Horses Didn't Come Home</i>	Pamela Rushby
2012	<i>The Smallest Bilby and the Easter Tale</i>	Nette Hilton illus. Bruce Whatley
2012	<i>Too Many Elephants in this House</i>	Ursula Dubosarsky illus. Andrew Joyner
2013*	<i>An Anzac Tale</i>	Ruth Starke illus. Greg Holfield
2013	<i>Banjo and Ruby Red</i>	Libby Gleeson illus. Freya Blackwood
2013+	<i>Big Red Kangaroo</i>	Claire Saxby

		illus. Graham Byrne
2013+	<i>Fire</i>	Jackie French illus. Bruce Whatley
2013+	<i>Jeremy</i>	Chris Faille illus. Danny Snell
2013*	<i>Light Horse Boy</i>	Dianne Wolfer illus. Brian Simmonds
2013^	<i>Mr Darcy the Dancing Duck</i>	Alex Field illus. Peter Carnavas
2013	<i>Operation Blue Dragon</i>	Stephen Dando-Collins
2013	<i>Seadog</i>	Claire Saxby illus. Tom Jellett
2013	<i>Song for a Scarlet Runner</i>	Julie Hunt
2013^	<i>Stay: The Last Dog in Antarctica</i>	Jesse Blackadder
2013	<i>The Three Wallabies Gruff</i>	Yvonne Morrison illus. Heath McKenzie
2013	<i>The Tiger Project</i>	Susannah Van Essen
2013	<i>The Swap</i>	Jan Ormerod illus. Andrew Joyner
2013+	<i>Welcome Home</i>	Christina Booth
2014	<i>Emu</i>	Claire Saxby illus. Graham Byrne
2014	<i>Little Dog and the Christmas Wish</i>	Corinne Fenton illus. Robin Cowcher
2014*	<i>Loyal Creatures</i>	Morris Gleitzman
2014*	<i>Midnight: the Story of a Light Horse</i>	Mark Greenwood illus. Frané Lessac
2014	<i>My Dad is a Bear</i>	Nicola Connelly

		illus. Annie White
2014*	<i>Naveed</i>	John Heffernan
2014	<i>Ninu Easter Bilby</i>	Lyndall Stavrou illus. Jann Forge
2014	<i>Pig the Pug</i> (first in the <i>Pig the Pug</i> series)	Aaron Blabey
2014	<i>Snail and Turtle are Friends</i>	Stephen Michael King
2014+	<i>Spud and Charli</i>	Samantha Wheeler
2014*	<i>The Afghanistan Pup</i>	Mark Wilson
2014	<i>The Croc and the Platypus</i>	Jackie Hosking illus. Marjorie Crosby-Fairall
2014	<i>The Duck and the Darklings</i>	Glenda Millard illus. Stephen Michael King
2014^	<i>The Last King of Angkor Wat</i>	Graeme Base
2014^	<i>The Ratcatcher's Daughter</i>	Pamela Rushby
2014	<i>The Skunk with No Funk</i>	Rebecca Young illus. Leila Rudge
2014^	<i>The Stone Lion</i>	Margaret Wild illus. Ritva Voutila
2014	<i>Tim and Ed</i>	Ursula Dubosarsky illus. Andrew Joyner
2014	<i>Top Dog</i>	Rod Clement
2015	<i>Adelaide's Secret World</i>	Elise Hurst
2015^	<i>Bob the Railway Dog</i>	Corinne Fenton illus. Andrew McLean

2015*	<i>Digger: the Dog Who Went to War</i>	Mark Wilson
2015^	<i>Horace the Baker's Horse</i>	Jackie French illus. Peter Bray
2015	<i>Hush, Little Possum: An Australian Lullaby</i>	P. Crumble illus. Wendy Binks
2015+	<i>Migaloo: The White Whale</i>	Mark Wilson
2015	<i>My Dead Bunny</i>	Sigi Cohen illus. James Foley
2015*	<i>One Step at a Time</i>	Sally Heinrich illus. Jane Jolly
2015	<i>Piranhas Don't eat Pyjamas</i>	Aaron Blabey
2015+	<i>Platypus</i>	Sue Whiting illus. Mark Jackson
2015*	<i>Prince of Afghanistan</i>	Louis Nowra
2015	<i>Seagull</i>	Danny Snell
2015	<i>The Bad Guys – Episode 1</i>	Aaron Blabey
2015*	<i>The Horse Soldier</i>	Mark Wilson
2015	<i>Thelma the Unicorn</i>	Aaron Blabey

## Appendix 2:

### Notes to accompany *The Dog With Seven Names*

#### 1. WW2 and Story Timeline

##### 1939

- Sep 1 Germany invades Poland
- 3 Britain and France declare war on Germany (as does Australia).
  
- Nov 7 Dog is born on a north-west cattle station
  
- Dec 25 Dog is given to 11 year old Elsie

##### 1940

- Nov 6 Old Rowley wins Melbourne Cup  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UWB79Up7PA>>

##### 1941

- Oct 7 John Joseph Curtin is sworn in as Australia's 14<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister
  
- Nov 19 HMAS Sydney sinks off the WA coast (645 men lost)
  
- Dec 7 Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbour

##### 1942

- Feb 15 Fall of Singapore  
Elsie's family evacuates. Dog is given to Dave
- 19 Japanese air raids on Darwin  
<<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs195.aspx>>  
Dave dies. Dog is given to Doc
  
- Mar 3 Japanese Air raids on Wyndham and Broome  
(Jim Woods departs just before Wyndham, lands just after Broome)
- 16 RAAF commandeers the AIM/RFDS Fox Moth
- 20 Broome 2<sup>nd</sup> attack  
Dutch Dakota shot down at Carnot Bay (with a fortune in diamonds)
- 25 Port Hedland cyclone
- 31 AIM/RFDS repossess their Fox Moth after writing to Prime Minister

April 13	Fox Moth crashes on take-off, replaced by BA Swallow
	Construction begins at Corunna Downs
May 5-8	Battle of the Coral Sea
31	Japanese midget submarines raid Sydney Harbour
June	Darwin is bombed again
3-6	Battle of Midway; the first decisive defeat of Japan
July	AIM/RFDS hospital service has shifted inland to Marble Bar
1	Sinking of <i>Montevideo Maru</i> ; Australia's worst maritime disaster
27	Formation of Australian Women's Land Army
30	Port Hedland strafed (1 casualty), orders to evacuate the town
Aug 17	Port Hedland bombed again, no casualties
Sep	167 WAAAF girls working at Geraldton
	Dr Dicks moves aircraft to Marble Bar
Oct	The 'Brisbane Line' is mentioned during election campaign
Nov 21	380 <sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Air Force, US Army Air Corp is established
<b>1943</b>	
May 23	Seven B-24 USAAF Liberators fly into Corunna Downs secret airfield
26	Seven US Liberators leave for their 1 <sup>st</sup> air raid (Surabaya); all return the next morning

## 2. Notes and References

### Part One: Elsie

**September 3, 1939** – Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany.

**November 7<sup>th</sup> 1939** – Rivette wins The Melbourne Cup; the first mare to do so, at 100:1 odds. Her owner and trainer, Harry Bamber was a WW1 Light horseman.

**10 July – 31 October 1940** – officially recognised dates of The Battle of Britain.

**October 7<sup>th</sup> 1941** – Prime Minister Curtin is sworn in as Australia's fourteenth Prime Minister.

**November 19<sup>th</sup> 1941** – HMAS *Sydney* is sunk off the Western Australian coast by the German *Kormoran* with all hands (645 men) lost.

**December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941** – Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbour.

**February 15<sup>th</sup> 1942** – the Fall of Singapore.

Prime Minister Curtin:

*Every Australian has a duty. I call you to your duty. With the fall of Singapore the battle for Australia has opened. There must not be a man or woman in this Commonwealth going to bed tonight without having related his or her working time to purposes of helping defend Australia. Playtime must be put aside, hours given to sport and leisure must be given to war.*<sup>227</sup>

**February 19<sup>th</sup> 1942** – Japanese air raid of Darwin.

Darwin resident:

*...the shock was the extent of the raid, the number of machines employed on such a little place as Darwin. The Japs, they came over there and they started bombing the moment they arrived. There was practically no warning. When I say no warning," the voice continued, "they came in from a direction that, well we really, none of us expected them to come from...*

*Of course the siren went and I like everyone else thought, oh well, right I'll take shelter...*

*In a matter of, I'd say less than a minute, I heard the bombs crashing... As each bomb falls, and they're big bombs I can assure you, there's a sort of a nasty tremor in the earth. What really the worst part of it's when the bombing is on, it isn't so much as where the last bomb is dropped. You don't think much about that. What you're thinking about is where the next one is going to come....*<sup>228</sup>

Part Two: Dave

**MV *Koolama*** – an Australian merchant vessel used to transport passengers and general freight along WA coastal routes. She sank as a result of attacks by Japanese aircraft in February–March 1942.

**Doctor Allan Vickers** – with Royal Flying Doctor Service founder **Reverend John Flynn**, established a network of flying doctor bases across the country (previously known as the Australian Inland Mission [AIM]) and the foundation of the Flying Doctor Service as a national organisation. Before World War Two, Dr Vickers was in charge of the

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227 *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, Tuesday 17 February 1942, p.1.

228 <[http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/47182378?searchTerm="every Australian has a duty](http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/47182378?searchTerm=)>

hospitals at Port Hedland as well as Marble Bar. He became Lieutenant-Colonel Vickers, commanding officer (1939-43) of the 110th Australian General Hospital, Perth.

**Doc** – whilst the actions and character traits of the doctor in my story are fictitious, 'Doc' is loosely based on Dr Harold Dicks, the resident doctor stationed at Port Hedland during the war years with his wife and baby. Dr Dicks did tend wounded patients after the Broome attack and he was returning from Marble Bar with a patient when Japanese aircraft strafed the Port Hedland airstrip. There was (to my knowledge), no dog on board the small single engine Swallow, and beyond these links to historical occurrences, Doc's character has been imagined.

**Everett Bardwell** – was appointed Bookkeeper and assistant radio operator in Port Hedland, later obtaining his Commercial Operators License and taking over the base at Port Hedland, when previous Radio Operator, Fred Hull enlisted in the R.A.A.F.

**Japanese pearl luggers** – before the Japanese residents of Broome were interned and sent to POW camps, there were rumours that Japanese divers working on pearl luggers had been supplying maps and information to the enemy (Japan).

**Japanese battle cruiser *Ibuki*** – one of four battleship escorts of the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Imperial Force (AIF) convoy of troopships which departed from Albany on November 1<sup>st</sup> 1914. Before arriving into King George Sound, the *Ibuki* had escorted ten New Zealand ships to Albany. She then sailed ahead to safeguard two troopships of Western Australians, which joined the convoy off Fremantle. The ships then proceeded to the Suez Canal.

### Part Three: Beth

**Evacuations from north-west towns** – after The Fall of Singapore, as Japanese air raids targeted north-western Australia towns, residents of the Pilbara and Kimberley began evacuating south.

**Army presence in Port Hedland** – during the war years, a Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) was established in Port Hedland as well as a RAAF presence.

**WW2 evacuees from Dutch East Indies** – after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, the Dutch colonial government mobilized their East Indies forces, but their army was greatly outnumbered. Before surrendering on 9 March 1942, women and children were evacuated, many passed through Broome and Port Hedland.

**Swallow/Dragon/Lodestar** – aircraft seen above Port Hedland in 1942. The following links show examples of each:

Swallow

<<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=images+of+Swallo+airplane&qpv=images+of+Swallo+airplane&qpv=images+of+Swallo+airplane&FORM=IGRE>>,



Dragon

<[Lodestar](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=images%20of%20de%20Havilland%20Dragon%20&q=n&form=QBIR&pq=images%20of%20de%20havilland%20dragon%20&sc=0-0&sp=-1&sk=></a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

<[\*\*Jimmy Woods\*\* – a well-known aviator born in 1893. In 1942 he was responsible for daring air lifts and rescue operations.](http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=images%20of%20Lodestar%20airplane&q=n&form=QBIR&pq=images%20of%20lodestar%20airplane&sc=0-0&sp=-1&sk=></a>.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

**Australian Militia** – the Australian Citizen Military Force (CMF) was also known as the militia. They acted as a part-time home defence army until the start of the war with Japan in December 1941.

### **Air raid Precautions**

*One effect of the fall of Singapore has been a very marked acceleration of air raid precautions work in and around Perth. With local government authorities now co-operating freely there is beginning to be some evidence of an awakening consciousness that what has happened in Darwin may very well and very soon happen in Perth.*

*Three blackouts have been held since the middle of January and these unquestionably have done much to bring home to the public the necessity for taking these precautions seriously... A correspondent elsewhere in this issue urges the authorities to give Perth some practice in daylight air raid exercises, and since most of the destructive Japanese raids so far in this war have been daylight raids the advice is sound and opportune and no time should be lost in giving effect to it. An orderly populace which knows where to go and what to do in an emergency will fare better in the event of an attack than a disorganised, frightened rabble.<sup>229</sup>*

**Flatback Turtle Hatchlings** race for the ocean at Cemetery Beach in Port Hedland between December and March. This beach is approximately three kilometres from the site of the old hospital. <<http://www.careforhedland.org.au/programs/turtle-monitoring.aspx>>

### Part Four: Hendrik

**Wyndham & Broome** – both suffered air attack on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1942. By chance, pilot, Jimmy Woods departed Wyndham moments before the first attack and was able to land just after the Japanese Zeroes left Broome.

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229 *The West Australian*, Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> February 1942, p.4.

**Mass Evacuation** – occurred after the Broome raid. Wounded Dutch evacuees were air-lifted to Port Hedland in two planes. Locals fled inland on trucks; some heading to Beagle Bay, others heading south. Impassable roads meant many fleeing residents returned to Broome.

**Broome Massacre** – Due to the cramped and urgent nature of evacuation from Dutch East Indies, the exact number of fatalities and those injured in the Broome Massacre is not known. Casualty estimates vary between 88 and over 100. Victims included many women and children. Hendrik is a fictitious character.

<u>Dutch</u>	<u>English translation</u>
<i>Engel</i>	Angel
<i>Niet gaan.</i>	Do not go.
<i>Moeder</i>	Mother
<i>Kom en vind me.</i>	Come and find me.
<i>Waar is Moeder?'</i>	Where is mother?
<i>Het spijt me.</i>	I'm sorry.
<i>Dankjewel Engel.</i>	Thank you Angel.
<i>Godzijdank</i>	Thank goodness.
<i>Kan ik de hond met me mee?</i>	Can I bring the dog with me?
<i>Alsjeblieft</i>	Please
<i>Het spijt me</i>	Sorry
<i>Ik heb mijn engel.</i>	I need my angel.

**Hospitals** – In 1942 there were three hospitals in Port Hedland: the central hospital, the Native Hospital and the Lock Hospital. The latter accepted venereal cases from across the Pilbara and was located on the outskirts of town. The patients were segregated and 'locked' in barbwire compounds.<sup>230</sup>

**John Flynn** – the name of the Fox Moth used by the Australian Inland Mission (RFDS) in early 1942.

Newspaper Extracts:

*Western Australia to-day for the first time in its history tasted the actual violence of war on its own soil when Japanese planes attacked Broome and Wyndham. Aerodromes and aircraft were the objectives of the raiders and some damage was caused at both towns.*

*These raids show the growing seriousness of the war as it affects Australia. The bombing attacks on our own soil bring the war nearer to the Australian citizens. Three of our towns in the*

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230 <<http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/Details/a9d0cebf-49d0-48ae-b718-eb17f22cdf0f>>

*north have now been attacked by the Japanese and we must be prepared for further attacks.*

*These attacks should make us all the more determined to put every ounce of our energy into the war effort, to which everyone in Australia should make his maximum contribution.*<sup>231</sup>

*News that Broome and Wyndham had been attacked by the enemy brought the war to our back door. The Darwin bombings seemed uncomfortably close, but with raiders at Broome and Wyndham, our own State territory had been actually violated.*<sup>232</sup>

*... it is revealed that Allied planes went up to meet Broome's six raiders, one of which was brought down. Broome, it is further revealed, suffered some casualties.*<sup>233</sup>

*'...I did not hear any air-raid warning,' said Mr. Litster, 'but someone told me afterwards that some sort of whistle had been sounded. Standing in front of my camp overlooking the harbour and about half a mile from the action, I saw the whole thing. It did not seem to me to last more than about 10 minutes...*

*'I saw no opposition put up at all.*

*'The enemy raiders did not go near the town; nor did they attack any of the local craft in the harbour, Mr. Litster said. After they had got their objectives in the harbour they just went on to the aerodrome and did what they had to do there, then got right away. He had seen men diving overboard from flying boats moored in the harbour. Two Qantas machines which had just taken on passengers and were ready to take off were also attacked.'*

*Mr. Litster said he had heard no bombs dropped but there was one big explosion when one of the flying boats managed to get up off the water and was then shot down. The enemy planes were all fighters and carried extra 'belly' petrol tanks...*

*Next day Mr. Litster was evacuated to Perth by air. He was told on the trip that had the raid occurred one day later there would have been plenty of anti-aircraft guns to oppose the raiders. 'The trouble was that the A.A. gun emplacements had only just been completed and the cement had not had time to set. Another day would have done it.'*

*Of the 26 years Mr. Litster has lived at Broome, 16 were spent in active pearling operations, in which he still has*

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231 *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, Thursday 5 Mar 1942, p.1.

232 *The West Australian*, Wednesday 4 March 1942, p.5.

233 *The Daily News*, Wednesday 4 March 1942, p.1

*interests. Some of the Japanese, he said, know every yard of the north-west coast and far better than any white man.*<sup>234</sup>

**Gus Winckel** – a Dutch officer and pilot. After landing a planeload of Dutch refugees on Broome airstrip on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1942, just before the Japanese attack, Winckel managed to shoot down a Japanese fighter using a dismantled machine gun.

**Harold Mathieson** (sometimes spelt Matheson) – captain of the refuelling ketch, *Nicol* (or *Nicole*) Bay. On the morning of March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1942, Mathieson and **Charlie D'Antoine** showed enormous courage weaving through burning fuel to scoop Dutch survivors from Roebuck Bay. When D'Antoine saw a shark fin breaking the water, he dived in to save a woman and children. The pair saved many lives.

#### Part Five: Lee Wah's Gengi

'Rumours to the effect that the Broome raid resulted in a heavy loss of life are utterly untrue...' - Prime Minister Curtin

**RAAF commandeered Dr Dicks' Aeroplane** for military use in 1942. It was returned after Dr Dicks wrote a letter to the Prime Minister.

**Cyclones** – Port Hedland's first *recorded* category 1 cyclone occurred in January 1939. The second occurred in March 1942. Damage was far worse in the 1939 'blow' due to it coinciding with high tide.

**Japanese Submarines** were sighted along the WA coast during 1942.

**Carnot Bay diamonds** – on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1942, the Dutch Dakota DC-3 *Pelikaan*, left Bandung with a planeload of refugees and also a fortune in diamonds (approximate value of 300,000 pounds). The Dakota was headed for Broome and was unluckily approaching just after the Japanese raid. The *Pelikaan* was hit, made a hasty beach landing and was then strafed. Several books have been written about the ensuing fate of the passengers and also examining the mystery surrounding the diamonds as only a fraction were ever recovered.

#### Part Six: Doc's Marvellous Flynn

*The phrase 'air strength In the Pacific', which was used glibly and more or less unthinkingly a year ago, has a very real meaning today.*<sup>235</sup>

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234 *The West Australian*, Wednesday 11 March 1942, p.4.

235 *The West Australian*, 26 May, p.3.

*... the battle stressed the supreme Importance of airpower to the defence of Australia. It proved, in fact, that given sufficient numbers of aircraft of the right type - heavy bombers, medium bombers, dive-bombers, fighters and coast and sea reconnaissance aircraft - and a sufficient number of bases placed with regard to defensive and offensive strategy, Australia could defend her shores without naval assistance but with airpower alone.*

*... the air position of this country today compared to what it was even 6 months ago is rather like comparing our war effort of 1914-1918 with our contribution to the Boer War. Very soon it will be like comparing the Second World War with Mafeking. 'We shall need every ounce of our present and potential strength to beat the Sons of Heaven because 5 months of this war have already proved that their country ranks among the great air Powers of the world. They have first-rate planes, excellent pilots, a shrewd directive and an uncommonly good sense of co-operation and tactics. They have known for years the value of air strength in the Pacific.*

*Their heavy fleet of mobile aircraft-carriers and seaplane tenders-the largest in the world-proves that they have long appreciated the value of a highly mobile sea force capable of striking by air over a wide area.*

*... the days of scoffing at Japan's 'military inferiority' have gone and we can now size up our enemy as he is - a relentless, clever, courageous and thoroughly dangerous foe...*

*... And he is employing planes which are of undoubted high quality - apparently concentrating on a minimum number of proven types and mass-producing them on a large scale. He has found an exceptionally good plane in the Mitsubishi Zero...*

*He is a tough enemy and he pins his faith to air power. It is with air power that we shall beat him but we won't do it by underrating his ability or strength.<sup>236</sup>*

*BROOME, Mon — Pulling out a set of large salt and pepper shakers, an ill clad, middle-aged beachcomber flicked them as if throwing dice and spilled on a table before astonished Lieut-Colonel C. B. Gibson a glittering layer of diamonds said to be worth £300,000.*

*While he was walking down the coast to enlist, he had kicked a paper parcel embedded in the tidal mud. To his amazement the fortune in diamonds cascaded out. It was the amazing climax to a tragic story of the shooting down of a Dutch airliner, perhaps the last to leave Java, by Jap*

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236 *The West Australian*, Tuesday 26 May 1942, p.3.

*raiders returning from Broome early in March.*<sup>237</sup>

*... squadrons of Japanese planes attacked the airport and harbour at Port Hedland, north-western Australia.*

...

*Residents of Perth and also Kalgoorlie to a lesser degree will be interested to learn that 'Port Hedland next to Broome and Wyndham is the most important town in Western Australia'. The Tokio radio said so this morning in a garbled version of the recent raid on Port Hedland.*<sup>238</sup>

**Mrs Kerr at Wallareenya Station** – Mrs Charlie Kerr of Wallareenya Station is mentioned in Jenny Hardie's *Nor'Westers of the Pilbara Breed*.<sup>239</sup>

**Spinifex Flyer** was the name of the train that ran from Port Hedland to Marble Bar. Called the Spinifex Express, the service was in fact very slow, however it was an important line, transporting both freight and passengers inland.

**Relocation of hospital to Marble Bar** occurred due to concerns regarding Japanese raids on coastal towns.

**Doc as Magistrate** – in 1942 the RFDS doctor in Port Hedland and Marble bar acted in many other capacities, including magistrate and mining warden.

**The Battle of Rabaul** occurred in January and February 1942 and was a significant Allied defeat. Japanese forces occupied the strategic port of Rabaul. The Australian Army Garrison (Lark Force) was completely outnumbered with the RAAF contingent able to offer limited support with ten light **Wirraway** training aircraft and four light bombers.

#### Part Seven: Joan's Florence

**Marble Bar** is known as the 'hottest town' in Australia, with consistently high temperatures in the summer months of over 38 degrees, often occurring for days on end. Marble Bar is home to a multitude of biting creatures and insects, including; ants, mosquitoes, spiders, sandflies, bungarra.

**Outhouse** is the name given to an outside toilet. **Thunderbox** is a non-flushing, box-like toilet seat placed above a drop pit toilet.

#### **Nursing staff**

'New nurses came and went all the time.'<sup>240</sup>

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237 *The Daily News*, 4 May 1942, p.1.

238 *The West Australian*, Thursday 6 August 1942, p.5.

239 Jenny Hardie, *Nor'Westers of the Pilbara breed*, p.165.

Staff at Marble Bar Hospital mentioned in Kathleen Mallett's *To the Bar Bonded* include: Matron Joan Arlborough (1940); Florance Mallett, Helena Crisp, Becky Hodgson (1940); Matron Markey (1942); Doreen Burns and Bonnie Bonfield.

The staff members in this story are fictitious; however I have used the name, Joan in acknowledgment of the help given to me from Joan's daughter, (Joan Foley), and the name Bonnie because there were two different nurses of that era called Bonnie.

**Chook eggs** did cook when they hit the hot ground.

*If I heard a hen cackling, as they do when they are about to lay, I'd run straight to the coop and grab the egg. If I didn't, within a couple of minutes the egg would be cooked.*<sup>241</sup>

**Illnesses** – the lack of water and reliable sanitation, combined with extreme heat in areas like Marble Bar and Corunna Downs led to a variety of illness. Common ailments included; prickly heat, malaria, dengue fever, spinifex hay fever, jaundice, vitamin deficiencies as well as infection from sand fly, March fly and mosquito bites, scorpion stings, centipede, tick or snake-bite (including death adder), problems with childbirth and accidents linked to horse-riding and mining.

**Derby Leprosarium** – also known as Bungarun; operated from 1936 to 1986. In addition to work, residents were taught by nuns to play music and an indigenous orchestra was formed.

**The Ironclad Hotel** – Marble Bar's first hotel was erected in 1892 and retains the corrugated iron façade for which it was named.

**Transport of equipment and supplies** to Corunna came on the railway (Spinifex Flyer) or via a small railway shunt called, Kalamazoo.

**Air Raids** trenches were built in Marble Bar and elsewhere across the Pilbara. Joy Flegg reports that '[policeman] Gordon Marshall's police car siren began to sound continuously up on the hill. That was our air raid siren.'<sup>242</sup>

#### Part Eight: Hank's Pooch

**Corunna Downs Secret WW2 Airstrip** construction began in 1942 and became a base for US Army Corps (USAAC) 380<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group Liberators and later RAAF B-24 Liberators. It was situated 35 kilometres south of Marble Bar by an ironstone ridge. Conditions at the base were extreme. In addition to searing temperatures, Corunna was home to scorpions and snakes, including the Death Adder. A natural heat haze helped protect the base from enemy aircraft. The first Liberators bombing mission left

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240 K. Mallett, *To the Bar Bonded*, p.104.

241 J. Flegg, *It happened in Marble Bar*, p.64.

242 J. Flegg, *It happened in Marble Bar*, p.100.

Corunna late afternoon on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1943. All seven Liberators returned safely the next morning. Residents of Marble Bar reported counting the planes in and out.

The airbase was spread over a large area and had a ten-bed hospital with two nurses.

#### **Woodrow Wilson:**

*If a dog will not come to you after having looked you in the face, you should go home and examine your conscience.*<sup>243</sup>

**Tokyo Rose** (also Tokio Rose) was the name given to one or more English-speaking female Japanese radio broadcasters. Their propaganda was designed to lower the morale of Allied forces serving in the Pacific region.

*'We will find you, Corunna,' was a nightly call from Tokyo Rose. She was talking about Corunna Downs, where the American planes were based, ten miles from our camp. Most nights we heard the American Liberators leave Corunna to go out and bomb Japanese installations. Later in the night we heard them come back. Our war propaganda broadcast generally claimed that all our planes always returned, but we knew that was not true. We would count, and a lot more went out than came back. Corunna Downs was ideal for an air base as there was an unusual natural camouflage. From the air the night shadows cast by the hills looked like a second row of hills. This extra line of phantom hills confused the Japanese navigators, so they never did locate Corunna Downs airfield.*<sup>244</sup>

**Lightning bouncing between sky and Ironstone ridges** – this phenomenon occurs in the Pilbara during thunderstorms. Chain lightning bounces between clouds and hilltops due to the high iron content in rocks.

#### Part Nine: Matron's Flynn

**Coastwatchers** served within Australia, Papua New Guinea and on Pacific islands. Their job was to observe and gather frontline intelligence, which was then radioed back to headquarters. It was lonely, dangerous work.

**No. 4 Service Flying Training School** (No. 4 SFTS) was established in Geraldton in February 1941. Run by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), it was responsible for intermediate and advanced instruction of pilots as part of the Empire Air Training

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243 <<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/13614-if-a-dog-will-not-come-to-you-after-having>>

244 J. Flegg, *It happened in Marble Bar*, p.78.



Scheme (EATS). Before the school closed in May 1945, it had graduated over 1,000 pilots.

**The Women's Land Army** was formed during WW2 to help combat farm labour shortages.

**Planting guide** <<http://www.gardenate.com/zones/Australia%2B-%2Bsub-tropical>>

**Japanese Air raids on Exmouth** occurred on May 20, 21, 22 1943.

**The Brisbane Line** was an alleged and controversial demarcation line detailing which parts of Australia could and could not be defended in the case of Japanese invasion.

**The Battle of Wau** occurred in late January 1943.

**The Battle of Guadalcanal** was the first decisive victory for Allied forces in the Pacific. Beginning with a surprise attack by US marines in August 1942, the campaign continued until Japanese withdrawal in February 1943.

#### Part Ten: Elsie's Princess - Afterword

**Changi** – a notorious Japanese prisoner of war camp located in Singapore. It housed Allied soldiers and Malayan civilians.

The war in Europe ended on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945 with the suicide of Adolf Hitler. The end of the Pacific War (and end of WW2) occurred with the Japanese surrender on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1945.

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