



# YONGALA

GUY LANE

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About Yongala:  
Yongala is a fictional story based on a real ship. The characters and plot are fabrications. However, efforts have been made to be true to the story of the ship.

Titles by Guy Lane.  
See details at the end of this book.

Aquaria  
Yongala  
Intervene  
The Moogh  
The Oil Price  
Heart of Bone

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## Chance Encounter

*Sunday, 19 March 1911*

Among the sturdy, sandstone buildings of Brisbane City, a man walks alone. Corben Plath is middle-aged with the physique of an old soldier. He wears a dark woolen suit that has seen over a decade of service. His leather shoe uppers are polished, but the soles are worn and will not last another season.

Plath walks silently, watching the pavement. Approaching the front entrance of the Queensland Club, he makes to walk up the stairs, but is halted by the doorman.

“Members only,” says the big guy at the top of the steps.

“Who are you?” asks Plath, surprised.



“I’m the doorman.”

“No way,” says Plath, squaring up,  
“I’m the doorman at the Queensland  
Club.”

“No, mate. You’re the former  
doorman. You just haven’t been told  
yet.”

The manager approaches from inside  
the building. He is short, wearing round  
spectacles. “Sorry, Corben, we had to  
let you go,” he says.

“I don’t understand,” says Plath,  
alarmed.

“One of the members says he smelt  
grog on your breath. Can’t say I hadn’t  
warned you.”

Plath looks at the younger man who  
has taken his job. Moving his hand  
under the back of his jacket, he grips  
the ever-present pistol tucked into the

back of his pants. He thinks hard for a beat, then returns his hand to view.

Plath turns and walks away slowly, his head low. Around the first corner he stops, rests his back against a wall, feeling a familiar panic. He takes a hip flask from his jacket pocket, unscrews the cap and takes a swig of scotch. That takes the edge off.

Plath starts walking again, aimlessly, staring at the pavement. He walks and walks, turning over the events of the day in his mind. When he finally looks up, he finds himself standing in front of a shop window: Brisbane Maritime Supplies.

Inside the window display are items useful to the seafarer: charts, ropes, pulleys, and navigation equipment. Plath watches, fascinated, as a woman

places a card in the window on which is written his name: C. Plath.

The woman then places an object against the board. It is a highly polished brass marine sextant.

“Will you look at that,” Plath murmurs, hypnotized by the device.

He places his hands against the glass, peering intently at the sextant. The shop assistant places a price tag that reads ‘£125.’ She flashes him a smile and moves away from the window. Plath’s heart races. He takes out his wallet and looks inside; he’s got £10 in there. “But of course...”

He replaces his wallet and takes a final longing look at the sextant. Then he turns his attention back to the pavement and walks on, wondering what he is going to do next.

As he walks, an immaculate carriage pulls up at the intersection a little way down the road. On the side of the shiny, black cabin is an insignia with the letters Q.C.B. embossed in gold. Inside the cabin, on the black leather seat, sits an impeccably dressed man.

Melvin Possner, the Chief Executive of the Queensland Coal Board, has been called into work by the chairman for an ‘extraordinary’ general meeting. He is still grumbling about having lost his Sunday morning.

Possner glances out of the carriage window and sees Plath walking in his direction. Something about Plath’s gait causes Possner to take an interest, and he adjusts his position to observe the man in the old suit. Suddenly, Possner recognises the man who has now halted

and retrieved a hip flask from his pocket.

“That’s Corben,” says Possner, to himself, astonished. It is thirty years since Possner has seen his half-brother, but it is him, without a doubt.

Possner adjusts the drapes in the cabin to see better. He watches as his half-brother takes a swig from the flask then wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

“I have always wondered what became of you,” Possner says to himself.

As the carriage continues, Possner turns to catch a final glimpse of Plath shuffling along the street. Then he sits back, thinking it through. He pushes his fingers together, tightening the silk gloves on his hands, adjusts his Italian designed necktie and puts the incident out of his mind.

## En-route to Brisbane

One hundred miles south of Brisbane, a steam train thunders through the southern Queensland countryside, heading north. The air is warm, and the cane fields glow deep green in the morning light.

In the leading carriage, a young girl has her face pushed out of the window, feeling the warm breeze against her cheeks. With her eyes closed, she inhales a distinctive aroma of coal smoke and steam mixed with the tang of molasses, the scent of cane mills.

Felicity Cumberland is twelve going on fifteen. Her pigtails are tied with black lace. She opens her eyes and sees that the train tracks curve around the base of a thickly forested mountain.

Observing this, she senses trouble and moves away from the window to dash the length of the carriage.

At the end of the carriage, Felicity pulls open the door and steps onto the narrow metal platform. Below her, the train tracks flash past, and metal couplings grind against each other. There is a cacophony of metal noises, the clickety-clack of the wheels and the squeaking of ungreased steel surfaces rubbing together.

Crossing between the carriages is scary, but that is all part of the adventure. She chooses her moment and then steps quickly across to the other side, feeling a flush of adrenalin. She looks back excitedly at the chasm she has crossed and then enters the next carriage.

Felicity reaches her First Class cabin. She gingerly slides open the door, holding her mouth in just the right angle to prevent the hinges from making noise.

Inside, she closes the door quietly and gently places herself on the seat next to her old uncle. He's sitting upright with his eyes closed and his hands resting on his cane, fast asleep. The old man has not moved from this position since Felicity left to see the smoke coming out of the funnel of the steam train.

Felicity retrieves a book from her bag. It has a purple velvet cover with brown leather on the spine and the corners. She opens *Worlds in the Making* and searches for her page.

Besides her, seventy-something Professor Frederick Portland continues



his well-deserved nap. Wearing a top hat and overcoat, Portland rolls from side to side with the movement of the train. The ever-present *clickety-clack*, *clickety-clack* of steel wheels on iron rails serves as a melody that rocks the old mechanical engineer in his sleep.

Felicity finds her place in the book that was written by Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius and published in 1908, three years after Albert Einstein announced his groundbreaking theory,  $E=MC^2$ .

The train thunders around the long curve at the base of the mountain forcing Portland to lose balance. He bumps into Felicity, disturbing her.

While Portland is slow and ponderous, Felicity is swift and sharp as a paper-cut. She immediately starts talking in

her intelligent and articulate manner.

“Uncle,” she announces, “it says that the world would get colder if the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere were.”

Portland wakes, blinking, taking in his surroundings; the racket of the train no longer part of his dream. He listens to the cadence, comforted by the sound of a machine in balance, performing as designed.

He stretches one of his old, worn-out shoulders as he continues acclimatizing himself to his surroundings: the tight confines of the cabin, the warmth and his young niece beside him. Portland turns to see Felicity transfixed by her book.

“What did she say,” he thinks, “something about Arrhenius’ work on

atmospheric carbon?”

Portland retrieves a pipe from his jacket pocket, checks the quantity of Havelock tobacco inside the bowl then fumbles for a match.

“Here it is, here it is,” says Felicity excitedly, running her finger along the lines on page fifty-three, “it says that doubling the carbon dioxide in the air would raise the average temperature of the Earth by four degrees. Four degrees, Uncle!”

Portland nods his head knowingly as he is familiar with Arrhenius’ theory. He locates the box in his pocket and retrieves a match.

“That’s why you built the Smoke Engine,” says Felicity.

Portland strikes a match and puffs the flame repeatedly into the pipe bowl

until the tobacco crackles and burns orange. Then he corrects Felicity.

“I designed the Smoke Engine,” he says, “we haven’t seen it built yet.”

From inside her bag, Felicity retrieves a sheet of folded paper. She unfolds the document and lays it on her lap. It is the blueprint of the Portland Smoke Engine.

“How does it go, again?” she asks for the umpteenth time. Portland taps the mouthpiece of his pipe in the centre left of the blueprint and draws it across the page as he explains the workings of the machine.

He says, “Vegetative matter in the pyrolysis chamber is heated with limited oxygen to produce wood gas. The wood gas is mixed with oxygen-rich air in the vortex, and this potent mixture is

burned in the combustion cylinders.”

“Hold on,” says Felicity, trying to keep up.

Portland waits for a few moments as the information sinks in, then continues.

“In the cylinders the wood gas is combusted, driving the pistons and conveying its energy into the spinning flywheel,” Portland says.

Felicity follows the tip of the pipe along the diagram with her finger, listening intently. But she gets lost somewhere between the vortex and the flywheel.

“How does it go again?”

“It goes like this,” says Portland. He puffs the wrong way through his pipe so that a plume of blue smoke rises into the air like a smoke signal.

Felicity breaks into a peal of laughter and claps her hands, “How did you do that?”

Portland rests back in his seat, content, and says, “I huffed and puffed and blew the house down.” However, he immediately regrets his choice of words for he sees Felicity’s mood quickly sour. She lowers her hands to her lap and looks forlornly at them.

“Uncle,” she says, softly, “when the wood heats up and makes the gas, is that poisonous?”

Portland knows where this is going so he chooses his words carefully. He places his old hand over Felicity’s and says, “Wood gas is mainly carbon monoxide. If one were to breathe it, they would just go to sleep.”

“I was thinking about Mummy and

Daddy,” says Felicity.

Portland catches her eye and winks at her in a way that makes her smile,  
“Don’t fret, Flicky. We’ll complete your education. You’ll see.”

## Brisbane Station

As the train approaches Brisbane's Central Railway Station, Portland collects the bags from the overhead shelf and stacks them in a pile next to the door. Felicity has her nose pressed to the window.

The train comes to a stop with a shudder and a great whooshing noise. Once the train is motionless, Felicity is away! She leaps from her seat, knocking over the bags. In a flash, she's out of the cabin, along the corridor, off the train and has disappeared into the steam and commotion on the platform.

Portland staggers to the door of the carriage, struggling with the bags. He catches a glimpse of Felicity sweeping past amid the billows of steam and the



rapidly forming crowd.

Portland stamps his cane on carriage decking angrily and bellows, “Felicity Cumberland!”

Felicity turns and walks with her head bowed towards him. “I’m sorry, Uncle,” she says sheepishly, as she approaches.

“Help an old man with some bags,” snaps Portland.

Felicity complies and helps Portland shift the bags onto the platform. When they are clear of the carriage, Portland takes out his pocket watch, checks the time and looks around to see a man in a tall hat moving their way. He is modestly dressed and has the air of someone for whom money is less a concern than pecking order and politics. It is Aldous Thompson, the

government man.

“Thompson is right on time,” says Portland.

“Can I make the introduction?” asks Felicity, eagerly.

Portland looks at Felicity with a frown that gives way to his warm smile, and he chuckles at the idea. “This should be fun.”

Felicity steps forward and offers her hand to the man in the tall hat.

Thompson glances anxiously at Portland, unsure how to take this.

“You must be Mr. Thompson from the Queensland Government,” says Felicity, boldly. “On behalf of my Uncle, I would like to extend our gratitudes...”

Portland interrupts, “Gratitude.”

“Extend our gratitude for your... to

your government. Is it ‘to your’ or ‘for your’, Uncle?”

“To your.”

“To your government for constructing the Portland Smoke Engine and ‘felicitating’ our journey to Queensland.”

Portland laughs gently and places his hand on Felicity’s shoulder. She looks up at him, beaming a smile.

“Thank you for that kind introduction, Felicitous Felicity,” says Portland, chuckling. “There you have it, Aldous, now we’re introduced.”

The two men shake hands warmly.

“Good to see you, Frederick. You have a smart one, there,” says Thompson, ruffling Felicity’s hair, much to her disapproval.

“Smart alright! Another few years and

she'll take over my practice," Portland exclaims.

Thompson calls for a man with a barrow and oversees him placing the bags inside. He leads Portland and Felicity from the platform towards a waiting carriage.

While Portland and Thompson walk and talk Felicity follows trying to put her hair back in order. She looks around in awe at all the things going on inside the halls of the Central Railway Station.

Felicity sees a row of seats where a team of shoeshine boys plies their trade. She observes one receive a coin for his efforts. She is surprised to see how free the boys are, even though they are her age or younger. They are running their own business, it seems.

“Uncle,” Felicity says, anxiously, observing that two adjoining seats are empty and tugging at Portland’s sleeve, “your shoes are dirty. And yours too, Mr. Thompson. Yours are absolutely filthy.”

Portland looks down at his polished black leather uppers and concurs, “So they are. What do you say, Aldous? Time for a quick shine?”

Thompson wants to keep moving, but Portland subtly presses the point. So, Thompson takes the seat next to Portland and lets the boy adjust his shoe on the box.

As the shoeshine boys get to work, Felicity provides quality control. “In there,” she says, pointing to Portland’s shoe, “get the stitching.”

Portland is relieved to be sitting down.

He retrieves his pipe and puffs it alight. “So this is Brisbane,” he observes, looking around.

“Welcome to the capital of Queensland. I trust you are familiar with the electricity networks in our state?” says Thompson, getting straight down to business.

“Yes,” says Portland, “I read your documents: transmission lines, substations, vast distances. Powering this state from centralized energy plants is a very expensive business indeed. Clearly what you need is a reliable source of disaggregated energy.”

“Exactly,” says Thompson, excitedly. “And this begs the question: does your smoke engine technology have the capacity to replace coal in Queensland?”

Portland nods as he peers down to check the progress of the shoeshine; his clean shoes are even cleaner now.

“Given enough fuel, I contest that Smoke Engines could power Queensland for a fraction of the cost of coal.”

“Good answer, Professor Portland, good answer,” replies Thompson, enthusiastically. “Our biggest energy expense is in the North Queensland region, very remote. There is an abundance of material coming from the cane industry up there; it’s referred to as ‘bagasse’. This is where we plan to deploy your machine in the first instance.”

Felicity picks up on a new word. “Bagasse?” she asks, looking up from the shoe shine.

“It’s the fibrous material left over from the sugar cane after the crush,” says Portland. “How are we doing there?”

“All finished now,” says Felicity. She watches intently, as Portland takes out his wallet.

“Let me pay. Let me pay.” Felicity takes the coins from Portland and hands them to the shoeshine boys, saying, “Thank you very much for your kind service, young gentlemen.”

“Bright as a button,” says Thompson, “your daughter?”

Portland looks warmly at Felicity. He replies quietly, “My niece. She’s been in my care since the passing of her parents a few years ago. House fire. Very nasty business.”

As the two men stand, pushes her



hand against Portland, holding him in his place. She inspects his shoes from all angles until she is satisfied. “Okay, we can go now.”

## Engineering Workshop

In the carriage, Portland and Thompson continue their discussion about the Smoke Engine while Felicity investigates the mechanism that lowers the blinds on the carriage door. She sits quietly, looking outside at Brisbane, all the while eavesdropping on the conversation taking place next to her.

Thompson opens his case and retrieves a sheaf of blueprints. He hands them to Portland, saying, “These are ‘as constructed’ plans of your Smoke Engine. I have obtained a cartload of bagasse for the trial this afternoon.”

Thompson retrieves a bundle of bagasse fibers from his bag and hands it to Portland. Felicity is distracted from

her daydreaming and turns to observe the bagasse.

“Moisture content?” asks Portland, examining the fiber.

“It will burn, don’t worry.”

“We don’t want to burn it, Aldous. We want to pyrolyze it.”

“And the difference is?”

“The absence of oxygen.”

“It will pyrolyze, don’t worry,” says Thompson, unconvincingly.

Felicity shifts her attention between the Brisbane streets and the bundle of bagasse. “Can I see?” she asks eagerly. Portland hands her the bagasse, and she examines it on her lap.

“You’ll be seeing a lot more of that stuff soon, young lady,” says Thompson.

“Young lady?” asks Felicity, smiling.

“How come?”

“In a few days, you’ll be on a ship to Townsville in North Queensland.”

“A ship?” Felicity’s eyes light up.

“I thought you’d like that,” says Portland, grinning.

“Why are we going on a ship?”

Thompson says, “We have organized a demonstration of the Smoke Engine in Townsville in conjunction with the Pastoral Agricultural and Industrial Association.”

“What sort of numbers are we expecting?” asks Portland.

“Hundreds, I believe. Cane farmers, network engineers, government folk, newspaper men.”

“What’s it called?” asks Felicity, thinking of the ship.

“What is ‘she’ called?” corrects

Thompson.

“The ship’s a girl?” asks Felicity, confused.

“A ship is born a woman,” says Thompson.

“Ships don’t get born,” Felicity scoffs, shaking her head.

“Well, launched, then,” mutters Thompson, out-smarted.

“That’s so funny.” Felicity pushes the bagasse into her bag.

“So what is ‘she’ called then?” Felicity asks. She is interrupted by the carriage pulling to a halt outside the gates of a factory. She grabs the door handle, desperate to get outside.

Portland sees that one of her pigtails has come loose, probably from Thompson scuffing her hair at the train station.

“Hold up Flicky, we have a hair-mergency,” says Portland, arresting her escape. He grins at Thompson, “Hair-mergency. Get it?”

Felicity goes completely still allowing Portland to re-tie her pigtail.

“It’s a trade-off,” Portland tells Thompson. “I teach her engineering, and she lets me tie her hair.” Portland then addresses Felicity, “Stay close, and no running around. Engineering workshops are dangerous.”

“Is the Smoke Engine here?” asks Felicity.

“Oh, yes,” says Thompson, “she’s here alright.”

## Majestic Machine

Portland, Felicity, and Thompson exit the carriage and walk into the courtyard of the engineering workshop. It's a stone building with a tile roof and cobblestone courtyard. In the centre of the courtyard is the Portland Smoke Engine.

The Smoke Engine gleams in the daylight. It is not only a work of art but a technological wonder of its age. At one end of the machine is a shiny brass hopper connected to a large pyrolysis chamber underneath. At the bottom of the chamber is the vortex, a complex device with air vents and taps.

Glistening copper pipes lead from the vortex to the engine block that has steel rockers and tappets on the top.

Attached to the engine is a large flywheel, connected by a shaft to an electro-generator.

Thick electrical cables lead to a control box and from this, a string of light globes have been strung across the courtyard like glass bunting. The Smoke Engine looks at once both an object of power and beauty.

Seeing the Smoke Engine for the very first time, Portland's eyes light up. He taps his cane on the cobbles, saying excitedly, "I'll be dazzled by dancing ducks!"

Felicity breaks free of Portland's hand and runs around the Smoke Engine, excitedly. She peers at her reflection in its shiny surface, then taps her knuckles on the metal, with her ear pressed tightly to hear the resonance.



“Look, Uncle, the bagasse,” shouts Felicity pointing to a cart that has arrived, overflowing with beige coloured fiber.

The workshop manager approaches wearing grimy coveralls and stout boots. He wipes his hand on his sleeve and then offers it to Portland.

“This is Mr. Grimes,” Thompson says.

“It’s a pleasure to meet the man who designed this beautiful machine,” says

Grimes, “and you too, young missy,” he says to Felicity. Felicity shakes his hand, looking dismayed at the smudge of grease left behind on her palm.

“Young missy,” she repeats with a scowl.

“Well there she is in all her beauty, Mr. Portland,” says Grimes, crossing his arms and looking with affection at

the machine that he has constructed.

“And over here, the shipping crate you requested.”

Portland walks over to the crate with Grimes. The box is large and sturdy, and the inside padded with thick material.

Grimes slaps his palm on the paneling, and it makes an intimidating noise. He kneels and indicates the material inside. “We had a devil of a job fitting in the flotation material, but we did it.”

Portland examines the crate, nodding appreciatively. He looks over at the Smoke Engine then back at the crate, all the while performing engineering calculations in his head.

“Excellent work, Mr. Grimes,” says Portland, “she’ll float alright.”

“How about we fire her up then?”

says Grimes as he waves to the man on the cart with the bagasse.

“Fire ‘her’ up,” whispers Felicity to Portland. “Is the Smoke Engine a girl?”

“Not a girl, but a beautiful woman.”

Felicity claps her hands excitedly as her suspicions are confirmed. “I knew it.”

A man with a pitchfork starts to move bagasse from the cart into the Smoke Engine’s brass hopper. After much shouting of instructions and waving of Portland’s cane, the pyrolysis chamber is packed with bagasse. A lit match is pushed into a hole at the bottom of the hopper, and the flame takes hold of the dry bagasse.

With a whirl of the hand crank, the pistons are set in motion and after a few smoky coughs and splutters the

smoke engine catches, chugging along as planned.

“Now shut off the oxygen to the pyrolysis chamber,” instructs Portland.

Blue smoke pours from the exhaust pipe, and the flywheel picks up its pace, spinning rapidly. The workers continue to feed the hopper with bagasse, and within minutes, the cadence of the engine has stabilized to a low hum.

“That’s good! That’s good!” shouts Portland, excitedly. “Now the electro-generator.”

“Can I do it? Can I do it?” begs Felicity anxiously, barely audible over the noise of the Smoke Engine.

Portland moves her to the junction box that connects between the Smoke Engine and the electrical junction box. He shows her the clutch lever and

instructs her in its use.

Portland stands back and shouts,  
“Okay, Flicky! Let’s go!”

Felicity pulls the handle, engaging the generator. The Smoke Engine grumbles, the electro-generator spins and the string of electric lights flicker into life, burning brightly.

“What’s she drawing!?” yells Portland.

Felicity peers at the needle wavering on the dial and shouts back, “One hundred kilovolt amps!”

“I’ll be dazzled,” says Portland, astonished, “it works!”

There is much joviality as Portland, Thompson, Grimes and Felicity excitedly pat each other on the back and shake hands.

A journalist and a photographer from the Brisbane Courier approach and

Thompson gives them the okay to do their work. The light of the camera flash reflects boldly off the brass and copper of Professor Portland's renewable energy machine. The smoke from the flash blends with that of the pyrolyzed bagasse, drifting lazily in the warm Brisbane air.

The journalist chews the end of his pencil, thinking up a headline to show his editor. He has an inspiration and scribbles: Coal Out, Cane In.

## Extraordinary General Meeting

The boardroom of the Queensland Coal Board is raucous: the sound of a dozen overfed plutocrats in a state of panic. Chief Executive, Melvin Possner, is getting hammered.

He's a handsome man and his dress sense projects someone who knows how to balance a personal interest in fashion with a professional respect for tradition.

The Chairman raps his fountain pen on the table repeatedly, attempting to hush the boardroom. He is old and has white hair and a bushy mustache, like an albino walrus. He's been digging up and flogging off coal for nearly seventy years. His nose is red from having shouted too much.

He turns on his chief executive,  
“Possner! We engaged you expecting  
results. Now in this very city, there is a  
device that obviates coal!”

Possner has been fighting this bushfire  
all day, and he’s bored with it. “Mr.  
Chairman. Speculators have gotten hold  
of the story about this machine and  
completely overblown its relevance,” he  
says.

“Our mole at the Brisbane Courier  
tells me it is being demonstrated this  
afternoon,” bellows the Chairman. “It’s  
alive, Possner! It’s a spectre stalking us.  
It is going to swallow us whole!”

The Chairman lifts a report from the  
table and thumps it down heavily in  
front of the man to his left. “Let’s hear  
it from our economist.”

Kenneth, the economist, has pale skin



and black, oily hair. His eyes dart around through through thick glasses. He opens the document, and browses for a few moments as he chooses his words.

Then he says with a private school accent, “Our modeling concludes that the Smoke Engine, fed with bagasse from the sugar cane industry, will, in the first instance, force coal from the North Queensland region. And later, fed with timber from the state plantations, the Smoke Engine will force coal from the south of Queensland as well.”

Kenneth looks around the board table, observing the terror in the faces of the board members. He continues, “We thus conclude that the Smoke Engine renewable energy technology and the

coal industry are mutually exclusive.”

He takes off his glasses to polish them, and observes the board members, who now look like fuzzy blobs. “You can have coal or renewables, but not both.”

There are gasps of horror and disbelief from the board members. It is the sound of old tycoons fearing for their wealth and prestige.

“How could you let this happen?” demands the Chairman of Possner.

“What would you have me do?” Possner calmly asks the Chairman.

“Whatever needs to be done,” replies the Chairman, ominously, “we know your capabilities. Cut deep!”

“It’s time to take off your silk gloves for a change,” says one of the Directors.

“We could buy exclusive rights from the Professor,” suggests Possner, “then shelve the technology. That’s the standard practice.”

“It’s not for sale, you fool!” shouts the Chairman, thumping the table with his palm again. “He is not a businessman, he’s a zealot. He thinks that we are burning up the sky. This project is like a religious conviction to him. It needs to disappear now and for all time. Both he and the machine. If not, I’ll take your job.”

The board members rowdily bang the table and shout, “Hear! Hear!”

When the meeting concludes, and the board members retire to the Smoking Room for cigars and brandy, Possner calls the legal counsel into his office. Possner sits behind his desk, fiddling

with a letter opener while he listens to the lawyer mumbling.

“Speak up man!” snaps Possner.

The lawyer says, “No legal argument can be used to prevent the further development, use or display of the Smoke Engine. It’s all legal.”

“We pay you for this?” Possner snaps. “Go and find Helmut. Tell him to come here.” He waves the lawyer away, stabbing the letter opener into the desk.

Helmut arrives at the door. He is a heavy-set man with a bent nose and short-cropped hair. He is head of security for the Coal Board.

“Helmut. Come in,” says Possner, relieved to see someone who doesn’t care one way or the other about the Smoke Engine. “The government man, Thompson, is he on our payroll?”

“Not yet. Some of his juniors are, though.”

“Put a tail on him. I want hourly updates on his movements.”

Possner waves Helmut away. He picks up the earpiece of the telephone and taps the receiver arm for a line. He dials a familiar number. There is a crackling noise and then a woman’s voice.

Possner says, “Hello Miriam, it’s Melvin from the Coal Board, sorry to disturb you on a Sunday. I was hoping to speak with Clive.”

“He’s not here at the moment,” she replies. “He’s out playing golf.”

“And that’s exactly where I should be,” says Possner.

## Brisbane Golf Club

When Possner arrives at the Golf Club, he finds the Police Chief on the driving range. Possner approaches with an air of authority and announces his arrival by saying directly, “Hello Clive. Thanks for meeting me at short notice.”

“I didn’t agree to meet you,” grumbles the Police Chief.

“Well, seeing as I am here,” Possner steps back and watches the Chief swing his driving iron.

The little white ball flies through the air, hardly visible against the clouds in the sky. The Police Chief rests his club on his shoulder watching the ball land on the green. Then he turns to Possner and pretends that he has just noticed

him.

“Ah, Mr. Possner. Have we told you how grateful we are for the Coal Board’s continued support of the Policeman’s Charity Fund.”

“You’re most welcome,” says Possner, graciously.

“And now you want something in return,” the Chief, “and on a Sunday afternoon, at that.”

“There are no days of rest in the coal business, Clive.”

“Alright then, Melvin. What is it you are after?”

“I am looking for a very special someone,” Possner says. He briefs the Police Chief as they walk towards a police officer sitting on a horse, minding the Chief’s carriage.

The Chief takes the horse by the

bridle and addresses the officer on its back, “Afternoon, Mr. Toffee.”

“Afternoon, Sir.”

“How’s Esmeralda?”

“Oh, she’s a fine horse, Sir.”

The Police Chief lifts the horse’s lip to show off a pink, foaming tongue. “You see this?” he asks, inviting Possner to look inside.

Possner glances into the horse’s mouth. It’s all tongue and teeth and slobber in there, and he grimaces.

“That’s just beautiful,” he says, disingenuously.

“Esmeralda was donated from a local stud, so technically, I am breaking the rules. *Huh?* Don’t look the gift horse, *etcetera, etcetera.*”

“I agree,” Possner says, “You really shouldn’t.”



“And you are something of a gift horse yourself, aren’t you, Melvin. All that money you throw around to lubricate your industrial enterprises.”

“Is this going somewhere?”

“It is. I am telling you that I won’t be looking in your mouth and asking what it is that you intend to do with this ‘special man’ you seek.”

“Well, that is much appreciated,” says Possner.

“And I am also saying that if there is any blowback, you can expect that the Queensland Police might not be so pally with the Coal Board in the future. They turn horses into glue, you know.”

“And quite rightly so,” says Possner.

The Police Chief pats Esmeralda on the neck, eyeing Possner, suspiciously. He addresses the officer again. “Mr.

Toffee, will you make arrangements for my associate to tour the cages tomorrow morning. See that he gets what he wants.”

## The Bellevue Hotel

Later that evening, Portland and Felicity are in the Bellevue Hotel tucking into a well-deserved dinner of roast lamb. As they are eating, Thompson appears in the doorway of the restaurant and approaches with a clear sense of urgency. He leans towards Portland and whispers in his ear. Portland grunts and wipes his hands on his napkin then turns to his young niece. “Felicity. Would you allow Mr. Thompson and I to speak in private?”

Felicity shows a disappointed look and drops her cutlery noisily on her plate. Her lips purse and her eyebrows move close together in a manner that Portland calls the ‘frump’.

Felicity is well practiced at leaving the room when adults need to talk. She gets up from the table, slips behind a row of pot plants, and listens in.

“I am so sorry to interrupt,” says Thompson, taking Felicity’s seat and leaning towards Portland. Felicity squirms behind the planters, anxious that Thompson is so close to her meal.

“It’s quite alright,” says Portland, “what’s troubling you?”

Thompson leans even closer and says, “I’ve just received word of an extraordinary meeting of the Queensland Coal Board to discuss the Smoke Engine.”

“What of it?” asks Portland.

“It’s our concern that the Coal Board may take extreme measures to stop the Smoke Engine being displayed. It is a

disruptive technology and the coal people use unconventional methods to achieve their ends.”

Portland retrieves his pipe and fiddles with it in thought, “*Hmmm*,” he says at length. “Unconventional methods. What might that mean?”

“We are concerned that some Coal Board thug might try to damage the Smoke Engine, rendering it inoperable.”

Portland chuckles, “That would be some thug.”

“We could cancel the trip,” says Thompson.

“Good grief, no,” says Portland, surprised. “She’s cast iron, you know? The engine block.”

“In that case, the government will provide a private security contingent to

watch over the Smoke Engine until after the exhibition in Townsville.”

Portland smiles, “If you think we need security guards to protect against a brat with a hammer, who am I to argue?”

Thompson sits back in his chair and exhales deeply. Once he has composed himself, he says, “That’s good, then. One more thing. Just a reminder that you are presenting the Smoke Engine to the engineering students at the University, tomorrow at two.”

“Yes, of course. Now, with respect to Felicity,” says Portland.

“My wife, Clarice, has offered to take Felicity for Afternoon Tea,” Thompson says.

“Jolly good then. She’ll like that.”

Thompson stands, shakes Portland’s hand and departs the restaurant. From

behind the pot plants, Felicity watches him leave. Then she nonchalantly makes her way back to the table. She sits down with her arms folded.

Portland says, “My apologies, Felicity, adult business.”

Felicity thinks that she needn’t punish her Uncle because she has already got something of value: she knows the secret of the private security detail.

“You’re forgiven, Uncle,” she says, unconvincingly, then plunges her fork into a cold Yorkshire pudding.

## The Worker's Tavern

The Sunday evening session at the Worker's Tavern is always busy. It's dingy and loud, crammed with tough working men and dipsomaniacs of every type. For Corben Plath the Tavern is less a venue to imbue alcohol and more a family home.

The rough wooden floor crackles underfoot as he enters, the sound of peanut shells and broken glass under worn-out shoes. Plath takes a seat at the bar.

"What a day," he thinks. Ten quid in his pocket, no job; there is only one thing for it. He orders a drink and watches silently as the bartender pours the whiskey into the glass. Plath doesn't move, he just sits staring at the glass.



A young boy touting tobacco pouches, tugs at Plath's sleeve, breaking him from his trance. "Want some baccy, Mr. Plath?" he asks, hopefully.

"I gave that up, Tim. How's your Gran coming on?"

"Not too good, Sir. She might be giving it up too."

"Sorry to hear that," says Plath.

Tim continues his rounds and Plath turns his head to see him go. He sees himself in the young boy, pressured by circumstance, constantly on the move. He turns back to his drink and thinks about his job at the Queensland Club. He thinks about the brassy sheen of the sextant.

The sextant stirs a memory and he feels sadness. Plath instinctively pushes his hand into the pocket of his old suit

jacket, retrieving a military medallion. He observes the medallion, turning it over with his fingers. It's like a familiar face, but he's never sure if it is a friend or enemy.

Behind him, young Tim moves towards a scummy looking man, a regular in the tavern called Travis. He's a drunken bum with nothing decent to do with his time.

Travis raises a cigarette butt in front of Tim's face and says, "See this?" He flicks the butt past Tim's face. It flies through the air and lands neatly in Plath's scotch glass. Plath snaps out of his trance and looks at the stogey floating in his scotch.

"Things are going from bad to worse," he thinks. He slips the medallion back in his pocket and looks around to see

Travis has pinched a tobacco pouch from Tim's tray.

"Hey, mister, give it back," protests Tim, jumping up, trying to snatch the pouch back.

Travis shoves Tim to the floor, "Sod off you little runt."

Tim stands and grabs Travis' sleeve and the drunk raises the back of his hand to strike. Plath catches the movement of Travis' hand into the striking position in his peripheral vision and it's an instinctive trigger for him. He whips around and snatches Travis' wrist in his burly fist.

"Pay the boy," snarls Plath.

"Get off me, you fricking baby killer," snaps Travis.

Plath twists Travis' arm behind his back, temporarily paralyzing him. He

forces Travis to the bar with little effort and pushes his head onto the wood, forcing him to look at the cigarette butt in the scotch glass. “And you owe me a drink.”

“Get off me!” shouts Travis, struggling to get free.

Plath releases his hand and in a single move, taps Travis’ skull against the bar, letting him free. There is a loud thud as Travis falls and his head hits the floor.

Plath sits back in front of his glass and waves the bartender over to pour a fresh drink. He watches the pale brown fluid move from the neck of the bottle into his glass, uninterested in what is happening behind him.

Behind Plath, a group of people gathers around. A man squats next to Travis and lifts his limp hand. He looks

around the crowd, shaking his head.  
Travis is dead.

Plath glances around, and he watches as strangers fuss over the dead drunkard on the floor. Clouds form over his head, and he wonders, “Where the hell did that come from?”

On one hand, there is one less annoying piss-head in the world. On the other, things are going to get tough, very soon. But what is Plath to do now? Cooing over a cadaver won’t help anyone. The best he can do is save face. Plath says aloud, “Don’t worry, I’ll get my own drink.”

He turns back to his glass. Sadness washes over him as he remembers Cousin Marin. She was thirteen and Plath just two years older when he invited her onto the roof of his house

with his homemade sextant to ‘fix’ the moon.

Plath knocks back the fresh scotch and calls for another. Inside his jacket pocket, he fondles the medallion and drifts off into a whirlwind of thoughts.

Through the hazy storm in his mind, Plath doesn’t detect the commotion as four police officers burst into the bar with truncheons ready. Then he hears a copper standing behind him saying his name.

“You’ve gone too far, this time, Corben Plath.”

Plath looks around unenthused. He’s been arrested by this copper before.

“That was the *entrée*. What are you, the main?”

The policeman grips Plath firmly on the right shoulder, the site of an old war

wound. A piece of iron shrapnel has rested there since the day it pierced him from an artillery round in South Africa. It's a trigger for deeply embedded muscle memory.

Effortlessly, Plath snatches the policeman's arm and smashes him to the floor. The other policemen rush in, only to be knocked to the floor with an elbow and a fist. Plath's fighting technique is precise and controlled. Within a few seconds, a mound of incapacitated policemen lay at Plath's feet. That's three down, one to go. Plath has some fun with the fourth.

He grabs the fourth policeman, holding him tight. From the back of his belt, Plath retrieves his service weapon from the Boer War. The gun is a Mauser C96 semi-automatic pistol, with

ten rounds in the magazine.

Plath raises the gun in the air and the people in the crowd flinch. He shouts, “Mr. Plath accepts the invitation to dance. Music, please, a jig!”

Word quickly moves around the bar, “Plath is dancing again.” There is much excitement as the patrons jostle for the best vantage point. The musician strikes a new tune, a jig, as requested.

Plath wraps his arm around the policeman’s neck and pokes the barrel of the Mauser down his throat, holding him firmly as he squirms and gags.

Plath looks around at the crowd in the manner of a showman. He whips up the crowd and gratefully receives applause and cheers. He is calm, a master at his craft.

Plath dances with the policeman,



saying out loud, “Plath the puppeteer leads and the Mauser Marionette follows.”

Plath swings the man over towards a courtesan who hovers in the shadows near the back door. She smells sweet and holds her breasts up with crossed arms.

“I’ve got a tenner in my pocket, lovely,” says Plath as he swoops past with the squirming officer held tight.

“I’ll give you two for a fiver each,” says the courtesan, blowing him a kiss.

In Plath’s life, there are very few instances of pure joy, and he revels in this game, playing to the crowd until a stream of disempowering thoughts breaks his attention. He thinks about paying the rent and Travis’ sudden demise and the shiny brass sextant.

Where will he find one hundred and twenty-five pounds? He thinks of Cousin Marion and the girl who died in the ruined schoolhouse in South Africa. These thoughts are debilitating. He lets his hostage fall to the floor. He returns the weapon to the back of his belt and turns back to his drink. He sculls the scotch then orders

another, all the while staring at the wooden bar top.

“This one’s on the house,” says the bartender, “better drink it quick, though.”

Behind Plath, the policemen slowly get to their feet and push the crowd away. The music stops, replaced by an expectant silence.

Plath swallows the scotch in one gulp. He glances over his shoulder and sees

the coppers and their raised  
truncheons. He shakes his head,  
ruefully, “Get it over with.”

## Awake Early

*Monday, 20 March 1911*

It is early morning in their room in the Bellevue Hotel, and Felicity is in front of the mirror, quietly trying to tie her hair the way her Uncle does. She is anxious to have the job completed before Portland wakes. The sound of his rumbling snore tells her she still has time to finish the task.

However, no matter how hard she tries, her hair looks more like a bundle of bagasse than pigtails.

Felicity is alerted to the final, nasal grumble of an old man's sleep. Portland clicks his tongue a few times and one of his old eyes flickers open.

The eye swivels towards Felicity's bed to check that she has survived the

night. However, the bed is empty. The eye pans around the room to see Felicity sitting in front of the mirror with what looks like a bird's nest on her head. Portland's other eye opens.

Portland chuckles knowingly and asks, "Now, what do you think you are doing trying to tie your hair on your own?"

Felicity looks at Portland through the mirror with a frustrated frown. "I was just practicing," she says.

"Nothing to do with Clarice Thompson taking you for afternoon tea?"

"Who is Clarice?" asks Felicity, disingenuously.

"Why don't you wait until I am up, and then I'll do your hair properly?"

"Well hurry up, hurry up," says Felicity, impatiently.

At midday Felicity and Portland meet Thompson and his wife Clarice in the lobby of the hotel. Felicity is anxious and excited at the same time. It is very rare for her to be in the company of a ‘real’ woman.

Clarice Thompson is mid-forties, beautifully groomed and very calm. As soon as their eyes meet, Felicity feels her heart beat faster. She moves automatically towards Clarice, who has her arms outstretched, beckoning her to come close. Felicity walks into Clarice’s web and is taken gently by her forearms and inspected from close quarters.

“What a delightful young lady you are,” says Clarice as she turns Felicity’s around a full circle.

“Young lady?” says Felicity, her eyes lighting up.

“So this is the plan. The men are going off to do men’s business, and we are going to do women’s business.”

“Women’s business,” says Felicity, excitedly. “What will we do?”

“We’ll take afternoon tea and buy something special for the sea journey.”

Felicity is enthralled. She has a new best friend today and a woman, at that. She walks up to Portland and Thompson, “Will you excuse us? Mrs. Thompson and I have women’s business to attend.”

“Just a second, Felicity,” says Portland. He steps towards Mrs. Thompson and gently takes her aside.

Felicity watches, annoyed; this is not how women conduct business together. She crosses her arms impatiently as Portland and Clarice confer.

Nervously, Portland says, “Mrs. Thompson.”

“Call me Clarice, Frederick.”

Portland has developed a sweat and a tremble, “Clarice. I *umm...*”

Clarice takes Portland by the arm and moves him a few paces further away from Felicity. Felicity stamps her feet and readies for action.

Portland’s looks at his hands, anxiously and says, “Felicity is reaching an age where I am unsure of my competency to communicate certain information to her.”

“Yes. Go on,” says Clarice Thompson, hiding her amusement.

“It is my understanding that she could blossom into a woman at any time,” blurts Portland, relieved to have the information out in the open. He



gestures with his hands in front of his chest.

“I understand that there are certain items of clothing.” he says.

“Frederick, are you asking me to buy Felicity a corset?” asks Clarice.

“I... I think so.”

“It is unlikely that she will suddenly need it overnight as you fear,” chuckles Clarice, “but I agree, she should have one. I’d be delighted.”

Felicity approaches, adamant that her uncle will not delay the woman’s business any longer. She takes Clarice’s hand and drags her towards the doorway of the Bellevue Hotel.

“Looks like we are away now,” says Clarice over her shoulder as Felicity tows her away.

## Police Lock-up

Plath wakes to on the floor of a dingy cell in the police station. It's dark, cold and moist. The floor is covered in damp straw that smells of sweat and urine. Iron handcuffs pinch the skin on his wrists. He lifts his hands to his head and teases his fingertips through his hair, trying to soothe the truncheon wound, the hangover and the storm of thoughts.

There is another prisoner in the cell, a gaunt man with bad breath. He moves his face from the shadows into a weak beam of light and says to

Plath, "I bashed a copper. What you here for?"

"Infanticide," says Plath, somberly, "that's the root of it."

There is a commotion in the hallway outside the cell and Plath's cellmate slinks back into his corner. The door swings open, flooding the cell with the orange glow of electric light that is punctuated by five shadows.

Toffee is there, accompanied by Melvin Possner and three police officers. Toffee points at Plath and says, "That one's got the temperament you need. He's a right nut-job."

Possner peers into the dingy room with a look of disgust. "Well, well, well. The things you find in the dungeon. Alright. I'll take him."

The police officers step into the cell and haul Plath to his feet. He is rendered speechless by it all and just lets the officers manhandle him into the hallway.

Outside of his cell, Possner asks Toffee, “Just give me a moment alone, will you?”

As the officers move away, Plath blinks in the bright light of the stone hallway, as his eyes adjust. Once he can see clearly, he is stunned to see his young brother. “Melvin?” says Plath, taken aback.

“How long has it been, Corben? Huh?”

“It’s like thirty years.”

“Thirty years since you walked out on me. You skank.”

Plath looks to the floor, despondently. “You don’t understand what happened,” he says, forlornly.

“Oh, I understand, Corben,” says Possner, icily. “One minute my big brother is there, looking out for me;

and then he fucks off never to be seen again.”

Plath goes to speak, but Possner interrupts him, jabbing his finger into his chest, “I ought to leave you in this shitty cell, but as it happens, I need you.”

Possner walks down the hallway. Shortly, the police officers return. They lead Plath to an interrogation room, direct him towards a wooden chair, and pass a chain around his handcuffs and through a metal ring on the floor.

The Police Chief is in the room, flicking through a thick document: Plath’s case files. Next to him is Possner, looking immaculate and calm.

Their eyes meet, and Plath considers that Possner is free, sober and immaculately dressed. He also needs

someone to get him out of trouble, again. Plath lowers his eyes as his younger brother approaches.

Toffee points to Plath's shoulder and says, "Careful, Sir. He's got an on-off switch right there."

The Police Chief nods as he reviews Plath's file. "He's a regular around here, old Mr. Plath. A brawler. He spent three years fighting the Boers in South Africa. And since then he has been fighting the bottle. He beat the Boers."

Plath scowls. That sums him up pretty well.

"Former Army Captain," continues the Police Chief.

Possner inspects Plath's bedraggled suit, observing that it was once a quality garment. He wants to check the brand written on the tag in the collar, so he

asks, “Do you mind?”

“I am all yours, mate,” says Plath, truthfully.

Possner gently pulls back the collar of Plath’s jacket to inspect the label. Then he looks up and nods to the Police Chief.

“What’s he in for?” asks Possner.

“Mr. Plath is on a murder charge, today,” says the Police Chief, cheerfully.

“Good,” says Possner. “That’s just perfect.”

Then to Plath’s surprise, he is unshackled and helped to his feet. He is escorted out of the interrogation room and along the corridor.

Possner walks alongside, speaking rapidly to Plath, “We need you suited, shaved and innocent looking, ready to join a ship tomorrow morning. Have

you've been on a ship before, Corben?"

"Only sinking ones."

"This one won't be sinking. Indeed, I have sprung you from jail into a First Class cabin on a luxury cruise liner. You're going on a voyage on the Coral Sea. How does that sound?"

"Acceptable," mumbles Plath, not sure that he hears right.

They arrive at the door that leads outside onto the street. Possner sends the officers away. Then he hands Plath his pistol, holding it in a manner that suggests he finds the tool dangerous. "I've called in a lot of favors for you Corben," he growls.

Plath returns the Mauser pistol to its place in the back of his belt.

"Now," says Possner, "if I give you some money what are the chances that



you will do as I ask before you start drinking? Huh? I trust that you are gentlemen enough to know how to clothe yourself?”

Plath nods numbly, not knowing what is the right answer. Possner pushes a wad of cash into the pocket on the inside of his suit jacket, then adjusts Plath’s lapel, smartening his soldier.

“Onboard the ship is a Professor and a machine called a Smoke Engine. We need the Professor dead, and the Smoke Engine destroyed or sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Do you understand?”

“First Class, Sir,” says Plath.

“I am only going to repeat myself five times on this point, Corben, so listen up. There will be one thousand pounds in an envelope at the Coal Board in

Townsville, which is your success fee. If on the other hand, you fail me, the charges that I have had lifted from you will be reinstated, and you will be arrested in Townsville, then hung for murder. Succeed in this mission and you can start a new life a long, long way away from me.”

Possner opens the door to the street and steps outside into the bright sun. Plath covers his eyes with his forearm. When he adjusts to the light, he sees Possner eye-balling him at close range.

Possner is four years younger and two inches shorter. Plath feels empathy because his little brother still needs him. He wants to say something like, “Don’t worry mate, she’ll be right,” maybe even scuff his hair like he used to. But instead, he is rendered mute by

Possner's sharp tone.

Possner passes Plath a parcel, his personal possessions taken from him when he was arrested. Plath can feel the familiar form of a small bottle in there.

"Take your poison. Try not to drink it all at once," Possner says, "I'll arrange for a room under your name at the Bellevue for tonight and a carriage for tomorrow morning. Understood?"

"Understood."

"Get the work done before the ship reaches Mackay. It's only a short leg from there to Townsville." Possner takes a step back. "Are we all good?"

"We're good."

"In that case, we have an offer with consideration and acceptance; thus, a contract," says Possner, ritualistically.

"You are now contracted to the

Queensland Coal Board.”

Plath remains at attention as he watches Possner depart. He thinks that being contracted to the coal board is like the relationship a fish has with a hook.

Possner is ten paces away when Plath instinctively says out loud, “Melvin.”

Possner turns and looks contemptuously at his half-brother.

“I’m sorry I left without saying goodbye.”

Possner scowls and walks away.

Plath watches him turn a corner and then breathes a long sigh. He squeezes the parcel to his chest and looks down at a scruffy, underfed terrier looking up at him. It’s like looking into a mirror. Plath sits on the sidewalk and pulls the terrier up onto his lap. He sits there for

a long time scratching the dog behind its ear, contemplating the turn of events.

## Mrs. Clarice Thompson

At afternoon tea, Mrs. Thompson introduces Felicity to the idea of the corset. This is not something that Felicity has ever considered before, but with Clarice Thompson selling the virtues of the garment over her porcelain teacup, Felicity's mind starts whirring and she wants to know everything there is to know. When Felicity starts asking a string of questions, Clarice puts down her cup and takes Felicity's hand in hers.

Clarice says, "As it happens a good friend of mine designs and makes corsets and has a shop in George Street. Would you like me to introduce you to Sarah Jenyns?"

The Jenyns' shop in George Street

sells not only corsets but surgical instruments and belts. While Clarice enquires, Felicity wanders around the store with wide eyes. Staring at a cabinet full of medical instruments next to a rack of leather belts, Felicity is suddenly unsure if this corset business is all it's cracked up to be.

When Clarice returns with Mrs. Jenyns, Felicity returns to her comfort zone once more. She is in the hands of well-meaning experts in women's business. Mrs. Jenyns has Felicity stand with her arms raised as she takes measurements with a tape measure. Felicity tries not to giggle, but she is having too much fun. This is so very different to how Uncle Portland selects clothing for her.

“When I go shopping for clothes with

Uncle Portland,” she explains to Clarice and Mrs. Jenyns, “he buys four different sizes, we take them home, I try them on, and the next day he returns the ones that don’t fit.”

“This is a much more scientific approach,” says Clarice, smiling broadly. Eventually, the perfect corset is found, and Felicity enters the change room to try it on. It’s a bizarre contraption with straps and panels.

When Felicity returns from the change room, she is beaming. Clarice is there to adjust the laces. She informs her that when the time comes she should have to wear the ‘contraption’ every day. She points out the two panels of satin on the front, telling Felicity that the corset has not only practical value but is also an object of beauty that can be used to



ensure the assistance of menfolk.

Felicity is not sure what this means but understands this is a very serious business indeed.

Returning to the change room, Felicity removes the corset and gets back into her clothes. At the counter, the corset is wrapped in brown paper and tape. Then with the corset tucked under her arm, Felicity exits the store holding Clarice's hand, feeling smug and important.

"Should I be wearing it now?" asks Felicity as they walk along the busy street.

"You don't need it now. But you will, one day soon."

"How soon, Mrs. Thompson?"

"You will know when the time comes."

## Buying the Sextant

The terrier is a friendly companion for Plath, but the relationship can only last for so long. Plath lifts the dog off his lap, gives it one last pat, then sends it on its way.

Then he retrieves the envelope that his young brother pushed into his jacket pocket. He tears open the corner, seeing that it is stuffed with cash. He counts the edges of the bills and estimates that he is now richer by five hundred pounds.

Plath rises from the sidewalk and brushes himself down. Then he hurries along the street, with a new spring in his step.

He pulls up in front of the maritime supplies shop and is relieved to see the

C. Plath sextant is still in the window display. He steps inside, smiling broadly. The shop assistant looks in surprise at the blood matted in Plath's hair and the stubble on his chin.

"I'm here for the sextant," he tells her.

The shop assistant retrieves the device from the window display and hands it to him. The sextant is made of brass, shiny and dense. He observes the perfect machining of the mirrors, the semicircular rack and pinion, and the bevels.

Plath raises the sextant to his face and squints through the lens tube. He pans around the shop, then focuses the telescope outside through the windows and in so doing he sees a young girl observing him from the street. The girl has a parcel under her arm and is

holding the hand of an attractive middle-aged woman.

Felicity pulls Mrs. Thompson to a halt and watches in fascination, mesmerized by the man squinting through the shiny metal device. Plath lowers the sextant and locks eyes with Felicity. He flicks a nervous smile and turns to the shopkeeper.

“I’ll take it.”

The shopkeeper says, “There is a bezel screw that needs replacing. See here? We can have it delivered this afternoon?”

“The Bellevue Hotel,” says Plath. He scribbles a note on a piece of paper and places this and a pile of bills on the counter.

The shopkeeper reads the words on the note and chuckles. “Is that really

your name?” she asks. “I can’t wait to tell my husband about this.”

From the maritime shop, Plath finds his way to a tailor. He continues with a spring in his step. In no time, Plath finds himself moving expertly around a rack of suits. The tailor looks on with a mixture of fascination and disgust.

“Can I help you with something, Sir?”

“I want a navy pinstripe suit, dinner jacket, five shirts, five pairs of socks, five briefs, two ties, and black shoes to fit,” says Plath.

“How many buttons on the jacket?” asks the tailor.

“Two. Double stitch.”

“We have just the thing for you over here,” says the tailor.

Plath leaves the store with his new clothes in a bag. He hails a carriage and

rides to his quarters, a dingy set of apartments in Fortitude Valley. He asks the driver to wait for him.

Inside his room, he retrieves a leather suitcase from under his bed, one of the few quality things that he owns. Inside is a leather case. He checks to find his ammunition and cleaning gear for the Mauser pistol.

He quickly gathers up a half-dozen small scotch bottles from various locations in the room and puts them into the case. On top, he places the bag containing the new suit. Before he departs, he checks himself in the cracked mirror over the grubby basin. He splashes some water on his face and does his best to remove the dried blood.

On his way out of the apartment,

Plath drops in on his landlady. He hands her a bundle of notes, paying his rent up to date. He tells her he won't be coming back. He steps inside his carriage and says, "Bellevue Hotel, please driver."

At the Bellevue Hotel, the concierge looks stunned as a big man in the ruined suit approaches.

"My name is Plath. Corben Plath. There is a room booked for me."

The concierge is disbelieving until he finds Plath's name on his list.

"Also, there is a parcel arriving for me soon. Will you let me know when it arrives?"

In his room, Plath takes a much-needed wash. Steam rises from behind the curtain surrounding the bathtub. Diluted blood moves towards the

plughole at Plath's feet.

After the shower, Plath looks at himself in the mirror. He rubs his hand across his face and smiles. He can't remember the last time he was so clean-shaven and sober. "Good evening, Mr. Plath," he says to himself, "fancy a drink?"



## Plath meets Felicity

In the lobby, the concierge hands Plath a box wrapped in brown paper. In his new suit, Plath looks unusually dapper. Now with his sextant, he is complete. He takes the box to a lounge chair in the lobby.

Opening the box, Plath stares at the shiny brass sextant. How many years has he coveted this device? When he was fifteen years old, he fashioned a sextant out of small mirrors and pieces of wood. It didn't work, but it looked as though it might. Plath shudders as an errant thought enters his mind, making him pensive for a while. The dazzle of the real sextant quickly recaptures his attention.

Nearby, shielded from view by a row

of pot plants, Felicity, Portland and the Thompsons are taking pre-dinner drinks. Felicity is not concentrating on the adults talking. Instead, she has spied Plath through the leaves and watches as he lovingly examines the sextant.

Intrigued, she slips away from the adults and approaches Plath, mesmerized by the object in his hands.

“Hello, Mister,” she says, boldly, “that’s a beautiful thing.”

Plath looks up, surprised. He smiles awkwardly, “I just bought it today.”

“Is it for doing operations?” asks Felicity, thinking it looks like something from the corset shop.

“This is a sextant,” says Plath, holding it up.

“A sexton?” she mispronounces, “what does it do?”

“It’s a positioning device for marine navigation.”

Felicity is awestruck by the glistening metal and the complicated detail of its shape. She turns to see Portland and the Thompsons stand. “I have to go now,” she says.

Plath continues to admire the sextant, caught in his dreamy world. He retrieves the instruction manual and spends a good half hour reading as though it were a part of a ritual and he was going to be tested on his knowledge.

Eventually, he looks up from the manual and takes stock of his luxury surroundings. Then he remembers he had promised himself a drink.

He takes the sextant to his room, then descends into the lobby, leaving his key

at reception. He steps out of the hotel and spends some time ambling around Brisbane, looking for a watering hole that is on par with his attire.

Later that night, Plath rests at the bar amongst a crowd of equally well-dressed men in an up-market city hotel. The bartenders work at a frenetic pace, and the crowd is three deep. Plath is trapped in the scrum, sitting contentedly, enjoying the bustle. He has a scotch in his hand and a big grin on his face.

A skinny man in a suit takes offense at Plath's reluctance to shift from his position. "Afford some latitude with your elbows, my man, there's a push on for service."

Plath glances at the man, and chuckles. He wouldn't survive five

seconds in the Worker's Tavern.

The skinny man continues to moan, "The convention at this bar is that one shouldn't occupy the stools when there is a push for service."

"Are you talking to me?" asks Plath, genuinely surprised to have the man addressing him in this way.

"I'll be doing a jolly sight more than talking if you refuse to avail your seat."

"*Pah!*" snorts Plath, "You are like a stick insect with a stick up its ass."

"Damned rudeness, move on!" says the skinny man. He lands his scrawny hand on Plath's shoulder, not knowing that this is a foolish thing to do.

Effortlessly, Plath puts the skinny man in an arm lock. He is about to deliver a blow to his head when he takes stock of crowd around him. This venue is far

too cultured for a bar fight. So, instead, Plath allows the skinny man to put in a few punches here and there while he swings him around in circles. Space opens up around them as the people in the crowd step back, unsure whether this struggle is a threat or theater.

So Plath makes it easy for them. He dances with the skinny man allowing him to punch uselessly at his head. He takes the Mauser pistol from his belt and places the barrel against the thin man's forehead.

"I call this one the Boer Waltz," Plath says aloud, as he pirouettes through the crowd.

There are noises of shock and fear, followed by cheers and laughter. Plath is grinning from ear to ear. He dances from one end of the room to the other,

looking for a courtesan, but he can't tell the working girls from the society women, so he smiles at them all.

“Get him, Henry,” shouts someone from the crowd, disingenuously. Henry, the skinny man, struggles to punch at Plath, but to no avail.

“Sit down, old chap,” says Plath, when he has had his fill of the dance.

He releases the skinny man, placing his strong hand on the man's bony shoulder and forcing him onto a stool.

“Let me buy you a drink.”

## Municipal Wharf

*Tuesday, 21 March 1911*

A whistle bellows, blasting steam from the funnel of a large black ship tied alongside Municipal Wharf on the Brisbane River. She is a large ship with a white superstructure, two decks high and a single funnel. A row of lifeboats hangs from derricks on the Boat Deck. Large, yellow cranes are active, moving cargo to and from the ship.

The wharf is busy with many people moving around, engaged in the turnaround of the steamer. Possner is there, like an immaculate butterfly, motionless amongst dried leaves moving in a breeze. He observes as a carriage pull up, and then walks across the dock to meet it.



Possner opens the carriage door to see Plath inside. He looks Plath over and nods approvingly.

“Good. Good,” Possner says. “Apart from the bloodshot eyes, you look the part. I hope you have it all planned out.”

Plath is not happy to be answering to his younger brother so early in the morning. He thinks quickly, remembering his instruction and says, “I’ll take care of business the night before we reach Mackay.”

“Good. Our men in Mackay will be looking out for you. Here.” Possner hands Plath a folder. “Your travel documents. Keep off the grog until you have completed your mission, Corben. They have jails in Townsville too, you know?”

“How do I identify this professor?” asks Plath.

“If he looks like a professor and talks like a professor, he’s your man. Oh, one last thing,” says Possner, ominously, “I’ve sent you back to Yongala.”

Possner closes the carriage door, leaving Plath confused, not knowing what the comment meant. He opens the folder to review the travel documents inside. He stares at the paper, trying to piece the information together.

“What’s going on?,” Plath says aloud, anxiously. He rubs his eyes with the back of his hand and continues reading.

What’s that? Why is the document trembling in his hand? From where came this sweat and these panicked thoughts?

Plath gasps! His eyes fixed on one word.

It's that word again. Yongala. He hastily opens a folded piece of paper revealing a map of a ship. At the top of the page are the words: S.S. Yongala.

“No!” Stunned, Plath pulls back the curtain of the carriage and sees, across the busy wharf, the big black hull of the steamship. He sees the steel plates and the myriad rivets that hold the ship together. With his eyes, he follows a line of rivets all the way along the hull to the bow, the front of the ship, where there is painted in bold white letters the name: YONGALA.

“No. It can't be!” Plath gasps. He becomes light-headed, feels himself blacking out. He draws a deep breath and continues staring in angst at that

word. All of his demons rise to the front of his mind, and he remembers cousin Marion, the smell of her hair, as though she were sitting right beside him.

## Flashback in Time

*South Australia, 1885*

In the arid country on the high plateau, there is a dusty track, and in the hazy distance, a small town. An open two-seat carriage moves along the track past a wooden sign that reads: Yongala - population 310.

On the cart is a woman in her early forties, Plath's mother, and a young girl, thirteen, Marion.

"Cousin Corben will be happy to see you," says Mrs. Plath. "Assuming that we can get him down from the roof, that is."

"Does he still go on the roof?" asks Marion, giggling.

"On the roof, up a tree. Anywhere he shouldn't be. You be careful around

him now, you'll get yourself hurt."

Later that day, young Corben Plath, aged fifteen, stands with Marion behind the house looking up at the chimney. He has a canvas bag slung over his shoulder.

"We can fix the moon from up there," he says, cryptically.

"I don't know what that means, but it sounds dangerous."

"Not if you're careful, its not. Come on."

Young Plath helps Marion onto a ladder leaning against the house. On the roof, Plath takes from his bag a device made of pieces of wood and mirrors. He hands it to Marion who makes a confused smile.

"What's this?" she asks, giggling.

"It's a homemade sextant."

“What’s it for?”

“I’ll show you.” Young Plath stands behind Marion with his arms around her and adjusts the wooden sextant in her hands. It’s very intimate. He smells the fresh scent of her hair.

“Look through the little tube there. See the moon rising?”

“It’s so pretty.”

Plath adjusts the mirrors for her,  
“Now, align the moon with the horizon.”

“I think I can do it. Oh wow!”

“Good huh? One day I am going to buy a real one. A C. Plath marine sextant.”

“They made one with your name.”

“Funny isn’t it?” he says.

Plath gently leans his face towards her to place a kiss on her cheek. Marion

adjusts her position to face him but her foot slips from under her, and she overbalances.

In a flash, Plath snatches Marion's hand. He manages to hold her weight for a second, but she is hanging over the side of the roof now and panicking.

Plath grips tighter, desperately trying to grasp the bricks on the side of the chimney with his other hand. But Marion slips from his grasp, and she falls. Plath stands, dumbstruck, his eyes wide open, staring at the ground where Marion has fallen.

At Marion's funeral, Plath sobs as the coffin is carried towards the grave. He follows solemnly, holding his mother's hand, staring at the dirt in front of him.

"It wasn't your fault, Corben," says his Mother. But Young Plath cannot hear



her words for the storm of thoughts in his mind.

A week later, Plath wanders away from home and stands forlornly in the main street of the neighboring town, Peterborough. He is depressed and withdrawn. He watches a group of men gathered around a desk attended by two uniformed soldiers. A sign reads: ‘Army Recruitment. First South Australian Mounted Rifles.’

A soldier sees Plath and points at him, “You there, boy, come over here.”

Thirty years later, in Brisbane 1911, Plath closes the curtain of the carriage feeling forlorn. Sweat has dried on his skin, and he feels sticky and uncomfortable. He holds his face in his hands, dumbfounded, anxious and confused. The carriage driver knocks

on the cabin roof, hurrying him along.

Plath steps out of the carriage,  
lightheaded. He carries his suitcase up  
the gangplank. In his cabin, he collapses  
onto his bunk and lays there, breathing  
heavily.

## Security Guards

Amid the hive of activity around the ship, another carriage pulls up. The door flies open and Felicity leaps out. She hits the deck but instead of rushing off into the crowd, she is instantly halted by the presence of the steamship Yongala, tied up alongside Municipal Wharf.

The most immediate sensation of the vessel is its vast size. Felicity finds that she can't observe the full extent of the ship just by moving her eyes. She has to turn her head to see from one end of the ship to the other.

The next consuming sensation of Yongala is the visual confusion caused by all the eclectic detail, the jumble of colours and shapes. The lower part of

the ship, the hull, is the most basic. The hull is comprised of sheets of steel locked together with rivets and painted black. Running most of the hull's length is a single row of round holes, portholes, looking like the ship has been shot up with a Gatling gun.

Above the hull, the variety begins. The most obvious elements are the busy cranes on the Main Deck, working tirelessly. Above the cranes at various elevations are the big white lifeboats; the guy wires that extend to the top of the funnel; the great bronze air scoops that ventilate the ship. And most relevant to Felicity's recent readings is a plume of carbonic acid and water vapour rolling out of Yongala's single funnel. A funnel that seems so perfectly centered it is almost as if the ship was

designed around it.

Observing this tangle of elements, Felicity feels that the ship is not a single thing so much as a collection of many things. It is as though this random assemblage, having been given the name ‘ship’, automatically falls into the right place to perform a specific purpose.

While Felicity knows not the first thing about ships, she feels instantly confident about Yongala’s prowess just by how she looks.

After drinking in the magnificent and scary vastness of Yongala, Felicity realizes that she is completely out of her depth, and she hurries Portland out of the carriage.

“Come on, Uncle. Quickly! Quickly!”

“Hold on girl, hold on,” Portland

protests, “we need the bags.”

Portland steps out of the carriage, exhausted by Felicity’s pace. He watches as the driver pulls their bags from the back of the carriage.

“I’ll take it. I’ll take it,” says Felicity excitedly, snatching the suitcase handle from the driver. She struggles to drag the bag across the dock, gets it halfway, runs out of puff, abandons it, and races off into the crowd.

“Felicity Cumberland!” shouts Portland angrily, stamping his cane; but it’s too late, she’s gone.

Felicity dashes madly through the crowd and comes to an immediate and sudden halt to watch crewmen adjust a canvas strap around the belly of a fully-grown bull. She looks up to see the cables leading to the end of a long

yellow boom on the deck of Yongala.

The bull rises into the air, and lets out a long, frightened “*mooo.*” The crane swings the beast over the gunwale and out of sight.

Felicity claps her hands, excitedly. In so doing, she draws the attention of two young deck boys, Tommy and Paul, slacking off from their duties. They’re resting against the rail on the Promenade Deck, watching events. Felicity feels self-conscious being scrutinized by the boys and turns away from them.

Through the crowd, Felicity sees Aldous Thompson, the government man, wave to someone. She looks across the dock and sees Portland is the recipient of his attention. She watches the two men approach each other and

shake hands.

Thompson draws Portland aside to investigate a carriage, on the back of which is a large black container displaying the words: 'Bulimba Meats'.

Felicity is onto this in a flash. She moves through the crowd and watches, intrigued, as Thompson opens the rear doors of the box. The insides have been fitted out with two sets of bunk beds. Sitting on the lower bunks are four suited men. They look hot and annoyed.

Across the wharf, Melvin Possner, CEO of the Queensland Coal Board, sees Thompson talking to an old man by the meat carriage and he recognizes the old man as Professor Portland. Possner tries to get a better look, but the moving crowd allows him just brief



glimpses.

Thompson points to the four men inside the meat truck and informs Portland, “This is your personal security detail. Hugh, Pell, McGrew and Turk. Turk’s in charge.”

Hugh and Pell look like brothers, gaunt, with beady eyes. McGrew is Irish, big, steely and tough. Turk is older, with olive skin, a mustache, and a mean looking scowl. He plucks a hair from his nostril and examines it.

“This is Professor Frederick Portland,” says Thompson.

Turk sees Felicity peering in his direction. Their eyes meet, and he licks his lips at her. Felicity is terrified and hides out of sight. When the meat truck door is closed, Felicity approaches Portland and takes his hand.

“Oh, there you are,” says Portland, deliberately moving her away from the meat box.

“Where is the Smoke Engine?” she asks.

“It will be here shortly,” Thompson tells her and then addresses Portland, “let’s introduce you to Captain Knight and let him know of our situation.”

Portland nods, “Come on, Felicity, we’ll board the ship.”

Taking Portland’s hand, Felicity walks across the wharf to the gangplank that connects Yongala to the land. Portland steps onto the long metal and wood structure and starts to walk up it. She follows, anxiously moving up the steep wooden plank toward the Main Deck of the big black ship. She peers anxiously at the river water between the

wharf and the hull.

Leaning over the handrail a deck above, Tommy and Paul watch the passengers boarding. Half a dozen people are ascending the gangplank. At the head of the group is an old woman with one hand gripped tightly on the gangplank rope, the other clutching her handbag.

“What about that one?” suggest Tommy, laughing.

“Nah,” says Paul, “definitely too old.”

Behind the old lady is a flamboyantly dressed woman in her mid-forties. Her generous breasts seem to have a life of their own.

“Whoa!” says Tommy.

“More like double whoa!” says Paul.

Trailing behind Portland, Felicity is the next person to be scrutinized by the

truant deck boys.

“*Nah*,” says Tommy, “she’s on the cusp, I reckon.”

## Boarding Yongala

At the top of the gangplank Felicity halts, suddenly overwhelmed by the vast presence of the Steam Ship Yongala. The sights, sounds, smells and the sheer scale of the ship, overwhelm Felicity's senses. Yongala is as large as a Sydney office block laid on its side.

At the top of the gangplank, Felicity hits a crossroads; she is neither on the ship nor off it. She observes that the top of the gangplank is moving relative to the side of the ship, and she's reminded of the gap between the carriages of the steam train.

She looks anxiously left then right and sees that the ship exists now only as an eight-foot wide deck, between the superstructure and the bulwark, that

stretches far into the distance in both directions. Portland has gone, having entered a set of double doors and disappeared inside.

Felicity is alone, trapped at the top of the gangplank. For a few moments, she is afraid, as though stepping aboard Yongala is a commitment from which there is no turning back. She closes her eyes and steps forward.

Immediately, it is as though she has fallen into a rabbit hole; every sense is alerted to a fundamental rearrangement of her surroundings. The ship moves beneath her feet, rumbling, with the hum of machinery transmitted through steel. There is the sound of fan-forced air rushing through the vessel and an aroma of salt, coal soot and fresh paint, all mixed together.

Felicity stands motionless on the deck, gazing around her, drinking it all in, feeling as though a living being had absorbed her into its metal flesh.

Portland steps onto the deck and calls her name, breaking her from her trance.

“This way, Flicky,” he says, waving her over.

Felicity moves quickly to him and takes his hand. She peers curiously into the lobby of the ship. Here, she sees a more familiar sight, much like that of the Bellevue Hotel. It is all immaculately wood paneled. There is a wide stairwell that leads up to a higher deck and, less invitingly, down to a lower deck.

The purser welcomes them onto the ship and checks their names against the manifest. A seaman takes their bags and

escorts them up the carpeted stairway towards the first class staterooms on the Promenade Deck. This is as good as it gets on the Yongala, he tells them.

Inside the cabin, there is a double bed that is folded up into a recess in the wall. There is a braided rope attached to the upper edge, and Portland pulls on this and steps back as the bunk lowers.

There is a bunk bed against the outer wall, the lower berth set up like a bench seat. Felicity tosses her bag onto the upper bunk then scrambles after it. There is a porthole looking out onto the Promenade Deck. Felicity snuggles up with a pillow and observes the activities outside, across the way on the banks of the Brisbane River.

“This looks very comfortable,” says Portland, stretching himself out on the



bunk, giving it a test run.

Felicity is suddenly alerted to an upcoming opportunity. She watches as Portland settles himself and his eyes flicker closed. Then, she counts in her head to twenty, which is as long as it takes for Portland to fall asleep. Then she jumps down and departs the room, gently turning the door handle closed behind her.

With Portland asleep, Felicity is free to roam. She moves along the hallway to the stairwell where there is a door that leads into the Drawing Room.

The walls are made of polished walnut, inlaid with panels of decorated, textured wallpaper. There's a piano and a bookcase, with carved doors. The ceiling is painted ivory, and in the middle, there's a cupola, a glass paneled

roof that allows natural light to flood the room.

There are a few women seated in the Drawing Room, and Felicity is unsure whether she is permitted to join them. So she moves quietly to avoid being noticed

Down the hallway is a room that she is definitely not allowed to enter: the Smoking Room. As she approaches, a man exits and the door slowly closes behind him. She sees that room is empty and instinctively darts through the doorway before it closes. Her heart races as she stands inside the room, her back pressed against the wall.

It's half dark, the blinds having been drawn down, but within the gloom, there is a golden glow coming from the far wall. The light draws her in, like a

moth. Stretching from one side of the room to the other are twelve large polished copper sheets into which the signs of the Zodiac have been hand beaten. For each sign there is a nubile and voluptuous woman draped in Greek costume, standing in relief from a half-moon. The Greek symbol for each star sign is embossed underneath.

Felicity studies this art piece with her mouth and her eyes wide open. These symbols are familiar, but their meaning is unclear. She observes the imprints of stars in the copper plate and silently mouths the words written above each of the panels. In the half-light, the words are indistinct, so she has to make them up.

“*Hairys, Callicorn, Librit, and Piskis...*” she says, mesmerized by the names;

fascinated by the fact that they are abstract and yet part of an elaborate pattern. She takes note that she must ask Portland to explain it to her. Except that she would then be forced to admit that she had been inside the Smoking Room.

She hears voices and suddenly becomes anxious to be out of this secret men's place. She slips out the door silently and continues on her journey.

Felicity descends the wide staircase, snoops around the First Class Saloon and descends a deck further, where she comes across something most scary: the Children's Room.

The room has been purposely set aside for children who travel on board the ship. A room so designed that

adults don't have to see or hear them during their trip. Felicity peers inside in horror, seeing a girl her age playing with dolls and blocks. There is not a book in sight. She gulps and has a strong sense that this is where she will end up if she annoys Portland too much.

She moves into a tiled passageway illuminated with electric luminaires. She's deep inside the ship now, below the Main Deck. It is claustrophobic, and electric fans force air throughout, filling the passageway with a rushing noise.

She moves gingerly along the tiled corridor when a door opens and reveals the Galley, in which many people are at work. The ship suddenly seems full of people and bustle.

Felicity hears a noise from behind her

and turns to see a Galley worker enter the corridor, moving towards her. She's trapped, and she freezes, but the Galley worker passes her without comment.

She heaves a long sigh of relief and promptly rushes along the corridor, past the Children's Room, up two flights of stairs and along the corridor.

Inside her cabin, she closes the door quietly and rests against the wall breathlessly and watches Portland wake.

"Oh," says the old Professor, "I must have nodded off."

"Just for a few seconds," says Felicity, catching her breath.

Portland retrieves his watch and says, "We have to meet Thompson and the Captain on the bridge."

"The bridge?" says Felicity, confused.

“There’s a bridge?”

“That’s the bit at the top where they drive the ship from.”

“This way then, Uncle,” says Felicity, authoritatively and leads him into the hallway.

## Yungle in the Jungle

Felicity and Portland ascend a flight of stairs to the Boat Deck. They walk past the cupola, the windows looking down into the ship. Portland glances through the glass and sees the carpeted floor below. He feels vertigo and looks away.

“That’s the Drawing Room,” says Felicity, knowingly.

They come to the structure that forms both the Chart Room and the Captain’s quarters. Outside the Chart Room door, Thompson is in discussion with Captain Knight.

Knight is in his sixties. He is solid, six-foot-something with a white mustache. He’s like a marine version of Portland, albeit a decade younger, much more sprightly and not so prone to nodding



off.

“This is Professor Portland,” says Thompson.

Pleasure to meet you, Professor,” says Knight.

“And my niece, Felicity,” says Portland.

“Aren’t you a dainty lass?” says Knight, beaming a smile at Felicity.

“Dainty Lass,” grumbles Felicity, who is feeling more bullish than dainty at that moment.

“What’s in there?” she asks directly of the Captain.

“That’s the Chart Room. Take a look inside,” says Knight, “I’ll just finish up with Mr. Thompson.”

The main feature of the Chart Room is the chart table upon which is a large sheet of paper featuring a map of the

Queensland coast. Brass tools and pencils are scattered across the chart.

Portland picks up a pair of dividers instructs Felicity on the use of the marine navigation chart.

“Here we go, Flicky, let’s see how far it is to Townsville,” he says.

Felicity watches intently as her uncle taps the pointy ends of the brass dividers against the scale on the side of the chart.

“Measure distance in nautical miles against the latitude scale on the side of the chart here,” says Portland. He opens the points of the dividers to measure a hundred miles then places one point on the dot representing Brisbane.

“Then walk to Townsville,” he says.

“Walk to Townsville?” says Felicity,

giggling.

“Like this, see?” Portland demonstrates the technique then hands Felicity the dividers.

While Felicity practices walking to Townsville, Thompson and Captain Knight are discussing in a whisper outside the Chart Room. The Captain says, “That’s quite alright, Mr. Thompson. I am prepared to omit the names of these security men from the official record. I will nonetheless make note of the names in my private notebook.”

“And you will brief your crew about the secrecy of our mission?” asks Thompson.

“Secrecy?” laughs Captain Knight. “That doesn’t exist on a ship. If one deck boy gets a whiff of the news,

within an hour every stoker, cook and scullery maid will be speculating a hypothesis on the matter.”

Captain Knight turns his attention to his guests. “How is our new navigator coming along?”

Felicity steps the dividers along the chart counting aloud, “Three hundred miles, four hundred miles, five hundred miles, six hundred miles to Townsville on Yongala.”

“That’s ‘Yungulla’, corrects Captain Knight, “think of Yungle, like the jungle.”

“Yungle like the jungle,” laughs Felicity. She puts down the dividers and notices a door at the back of the Chart Room – a door that she has not yet been through.

Portland says, “Captain, it would give

me much comfort if my Smoke Engine could be stowed above decks.”

“I’ll see what we can do. Maybe we will even bend company rules and allow Felicity to dine with you in the First Class Saloon.”

“Much appreciated,” says Portland.

While Portland and Knight are distracted, Felicity opens the door and steps inside the room. She sees a bunk and a chest of drawers and quickly realizes that she is in someone’s personal space. Her stomach knots and she steps backward, thinking she is most definitely destined for Children’s Room.

She turns to see Portland has caught sight of her inside the Captain’s Cabin, and she gulps deeply.

“Felicity Cumberland!” he hollers,

stamping his cane on the floor.

Felicity freezes and robotically moves back into the Chart Room. She glances nervously at the Captain and is relieved to see that he is smirking as Portland berates her.

“If there are two places on a ship where a young female requires explicit invitation it is the Captain’s Cabin and the Smoking Room. Do you hear me? These places are off limits.”

Felicity shrinks. Portland called her ‘young female’. That is the strongest language that he ever uses, and its effect is always devastating.

“Yes Uncle,” says Felicity, staring forlornly at the deck.

Moments later, she raises her eyes to see if Portland is still glaring at her. Fortunately, he has finished his tirade

and has turned his attention to the Captain.

So she lets out a relieved sigh and then finds herself smirking. She has, after all, prevailed. The two forbidden places on ‘Yungle in the Jungle’ – the Captain’s Cabin and the Smoking Room – have both been probed by her, without invitation; and all within half an hour of boarding the ship.

## The Bulimba Meat Truck

On the dock, metal couplings are attached to the lugs on the meat box. Inside, in the dark, the security guards listen anxiously to the noise amplified by the thin metal skin of the box. As the crane takes the weight of the box, Turk anxiously grips the edge of his bunk.

“How’s this going to work then, Boss?” asks McGrew, slouched back in the dark. “It’s hot as hell in this box.”

“We’ll hook up to the ship’s refrigeration,” Turk says, gritting his teeth.

“I didn’t know you were a tradesman.”

“I’m not, Pell is.”

“I’m not a tradesman, that’s Hugh,” says Pell.



“What?” says Hugh, “I was a carpenter before I got into security. I don’t know the first thing about refrigeration.”

“Oh, blimey,” says McGrew. “Who set this up?”

Turk scowls. He plucks a hair from his nostril and flicks it into the dark.

The meat box is hoisted over the ship’s rail and lowered into the hold. It touches down with a bump. Then there is a scrabbling noise as crew disconnects the couplings.

Tommy, the deck boy, opens the door of the box and peers inside. He is holding an electrical cable with an illuminated light globe on the end. The four security guards look at him impassively.

“You should be snug as bugs here,”

he says as he hands the globe to Turk.

“Treated like fricking insects,” grumbles Turk, venomously. “Come on, Pell. String this thing up.”

“Yeah. And off you go, Hugh. Start fridging,” says McGrew.

“But I’m a carpenter,” Hugh moans.

“Shithouse door,” grumbles Turk. “Protecting a guy in First Class and we don’t even get a proper cabin. For frick’s sake Hugh, stop bitching and get onto it.”

“So how’s it going to work then, Boss?” asks McGrew plumping up his pillow. “You know, this security detail.”

“We’ll take shifts, one at a time while the rest of the insects stay in the hole.”

“So what are we actually doing here?”

“Protecting a Professor and his stupid toy box. You’ll report anything

suspicious to me. I have been deputized to arrest. And if I catch any of you guys taking advantage on company time...”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. So who’s up first then?” asks McGrew.

“I am,” says Turk. “Come on, Hugh. Snap to it. I want this place chilly when I get back. And Pell, what the frick are you doing?”

“I’m just laying here.”

“Yeah, well fricking don’t.”

## The Smoke Engine Arrives

Portland and Felicity are on the deck watching as the Smoke Engine crate, wrapped in a thick net, is lowered onto the cargo hatch behind Yongala's superstructure. Felicity does a little dance, indicating that she wants to get away.

Portland holds her tight. "Lesson coming," he tells her.

Felicity stops trying to escape and looks around for the lesson.

Portland addresses the deck hand in charge. "Do you have the couplings that allow one to release the crate from the deck in an instant?"

The deck hand turns to his crew and barks, "Get the quick links."

Portland watches the crew apply the

quick links to the crate. He inspects the work and is satisfied. He says to Felicity, “If the ship goes down, we don’t want the Smoke Engine going down with her.”

“The ship won’t sink, will it Uncle?”

“Highly unlikely. It’s a good, strong ship, this.”

“Is that the lesson?” she asks.

“The quick links are the lesson.”

“I don’t understand,” says Felicity.

“It is important to plan for events if you have the time. Even the very unlikely one.”

Felicity’s is distracted by something quite odd. There is a horse hovering in mid-air. “Uncle, look!”

Across the side of the deck, a horse is being winched aboard. Felicity finds a place to watch, next to the deckhand

who is controlling the horse with a rope.

“Took its time,” the deckhand tells her. “You’d think the racehorse would be here first.”

Felicity smiles. She likes that the deckhand spoke to her so directly. She jumps up and down with joy, clapping her hands as the horse touches down gently on the deck.

With the horse on board, the ship’s whistle lets out a bellowing scream, and the seamen cast off the mooring lines attaching the Yongala to the dock.

Felicity skips off to observe the gap opening between the hull of Yongala and the wharf. The ship is now a steel island in the Brisbane River.

She rushes across the deck and sees the buxom woman who was ahead of

her on the gangplank. She stops in front of the woman, beaming a big smile.

“Hello, beautiful miss. Who are you?” the woman asks.

“Beautiful miss. That’s nice. I’m Felicity. Are you going to Townsville?”

“Going all the way, sweetie.”

“You smell nice, are you wearing perfume?”

“I am absolutely and positively drenched in Tea Rose, my Little Darling.”

“Little Darling,” says Felicity, then races off, along the Promenade Deck.

Not looking where she is going, she runs smack into a man who grabs her roughly by the arm. The man squats and puts his face close to hers, holding her tight. It’s Turk.

There are bits of green material caught in between his teeth, and his breath smells like a toothache. Felicity gasps and struggles to get free, but she's held fast.

Turk pulls a hair from his nostril and shows it to her. He snarls, "See this? It's wolf hair."

Felicity sees something metal in a leather holder under his arm. She looks around anxiously but on this part of the Yongala, there is nobody to be seen. She struggles to get free, but Turk's grip is tight.

"I'm the big bad wolf," growls Turk. "If you tell anyone about my wolf pack, I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll lick your house down." Turk flicks his tongue out like a man possessed.

Felicity wriggles free from his grasp



and tries to run but Turk lunges for her, catching her around the waist. She shrieks and bolts for it, running swiftly along the deck looking for her uncle.

## Steaming Downstream

Later, Felicity is sitting with Portland on the wooden benches on the Promenade Deck where the First Class passengers are taking in the view.

She is still jittery from having Turk manhandle her, and she scans the deck anxiously, on the lookout for danger. There is a crowd of about twenty people leaning against the rails watching Brisbane slide past.

Portland strokes her hair gently, “I am telling you, Felicity Cumberland, you’ll come to harm if you run around without looking,” says Portland.

“I’m sorry, Uncle,” says Felicity, forlornly. She sees the nice lady strolling in their direction and beams a smile.

“Good day,” says Mrs. Tea Rose.

“Good day Ma’am,” says Portland, formally.

“Hello, Mrs. Tea Rose,” says Felicity with a cheeky grin.

“You have already met?” asks Portland, surprised.

“I met your charming daughter just briefly, at the back of the ship, or was it the front? I can’t tell.”

“Charming daughter?” asks Felicity.

“My niece,” corrects Portland.

“He’s my uncle.”

Mrs. Tea Rose holds a document in her gloved hand. She unfolds it, saying, “I have this fact sheet about the ship but my eyes aren’t as robust as the rest of my body. Perhaps you could tell me what it says.”

“I’ll do it,” says Felicity. She takes the

document and examines it, feeling comfortable now that she has friendly faces around her and an audience.

“Let’s hear it then, felicitous Felicity,” says Portland.

The Yongala slowly steams down the Brisbane River followed by an oil cloud of black coal smoke tinged with white steam. Below decks, boiler men, muscular and covered in grime, shovel coal into the roaring furnace. In the adjacent compartment, the Engine Room, machinery glistens under electric light and massive pistons cycle up and down. The entire vessel hums with the cadence of the steam engine that drives her. The shaft spins swiftly, and the single propeller churns through the water throwing a huge frothing wake behind the ship.

On the Promenade Deck, Felicity clears her throat and reads aloud from the document, “Launched in 1903, Yongala is a steel hulled passenger and freight vessel some 350 feet in length. With three boilers she is powered by a triple expansion steam engine turning a single propeller. She burns about sixty-seven tons of coal a day and can achieve a top speed of seventeen knots. She is one of the first ships to feature not only a refrigerated hold but also electricity.”

“Quite fascinating,” says the woman.

“Sixty-seven tons of coal!” Felicity is astonished.

“That’s over 250 tons of carbonic acid,” says Portland.

“Could a Smoke Engine power the Yongala, Uncle?”

“I dare say it could, given enough bagasse.”

“There’d be so much bagasse,”  
Felicity giggles.

“As if we need more big asses in the world,” says Mrs. Tea Rose, making a haughty laugh.

Felicity doesn’t know what to make of that statement, so she shoots a glance to Portland, seeing that he looks almost stunned. So she just smiles and hands back the document to Mrs. Tea Rose.

## Action Stations

Meanwhile, back in the Coal Board offices, Possner storms around like a man on fire, shouting, “Helmut! Helmut!”

“I’m here. What’s going on?”

“Something is happening on the Yongala!” shouts Possner, “It’s that government man, Thompson. Where is he now?”

“Last I heard, he was heading towards home.”

“Get some muscle. We’re paying him a visit. Come on, man. Chop! Chop!”

An hour later, Possner is in the Coal Board carriage, outside Thompson’s house, a cottage in Paddington. He steps onto the street, tightens his fingers in his white gloves, then enters

the building.

Standing in the hallway, he looks into the lounge room and sees Clarice Thompson hog-tied and gagged, face-down on the sofa. “You have good taste in furnishings and women, by the seems of it,” he says to himself.

There is a choking noise from the kitchen and Possner moves to the doorway. He sees that Helmut has a boot holding Thompson’s head firmly in position on the floor. One of Helmut’s heavies has Thompson’s arms held behind his back.

“*Abbb*. Thuggery,” says Possner, approvingly. “Now this is a management technique that gets results every time.”

He delicately lowers the tip of his cane into Thompson’s exposed ear. It’s a



tight fit, and the Government Man squirms as his hearing is shut off.

“What have we learned?” Possner asks Helmut.

“Old mate here says there are security men on the Yongala looking out for the Professor.”

Possner nods somberly, thinking it through. “They are probably from Wilmington’s private security. Inept, untrained and underpaid.”

“And armed.”

“Really? How do we know this?”

“That’s what old mate said when I twisted his ear.”

“How do you know that he didn’t just say that to get you to stop twisting his ear?” Possner asks.

“I thought about that,” says Helmut. “So I twisted his other ear, as well.”

“And?”

“He didn’t recant.”

“Very thorough. And is the Professor traveling alone?”

“I think so,” says Helmut. “So, what do you want to do, Mr. Possner?”

“Well, given that the Yongala has no radio, we should send a telegram to our mercenary via Mackay. And hopefully, Mr. Plath is sufficiently sober to read it.”

“A telegram?” asks Helmut.

“Okay, how about this? Send two cables to Mackay, the first advising our mercenary that there is trouble aboard.” Possner grits his teeth and says snidely, “And the second reiterating that Mr. Corben Plath is under contract to the Queensland Coal Board, and that if he fails us, he hangs in Townsville.”

“*Umm*,” says Helmut, apprehensively.

“*Umm*, what?”

“I’m a dab hand at mugging people, Mr. Possner, but my grammar ain’t so good.”

“Okay, I’ll send the damned cable myself!” Possner snaps. He thinks it through some more. “And maybe a third cable, inviting the leader of these idiot guards for a quiet chat. What do we know about him?”

“His name’s Turk. He’s a fricking weasel.”

“Is he a married fricking weasel?”

“He’s shackled up with a blonde with a wart on her nose.”

“Then maybe we pay warty Mrs. Turk a visit.” Possner withdraws the cane from Thompson’s ear, then wipes the tip clean on the Government Man’s

trouser.

## Yongala at Sea

Later that evening, Yongala is steaming easily, twenty miles from the coast. She has passed the lee of Moreton Island and now surges powerfully through the sea with gentle rolling motion due to the light sea swell coming from the East.

Plath has spent the afternoon in his cabin, sleeping off his hangover. As the sun sets, he moves to the transom with the sextant box under his arm. The transom is a narrow stretch of the deck between the steering gear cabin and the white railing. From this position, the ocean and sky fill the entire senses.

The air hisses with the white noise caused by the churning white water of the ship's wake. Plath scans the horizon

and takes a deep breath of the warm air punctuated with the tang of salt. He feels an overwhelming sense of release and liberty, almost like his whole life has been leading him to this point.

Plath retrieves the sextant from its box, handling it with the care that one would show the crown jewels. After thirty years of dreaming about this moment, it's upon him. He's going to fix a star with a C. Plath sextant.

He feels anxiety mixed with euphoria as he raises the sextant to his face and peers through the small brass telescope affixed to its centre. Drifting in and out of vision through the tiny glass lenses, he sees the stars.

Unbeknown to Plath, Felicity is watching him from around the side of the bulkhead. She is fascinated to see

Plath holding the shiny thing in his hands. She wants to talk to Plath but feels self-conscious.

Eventually, she is unable to keep her distance, and she steps into view. She watches fascinated as Plath adjusts the index arm. She doesn't approach him, but rests against the transom.

Plath notices her and lowers the sextant, looking at her directly. "Oh, its you again."

"You're the man from the hotel."

Plath glances around and sees that they are alone. He appears confused for a moment, as he is thinking, "Where the hell did she come from?"

"Hello again, Missus. What are you doing on the ship?"

"Missus," giggles Felicity. She fixes her eyes on the sextant. It is gleaming in

the glow of the stern light. She's intrigued and moves closer.

"Are you measuring Hairies and Carricorn?" asks Felicity, thinking back to the copper art piece in the Smoking Room.

"I'm not too sure."

"That's a very pretty sexton." Felicity says raising her hand in the direction of the device.

"Sextant. It's called a sextant."

"Is it a girl or a boy?" she asks.

Plath laughs, "I don't know the answer to that."

"Does it have a name?"

"It does. It's a C. Plath."

"And what's your name?" asks Felicity.

"My name is Corben Plath."

Felicity giggles, "You named the



sexton after yourself.”

“Funny isn’t it.”

“Can I hold it?”

Plath pulls the sextant away. “I can’t let you do that,” he says, anxiously.

Felicity watches in disappointment as he puts the sextant in its box and closes the lid. “I have to go now.”

Felicity stomps her foot on the deck, her face twisted with frustration. “You didn’t ask me my name.”

Plath halts. He turns and looks at her, conscious that she had unnerved him. He holds out his big hand. “I’m sorry Missus, I was very rude. To whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?”

She takes hold of his fingers, “I’m Felicity Cumberland.”

“Hello, Miss Felicity.”

“Miss Felicity. Maybe you could bring

the sexton out another time?” she asks hopefully.

Plath wonders what he can say to get away from her. As he departs, he mumbles, “Maybe. Maybe I could.”

## Kicking Heels

Felicity sits on the edge of her bunk kicking her heels in the air. Portland has his shoes off and has his back against a pillow, reading the newspaper on his bunk. He observes Felicity from the corner of his eye, wondering what is driving her nervous energy.

“Uncle Portland, do you know the height of Carricorn above the horizon?”

Portland lowers his paper and looks at his niece directly, “I can’t say I do.”

“I do,” she says, stropily.

Portland looks back to his paper, not too sure how to take this. “We’ll be going for dinner shortly,” he says.

“I’m not hungry.”

Portland lowers the paper and

observes Felicity staring at the floor.

“Everything okay with you, Flicky?”  
he asks.

Felicity turns away and lies on her bunk facing the wall. She thinks about the horse in the sling, the sweet aroma of Mrs. Tea Rose’s perfume and she wonders what she did that Mr. Plath refused to let her hold the sextant.

She stays like this until she Portland exit the cabin. The she curls up next to the porthole and watches the comings and goings on the Promenade Deck and the stars reflecting off the sea surface. She wonders if she will see Mr. Plath again, and if so whether she should ask after the sexton. Or maybe she should just ignore him altogether.

## Reconnoiter Yongala

In his cabin, Plath stows the sextant case and slips a bottle of scotch into his pocket. He retrieves the map of Yongala from the document pouch, tracing his finger along the diagram as he makes a mental image of the layout of the ship. With the map as his guide, Plath steps into the hallway and sets out to reconnoiter the ship.

He quickly moves through the upper two decks observing both the Smoking and Drawing rooms and the corridors that connect all the cabins.

He finds his way below decks where the ship is more convoluted and cramped. Four decks below his cabin, he finds himself standing in front of a steel door bearing the words Boiler

Room. He's in the bowels of the ship now. It's hot and humid, dominated by the hum and vibration of machinery.

Plath pulls open the door to the Boiler Room and takes a few paces down the steel ladder. As expected, he feels the heat and sees the glow of the boilers and the strong men, covered head to foot in grime, actively shoveling coal into the furnace.

Plath ascends, steps into the hallway closing the Boiler Room door behind him. He moves along the hall to another steel door; this one labeled: Engine Room. He pulls the door open and slips inside.

Along the hall, Plath's actions are observed by Hugh, one of Turk's security guards. A man wearing a suit exiting the Boiler Room dressed in a

suit certainly fits the description of ‘strange behaviour.’ “There could be a bonus in this for me,” he thinks. He walks up to the Engine Room door and presses his ear against the steel to hear.

Inside the door is a ladder leading down to the metal grating on the floor of the Engine Room. Gingerly, Plath makes his way down the ladder. Near the bottom, he hears the sound of the door as Hugh enters.

He looks up to see Hugh standing above him, and he thinks that a suited man in the engine room is mighty suspicious. Plath quickly climbs the stairs, grips Hugh’s lapel and pins him against the inside of the Engine Room door with his forearm pushed under his chin.

“Who are you?” demands Plath.

“Who the frick are you?” repeats Hugh, desperately, struggling to get free. The security guard reaches under his armpit and grips the butt of a revolver. Plath sees the gun and delivers two hard blows to the side of Hugh’s head with his elbow.

Hugh collapses and topples over the handrail, hitting the metal grating below with a loud thud.

Plath looks over the rail to see the man, motionless on the deck. “What the hell?”

He moves quickly down the stairwell, looking around, anxious to not be seen. Plath kicks Hugh’s motionless foot, but there is no response.

“Where do these dead ones keep coming from?” Plath thinks, rubbing his hand over his face. He observes the



pattern of the metal grating and sees a handhold. So, he squats down and grips the handle and raises the metal plate. With his free hand, drags Hugh's body and lets it slip into the bilge water below the grating.

He closes the lid then retrieves Hugh's pistol and quickly turns it into the light. It is a Webley Scott Mk IV, six shot revolver. He used to use one like this himself. He tucks the gun down the front of his pants.

At the top of the ladder, Plath takes a moment to collect his thoughts. Then he steps into the hallway. Apart from being drenched in sweat, he checks out okay. So he makes his way up a flight of steps onto the deck.

When he steps outside, it hits him. Cool, dry air moves against his skin,

and he is struck by the vastness and silence of the ocean, compared to the tight confines of the noisy engine room. He braces himself against a bulkhead for a moment, feeling lightheaded, wondering what had just happened.

Then he feels the revolver in his belt, and he remembers that he just had a close call, and it seems like he has escaped undetected. He moves over to the handrail, glances left then right, then tosses the gun into the dark sea.

Plath moves back into the superstructure, along corridors and flights of stairs and back to his cabin. Inside, he rests his back against the door, catching his breath.

It all happened so fast that it seems like it was only seconds since he had left this room. He replays the events of

the past few minutes in his mind and a dozen questions flood his mind. Who was that man? Why was he armed and wearing a suit in the Engine Room? How long before he'd be found in the bilge? Did anyone see him as he made his escape? Just what in the name of hell is going on?!

Plath holds his hand in front of him and watches it tremble. That's not a good sign. It doesn't normally do that. He pulls the scotch bottle from his pocket raises a toast to himself, saying, "One less man with a gun."

Plath swallows some more scotch until he feels the head-rush come on. Then he removes his jacket and lays it on his bunk. He retrieves his new dinner jacket, dons this, then steps out of his cabin and walks towards the Saloon.

He's feeling peckish; that  
reconnoitering has given him an  
appetite.

## Investigating the Crate

*Wednesday, 22 March 1911*

It's early morning, and Yongala is making good speed. Plath is on deck in the half-light. For the time being, he has the deck to himself. He's taking some time to familiarise himself with the Smoke Engine.

He rests against a bulwark, observing the wooden crate on top of the after cargo hatch. It's wrapped in heavy rope netting and clearly visible on the side of the box are the words 'Portland Smoke Engine' and 'This Way Up'.

Plath calmly observes the crate, trying to get a sense of its weight, and where its balance and fulcrum points might be. Overhead, he observes the yellow boom of the cargo crane. It is

hydraulically driven, with a manual override.

Plath walks around the crate observing its construction and the quick links that attach it to the hatch cover. He checks that no one is around and then pulls open one of the panels, observing the flotation material inside. He looks at this with curiosity, stepping back to gauge the size of the crate.

Then he closes the panel with the heel of his boot. Behind him, Turk steps out on deck and yawns. He picks a blob of booger from his nose, rolls it and pops it into his mouth. That's breakfast sorted!

Glancing around the deck, Turk notices Plath tampering with the crate. He marches forward and taps Plath on the shoulder. Plath snatches Turk's

forearm, twisting it so their faces are brought close together. Turk moves his hand toward his jacket pocket, fumbling for his revolver.

Then Captain Knight comes into view, taking his constitutional tour of the ship. He sees the two men acting oddly and chimes, “Beautiful morning gentlemen!” as though nothing odd were happening on his deck.

Plath and Turk step apart in the manner of two schoolchildren being reprimanded by the Headmaster. Turk holds his wrist, scowling.

“I trust you gentlemen are acquainted?” says the Captain, observing them suspiciously. Turk and Plath shake their heads, sheepishly.

“Well then, maybe we can facilitate a new friendship? Why don’t you join me

for dinner tonight? 6:30 pm sharp.  
Captain's orders.”

Plath and Turk eye each other angrily,  
and the three men go their separate  
ways.



## Afternoon Nap

Mid-afternoon, on the lying on the canvas cover of a lifeboat, Plath is fast asleep and snoring heavily. He has a handkerchief over his face to protect him from the sun. His sextant is on his belly and by his side is a small empty whiskey bottle.

Plath wakes to the noise of singing. It's a strange tune that goes: "*Hairies, Carricorn, Librit* and Fish, Yungle, Jungle, make a wish..."

He looks over the side of his lifeboat and sees a familiar face. It's Felicity, skipping and holding the bundle of bagasse. She sees him looking over the edge of the lifeboat and steps closer to observe him. She notes the empty scotch bottle and the sextant.

“Hello, Mr. Plath. Are you resting with your nursemaid?”

Plath looks around, groggily,  
“Nursemaid?” he asks, nonplussed.

“Uncle says it’s good to have one or two to aid digestion. But he always has about eight,” she giggles.

“I don’t understand,” says Plath.

“That’s what Uncle says. I am too young to understand.”

“You’re too young to drink?” asks Plath, lost.

“I am in my teens, nearly,” says Felicity, defensively.

“I was drinking in my teens,” says Plath.

“You see? I’m grown up enough for that. Could you show me the sextant?”

Plath pulls his jacket over the sextant,  
“I am very sensitive about the sextant.”

“Fine,” snaps Felicity, “then you can’t see my bagasse!”

“Can we still be friends, though?” asks Plath, not knowing why he asked.

Felicity mulls it over, but she’s not giving in, “If I wanted a sexton so much, I would have my Uncle make me one,” she says coyly.

Plath scratches his head. “So, are we still friends?” he asks.

Felicity steps off the lifeboat frame, and Plath rises to see her move away, down the ladder that leads to the transom. He wears a look of confusion that gives way to a soft laugh.

Plath sits up on the side of the lifeboat. His Mauser pistol is on the canvas, covered with sand and salt crystals. He dusts it off and tucks it down the back of his pants.

Plath hears voices and looks over the rail. On the lower deck next to the Smoke Engine crate, an old man is delivering a speech to a group of passengers. Plath watches with interest.

“What did Possner say? If he looks like a Professor and sounds like a Professor, he’s your man.” At last, Plath has his eyes on his target.

On the lower deck, Portland addresses a small crowd who have gathered around him. “It is a little-known fact, even amongst those in the scientific community, that the carbonic acid released through the combustion of coal is raising the temperature of the Earth’s atmosphere.”

Plath notices that there is a large crane on the Poop Deck. Probably the one that lifted the smoke engine into its

place, he thinks. He descends a flight of stairs to the Main Deck, passing the crowd of people listening to Portland and ascends the steps to the Poop Deck and walks towards the crane.

He looks down at the smoke engine and takes hold of the hand crank to get a feel for the mechanics of the crane. Felicity moves through the crowd of passengers to stand in front of her Uncle.

But Plath doesn't see Felicity join her Uncle because he has frozen on the spot. The security guard, Pell, has the barrel of his revolver pressed against his spine.

"You take a lot of interest in that crane," says Pell. "Who are you?"

"I'm your funeral director," growls Plath.

“Where’s our man, Hugh?”

“Is that the guy with the blood coming out of his ears?”

Pell pushes the pistol harder into Plath’s spine. Plath resists the instinct to fight back. A tiny slip and he’ll get a bullet in his spine.

“This way, funny man. Funeral parlor’s down the back,” says Pell.

Pell maneuvers Plath towards the transom. Plath doesn’t want to take the battle to his special place on the ship. However, the man with the gun in his back seems is fidgety and undertrained, risking an accidental of the weapon.

Pell brings Plath to a halt at the narrow deck between the back of the steering gear room and the transom rail. Plath grimaces at the thought of what is about to take place in his sanctuary.

“Do we have to do it here?”

“Show me some identity,” demands Pell.

Plath raises his palms and slowly reaches inside his jacket. Instead of retrieving a wallet, he whips out his hand and smashes the revolver from Pell’s grip.

Plath thumps his knuckles into Pell’s throat, grabs the Mauser pistol from the back of his pants, cocks it, slides off the safety, shoves the barrel under Pell’s chin and pulls the trigger.

*Click!*

Nothing happens. Salt and grit have jammed the action. Instantly, Plath brings his elbow against the security guard’s head. He re-cocks the pistol and fires again.

*CRACK!*

Smoke curls from under Pell's chin. Plath stoops, grabs him by the trouser leg and tips him over the side of the vessel into the foaming water below. The body bobs momentarily to the surface surrounded by foaming, bloodied water and then it drifts from view.

“Consider that your wake.”

A deck boy doing his rounds approaches and Plath notices Pell's revolver lying on the wooden planking. He slips the Mauser pistol back into his belt, looking the deck boy straight in the eye.

“Afternoon, to you,” says Plath, placing his foot over the revolver, dragging it towards him.

“Afternoon, Sir,” says the deck boy, continuing on his way.



Plath flicks the revolver over the side into the sea. He looks out across the wake, but there is no sign of the man apart from a blood splatter on the flagpole that hangs over the transom.

Back in his cabin, Plath retrieves a bottle of scotch from his bag and rests against his door. His hand is trembling again. He salutes, saying, “Two less men with guns.” He takes a swig, then lowers the bottle, thinking, “What the devil is going on?”

## Where's the Bow?

After the crowd around the Smoke Engine moves away, Felicity is reminded of an outstanding mission. She has to get to the bottom of the mystery of the bow tied to the front of the ship.

She finds her way to the Promenade Deck, right to the front, overlooking the pointy end of the ship, and looks across the wood and steel structures there. She searches avidly, still confused why anyone would tie a bow on a ship. She refers to the map of the ship and reaffirms that it most definitely says B-O-W. It even has an arrow pointing to the front of the boat.

Below her, on the Main Deck, Tommy and Paul walk past, and she calls out to

them, “Excuse me. I’m looking for the bow. Is it up there somewhere?”

“The bow?” asks Paul, genuinely surprised. Then he gets it and starts laughing, hiding his amusement behind his hand.

“She wants to know where the bow is,” he hisses to his mate and the pair barely conceal their laughter. He addresses Felicity, pointing toward the front of the ship, “It’s up there, Miss, can’t you see.”

“And the arrows are down the back,” says Tommy as they walk out of sight, laughing.

Felicity is unimpressed, and she decides that it is time to ask the highest authority on the ship. She storms along the Promenade Deck to the flight of steps and ascends to the Boat Deck.

On a mission, she marches up to the Chart Room, pounds on the closed door and waits with her arms crossed and the frump look welded to her face.

She waits and waits and is about to bang on the door again when she hears a noise from inside. The door opens, and Captain Knight emerges, looking like he has just woken up.

“Where’s the bow?” demands Felicity abruptly, “it says there is a bow on the map, but I can’t find it.”

“Right then,” says Captain Knight with a knowing sigh. He looks around hoping to spot Professor Portland but sees that he is alone with the precocious girl. He pushes the door open wide and ushers her inside.

Felicity steps inside the small wooden structure and watches as the Captain

retrieves a rolled up set of plans of the ship and lays it out on the chart table. He pins down the corners of the chart with four small paperweights.

“Since I am awake, you are asking, and it’s my favourite subject, I will educate you in maritime nomenclature,” the old sea captain tells her.

“Okay,” says Felicity, sensing that she has had a win at last.

Captain Knight sweeps his hand across the plans indicating the long section of the ship. “This part of the ship is called the hull, and it is painted black. Running horizontally along the top of the hull is the Main Deck. Above the Main Deck is this white section called the Citadel or the superstructure. You can see that it occupies the middle half of the ship.”

“Okay,” says Felicity, leaning closer.

“Now,” says Captain Knight, placing his finger on the chart, “this is the Seagate, where the top of the gangplank meets the ship. When you stepped off the gangplank and onto Yongala, you went through the Seagate onto the Main Deck, right here. The Main Deck runs the length of the whole ship. Are you with me?”

Felicity is with him, but she is anxious to get to the good bit. She nods impatiently.

“The deck above is called the Promenade Deck, that’s where your cabin is, and the deck above that is the Boat Deck. That’s where we are now. Do you follow so far?”

“I do, I do, I do,” says Felicity anxiously.

“Now, one level above the Main Deck at the front and back of the ship are the Fore Deck and the Poop Deck, respectively.”

“The Poop Deck?” asks Felicity, astonished, “why is it called that?”

“That’s where they used to poop in the old days. Over the side.”

“That’s disgusting,” says Felicity.

“Maybe so, but nonetheless very sensible. It’s downwind, you see. Nowadays we do it inside the ship which creates its own issues if you follow.”

“So where’s the bow?” Felicity demands.

“We’ll come to that. Okay, so between the Citadel and the Fore Deck is a section of the Main Deck called the Forrard Tween Deck. And between the

Citadel and the Poop Deck, there is a part of the Main Deck called the After Tween Deck. That's where your Smoke Engine is located. Do you follow?"

"I do, I do, I do," says Felicity, practically jumping on the spot.

The Captain continues, "Now, if you move toward the front of the ship we call that going forrard and if you want to go to the back of the ship, we call that going aft."

"And the bow?"

"Nearly there," says the Captain. "The very back of the ship is called the transom. So you would have to walk aft from the citadel to get to the transom. Now this is the bit that you've been waiting for. The very front of the ship is called the bow. So if you want to go to the bow, you have to walk forrard



from the citadel. There you are. You see.”

“So where is the bow?” Felicity asks perplexed.

“Well, there is no bow, Miss Felicity. It’s the bow. The front part of the ship.”

“There’s no bow?”

“There is a B. O. W. but it is pronounced ‘bow’ like a dog’s bark and not ‘bow’ like a rainbow. Don’t you see?”

Captain Knight continues with a jaunty tone, “Now if you are looking towards the bow, everything on your left side is to port and everything on your right side--”

Felicity turns and walks out of the Chart Room.

Captain Knight watches her leave and

thinks to himself, “That ought to keep her from coming back.” He closes the Chart Room door and goes back to his cabin to sleep.

## Felicity is Lost

Later that evening, Felicity is sitting on her bunk looking at the bagasse in her lap, pensively. Portland looks over to her, concerned.

“Everything okay with you, Felicity?”  
Portland asks.

“I’m okay.”

“Are you enjoying being on the ship?”

“She is a lovely ship, Uncle,” she says, glumly.

Portland lifts Felicity’s chin. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

She nods without meeting his eyes.

“You don’t look okay. You want to tell me?”

Felicity moves her head away from her Uncle’s hand. She curls her legs up under her.

“Sometimes I feel lost, Uncle. I don’t know where I am.”

“*Hmmm.*” Portland wonders what this could be about, and absolutely nothing comes to mind for him to say.

“Do you have times like this?” asks Felicity.

Portland doesn’t, but he feels he can’t say as much. Felicity watches Portland dithering uselessly. She returns her eyes to the bagasse, hoping that there is an answer for her within the fibers.

She looks out the porthole and sees that dusk is falling, and she wonders whether Corben Plath will be on the transom with the sextant again.

“I am going for a promenade,” she tells her Uncle.

## Shooting the Moon

On the transom, Plath rests against the rail with the sextant in his hands. In this location, the entire ship is behind him, and it might as well not exist. Here, the world consists just of ocean and sky with a dead-straight horizon separating the two.

Above Plath's head, a red ensign flag, illuminated by the stern light, flutters in the moving air. There are traces of Pell's blood and brain matter on the flagpole, but none of this registers with Plath, he's drunk and contemplative.

Below him, the wake of the ship throws a pale green light as plankton phosphoresces in the churning water. Despite the muffled roar of the ship's engines and the low-frequency

vibration of the deck, it is very peaceful.

Plath looks round to see Felicity looking at him. He shakes his head pensively as she approaches.

“You know, Miss Felicity, there could be trouble if we keep bumping into each other like this?”

“Why?”

“Convention. History,” says Plath.

“We are just talking.”

“I like our little chats. How old are you?”

“I’ll be sixteen in four years,” she says.

Plath laughs softly, “That old?”

“How old are you?” Felicity asks, boldly.

“I’m ancient. On my way out.”

“Why are you going to Townsville? Is your wife there?”

“I’ve never had a wife,” says Plath,

staring into the wake, hypnotized by the churning water below.

“My Uncle never had a wife either,” says Felicity. “Do you have a fiancée?”

“Nah. I’ve had some girlfriends, though, a few girlfriends. Nothing serious.”

Plath’s thoughts turn to cousin Marion, and he wonders whether her death was the reason he never married. He feels the mind miles coming on, the familiar haunting cloud of thoughts.

Plath shakes his head, aware of Felicity still standing next to him. The soothing white noise of the Yongala’s propeller churning the sea rises and falls. He smiles, feeling like the young girl standing in front of him is something new and good. He realises that he had been afraid of Felicity, but now his fear

is gone.

Felicity looks at his sextant, expectantly, then back to Plath with a hopeful smile. She wonders why he is so impenetrable.

She asks, “Are you waiting for the moon?”

Plath looks at Felicity for a long beat. Something stirs deeply within him. Then he moves the sextant close to her. The brass surface has a brilliant gold-coloured gleam, just begging to be touched.

“You have to call it by its proper name.”

“You mean Mr. Plath?” says Felicity.

Plath laughs again. “It’s a C. Plath marine sextant. S-E-X-T-A-N-T. It’s designed to measure the angular distance between the horizon and a



heavenly body.”

“Why would you do that?” asks Felicity, stepping closer.

“For navigational purposes. It tells you where you are.”

Felicity is mesmerized. She studies the sextant’s shiny metal surface, unable to stop her hand raising and moving towards it. She desperately wants to touch it and feel its metal against her fingertips.

Felicity asks, “Does it really tell you where you are?”

“It does.”

“I’d like to know that,” she says.

“If you know where you are, then you know which way to go to get where you want to be.”

Felicity looks at Plath with wide eyes, “Can I hold it please, Mr. Plath?”

Plath weighs it up. “Call me Corben.”

“Please? Mr. Corben.”

Plath chuckles. He hands the sextant to Felicity. She makes a gasp as she feels its weight.

“It’s heavy,” she says.

“Its heavy alright.”

“How do you use it,” she asks.

“You have to hold it like this.” Plath gently manipulates the sextant in her hands, but retains the weight of the device in his own hand.

“Look through here, see, like this. Gently twist this little dial. See the biggest star there? Near the horizon? Look. Move the index arm until the star touches the horizon.”

Felicity rests against the rail to get a better purchase and intently concentrates on using the instrument as

instructed. Plath looks down at her and has a moment of brilliant clarity, like he were standing on a mountain top in thick fog and just for an instant the fog clears, revealing the next peak.

Plath says, “When I get to Townsville, I’m going to buy a house and make it a home for orphan boys.”

Felicity raises her face from the sextant, “I think I did it.”

Plath reads the numbers on the arc scale. “Twelve and a half degrees.”

“Is that good?” asks Felicity.

“That’s good. You will be able to find your way now.”

The ship’s bell interrupts the background noise of the wake. It’s 6.30 pm. Dinner time.

“Thank you, Mr. Plath. I have to go to dinner now,” Felicity says, moving

away. In an instant, Felicity skips off out of sight.

Plath watches her depart and gently nods his head. He looks out across the ocean feeling the either ship disappear. He feels a sense of euphoria washing over him. Something more refreshing than the scotch. “Something good happened tonight,” he thinks.

## Dinner with the Captain

Plath returns to his room and stows the sextant in his suitcase. As he retrieves his dinner jacket, he recalls Possner shoving the bundle of cash in his pocket and instructing him to complete the work before Yongala reached Mackay.

He opens the travel itinerary and realizes that the ship will arrive in Mackay the following morning. “It’s tonight,” he thinks.

Plath dons his dinner jacket while contemplating his task. He can have his halfway house for homeless kids if he honors his promise to his little brother. He thinks through his plan in simple steps, “Take some dinner. Shoot the Professor. Winch the Smoke Engine

over the side. Have a drink. Easy.”

As he is departing the room, Plath turns and observes his medallion lying next to his pillow. It strikes him as strange. He can’t remember the last time the medallion was anywhere but his pocket. It’s all the boozing, snoozing and killing strangers, he thinks. He’s being discombobulated by the ship. Plath slips the medallion into his pocket and exits his cabin.

There is a lively sound of chatter filling the saloon. The *maître d’* approaches holding a clipboard, “Good evening Sir, may I have your name?”

“Plath, Corben, Mister,” he says.

Plath watches as the *Maître d’* runs his finger down a list of names.

“Do you mind?” asks Plath, taking hold of the clipboard. He looks down

the list and sees the name F. Portland and a room number.

“That’s me right there, look,” Plath says, pointing to his own name.

“You are at the Captain’s table,” says the Maître d’, “this way, Sir.”

Plath follows the Maître d’ through the saloon. His attention is caught by Captain Knight sharing a joke with Mrs. Tea Rose. As Plath approaches the table, he is afforded a view of Mrs. Tea Rose’s magnificent cleavage, and he can’t help but be distracted by it. She reminds him of one of the courtesans from the Docker’s Tavern.

He takes his place, not realizing that he is sitting next to Felicity. When their eyes meet, Plath feels something akin to a jolt of electricity and he squirms uncomfortably.

On Felicity's other side, Portland observes this interaction. "Everything well, Felicity?"

"Oh yes, Uncle. I know exactly where I am. *Carricorn* is a twelve and a half degrees."

"Oh," says Portland, not sure how to respond. He looks at Plath and reaches out his hand over Felicity's head.

"I am Frederick Portland. This is my niece, Felicity."

Suddenly, Plath freezes. Hairs spring erect on the back of his hand, and his heart rate zooms up.

*Felicity is Portland's niece!*

Plath is thrown off guard. He'd not planned to shake the hand of the man he was sent to kill. He hadn't intended to befriend his niece. "What the hell is going on?"



“Corben Plath,” he says, numbly, unable to meet the old man’s eye.

“Mr. Plath is a navigator too,” says Felicity, looking up at the hands joined above her head. “He has a shiny sexton and it’s very heavy.”

Plath gulps, feeling adrift, his eyes glaze over. He rolls his right shoulder and grips his trembling hand, under the table.

“Nice to see you again, Mr. Plath,” says Felicity. She holds out her tiny hand. Plath looks around the table. There are eyes trained on him. He has no choice but to shake. He takes Felicity’s hand, revealing a smear of grease on his sleeve that he thinks could only have come from the Engine Room when he was disposing of Hugh’s body.

Felicity’s sharp eyes pick this up and

she immediately interprets it, “Grease! Did you get a tour of the Engine Room?” she asks excitedly. “Uncle, could we do a tour of the Engine room, too?”

Plath’s eyes nervously dart to the Captain. Fortunately, he hasn’t heard this comment. Plath sees Turk arriving, taking a seat across the table. Plath’s heart pounds and a sweat breaks out around his neck.

Turk glances towards Portland, who offers him a knowing and subtle wink. This only makes Turk scowl harder.

Captain Knight sees everybody is seated and says, “Very good. We’re all here now.”

Plath looks anxiously around the saloon, checking the location of doors and the obstacles in between. He’s back

on the battlefield and he should have the Mauser pistol in his hand. He'd shoot Turk in the head in the first instance. Shoot Portland next, throw the Smoke Engine over the side and then make his getaway. But getaway to where? Plath's mind goes into free fall.

Felicity rescues him. She leans close and whispers, "You'll need strong soap for that grease."

Plath grins awkwardly. He whispers back, "Please don't talk. Convention, remember."

Felicity pulls the frump. She crosses her arms and turns away.

A waiter approaches Plath and places an empty bowl in front of him and says, "Clear *tortue*, Sir?"

"You should have the pig's cheek," growls Felicity, having already read and

memorized the menu.

The waiter ladles turtle soup into Plath's bowl while he stares blankly at a tiny thread of cotton that sticks above the weave of the tablecloth. The only things that exist are in his peripheral vision.

Captain Knight addresses Portland, saying, "So Professor, how did you come to develop the machine that graces our ship?"

Portland is already tucking into his turtle soup. He lowers his spoon, dabs his mouth with the napkin. He says, "Thank-you Captain. Yes, well, I've had a good engineer's life, and I wanted to leave behind some of my knowledge to make a contribution to the future."

"Very noble," says Captain Knight.

"Privileged nobles," mutters Turk

under his breath.

“I have followed the work of the Swedish scientist, Svante Arrhenius, for many years and understood the danger of the hothouse gas, carbonic acid. Some also call it carbon dioxide. I have one of his books; I will loan it to you if you like.”

“What ?” thinks Felicity. “He’s giving away my book!”

“I’d like that,” says Captain Knight. “Can’t say that I’ve ever heard of carbon dioxide.”

“A good deal of it comes from the funnel of this ship,” Portland says.

“Two hundred and fifty tons a day,” growls Felicity.

“Fascinating,” says the Captain.

Portland continues, “As such, I have spent the last eight years perfecting the

design of a machine that will allow us to power society efficiently with vegetative matter without the risk of overheating our delicately balanced atmosphere.”

Plath has finished his soup and stares at his empty bowl immediately feeling the need for something else to occupy his mind. He nervously brings his military medallion from his pocket. Fumbling, he drops it on the floor.

Felicity watches as he bends over to pick it up. The Captain interrupts him with a direct question.

“And Mr. Plath, a military man? A veteran of the Boer campaign, perhaps?”

Plath is trapped. He glances anxiously at the medallion on the floor.

“If I’m not being rude,” the Captain says.

“Three years in South Africa,” Plath straightens up, trying to sound coherent.

“In what unit did you serve?”

Plath is reluctant, but everyone is looking at him. “The First South Australian Mounted Rifles. Like yourself, I was a Captain.”

“A friend of mine was in the Second. Only there for a year or so, I recall,” the Captain replies.

“I later ran an independent unit with forty men under my command.”

“Mercenary,” interrupts Turk.

Under the table, Plath’s clenches his fists. He wants the medallion back.

“Excuse me, Mr. Plath,” says Felicity, her curiosity trumping her grumpy expression, “but what is a Boer?”

Turk answers, “A subhuman enemy of

the Empire.”

Plath glares at Turk and says, “A Boer is a white skinned farmer in South Africa. Mainly of Dutch origin.”

“Why were you fighting them?” asks Felicity.

“That’s quite enough felicitation,” interrupts Portland. Felicity goes straight back to frumping.

Plath is appreciative of the reprieve. He adjusts himself to peer under the table to see where his medallion is. Felicity sees this and wonders what could be down there. Whatever it is, she wants to get it before Plath does.

Felicity sweeps the floor with her foot until she detects something small and hard. She drags it closer. Slipping off a shoe, she grips the thing between her toes and raises her foot to grasp the



object in her fingers.

She caresses it under the table while she replaces her shoe. Her shoe back on, Felicity glances at the object in her hands. It is round, dull, made of metal with a coloured ribbon. She doesn't know what it is, but she knows that Plath wants it. Maybe she can gain his favour by returning it.

Captain Knight leans towards Felicity, "A military man is conditioned to follow orders. Does as instructed by his superiors."

"Except when he's freelancing," says Turk.

"Nasty business the Boer War," says Captain Knight.

"War is nasty business. All of them," says Plath, tersely.

Captain Knight's tone lightens. He

addresses Felicity, “A soldier is like a ship’s Captain, young lady. He follows his superiors’ orders. In my case, the board of the Adelaide Steamship Company.”

“Young lady,” says Felicity, smiling. She looks intently at the Captain as he addresses her. Having created an adequate distraction, Felicity passes the medallion under the table to Plath. The medallion bumps against his leg. He looks down to see Felicity’s hand extended towards his lap.

It’s all too much. On a battlefield Plath would have blasted his way to freedom, Turk first. However, at the Captain’s table on the Yongala, and with Felicity doing something with his leg, Plath is overwhelmed with anxiety. He stands, abruptly and desperately

stammers out an excuse.

He says, “Will you please excuse me, Captain? My stomach has taken a terrible turn.”

“Very well, Mr. Plath. Let us know if we can do anything for you,” says the Captain.

“I’ll be fine,” says Plath, as he quickly shifts from behind the table and departs.

Felicity grips the medallion tightly in her hands, not knowing what to do. She smiles cheekily. She is all powerful now because she has something of value that Plath wants.

## Returning the Medallion

Back in his cabin, Plath strips off the dinner jacket and tosses it on the bunk. He feels exhausted, emotionally and physically. The mind miles are coming on, so many thoughts clamoring for attention. He takes out a bottle of scotch, opens it and stares at the open neck.

A sudden knock on the door startles him sending his heart racing. He whips out the Mauser pistol and aims it at the middle of the door panel. He notices it still has sand and salt in the action. If Turk comes for him with a revolver and the Mauser jams again, he is finished. He reaches for the dinner jacket and tucks the pistol under it, with the barrel aiming at the door.

“Come,” he says, hearing the anxiety in his own voice.

Slowly the door opens. His finger curls on the trigger as sweat rises around his neck. He sees Felicity standing there holding his medallion.

“Excuse me, Mr. Plath, but you dropped this.”

Plath is frozen, staring first at the medallion and then at Felicity’s young face. He slowly reaches out his hand and takes the medallion. Felicity sees his hand shaking and doesn’t know what to make of it.

She says plainly, “I think that whatever happened with the Boers is okay because you were told to do it. It wasn’t your fault.”

Plath says nothing. He just nods numbly. He has never felt more

powerless and vulnerable in his life. Even the semi-automatic pistol pointed at Felicity's chest offers no security.

Fortunately for Plath, Felicity has nothing more to say. She turns and walks along the corridor back to the saloon. Plath closes the door behind her and locks it. He turns the medallion over and over in his hand. Is it a friend or foe?

Retrieving the Mauser from under his dinner jacket he examines the salt and grit lodged in the action. There is always a grueling punishment for failing to maintain a weapon. So he retrieves the gun case from his leather suitcase, along with a bottle of scotch. From inside the gun case, he removes a piece of fabric that he spreads out on the floor. Then he sits crossed legged in

front of the fabric with the weapon in one hand and the scotch in the other.

Plath downs half the scotch in one long swig. He grimaces as the alcohol slides down his throat. He feels giddy and hears Felicity's voice ringing through his skull like the reverberation of a nearby explosion, "Whatever happened in the Boer War wasn't your fault because you were told to do it."

"What did happen in the war?" Plath asks aloud. He killed a lot of men; that's what happened. Damn, he was good at it. Following orders, giving orders. Then he quit the army and accepted a mission. And he ordered the village shelled. The village with the schoolhouse. The school with the children inside.

"Was that my fault?" he asks aloud.

He stops, catatonic, staring blankly at the Mauser pistol in his hands, remembering the sight of the young ones, bloodied and broken.

“You’ve failed to maintain your weapon,” he says aloud. He skulks the rest of the scotch and then strips the Mauser pistol into its component parts. Then begins each piece meticulously until his fingertips ache.



## Plath's Telegram

*Thursday, 23 March 1911*

It's seven a.m. and Yongala is anchored off Mackay. On deck, there is much activity as goods are loaded on and off the vessel. Small boats move alongside, and departing passengers gingerly make their way down the gangplank.

Tommy emerges from the Chart Room with a stack of letters and telegrams. He takes them to a quiet spot where Paul waits, and they examine each piece of mail.

They walk along the deck, not looking where they are going, arguing about what each of the telegrams might contain. Tommy slips, landing on his backside. Paul quickly gathers up the

dropped telegrams and notices one has one falls overboard. The deck boys peer over the side and see the missing telegram floating away.

“Oh Blimey, now we’re screwed,” says Tommy.

“Bloody heck,” says Paul, “which one was it?” They anxiously flick through the names on the remaining telegrams.

“It was Mr. Plath’s,” concludes Tommy, “he had two.”

“You reckon they were the same? Like duplicates?” asks Paul, hopefully.

“Of course,” says Tommy, brashly, “happens all the time.”

In his cabin, Plath wakes to find himself on the floor surrounded by gun parts and empty scotch bottles. A knock at the door shocks him into action. Instantly he assembles the

Mauser, loads and cocks it. He sits upright, both hands gripping the pistol tight, the pistol trained on the door.

“Who is it?” he shouts.

A voice from beyond the door says, “Telegram for you, Sir.”

Plath staggers to the porthole. He places the palm of one hand in his aching eye socket and with the other eye, squints into the bright light. It’s blurry, but eventually, something becomes visible: mud banks and trees and small boats moving around.

“Oh, shithouse! It’s Mackay.” He steps back from the porthole and leans against the wall, trying to figure out what that means. He hears a noise at the door and remembers that someone is waiting on him.

Plath opens the door just enough for

Tommy to slide the telegram inside. He closes and locks the door and sits on the side of his bunk, rubbing his face. Nothing makes sense this morning.

He opens the envelope and unfolds the telegram inside. It's all blurry and out of focus. Plath shakes his head like a wet dog and stares at the words. There's not many of them. The message is short and to the point.

Plath reads out loud, "If the mission is not complete by the time the ship reaches Townsville you will be arrested and sent to the gallows." The message ends with just the letters 'M.P.'.

Plath lowers the telegram, feeling a sense of dread. He looks around his luxury cabin and sees scotch bottles on the floor and a piece of fabric stained with gun oil. He has a pounding

headache and the sense that he is soon to murder an innocent man with a horrendous hangover.

“Alcohol, war memories, and death, that’s all I amount to,” Plath thinks. “Is this as good as it gets?”

## Turk Goes Ashore

Swathed in blankets, Turk rises from his bunk at the sound of knocking at the door of the Meat Box. He swings his legs over the side of his bunk and retrieves his revolver, hiding under his pillow. “What?” he shouts, angrily.

“Telegram, Sir,” says Tommy.

“Well come on then.”

Tommy pushes the door open a fraction and passes the telegram to Turk.

“Who’s it from?”

“I wouldn’t know that, Sir.”

“Alright, sod off then, you little runt.” Turk digs a fingernail into the envelope and rips it open. “Who the frick is this from?” he asks again.

“It’s from your wife,” says McGrew

from under a pile of blankets. “She’s run off with a fat guy with no money who’s as ugly as a hatful of busted assholes. What does that say about your marriage?”

“Shut up, McGrew!” Turk snaps. He looks around the Meat Box. “Oy! Where the frick are Hugh and Pell?”

“They’re queers, and run off together,” grumbles the drowsy Irishman. “What’s the note say?”

“It says you’re a fricking dunny-pipe.”

McGrew starts laughing under the blanket, “Why’s my Pa doing writing to you?”

“It says I have to go ashore to meet someone.”

McGrew pulls the sheets aside and sits up, blinking. “What?” He watches as Turk departs the meat box. He looks

around the empty box and says aloud,  
“Oy! Where the frick are Hugh and  
Pell?”

Up on deck, Turk finds his way to the  
Chart Room and locates Captain  
Knight to ask for the means to go  
ashore. Knight informs him that if he  
has not returned in two hours, the ship  
will steam without him.

Turk is directed to a ladder at the  
bottom of which is a small boat pulled  
alongside Yongala. As climbs over the  
gunwale onto the ladder, McGrew  
hurries towards him.

“Oh, you decided to get up!” Turk  
snarls.

“Where are Hugh and Pell?” McGrew  
asks, anxiously.

“What am I their mother? Search the  
ship, you dopey Mick. Look



everywhere. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Where the hell are you going."

"Meet someone ashore."

"But, who?"

"I didn't say." Turk descends the ladder and steps into the little boat. He looks up to see McGrew looking down at him. So he waves his hand, angrily and the Irishman disappears from view.

McGrew wanders away in a daze, not knowing what to do. He moves towards the back of the ship.

On the transom, Tommy and Paul are standing under the flag pole, staring at red marks on the white paint.

"What do you reckon that is?" asks Paul.

"Fricked if I know," says Tommy. "I just painted that last week." He jumps

up onto the rail, licks a finger and wipes a smudge of blood. Then he licks his fingertip and instantly screws his face up and makes a gagging noise.

“What’s it taste like, then?” asks Paul.

“It tastes like fricking brains.”

“Oh, yuck!”

“*Nah*, just kidding!”

“Morning lads,” says McGrew.

“Morning, Sir,” the two boys say, in unison.

“Say, I am looking for my companion, Pell. You haven’t seen him have you?”

Tommy jumps down from the rail onto the deck, careful to hide his wet finger behind his back. “Honestly, Mister. I haven’t seen a trace of him anywhere.”

## Meeting in Mackay

When Turk's boat reaches the shore, there is a man in a black trench coat waiting for him with a carriage.

"Mr. Turk."

"Yeah. What's going on?"

"I'm Minder. Get in."

Turk steps inside and the carriage delivers him to a house. He is led into the living room and told to sit. Turk waits, tapping his foot nervously while Minder watches him impassively.

"I have to be back on the ship, you know?" demands Turk after fifteen minutes have passed.

There's a noise outside. Moves to the window and sees another carriage arriving. This one has the distinctive emblem of the Queensland Coal Board

on the side.

“Bloody hell,” he says, panic rising.

He rushes towards the back door, but Minder crashes him to the floor and sits on top of him. A man from the Coal Board enters the building. He is tall, gaunt, with a red scar down his cheek and hollow eyes. He wears a long overcoat.

Scarface kneels next to Turk. He brings his face close and stays that way, breathing on Turk, for what seems an age. Eventually, Scarface says, with a slow, ominous voice, “The Smoke Engine remains on Yongala’s after-tween deck.”

“What the frick are you talking about?” stammers Turk, barely able to breathe.

“We visited your wife. She’s got a wart

on her nose and she squeals a lot, so I'm told."

"It's nothing to do with me," protests Turk, anxiously. "I just took a job."

Scarface looks up at Minder for a while. Then he lowers his face back to Turk. "There is a man on board Yongala who's mission is to eliminate Professor Portland and Smoke Engine. You need to step aside. Let him complete his work."

"I have swallowed bucket loads of shit for this mission," shouts Turk, angrily. "They pay me nothing. Treat me like an insect. I'd like to kill the old bastard myself."

"There's an idea," says Minder. "You know, like, two bites at the cherry."

Scarface ponders this for a while. "Very well, Mr. Turk. Let's forge a

contract. You will guarantee that the Professor is dead and the Smoke Engine thrown over the side before Yongala reaches Townsville. What's your price?"

"Two hundred pounds each for me and my three men."

"Eight hundred pounds it is then," says Scarface. "If you fail me I will personally cut the face off your wife's mole." He nods for Minder to let Turk go free.

"Yeah, whatever," snaps Turk, getting to his feet.

Scarface stands and says solemnly, "We have an offer with consideration and acceptance, and thus a contract. You are now under contract to the Queensland Coal Board."

Turk thinks that being contracted to

the Queensland Coal Board is something like the relationship that a whale has with a harpoon.

“Just get me back to the damned ship.”

“I think you’d be better off walking,” Scarface tells him.

Turk watches as the two Coal Board men move out of the empty house and into the carriage. The carriage departs and Turk walks out onto the street. He looks left, then right, not knowing which way to go.

By the time he returns to the Yongala, he is sweaty and cranky as all hell. He climbs to the top of the ladder and sees McGrew waiting for him.

“I’ve searched everywhere,” McGrew says anxiously, reaching out for Turk’s arm. “It’s like they’ve just vanished.”

“Get off me you brainless toad!”  
snaps Turk, shaking McGrew loose.

“What the hell’s going on?”

“They’re dead, you paddy numbskull!  
And we’re going the same way.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Get down to the roach pit for a  
debriefing!”

Below decks, inside the Meat Box,  
Turk and McGrew sit opposite each  
other on the lower bunks, somberly  
talking it over.

“So, who do you reckon it is?” asks  
McGrew.

“It’s that drunken bastard who hangs  
around with the little girl. He’s a Boer  
War mercenary. Paid killer.”

“Why don’t we just stand aside? Let  
him do the job.”

“Because he’s such a bloody piss-head



he may never get it done.”

“Is he armed?” asks McGrew.

“Course he is, you dope. So, we’ll have to knock him off, too.”

“I don’t know,” says McGrew, pensively. “It sounds risky,”

“We’re already two down,” says Turk, “We get this psycho mercenary off our back, knock off the old boy, and we get a hundred pounds each on top of the shit money from the Government. And what’s Thompson going to do if the Professor is dead? Huh? Nothing.”

McGrew nods slowly, “I guess. I could sure use the extra money.”

## Departing Mackay

In the early afternoon, Yongala sets sail for the final leg of the journey to Townsville. Captain Knight's navigation plan has Yongala reaching Townsville early next morning.

Yongala steams out to sea, and the stationmaster at Mackay's Flat Top cable station hears the telex machine receive a telegram. He moves over to the machine and watches as the banner for a weather alert slides into view.

He reads the message through then moves to the window with a pair of binoculars. He searches for Yongala. She is visible just as an oily smudge of coal smoke on the horizon. The stationmaster lowers the binoculars.

He looks to the marine radio telex

machine, instinctively to send Yongala a message but then remembers that Yongala has no radio. The stationmaster draws a dark conclusion: he can't communicate this new information to Yongala.

Onboard the ship, a few brave passengers, observe the coastline slip by as the ship steams towards the Whitsunday Islands. It is raining lightly, but the strong wind makes the rain painful against the skin. There are dark clouds and the occasional brief flash of lightning up ahead.

On the bridge, Captain Knight surveys the sky ahead. He turns to the first mate, "Looks like we're in for some heavy weather. Let the crew know."

As darkness falls, the Dent Island Lighthouse becomes visible, a single

white flash every five seconds. Six thirty comes around, and a seaman rings the ship's bell signaling dinner-time.

## Stalking Portland

In his cabin, Plath shakes his head, gravely; conscious that time is slipping away. He has spent the whole day in his cabin waiting for darkness and for his hangover to pass. He has twelve hours to complete his mission or face arrest in Townsville. The only other alternative is life on the run.

His pistol is clean now. It has been over twelve hours since his last drink. It's dark; it's time.

In the hallway, Plath pauses and observes the motion of the ship. The wind has whipped up the waves and Yongala gently rises and falls as she surges through the stormy weather.

Plath halts by the door of Portland's cabin, listening intently to faint noises

from inside. He breathes deeply, quietly, psyching himself up to kill.

Inside, Felicity is on her bunk, tying a hair ribbon to the ceiling. At the lower end, she has lashed a coin. She sets it free, and the ribbon swings back and forth with the motion of the ship. She claps excitedly then lies on her bunk watching the coin moving through the air.

With the pistol held under his jacket, Plath raps on the door, ready to burst in. He counts down the seconds. Felicity pulls open the door. Plath steps back, shocked.

“Hello, Mr. Plath! Isn’t it fun with the ship rolling around? Are you looking for Uncle Portland?”

Plath feels a nervous shudder run through this body. “Where is he?” he

asks.

“I don’t know. Do you want to wait in here? Do you have the sexton?”

Plath looks anxiously along the corridor. Without replying, he walks away.

Felicity watches him go and fights against a frown that immediately forms. She closes the door and sits on her bunk watching the coin drift back and forth, reflecting the movement of the ship.

## Sea Shanty

Outside on the Main Deck, Plath leans against the bulwark, hyperventilating. He's too sober to be comfortable, and takes a swig of scotch to settle his nerves. "Don't drink too much," he tells himself.

The rain has eased, but the wind is still strong. Next to him a couple, wrapped up against the cold, are observing the Dent Island Lighthouse fading into the distance.

The woman says, "I'm hungry and cold."

"I have a simple solution," says her male companion, "It's dinner time."

As they move away from the rail, Plath notices that Portland is right there, observing the night. Suddenly, his



killer instinct is alerted, and every nerve is poised for action. Carefully, he reaches behind him for the immaculately clean Mauser pistol. As his fingers touch the stock of the gun, he turns his head to check that the deck is clear.

Plath is thinking that he could put one round in the old boys chest at point blank range and then simply toss the carcass over the side like he did to Pell the other day. Was that the other day, or the day before? Come to think of it, both of the Yongala victims had fallen over a rail. The first one wasn't dead when he fell, whereas the second already was.

“What the hell?” Plath finds himself locked in a cycle of irrelevant thoughts, and when he breaks free of them, he

sees that Portland has followed the couple inside.

“Bugger!” he says aloud, moving his hand away from the gun. Why is it so hard to kill an innocent?

Plath draws his palm across his face, wearily and then follows Portland through the door. Inside the saloon, he finds a seat that allows him to observe Portland. The old engineer is sitting at the Captain’s table with Felicity.

Then Felicity sees Plath and tries to catch his eye, but he looks away. The interaction makes him feel tired and anxious. He steps back onto the deck and gulps some more whiskey. He holds the rail and breathes the warm night air, feeling his nerves slowly steady. The ship is heaving as it moves through the sea that has formed from

the strong wind.

When he returns to the saloon, the ambiance has changed. There is an air of frivolity. Felicity is standing behind the Captain playing her favourite party game.

Felicity runs her knuckles down Captain Knight's back once, then twice. Then she draws the number sixty-nine in between his shoulder blades with her fingertips. As she does, she says, "Line. Line. Sixty-nine."

Then she walks her fingers up his back to his nape, "Something crawling up your spine." She beats her fist twice on the Captain's back then digs her fingers sharply into his ribs: "Knock, knock. Electric shock!"

The Captain jumps up in his seat, startled and surprised: "Whoa! That's

an ingenious surprise.”

Felicity falls apart laughing as she moves onto her next victim, Mrs. Tea Rose. She stands behind the woman and runs her knuckles down her back, “Line, line, sixty-nine.”

Mrs. Tea Rose asks the captain, “This is very rough weather. Is it a hurricane?”

“Something crawling up your spine.”

“There is no indication of that,” says Captain Knight.

“Knock, knock, electric shock.”

“*Arrrrgh!* Yes it is a shock,” stutters Mrs. Tea Rose. “Well it is hurricane season, isn’t it?”

Felicity giggles madly, holding her hand over her mouth. Two out of two. She’s on a roll.

Portland is sitting next to Mrs. Tea

Rose. He says, “We call them cyclones in Australia.”

“What’s the difference?” she asks.

“One is northern hemisphere and the other southern hemisphere,” says Portland.

“That’s right,” says Captain Knight.

“They are both tropical revolving storms but with one distinct difference. In the southern hemisphere the vortex rotates anti-clockwise.”

“Don’t really see the difference,” says Mrs. Tea Rose, “if you get blown away, does it matter if it’s rotating left or right?”

“Vortex?” says Felicity, picking up on the conversation; “there’s a vortex on the Smoke Engine.”

“That’s right, Felicity. There’s a vortex at the bottom of the pyrolysis

chamber,” says Portland.

“Have you ever been in a hurri-- in a cyclone?” asks Mrs. Tea Rose of Captain Knight.

“On one occasion we were very close,” says the Captain.

Felicity moves around the room looking for her next victim. She moves behind Plath. He shakes his head. He doesn't want to be involved. But she's not buying into that.

“Line, line, sixty-nine,” she says, drawing on his back.

Plath tenses up. He glances furtively around the room; concerned that Felicity will draw attention to him.

“But we pulled through aright and this is a much better-equipped ship,” says the Captain.

“I hear that the Adelaide Steamship

Company lost a ship some time ago,” says Mrs. Tea Rose.

“Something crawling up your spine.”

“That wasn’t due to a hurri-- cyclone, was it?” she asks.

“Knock, knock.”

“That was a different storm, altogether,” says Captain Knight.

“Electric shock!”

Felicity digs her fingers into Plath’s ribs. But there is no jolt of surprise, like the others. He remains static. Instead, she notices a bulge in the back of Plath’s jacket and gingerly touches it with a fingertip, feeling the metal of the Mauser pistol. She steps back and bumps into Turk, who growls at her.

Felicity gasps and Plath turns, takes her by the arm and moves her away as he stands up and faces off with Turk.

Turk skulks off, scowling. Plath resumes his seat and looks at Felicity. Under his breath he says, tersely, “You keep away from him. He’s got brain disease.”

“He’s supposed to protect us, and he has got a gun, too,” Felicity whispers.

“What?” Plath is distracted by Portland addressing Felicity.

“That’s quite enough felicitation for now, young lady. Come and join your Uncle.”

Felicity moves towards Portland, observing the look on Plath’s face. She realizes she knew something that Plath needed to know. Plath sighs and resumes his seat. He shakes his head, wryly. He has to get a break sometime.

Dinner is served, this time much more slowly as the weather deepens and the



ship rolls around in the wind and waves. There is a lot of excited chatter as the storm becomes more noticeable. The occasional wine glass tips over, and the turtle soup moves from one side of the bowl to the other.

The saloon door opens onto the deck and a young couple step inside, drenched from the rain. The wind howls through the door after them.

Plath eats his meal silently, with one eye trained on Portland. After the plates are cleared from the tables, Portland engages in a conversation with Mrs. Tea Rose. Felicity is surprised to see how lively her uncle is around this woman, who has so much flesh exposed.

Portland tears his eyes away from Mrs. Tea Rose for long enough to see that Felicity is wearing the frump look. He

winks at her. He is beaming an unusually large smile on his old face.

Portland tells Felicity, “Our new friend is equipped with a decent set of lungs.”

“What?” Felicity’s frump deepens.

Mrs. Tea Rose stands, holding the wall against the erratic motion of the ship, so she doesn’t fall.

“I have succumbed to pressure from the charming professor,” she says, “what did you have in mind, Frederick?”

‘Charming professor?’ thinks Felicity, ‘how does that work?’

“A sea shanty,” says Portland.

“I might have to improvise,” says Mrs. Tea Rose.

Felicity’s mood changes and she excitedly turns to Portland, “Is she

going to sing?”

“I talked her into it,” says Portland.

“Oh, wow!” says Felicity, clapping her hands excitedly.

Mrs. Tea Rose steadies herself and starts to sing simple rhyme, “*I’ll sing you a song, but I won’t take too long as it seems that dinner’s ending early. It’s the song of a ship on a very long trip and the name of the ship was...*” she leans to Felicity, “*...Young Girly.*”

Felicity claps her hands with joy and tugs at Portland’s arm, “Young Girly. Well done, Uncle!”

Mrs. Tea Rose sings on, “*On the deep Coral Sea, a hundred twenty plus me, and a wondrous renewable invention. Chained to the ship, along for the trip, was the newly built Portland Smoke Engine.*”

Portland starts to clap. He has a grin

spread across his old face.

The first mate enters the saloon followed by a burst of warm, wet air. He is wearing oilskins, drenched from the rain. Mrs. Tea Rose holds fire while he leans close to the Captain and whispers, “The wind is shifting to the North West. I’m concerned that this might be more than a gale.”

“Let’s go and test your hypothesis,” says the Captain. He stands and addresses Mrs. Tea Rose, “Please excuse me, Ma’am. I must tend to bridge duties.”

Mrs. Tea Rose watches the Captain depart and resumes her song, “*The boss of the ship departed with a clip after the First Mate whispered a message.*”

There’s a loud crash of waves on the hull and Mrs. Tea Rose staggers. She

puts her hand out to steady herself and in so doing tears her blouse revealing a patch of pink, shiny skin on the side of her breast. She theatrically holds her bosom as though it were wounded.

The men in the audience become distinctly more interested in her performance, sitting up as though they were seated on pins. Felicity observes this with curiosity.

Mrs. Tea Rose resumes, “*As soon as he left, the singer popped a breast, demonstrating inappropriate ship’s dressage.*”

Everyone in the saloon laughs uproariously. Except for Felicity, who doesn’t follow the theme, and Plath who has his gaze fixed on Portland.

Plath grumbles to himself; he has too much going through his mind to wait for the sing-a-long to end. He stands,

and returns to his cabin.

Mrs. Tea Rose sings, “*The wind it did roar, and the rain, it did pour and there was talk onboard of a hurri-- cyclone.*” Another wave crashes, she staggers again.

There is a loud clatter of breaking crockery as one of the waiters stumbles and drops a tray full of plates on the floor.

Across the table, a man turns to his companion and mutters, “One more wave and she’ll pop them both out simultaneously.” He quietly chortles and his mate replies, “I’ll catch them.”

Felicity hears this but doesn’t understand. She glances towards Portland and sees he is staring in wonderment at Mrs. Tea Rose, as though he were in a trance and someone had painted a stupid grin on

his face.

Mrs. Tea Rose continues, “*It was that time of the year and the ship she did steer...* what rhymes with hurri-- cyclone? Oh, hang it. I need a sherry.”

“Sing some more,” says Felicity, suddenly anxious. She looks to Portland for support, but he is glassy eyed and inattentive.

Mrs. Tea Rose ignores Felicity and announces to the men in the saloon, “We can’t continue in this vein with a child in the audience.”

“A child?” protests Felicity. She looks around the crowd for the child, then realises that it is her. Not only that, no one is even looking her way. All eyes are on Mrs. Tea Rose.

Mrs. Tea Rose moves towards her seat amid the sound of bawdy chatter and

laughter. Felicity reaches for her arm, but Mrs. Tea Rose doesn't see her.

"You have such buxom talent," says Portland. Mrs. Tea Rose leans forward and pinches his cheek while momentarily revealing a sea of pink cleavage.

"You are a cheeky little Professor," says Mrs. Tea Rose.

Portland is stunned and sits with a grin so profound that it would make a Cheshire Cat look depressed.

Felicity takes the rebuff badly. She looks up at Portland with a disdainful frown.

Portland touches her arm, "Are you alright, little one?"

"Little one!" she growls through clenched teeth and pulls her arm away from Portland's hand. "Everyone went



all funny, and I don't understand why?"

"It's because of the Adult themes," says Portland.

"What's that?"

"Something you're not old enough to understand."

"I'm old enough to have a corset and use a sexton!" Felicity protests.

"This is something else."

"Then teach me?"

"I'm not so good with those things," Portland mumbles.

"Well who is then?"

Portland stares at his hands uncomfortably. He is hoping that the moment will pass soon.

Felicity stands and kicks her chair under the table. "I am going to my cabin. Knock before you come in. I might be putting my corset on."

Portland goes to say something, but Felicity moves away, and all he can do is watch her depart the saloon.

## Young Girly Forever

In her cabin, Felicity sits on her bunk holding the bag containing her corset. She tears a little hole in the paper and runs a fingertip along the satin panel.

Above her head, the coin on the ribbon swings freely swinging through an arc of ninety degrees. The churning noise of the ship's engines is punctuated periodically by the hollow thud of waves crashing on the hull.

Portland knocks and gently opens the cabin door. He stands for a little while in the doorway, swaying from side to side. Felicity slides the corset bag under a pillow and out of view as Portland takes a seat next to her.

She asks, "Uncle Portland, why did you ask me to leave when Mr.

Thompson came into the restaurant the other day?”

Portland fiddles with his hands, choosing his words, “We were talking about things that we thought might frighten you.”

“About the four security men?”

“You know about them?” Portland asks, surprised.

“And Uncle, why was everyone laughing like that? What does ‘adult themes’ mean?”

Portland flounders. An engineering-type answer is all he can give, “It’s important to learn things in proper order. Some lessons won’t make sense unless the prior information has been established.”

“So I have to learn about men and women before I understand adult

themes?” asks Felicity.

“I suppose so.”

“So teach me.”

Portland looks at the floor, almost wishing that it would answer the question for him. If she had wanted to know about Stefan’s Law or the thermodynamics of steam engines that would have been easy. However, on this topic, he feels nothing short of inadequate. All he can do is excuse his ignorance.

“I know men quite well, Felicity, I have worked amongst them all my life. I don’t know too much about women. I was never married, you understand?”

“You were doing okay with the woman with the big lungs.”

Portland coughs, embarrassed, “That was just a conversation with a

stranger,” he responds.

Felicity glances at the pillow hiding the corset bag with a sultry look, “So who is going to teach me about men and woman?”

Portland fidgets with his hands. He looks up to see Felicity’s angry and accusing frown.

“Or do I have to be ‘young girly’ forever?”

## Plucking Up Courage

Plath stands in the middle of his cabin, holding the telegram from the Coal Board. He feels light-headed as he sways, the vessel moving around him. His thoughts are distracted by a loud, hollow booming noise as Yongala crashes her bow against an oncoming wave.

He looks around the cabin noticing the extent to which the vessel is moving. It occurs to him everyone will be so distracted by the storm that no one will notice the cold-blooded murder of an old man.

Plath opens the cabin door and looks up and down the corridor. He has to brace himself to prevent himself from stumbling. There is another loud boom

of a wave smashing against the hull; a noise that could cover the sound of a gunshot, maybe.

He steps back inside the cabin, his heart racing. He pulls the Mauser pistol from under his jacket and removes the ammunition clip. He pushes each bullet out of the clip, onto the bunk and inspects each bullet.

Then he vigorously activates the weapon's slide mechanism and trigger function to check that everything is in working order. He reloads the weapon, cocks it, places the safety on, then replaces the gun in its resting place under his jacket.

Plath draws a long, deep breath, holds it for a beat and the exhales and moves. His fixed with a look of murderous intent as he steps out of his cabin and



moves along the corridor in search of his quarry. Nothing can stop him now; not a gunman, not a cyclone, not even a precocious young girl.

## A Brandy or Eight

Later that night and the wind is fierce, howling through Yongala's rigging. The waves are pounding the hull with incessant regularity. Portland has been dithering, listening to the sound of the storm, waiting for Felicity to nod off. He places the back of his fingers lightly against Felicity's cheek and confirms that she is asleep.

Portland braces himself against the rolling motion of the ship then cautiously staggers out of the cabin. He steps into the hallway and grips hold of the rail, moving in time with the ship as best he can. He staggers towards the Smoking Room, but the ship won't let him get there easily. After what seems an age of moving back and forth along

the hallway, he finally reaches his destination.

Portland finds a leather armchair and sits down, out of breath. He listens to the sound of the ship, the mechanical hum of the great steam engine reverberating through the steel hull, the sloshing of the sea against the hull punctuated by the hollow boom of the waves. He grips the arms of the chair, steadying himself until he is confident he has the measure of the ship's movement.

Portland looks up to see Captain Knight enter the Smoking Room, and he smiles as he watches the old seaman move in an effortless dance between the seats until he is alongside Portland's chair. Captain Knight squats next to Portland, taking a few moments to

establish his balance.

“Professor Portland,” says Captain Knight, “I have been reading the book you gave me, *Worlds in the Making*. I have a few questions.”

“Certainly.”

“Is it possible that the emissions from a vessel, such as the *Yongala*, could affect the local weather? Enhance a storm, perhaps?”

“Absolutely not,” says Portland. He sees the look on the Captain’s face. “Is there something to be concerned about?” he asks.

“Nothing to be worried about,” says the Captain, shaking his head, “but you have been saying that burning coal releases hothouse gasses that energize the atmosphere and potentially strengthen storm systems.”

“Yes,” says Portland, “but the warming gasses are thoroughly mixed, and the greatest part is absorbed by the ocean. The issue is not the emissions from this ship or another ship, but the broad trajectory of global commerce based on fossilized carbon.”

The Captain looks bewildered. He raises his head and listens intently, hearing something that only one who is familiar with the ship could hear. The moment passes and he continues. “You say that much of the carbonic acid from burning coal is absorbed by the ocean.”

“That is correct,” says Portland.

“Then might not this have the effect of acidifying the seas, causing accelerated corrosion on the hulls of ships?”

Portland smiles warmly. He is too

tired to engage his mind in a conversation like this, particularly as it feels as though he is floating in midair. He knows the Captain has had only a small amount of time with the subject matter with which to invent fanciful worries.

Portland places his hand on the Captain's sleeve. He says, "I don't know the answer to that question, Captain. But these are very, very good questions to be asking."

Captain Knight nods at length, taking it all in. Then he stands, offers his hand to shake, then dances his way out of the Smoking Room.

After the Captain has departed, Portland's attention is caught by a noise that rises above the sound of the storm. He looks up and sees the Smoking

Room cupola, a structure with six panes of glass directly above his head.

The top of a wave, decapitated by the Wheelhouse, has found its way around the funnel and dashed itself into a fizz of salty water on the glass. Portland's anxiety intensifies.

He doesn't know much about ships, but he knows enough about the structural properties of glass to want another seat. He tries to raise himself but just trying to sit upright, let alone stand, exhausts him. He tries to time his departure from the chair with the motion of the ship but just when he thinks he has it right, the vessel shifts from under him and he crashes back into the chair, exhausted.

Portland looks anxiously at the glass panels above him. He recalls that when

he entered the Smoking Room there were two men seated on the other side. He looks around for them, but they are beyond his line of sight.

“Hello,” he says aloud. But he gets tired trying to speak louder than the storm.

Portland realizes that he is trapped. He pushes his hand into his pocket and withdraws a pewter flask, unscrews the lid and takes a swig of brandy. After another long swig from the flask, Portland’s anxiety subsides. He surrenders to the alcohol and rests back in his seat. He observes the storm shuddering above the glass panels now more with curiosity than fear.



## Get it Sorted

Below decks, in the meat box, McGrew is wedged against the wall of his bunk shivering, listening to the creaking of the hull. Below sea level, the sound of the waves sends a dull ringing noise reverberating through the hold. Even though the meat box is close to the waterline, where the motion of the ship is less pronounced, he and Turk slide around on their bunks.

McGrew has been chewing over the situation with Portland and the mercenary. He has done almost nothing but sleep for the last three days, and he's suddenly anxious to move. Hugh and Pell are gone, probably murdered. Turk is a useless, sour bitch and McGrew has a pay packet and a one

hundred pound bonus riding on the outcome of this mission. Someone needs to take control of things.

“Frick this!” says McGrew, standing uneasily and tossing aside his blanket. He checks his revolver then says, “I’m going to get it sorted.”

Turk looks up from his bunk. He is shivering and feeling decidedly seasick, and all he can do is just watch McGrew go.

McGrew steps out of the meat box and immediately over-balances, falling on a stack of building materials. He curses aloud, finds his feet, chooses his moment with the motion of the ship, and storms out of the hold.

## Yongala in the Storm

Steaming north from Mackay, Yongala moves out of the lee of the Whitsunday Islands gets exposed to the full force of the wind and the swell. The noises change and the motion changes aboard. The wave strikes are less frequent but now much more powerful, and everything is amplified by the vessel rising and falling and rolling in the big swell. The noise of the wind overtops every other sound. It groans and whines and sets outer sections of the ship vibrating.

Throughout the ship, one hundred and twenty people are keenly aware they are deep in the heart of a powerful storm. Everyone is wide awake and dealing with the conditions as best they

can.

Below decks, in the Boiler Room, the storm interferes with work as the motion of the ship makes it hard to shovel coal into the three great furnaces that power Yongala.

The boiler men slip on the decks, causing one in five shovel-loads of coal to miss the mouth of the furnace. These gritty workers are used to harsh conditions, but now, to a man, their stomachs are knotted with anxiety. It is unspoken knowledge that when the weather becomes too deep and the boiler men are unable to keep pace with the appetite of the furnace, the ship will have insufficient power to navigate and will be exposed to the whim of the sea.

In the Engine Room, the triple expansion steam engine powers on.

Engineers pin themselves against the railings and watch as oily bilge water sloshes through the steel decking. The Chief Engineer clambers to a set of dials and stares anxiously at the pressure of the bilge pumps – the pumps that move water from inside the ship. The steam pressure is good, and the port and starboard bilge pumps are at full capacity.

On the upper deck, Captain Knight is little comforted by Professor Portland's answers. He makes a dash from the Wheelhouse to the Chart Room where he reviews his navigation plan. He watches a pencil roll across the chart table, hit the raised edge and then rolls back the other way.

Below decks, second class passengers are crammed six to a cabin. There is

much confusion and anxiety.

Seasickness strikes one and then all in a cabin. The air is heavy with the smell of vomit, and a palpable sense of fear. The electric ventilation fans move the smell of sickness through the boat, spreading it like an epidemic.

In the crew's quarters, life is even more cramped than second class. The ship's crew are accustomed to rough weather. There is no panic just chatter that considers storm-related questions, such as how deep it might get and how long it might last.

In her cabin, Felicity wakes to the all-encompassing sound of the storm. Being located on the Promenade Deck, high above the sea surface, her sense of the storm is different from those below decks.

Felicity's experience is more that of the noise of the wind, and less the pounding of water against the steel hull. At first, the high pitch whining of the wind in the wires scares her, but she is comforted by the luxurious surrounds.

She sits up in her bunk and pushes her back against the cabin wall and braces herself. She watches the coin swinging wildly. It is no longer describing an arc that moves in plane, side to side. Now it swings in an aggravated manner that matches the movement of the ship as she pitches, rolls, yaws, rises, and falls.

Felicity feels a chill of fear crawl up her spine. Then she thinks back to Uncle Portland saying this is a good strong ship, and she won't sink. This makes the fear go away. She'd like him to tell her that again, but Uncle

Portland is not on his bunk where he should be.

“Uncle Portland!” Felicity calls out,  
“are you there?”



## The Smoking Room

The clock in the Smoking Room shows 11 pm. The storm is mature and Yongala is being constantly pounded by the warm water of the Coral Sea.

The powerful wind howls across the superstructure, emanating a different tune from every part it touches. The rolling of the ship is debilitating for anyone trying to stand.

Portland is fast asleep in his armchair, having consumed his flask of brandy. Plath watches over him, although not for any noble reason. Indeed, Portland would be dead by now if not for two men who are finishing off their drinks.

Plath looks up when he overhears one of the men say, “No more for me.”

“Nor me,” says the other, “I’m going

to sleep off this storm.” The men rise from their seats, balancing themselves delicately against the furniture and plotting their path out of the room.

One of the men makes a concerted effort to stagger across the room to where Portland is snoozing. He gently shakes Portland’s arm and says, “Wake up old chap. It’s 11 pm and stormy.”

Portland’s eyes flicker open. He waves the man away, mumbling something, then promptly falls back to sleep. The man cautiously makes his way towards the door where his mate waits, bracing himself against the doorframe.

Finally, Plath is alone with Portland. He takes to his feet slowly and moves closer feeling the room rotate around him. Checks there is no one in the doorway, he takes his Mauser pistol

from his belt. There is so much noise, commotion, and movement that he feels almost invisible.

Plath cautiously moves between the chairs, careful not to overbalance. He approaches Portland and raises the Mauser so that the barrel is pointing at the old man's heart. Moving closer, the pushing metal pushes against Portland's jacket. The safety is moved to the off position. The weapon is clean; there will be no misfires tonight.

Plath becomes motionless. His breathing slows. He sways, synching his movements to the motion of the ship, allowing the 1,700 tons of steel to float around him. He listens to the whistling of the wind and the thud of waves bashing on the hull. There is a pattern to all this noise that will work in his

favour. He counts the seconds that pass between each wave, sensing the motion of the ship as she rises and falls and rolls and yaws.

*B-o-o-m!*

A mountain of seawater descends on the hull sending a shudder along the entire length of the ship. Plath's breathing slows.

*B-o-o-m!*

Another wave. Powerful. Strong. Between the noises of the sea, Yongala reverberates with the low-frequency hum of her great engine. Plath's eyes are wide open. He will fire point blank into Portland's heart in time with a wave.

*B-o-o-m!*

The ticking sound of the Smoking Room clock tries to dominate the

empty space between the waves,  
highlighting the passage of time. His  
finger curls gently around the trigger.  
On the next wave, the old man will die.

*B-o-o-m!*

The barrel of the Mauser begins to  
waver. Plath's focused intent transcends  
to a new state. There is the end of  
something, the beginning of something  
new. The ocean beats down on the  
ship, but there is no sound of pistol  
fire; just the passing of something that  
cannot easily be put into words.

Plath lowers the weapon and replaces  
it in his belt. He clutches his stomach  
with one hand and with the other he  
grips Portland's chair to prevent  
himself from falling.

He simply can't execute Felicity's  
guardian; it would be like killing

another child, except that this time it would be deliberate. Shooting Portland would be like shooting Felicity.

As he stands, silently swaying, deep in contemplation, Plath lets down his guard. He does not see the shape of a big, tough man appear in the doorway of the Smoking Rom.

Something causes Plath to turn, and he sees, right next to him, McGrew, the big Irishman, standing right next to him.

McGrew has a clenched the size of Yongala's iron anchor raised in the air. "I've been looking for you," he says. Then the fist comes down and rattles Plath's brain inside his skull.

He falls, out cold. McGrew catches him, wrapping his arms around Plath's chest. McGrew stands there, holding

the deadweight, trying to maintain his balance. He wonders what to do next and decides that best course of action is to throw the mercenary over the side into the Coral Sea.

McGrew staggers backward out of the Smoking Room, clumsily bouncing off the walls and the bench seats. Plath is motionless, his heels dragging on the carpet, his head lolling from side to side.

## Tough Irishman

Felicity opens her cabin door, holding tightly to the frame. She looks up and down the hallway, and it makes her giddy as the hall is moving back and forth, up and down. As she tries to make sense of it all, she sees something down the far end of the corridor.

“What is that?” she wonders. It looks like a man dragging someone out the door onto the deck. “Is that Mr. Plath!?”

Curious, Felicity steps into the hallway. She overbalances, catches herself on the wooden handrail. Suddenly the cabin seems so far away. The ship seems to be guiding her towards the men. Clutching the rail, she half crawls, half stumbles along the



hallway.

McGrew adjusts Plath's body to free a hand, and he flings open the door onto the Promenade Deck. It is wild outside, a frenzy of salt spray whipping through the air. The sky is dark, and the sea alongside the Yongala is a foaming white mass, illuminated by the ship's lights.

As McGrew steps outside, he briefly loses grip of Plath and jerks the unconscious man's body up further to re-establish his hold. A wave shatters across the ship's foredeck, sending a stinging volley of salty spray lashing through the air.

The cold water strikes Plath in the face, and he instantly regains consciousness. After a second of confusion, he is wide awake. He doesn't

move, as he takes stock of the pounding inside his head and the rib-crushing grasp that McGrew has on him.

Patiently, he plays dead until the moment seems right. Then he raises his foot, puts his shoe against the doorframe and violently shoves himself and McGrew across the deck.

McGrew's back slams against the handrail and he lets out a surprised yelp.

Instantly, Plath flips around and drives his knuckles into McGrew once, twice, three times. Plath slips, lands on his knees, quickly regains his feet and drives straight back in. He pounds McGrew with fists and elbows to the face at close quarters.

McGrew responds in kind. He is

powerful and fast, but Plath is stronger, more precise. But, he is older. Each blow that connects is laborious and hard won. The deck is slippery and in constant motion. The noise of the roaring wind, a continual distraction.

McGrew gains a grip on Plath, holding him tight in a headlock, choking him. Plath struggles to pull McGrew's arm free of his neck, but he can't.

Plath reaches around and withdraws the Mauser. He pushes the safety off, but he doesn't fire straight away; concerned he could shoot himself. He endures the pain of his neck being torn off until the barrel is pushed against firm flesh that is not his own.

*CRACK!*

The bullet slams through McGrew's calf, blowing blood and muscle fiber

across the wet deck. McGraw screams and Plath rips his arm away from his throat. He twists McGraw's arm then slams his clenched fists onto McGraw's shoulder.

McGraw writhes and flails chaotically with his fists but doesn't connect. Plath ducks, then raises, tipping McGraw over the railing. The Irishman disappears from view.

Plath looks over the rail to see McGraw upside down, tangled up in a yellow crane on the deck below. He is moaning, and blood pours from his leg, coursing down his body and dripping from his wet face.

“Bugger!” says Plath. He rushes towards the stairwell, skidding chaotically on the wet planking. On the Main Deck, Plath grabs McGraw by the

collar and pulls him free from the crane. The Irishman lands heavily.

McGrew moans, writhing in pain. Plath flips the heavy Irishman around, pushes his face against the deck and then places the full weight of his body on his knee in the middle of McGrew's back. Gripping McGrew under the chin, he twists and pulls back hard. There is a lot of snot and heavy breathing and then - *CRUNCH!* - the Irishman's neck breaks.

Plath stands, holds the side of the ship, looking at the man at his feet. His face feels like is swollen and his neck and ribs ache horribly.

Plath raises a toast to the night with an imaginary bottle of scotch, "Another dead one!" he shouts aloud.

"When does this ever end?!" he

screams into the night. “I can’t take it anymore!”

The ship lurches chaotically and Plath slips, his fall broken by McGrew’s body. He clammers awkwardly to his feet. He looks down and sees the evidence of his handiwork lying on the deck.

Plath stoops McGrew’s body to the gunwale and strenuously bundles it over the side. But the body doesn’t fall. The Irishman’s leg has jammed and his body bangs against the outside of the hull.

A deck boy struggles along the deck. Sea-spray courses through the air around him. Plath greets him, shielding McGrew’s leg from view.

The deck boy grips the rail to steady himself. He shouts above the noise of the wind, “You should be below decks,

Sir, the weather's getting worse!"

"Aye, aye. Very well. Thank you!" bellows Plath. He watches the seaman move away.

Concentrating on his task, Plath uses all his brute force to twist McGrew free but he is caught fast by the leg.

"You bastard!" shouts Plath. He withdraws his Mauser, places the barrel against McGrew's leg and fires. The gunshots muffled by the howling wind and crashing waves - *CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!* – and McGrew's body falls into the dark sea.

The ship lurches and a torrent of water barrels along the deck. Plath slips, falling under the foaming water; it pummels him against the bulkhead. He gets up, his head pounding, his body aching all over. A violent shudder runs

through his body and his face is pale.  
He feels close to blacking out.

He grips the rail to prevent himself from falling and draws a deep, rasping breath; the taste of salt and blood in his mouth. A peal of thunder rings out and lightning flashes all around, momentarily illuminating the ocean and the ship. Flashing into view is a wall of foaming white water descending on the Yongala. The ship plows into the face of a vast wave and from the bow, a huge burst of white water cascades through the air.

Warm brine lashes Plath's face. It fizzles against his skin and stings like a slap. From deep inside him, a terrible noise emerges. Plath tilts back his head and lets out a long howling scream, "*Rrrrrrrrrhbbbbb!!!*"



There's a motion behind him. Plath turns rapidly. He looks up, his eyes sharp like a wolf's.

Felicity is watching from the Promenade Deck above. She is being pummeled by the fast moving air, drenched by the spray. Her hands are gripped tight on the railing, the wind pushing her back her hair flapping madly behind her.

Felicity sees the look on Plath's face, a wild man. She looks around horrified, but she's too scared to let go of the rail.

## Not Responsible

Instantly, Plath leaps onto the crane and vaults the rail, landing on the deck next to Felicity. He sees the deck boy slowly moving up a flight of stairs towards them.

Plath grabs Felicity and swings her into the corridor. They crash along the hallway, bouncing off the walls. Felicity struggles helplessly, her screams muffled by the noise of the storm.

Plath crashes through the door into his cabin and his grip loosens. Felicity sinks her teeth into the flesh between Plath's finger and thumb, and she struggles free.

Plath yelps and he lunges for her. He grabs her roughly by the arms and shakes her, bellowing in her face, "How

many are there?! How many more?!”

“Let me go!” she shrieks.

“I can’t take it anymore! How many are there?” Plath yells.

“Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!”

“How many?!” Plath raises his hand to strike her. Felicity flinches and tears pour pitifully from her eyes.

“Don’t kill me,” she shrieks. She raises her arm to defend herself. “Please don’t murder me.”

Then something clicks in Plath’s mind. He stops, suddenly able to observe himself objectively. It is like he detaches from his physical self and raises to the roof of the cabin, looking down at himself. He observes his raised hand, and is reminded of having killed Travis in the Workers Tavern for raising his hand in the same manner in front of

Tim.

“Someone ought to kill me for this,” he thinks.

Plath steps back, mortified, bumping against the cabin door. He sees the look on Felicity’s face and her tiny body cowering, hiding underneath her little arm. As though that little arm could offer her any protection for one of Plath’s right hooks.

Plath is back on the roof looking down at Marion lying on the ground. He is back in South Africa looking at the children curled up in the rubble of the school house. He bangs his head repeatedly against the cabin door.

“No! No! No!” he wails.

“Leave me alone,” stammers Felicity.

“Not again,” moans Plath. His knees give way, and he slumps to the floor. A

wave tumbles angrily against the hull. The ship heels and everything in the cabin slides around. Scotch bottles clink against one another in the suitcase under the bunk.

A change in the wind causes Yongala to resonate like an awkward choir. Every part of the vessel sings with a different tune as the fast moving sea air rages past. The porthole flashes white as the sea shatters along the deck, outside.

“You’re so mean,” says Felicity, her face streaming with tears. “You were going to kill me.”

“No. Please. Not again,” Plath howls. He is trapped, paralyzed. He is simultaneously back in every dangerous place he has ever been.

Felicity stamps her foot and shouts, “I

helped you. I gave your stupid thing back. I found it and gave it back. Now you've made me cry."

"I just shook you," says Plath, pitifully, desperate to redeem himself.

"You made me cry!" stammers Felicity, clutching her arms where Plath had gripped her.

"I didn't make you cry," says Plath, pleading.

Felicity's tears pour out, and she is thinking, "Who is this man? Why does he fail to meet minimum standards for a human being?" One minute he acts like her friend and the next he ignores her. And now this. She is not afraid anymore. Now she is plain angry. She steps forward and pounds Corben Plath with her fists.

"You're not responsible for things!"

she shouts.

Plath is stunned. He looks up as her tiny clenched fists fall on his head. Felicity bashes him, and he just sits there, looking at her, absorbing it.

“You have to be responsible for things.” Felicity steps back, looking wretched. She stumbles, catches herself awkwardly and then stands again.

Tears well in Plath’s eyes, he sobs, “I’ve done too much.”

“Be responsible now,” Felicity protests.

Plath looks up at the young girl calling him to account. His cup empties. He feels hollowed out and drained.

“I am responsible,” he protests, “I am responsible for killing your Uncle and throwing the Smoke Engine into the sea.”

“No!” Felicity howls. She strikes him again then staggers back against the bunk, clinging to the mattress, so she doesn’t fall.

“If you do that, then the planet will get hotter and hotter, and the plants and animals will die,” she wails.

“I know,” says Plath, his voice hoarse.

“You have to protect Uncle Portland and the Smoke Engine.”

“I know. I know,” sobs Plath.

“Maybe that will make up for all the bad things you’ve done.”

Felicity stands back, her face red from tears. She looks around the cabin rolling and shuddering. The noise of the storm is overwhelming.

When she looks back to Plath, she doesn’t see a big scary man. She sees someone who needs help. An empty



cup. A person who shouldn't be crying. Cautiously, she approaches Plath with her hand extended.

Plath sees her small hand coming towards his shoulder. His breathing gets heavier as her hand approaches and then touches his shoulder on the on-off switch. Plath doesn't explode. Instead, the war shrapnel buried in his muscle transforms into a meaningless piece of metal.

Plath exhales a long sigh and air expelled from his body takes a proportion of his bottled up angst and grief with it. He places his brawny palm over Felicity's hand.

Felicity gently sits beside him and pulls his big arm over her shoulder. She cradles his huge hand against her belly.

"It's okay, Mr. Plath," she says wearily.

“There was a little girl like you in Africa,” he says, somberly.

“It wasn’t your fault, Mr. Plath. It was war-time.”

“I tried to run away from something bad I did when I was young, and people have been getting hurt ever since.”

“That was just an accident,” says Felicity, sadly.

Plath breathes deeply, Felicity’s words playing over in his mind. Something in her words echoes a profound truth.

“What did you say?” he asks, numbly.

“That was just an accident.”

Plath feels light-headed. He feels like has emerged from the Engine Room, to a cool breeze on the Promenade deck. An all-encompassing catharsis rolls over him like a flood of morphine. Hairs come up on his arms, breaking free of

the dried salt.

For the first time, Plath sees the two incidents that had bedeviled him were not of his making, not of his choice. He didn't have a bad character, he just had bad luck.

The motion of the vessel has grown inside Plath's stomach. It is no longer alien, but now an extension of himself. He closes his eyes and feels as if he's on a playground swing, moving freely through the air without the anxiety of falling.

There is the sound of water crashing on the hull of the iron ship. It's a new sound; deeper, louder. It's incessant, over and over and over again. Each blow is seemingly weakening the Yongala.

*BOOOOOM!!!*

A vast wall of water pounds Yongala's starboard side. Felicity yelps in surprise and Plath snaps his eyes open. The ship heels, changing the gravitational relationship of all things in the cabin.

Cupboard drawers fly open, and things take flight. Plath instinctively shelters Felicity from debris falling through the air: toiletries, the medallion, the heavy box containing the sextant, empty and full scotch bottles.

Felicity pulls tightly against Plath's body, and they just sit there, clutching each other listening to the storm trying to destroy the Yongala.

They're silent for a long time, rolling back and forth with every movement of the great ship. Plath's breathing slows. He rubs his eyes with the back of his wrist and notices that he is wet all over.

There are salt crystals on his face. His face hurts, his neck hurts, his ribs hurt. But his soul is unharmed.

He watches white water flashing past the porthole. He is worn out.

Exhausted. And now he is worried.

Yongala has started singing as though the wind and waves and the hull are in harmony.

“That’s a dangerous storm,” says Plath.

“Uncle Portland says the ship is strong and won’t sink,” says Felicity, raising her face just enough to speak.

“I hope he’s alright,” says Plath.

“We should find him,” says Felicity, suddenly becoming anxious, “I wonder where he is?”

“He’s in the Smoking Room,” says Plath.

“Probably sleeping in a chair with his nursemaid.”

“Nursemaid?”

“She’s called Brandy,” Felicity says.

Plath laughs, “My nursemaid is called Scotch.”

“Is she good to you?”

“No. She’s a mean bitch.”

Felicity starts giggling as she finds her feet, “You said bitch. Like a dog.”

Felicity and Plath laugh together. They helping each other stand and then move into the hallway, bracing themselves against the handrail.

A seaman staggers towards them. He halts and looks up at Plath; he’s clearly frightened and desperate.

“Captain’s orders to stay in your bunk until morning,” he says.

“But we have to get to Uncle

Portland,” says Felicity.

## Man in the Doorway

After what seems like an age of fighting gravity, Felicity and Plath reach the Smoking Room. Portland is there in the leather chair, his arms hanging over the sides waving around freely.

Felicity presses Portland's hand, and he wakes. He glances around the Smoking Room anxiously. There is no healthy *clickety-clack* like when he woke on the steam train. Instead, he hears the sound of a 1,700-ton ship being pummeled by the ocean. He grips the side of his chair in panic when he sees Plath standing there, towering above him, swaying in mid-air.

Felicity grabs hold Portland's jacket to stop herself from falling, and she bellows, "Mr. Plath is going to help us



take the Smoke Engine to Townsville.”

The ship lurches and the room fills with the noise of things falling and breaking. The harmonic singing of the ship’s hull rises in decibels. Portland looks up at the glass skylight above his head. The cupola is leaking, dripping water onto them. Portland raises his hand and points towards the doorway.

There is a man; his body wedged against the doorframe so that he doesn’t fall. Turk has a revolver gripped in his hand. “I got you both!” he shouts, then fires. *BAM!*

Felicity screams and tumbles, clutching her side. Plath reaches for his pistol, but his jacket is wet, and he can’t raise its edge to grip the gun. He sees Felicity curled on the floor. Her face contorts as she grips her teeth together

to fight against the pain.

Plath's eyes light up like the furnace in the Boiler Room. He sees Turk's aim waver as he tries to keep his balance. Plath snatches up an armchair and hurls it with the full force of his powerful body. The chair careers through the air and smashes Turk like a bowling ball.

Plath turns to Felicity. She is gripping her side, blood on her hand. She is whimpering.

"Let me see," he says.

Felicity clenches her teeth and gasps as she allows Plath to raise her blouse to see the wound.

"It is a little graze. It will hurt, but you'll be okay." Plath places his palm on Felicity's cheek. "You okay."

There's a noise of a wet cough and it becomes apparent where Turk's bullet

ended its flight. A spatter of blood comes from Portland's mouth as he gasps his last breath. Plath pulls aside Portland's waistcoat to reveal the entry wound. Plath has done his triage. Felicity is okay. Portland is dead.

Turk lifts himself from the floor, groaning. He tries to stand but topples over the chair that hit him.

"How many guards are there?" Plath asks Felicity.

Felicity can't speak. She's staring at the blood trickling from Portland's mouth.

"I really need to know. How many guards are there?"

Felicity looks around to see Turk struggling to get to his feet. "He's the Big Meany."

"Is he the last one?"

*BOOM!* A huge wave crashes down on

Yongala's bow, sending a violent tremble throughout the ship. There is the sharp creaking noise as the paneling inside the Smoking Room comes away from the superstructure.

"There were four," says Felicity, "there were four!"

Plath thinks it through. There's one in the bilge, one over the transom, another one dead under the crane. So, there's one left.

"Look after your Uncle," says Plath. He stands and staggers across the Smoking Room. He makes it to the door and looks down at Turk, who is disoriented and confused. Turk gets to his feet just as Plath throws the full force of his elbow against Turk's head, slamming him backward down the flight of stairs into the saloon.

The ship makes a terrible groan, as though she were losing the battle with the storm. There is a crash on the hull and a violent shudder accompanied by the sense of falling as Yongala buries her bow into the heaving sea. A new noise, more of a tremble, penetrates the ship as her propeller breaks free of the ocean and churns in the air.

Plath staggers towards the stairs and sees Turk sprawled at the bottom, floundering, trying to regain his senses. He looks up at Plath at the top of the stairwell. He raises the pistol and fires until there are no more bullets.

*BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!*

The bullets slam into the wooden paneling, the banister rail and the ceiling around Plath, but none connects with his flesh. Plath grips the handrail

and marches down the stairs.

“Now he’s out of ammo,” Plath thinks, “the stupid amateur.”

Turk scrambles to his feet and limps out of the saloon into the corridor.

Plath is right on his tail, moving as fast as he can, gripping the guard rail tightly against the violent motion of the ship, then releasing and moving quickly forward.

Turk stumbles and falls to his stomach, crawling away. He comes to a doorway beyond which is a flight of stairs leading down to a lower deck. He half-crawls, half-falls down the ladder. At the bottom, he crawls away, looking back to see Plath approaching.

Turk gets to a steel door, he reaches up, pulls the handle and swings it open. A burst of hot, moist air erupts around

him, combined with the noise of heavy machinery. He turns to see Plath a few paces away, bouncing off the corridor walls. Turk looks down into the Boiler Room just as Plath catches up with him, grabs him by the legs and tips him down the ladder.

There is chaos in the Boiler Room. Coal slides across the deck, and boiler men fall over themselves desperate to keep fuelling the hungry furnace. Turk drags himself along the grating, gasping and terrified. Plath descends the ladder, looming down on Turk like a horrible and imminent death.

## Both Pumps are Down

In the Engine Room, the Chief Engineer grips desperately to the railing. He struggles to observe a gauge for the starboard bilge pump. The needle wavers back and forth. He whistles then shouts into the voice pipe to the bridge, “There is a blockage in the starboard bilge pump. We’re going to shut it down and clear it.”

In the Wheelhouse, Captain Knight struggles to keep his balance next to the voice pipe. The windscreen is a blur of white spray and the screaming wind muffles every sound. He clasps the mouthpiece desperately and bellows, “Get the water out of my ship!”

On the lower deck of the Engine Room, oily water sloshes through the



grating. The Chief Engineer grabs his second in charge by the arm and shouts into his ear, “Get in there now! Clear the pump!”

The Second Engineer crawls across the decking with bilge water splashing around him. He waits for the right moment to lift up the metal grating. As the ship rolls, the creaking noise of her hull is heard over the roar of steam-powered machinery. Then a new sound, a sharp twang. The sound of snapping rivets.

Plunging his arm into the oily bilge water, the Second Engineer sits upright, tugging at something. He shouts, “I’ve got it! I’ve got something!”

The Chief Engineer re-engages the starboard bilge pump and the gauge returns to its proper pressure. He looks

down to his companion and gives the thumbs up.

The Second Engineer struggles to raise the thing he has taken hold of. He pulls and it comes to the surface. It's a shirt sleeve with a hand in it, attached to a body.

A wave pounds hard on the hull and the body floats to the surface. There is a face, swollen from the water and covered in grime. It's the security guard, Hugh.

The Second Engineer shrieks and lets go of the sleeve. Hugh's body sinks below the water and is sucked back into the pump.

The Chief Engineer watches in horror as the pressure gauge drops to zero and Hugh's body jams the bilge pump yet again. Looking around nervously, he

hears more of that terrible noise.

*Twang! Twang! Twang!*

Yongala's hull plates are being torn apart and the metal rivets that hold them together are giving way. A tiny gap appears between the plates, allowing more water to enter the ship.

In the Boiler Room, the workers watch as Plath falls onto Turk and puts him in a headlock. At their wits end, they leap out of the way, abandoning their shovels.

Yongala heels violently and the fighting men slide across the decking accompanied by blocks of black, oily coal. Orange flame reaches out of the boiler like a giant spider lunging at a luckless fly.

Plath gets back to his feet and struggles to retrieve the Mauser pistol

from his belt. He tries to aim at Turk but the deck moves under him, and there is a deep moaning noise as the force of the raging sea twists Yongala's hull. Rivets pop now with the sound of a gun fight.

Plath fires and falls at the same time. The bullet goes awry, striking a metal pipe from which steam bursts with a high-pitched scream. He gets to his feet and raises a kick that forces Turk to stagger towards the violent orange flame that roars inside the open boiler. Plath fires twice, hitting Turk in the chest. Turk staggers and Plath fires two more bullets.

Turk falls back, slumped in the opening of the boiler. The inferno inside reaches out and grabs him. His scream is snuffed out by flame.

In the Engine Room, the Chief Engineer holds on for dear life, squinting at the bilge pump pressure gauges. On the decking below him, his second is rolling around and sliding helplessly, desperately trying to find purchase.

Oily water sloshes over him as he tumbles across the decking towards churning machinery.

Below the engine doom decking, Hugh's body is sucked deeper into the starboard bilge pump. The pump chokes and splutters, just audible over the roar of the engines and merciless hammering of the sea. The starboard bilge pump pressure falls to zero.

Then another noise, Plath's gunshots from the Engine Room and the bullet slamming into the steam pipe. Instantly,

the needle on the port bilge pump falls to zero. The Chief Engineer stares at both gauges, a look of terror covers his face. He shouts at the top of his lungs, “The bilge pumps are down.”

The Second Engineer is not there to hear him. He disappears beneath the surging bilge water and is torn to pieces on the metal work attached to the spinning propeller shaft.

Plath lowers his weapon and braces himself, looking at his feet where water sloshes about his ankles. The water is rising. Around him, frightened boiler men stare in shock. He heads towards the ladder.

In the Engine Room, the Chief Engineer forces a whistle from his lips. He bellows into the voice pipe to the bridge, “The bilge pumps have failed.”

Up above, Captain Knight stares into the night through the spray-drenched windscreen. He turns to hear the whistle and a garbled noise from the voice pipe. The seaman on the helm shows a panicked look.

“What did he say?” shouts the Captain.

“He says the bilge pumps are down.”

“Which one?”

“Both of them.”

Captain Knight looks out the bridge windows at the ocean devouring his ship. He makes a quick, simple calculation and says, “Oh my stars!”

## Funnel Collapse

In the Smoking Room, Felicity is slumped against Portland's legs, pleading with him, "Wake up Uncle Portland! Don't go to sleep!"

Yongala strikes the face of a vertical wave and has the effect of stopping the vessel's forward movement. The furniture in the Smoking Room surges forward, and Felicity tumbles onto the floor.

For a time, she lays on the floor, curled up, pushing her fingertip against the wound on her side. She sobs as she looks up at Uncle Portland slumped in his chair, his head lolling to one side. She crawls back to Portland, tears flooding from her eyes.

"You can't die," she sobs, "who will



teach me things!?”

A piece of Yongala’s decking comes loose and clangs into the porthole window. The window smashes and the wind spews rain deep into the Smoking Room.

Felicity looks up to see the glass skylight awash with foaming water. Seawater drips through the framework around the glass.

“Uncle Portland, please wake up!” she wails, pounding her little fists on the dead man’s legs.

Plath staggers into the Smoking Room, drenched and exhausted.

“Please, Uncle Portland!” she pleads. “Wake up for me!”

Plath places his hand on her shoulder. She turns to him, her eyes, streaming with tears.

“Felicity we have to go! Yongala is sinking!”

“Not sinking!” she yells through gritted teeth. “Uncle said she can’t sink!”

“I’ve seen the water rising. We have to go!”

“We can’t leave him here.”

“He is dead, Felicity, please, we have to go!”

“We can’t leave him. There’s no one else.”

“We can’t take him. There is no point.”

Felicity rounds on Plath, furious,  
“What do you know!? You’re just a stupid old soldier who drinks too much! What do you know about being dead?”

“What do I know about being dead!?”  
Plath is flabbergasted. He kneels on the

carpet so that he is at eye level with Felicity.

“What do you know about anything!?” she moans.

“What do I know about being dead!?” Plath stammers, “I have been dead for ten years and everywhere I go dead people join me.”

“You didn’t have to die!” wails Felicity, pushing her face against Portland’s legs.

“But I want to live, Felicity. And I want you to live. And if we stay here we will both perish!”

The Smoking Room resonates with the roar of waves, an incessant whistling of the fierce wind and the clanging of infrastructure falling apart.

The popping rivets from the hull below the waterline are audible amongst

every other noise, a reminder that there can be only one outcome for the ship.

Up above, the cupola groans as falling water continues to pummel it. The stream of seawater falling through the skylight wavers as the ship rolls. It spatters over Plath's head, and he looks up at the glass.

"Felicity we have to go," he says, anxiously, taking her by the arm. But she won't let Plath move her, and she clutches Portland's leg tighter.

"There is no one else to teach me," she wails.

"Felicity, we're in grave danger." Plath says, his face close to hers, "Will you let me teach you how to survive this?"

The Yongala shudders and a groaning noise emanates from the hull accompanied by the noise of twisting

metal and deck planks splintering.

“We can’t leave him here!” Felicity protests.

“Okay,” says Plath, giving in. “We’ll take him, we’ll take him!”

Felicity lets go of Portland’s legs and allows Plath to lift her away. He struggles to lift Portland from the chair. As he pulls the old man’s body upright, blood pours from Portland’s mouth.

Felicity shrieks and the Smoking Room clock starts ringing the quarter hour. Long metallic chimes ring out, distorted by the bells banging around inside the clock.

Yongala shudders and heels over. Plath braces himself as the Smoking Room starts to tumble around him. Tables, chairs and anything not bolted down is rearranged as the ship heels.

He struggles to lead Felicity over the strewn furniture, carrying the deadweight of the Professor over his shoulder. Instinctively, Plath stops and looks up through the glass roof. For a second, he is motionless with fear.

“Quick, Felicity!” he yells. He snatches Felicity’s hand and drags her forcefully out of the Smoking Room. They are followed by a terrific grinding noise of metal twisting against metal and the twanging guy ropes pulling apart.

Yongala’s funnel gives way and collapses onto the Boat Deck, steel crashing through the glass cupola. The ceiling collapses and the Smoking Room is suddenly full of falling, broken metal and wood paneling. The wind and water spray lash the room, forcing wet air through the door and pushing

Felicity, Plath, and the dead Professor  
into the hallway.

## Storm-swept Deck

Plath staggers a few paces along the corridor. He bounces along the walls. He has pain running the length of his body. Every muscle is stressed.

“We have to get the thing!” shouts Felicity, stopping dead in the hallway.

“What?”

“The sexton.”

“No!” shouts Plath, indignantly. He adjusts the dead weight of Portland on his shoulder.

“We need it!”

“We have to get off the ship, Felicity!”

Felicity becomes hysterical. In the churning hallway, she starts screaming and stamping her foot, “We need it! We need it! We need it!”

“What the hell for?”



“It tells you where you are.”

“Okay. Okay. We’ll get it.”

Plath staggers along the corridor to his cabin and pushes open the door. The sextant case is on the floor, smashed, the sextant intact. He lowers himself to the floor and accidentally bashes Portland’s head against the doorframe. He clasps his hand around the sextant and is reminded of its significant weight. Felicity clings to the hand rail in the corridor with one hand, taking the sextant from Plath and clutching it to her chest.

“If it weighs you down, throw it away!” says Plath, turning, careful not to bash the dead professor’s head against the wall again.

“I’ll never let it go.”

Plath stoops. He takes hold of

Felicity's small shoulder and steadies her. He needs to convey an important message, if only the ship will let him.

"Felicity. You don't need to know 'where' you are if you know 'who' you are! You could be anywhere, lost even, if you know that."

Felicity tries to understand, but the noise of the steam-ship falling apart makes it hard to think.

"Do you understand?" shouts Plath.

Felicity nods numbly. She sees Plath's medallion on the floor.

"Take your thing!"

Plath looks down at the medallion recalls everything that it signifies. "I don't need that anymore."

Staggering under the weight of Portland's body, Plath steps back into the corridor. Which way to turn? Where

is he going? They have to get off the sinking ship, but onto what? Plath continues staggering towards the door that leads onto the Promenade Deck. The door has swung off its hinges and water surges into the corridor.

Plath braces himself as a huge wave heels the ship over. He tries to grab the hand rail, but he falls hard against the corridor wall. The rail catches him under the arm, cracking his ribs. He grimaces in pain and Portland slips from his grasp. The body tumbles onto the deck outside and is swept up by the foaming water, jamming against the railing on the Promenade Deck.

Yongala heels to starboard and Plath clutches the corridor rail desperate not to fall out the door. There is a noise - a sort of thud and a squeal - and he looks

around to see Felicity tumbling down the hallway towards the door onto the Promenade Deck.

Plath's mind flashes back thirty years to when he lost Marion on the roof. That' can't happen again. He pushes himself away from the wall and falls towards the open door. He snatches Felicity by the wrist and jams himself tight with his feet against the doorframe. The jolt of Felicity's weight arrested from free-fall almost dislocates his shoulder.

“*Yaaarrrrrr!*” he shrieks, gripping Felicity's hand tighter.

Felicity hangs in mid-air suspended by her arm, the foaming water smashing against the Promenade Deck just below her feet. In her other hand the sextant, a deadweight that threatens to pull her

down to the seabed.

The wind rises, higher and higher like someone had taken off a restraining brake. A foaming mass of water barrels along the deck and Felicity watches as Portland is swept away.

“No!” she screams, hanging in mid-air, “don’t go!”

Plath struggles to lift Felicity back into the hall but he is distracted by a noise rapidly approaching. He looks up to see Mrs. Tea Rose, in her nightie, tumbling down the hallway. He full weight slams against Plath, and she tumbles onto the Promenade Deck.

For a moment, Mrs. Tea Rose is caught, wedged by her own weight against the railing. Her frail clothing is torn, her flesh bruised. Mrs. Tea Rose makes a long, injured gasp and her eyes

waver towards Felicity.

The wind whips higher still, forcing a terrifying shrieking noise as it slices through the rigging. There are harsh thumping sounds resonating through the hull as the Yongala's component parts beat against each other.

Mrs. Tea Rose manages a weak smile before a powerful surge of white water sweeps her away into the night.

Mortified, Felicity's eyes fix on the empty deck from where the sea has consumed another of her life tutors.

Yongala shudders and lets out a terrible moan. Something structural gives way. The popping rivets now sound like machine gun delivering short bursts of fire.

The wind rises to a new deafening high, seeming to reach a maximum,

when suddenly - as though someone  
had thrown a switch -the wind dies  
down to nothing.

No wind.

It just stops.

The Yongala suddenly rights herself  
and rolls freely in the swell.

With the noise of the wind gone,  
audible now is a hundred other sounds  
of metal clanging against metal and the  
dull groan of the hull suffering the  
weight of water she has shipped.

Plath pulls Felicity back into the  
hallway and grips her tightly. They stare  
out through the door catching glimpses  
of the foaming ocean tinged pale green  
by the phosphorescent algae. The  
surface of the sea is illuminated by an  
eerie, silver-blue glow. The deep rolling  
clouds move away, revealing a crystal

clear sky with stars twinkling and a half-moon shining brightly.

There is not a breath of wind.

Yongala is in the eye of the cyclone.

“He’s gone. He’s gone,” Felicity sobs.

“Felicity, we need to keep moving, we don’t have long.”

“Long for what?”

“Before the ship goes down.”

“She can’t sink. Uncle Portland said she was a good ship.”

Plath moves his face close to hers and pleads, “Please, Felicity, please! We have survived half a cyclone. We can’t survive the other half. Yongala is sinking. We have to get off her now.”

Felicity goes quiet. She looks around, surveying the hallway of the Yongala heaving and rolling at odd angles, the silver-blue sea rolling like a field of



danger beyond.

Felicity sees Plath's strained face, her one remaining friend and teacher in the world. She nods slowly.

## The Smoke Engine

Plath carries Felicity onto the Promenade Deck, cautiously moving from one stronghold to the next and deadily careful not to lose his grip on the slippery deck. The air is warm and still and the night sky seems vast compared to the cramped insides of the ship.

The seas are vast and they writhe silently with Yongala clung to its back, the ship resonating with strange noises. Metal wires flap freely and clang against the superstructure. Fatigued metal groans at its weak points. It is dark outside save for the deck lights, the stars, and the half-moon.

As the ship rises on the swell, gravity seems to increase, stressing all of

Plath's muscles, making it hard to move ahead. As she falls, gravity appears to lighten; then the danger is to slip on the wet deck.

Plath has Felicity gripped very tightly, her eyes wide in wonderment at the silvery seascape. She stares up at the galaxy above, the stars forming a three-dimensional cloud against the pitch-black of space. The ocean is a vast paddock that shimmers black and silver and occasionally gives way to a sharp hissing noise as a white foaming mass appears out of the dark and the top rolls off the crest of a wave.

Plath carries Felicity down the flight of steps to the Main Deck and moves aft. Where is he going? He's going to the transom, his sanctuary on the ship. Yongala pitches, bow down, shudders

and then rises, tipping everything towards the back of the ship.

Felicity is alerted to danger. She hears Plath grunt and then feels the sensation of falling. Plath loses his foothold, falls and slams into the wood decking heavily. Clutching Felicity, he slides freely along the wet decking. A few meters ahead, the wooden decking, has cracked forming jagged teeth of splintered hardwood.

Plath desperately gropes for a handhold, but his fingers slip on the wet planking. The jagged teeth come closer, and there is a terrific crash as something huge and heavy slams onto the deck in front of them. Plath and Felicity slam into the rope netting covering a large wooden crate. The Smoke Engine box has slipped from its

place.

Holding onto the netting, Plath readjusts his hold on Felicity. She is gripping him tightly, whimpering, holding the sextant between her body and his chest.

There is a noise behind them, and two bruised, and torn passengers tumble out of the ship onto the deck as they bash into the gunwale as they fall over the side screaming.

A huge wave rolls onto Yongala's side and floods the deck around them. There is an aggravated groan as the buoyancy of the crate stresses the one remaining quick link that has not yet snapped.

With Felicity clutched to his body, Plath claws around the netting and stares at the link, trying to makes sense

of the opportunity.

“Hold me tight, Felicity. Hold tight!” shouts Plath.

He stretches his arm towards the quick link. His body aches all over. Sinews scream in pain. His ribs are bruised and his face swollen. Plath holds the lever in his fingers.

An avalanche of water crashes over the gunwale and the crate rises as seawater floods the deck. At that moment, Plath throws the lever on the quick link and then pins Felicity hard against the netting.

The crate rises above the gunwale and comes free of the Yongala. As the deck drains, the crate floats away free with Plath and Felicity clinging to the netting atop it.

The distance slowly grows between

the Yongala and the Smoke Engine  
crate. The black hull of the Yongala  
looms as she rises and falls, wallowing  
in the huge swell.

Plath studies the ship as the distance  
between them grows. He becomes calm  
knowing that from this point on, his  
and Felicity's destiny is no longer tied  
to that of the sinking steamship.

## Yongala Succumbs

Aboard Yongala, amongst the passengers and crew, the eye of the storm creates a sense that the danger has passed. The violence and noise of the wind has ceased although the heavy seas continue to force Yongala into exaggerated movements. With a hull filling with water, she can no longer roll like she was designed to and the motion is awkward.

Warm seawater continues to seep between Yongala's deck plates with no functioning bilge-pumps to counter it. The more water she takes, the faster the water rushes in.

In the Engine Room, the water rises so high that the Chief Engineer is forced to give up his position. He tries



to make it to the stairway, but he slips into the maelstrom of churning water into the hot machinery.

As the water rises it spills into the boilers, throwing great billows of steam from where there should be an orange flame. Boilermen anxiously wade towards the ladder. With the fire extinguished, there is nothing more for them to do.

As the heat from the boilers wanes, the steam pressure falls. Yongala's great steam engine falls quiet, and the electro-generators cease flooding electricity around Yongala. The power goes out, plunging the ship into darkness.

With no propulsion, Yongala is unable to make steerageway, and she is completely at the mercy of the sea. It is the end for Yongala, and she slowly

disappears below the sea.

The drowning starts on the lower decks. Passengers and crew roll around, wretchedly gripping the sides of their bunks in pitch black. The Coral Sea enters into their cabins, at first seeping, and then flooding through the door frames. The warm brine rises in the darkness, and a new panic emerges as the frightened, bruised inhabitants onboard Yongala suffer the indignity of the salty wetness. They draw their last panicked, choking breaths before falling into a deep and watery sleep.

In the communal bathroom on the lower deck, a dozen passengers, battered and bleeding, slide around on the tiles, banging against basins and pipes as the water floods in. They scream and fight against the sea in the

darkness.

In their cabin, the deck boys Tommy and Paul grip each other in the gloom. A violent lurch of the ship throws them from their bunks, and they land heavily on the cabin floor. They search around in the darkness, trying to find each other so that they don't have to be afraid alone.

"I didn't mean to do it!" cries Tommy. His mate doesn't know what that means but before he can ask, the salty water rises and snuffs them both out.

The racehorse, panicked and terrified is liberated from its open top cage by the rising waters. It paddles furiously, stretching its long neck trying to keep its snout above the water. But the seas are too big and after just a few seconds treading water, it draws in a lungful of

seawater and drowns in the dark.

Nearby, the body of the bull rolls in the waves.

Captain Knight stands resolute as the water rises to the bridge. The vessel heels and water pours into the Wheelhouse. When the ship rolls back the other way, the water exits and the old sea dog is sucked into the night.

Most of the dying aboard Yongala takes place within a few minutes and then there is a quiet calmness as the steel ship, now filled with water, descends the short distance to the sandy floor below.

There, on the seabed, Yongala joins an international sisterhood, a sorority of ships lost at sea. One hundred and twenty plus souls taken to Davey Jones' locker from a ship that should have

been anchored in a lee.

## A Life Raft

Their destinies now parted from that of the Yongala, Plath and Felicity ride the safety of the Smoke Engine crate. The crate rises and falls on the swell.

Plath grips his fingers tightly around the rope netting and admonishes Felicity, “Hold tight girl! Hold me tight!”

Felicity is pinned between Plath and the crate and as long as she continues to grip him and he continues to hold the rope netting, they will stay out of the water.

As the crate comes to the crest of a wave, Felicity struggles to turn her face toward the lights of Yongala twinkling hundreds of meters away.

Plath and Felicity watch as Yongala’s

lights flicker, dim and then snuff-out for good. Suddenly the night becomes even darker, and now just a half moon and the gentle glow of the Milky Way illuminates the sea. Yongala's superstructure is visible just as a silhouette against a faint, creamy sky.

The Smoke Engine crate slides into a trough between the waves and now all Plath and Felicity can see is dark seawater. It seems like an age that the crate wallows in the valley between watery mountains. Then it starts to rise to the wave crest, but Yongala is no longer there.

For Plath, seeing the ship gone brings about a sense of relief. He lets out a long, deep sigh for not only has the ship disappeared, but so too has Yongala, the town. Three decades of

grief drift away and he experiences a wave of euphoria. He becomes light-headed and conscious to the each passing instant of his existence.

He is Corben Plath; drenched, bruised, clinging to a rope net against a wooden crate in the vast darkness of the Coral Sea. He is not afraid, he is fearless and he has just saved a young life.

Plath turns his face to Felicity, who clings to him like a desperate starfish. He can feel the hard edge of the sextant pressed against his chest, gripped in Felicity's hand and the fast patter of her heart.

He can also feel the Mauser pistol pressed against his spine. So he lets go one hand from the rope netting and reaches around, pulls the gun from the back of his pants and drops it into the



sea.

For Felicity, the sinking of Yongala fails to rise above the image of Uncle Portland and Mrs. Tea Rose being dashed violently into the sea. The memory plays over and over again in her mind. One second someone was there, the next, just a mass of foaming water and they were gone. How tenuous is a human life, she thinks. But how does that new knowledge help her? What is important is that she clings to the two things that she most needs: someone to teach her and the device that tells her where she is. Felicity grips Plath and the sextant with all of the strength that she has.

A howling noise rises in the distance. Clouds cover the moon, snuffing out what little light there is in the sky. The

calm eye of the cyclone gives way to the ferocious winds on its edge.

“The cyclone is coming back,” says Plath, his face pressed close to Felicity’s ear.

“I’m scared,” she whimpers.

“There is nothing to be afraid of anymore,” says Plath, calmly.

Felicity raises her head to look at Plath. He is just a shadow, but she can see that he is squinting, his face creased against the coming storm. She observes him as he anxiously scans ahead, making his appreciation of the approaching enemy. Plath looks down to the little starfish, clinging so tightly.

“Keep breathing, Felicity,” he says.

“Whatever happens, just keep breathing.”

A howling noise comes across them

and a ferocious wind approaches,  
turning the tops of the waves into  
horizontal lines of foam.

“Keep breathing, Felicity,” Plath says  
again. And this is the last thing that he  
ever says.

The terrible whine of the wind  
swallows his voice. It brings with it a  
rolling wall of water that rises and  
crashes down upon the crate. The shrill  
scream of the wind and white foaming  
water.

Hissing.

Fizzing.

## On a Beach

*Friday, 24 March 1911*

Thick clouds move swiftly across the morning sky. The wind is strong, but the power of the storm has passed.

Waves crash along a long, wide sandy beach, littered with shipwreck debris. There are pieces of wood, clothing, a shoe, a dead horse.

A heavy-set man, is lifeless, face down in the sand.

There is a large wooden crate, wrapped in rope netting. Wooden slats have come loose revealing a piece of curved bronze inside.

Sitting with her back against the crate, sheltering from the wind is a young woman. Long hair wraps around her face. She holds a brass sextant clutched

tightly in her hands.

Felicity stares into the distance. She is in a trance, her mind consumed by a single thought. She is all on her own now, and there is no one left to teach her.

The sextant slips from her fingers, onto the sand.

End.





**Guy Lane**

**Focus on Sustainability**

Entrepreneur / Commentator / Novelist

**A writer without readers is just a dreamer, so thank you, thank you, thank you for reading my book!**

If you would like to continue with our new relationship, here are some things you might like to do:

- I would love to hear your thoughts about the book. I appreciate all feedback, good bad or indifferent.
- Maybe could write a short book review ([see reviews here](#)) that I could put on my website for others

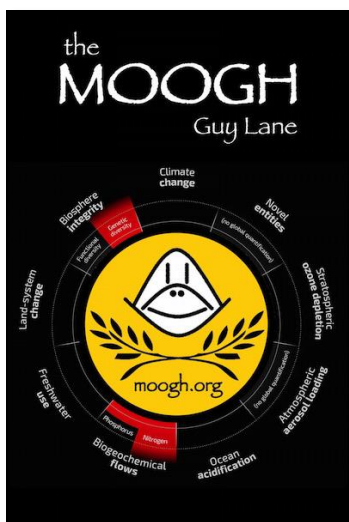
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- On the following pages, you can see all the books by Guy Lane.
- And of course, tell people about the book and the sustainability themes therein.
- There is no [trillionaire spaceman](#) coming to save us, and we are all going to have to intervene, ourselves.

Thank you again, dear reader.

All the best, Guy Lane





## The Moogh

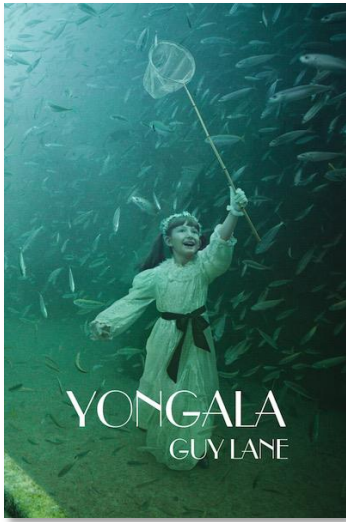
When people see the Moogh, they run towards it screaming with joy, believing it to be a messenger of peace and

sustainability. Maggie Tarp kept her head, and now she's the Moogh Reporter for the Fractious News Network. She's embedded with moogh.org, the shadowy organisation that won the UN contract to manage Moogh affairs. Unfortunately, for Maggie, her bosses don't like the stories that she writes about spirituality and Moogh philosophy - they just don't sell. So they pair her up with the hot-shot

journalist, Perrin Speer. Sparks fly, and Maggie rejects everything that Perrin tries to teach her. Perrin falls foul of moogh.org when he reveals that they are killing people to hide a deadly secret. As the Moogh Zone descends into chaos, Maggie finds that the Moogh also keeps a secret. But does she have what it takes to get the story?

*“There are pop-culture icons for killing zombies & catching criminals, now there is one for saving the planet. The Moogh restores nature and revives the planetary boundaries.”*

[Read \*\*THE MOOGH\*\* today](#)



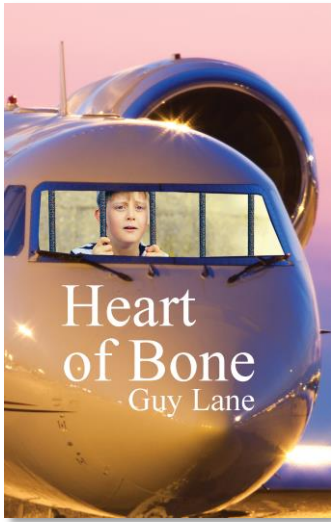
## Yongala

Boer War veteran Corben Plath has nothing to lose when his estranged half-brother (the C.E.O. of the Queensland Coal Board) offers him blood money and a ticket on the luxury cruise liner S.S. Yongala. Aboard Yongala, Prof. Frederick Portland is traveling to Townsville with his young niece, Felicity, and his renewable energy invention, the 'Smoke Engine'. Fearing that the Smoke Engine will ruin them, the Coal Board task Plath with murdering Portland and destroying his machine. Onboard the ship, Plath

strikes an innocent friendship with Felicity, not realizing that she is the niece of the man he has been sent to kill. As Yongala steams into heavy weather, Plath learns that there are armed men aboard looking for him. Tired of fighting, he comes to see that his own salvation depends on Felicity surviving the storm.

*“I wrote a fictional version of the final voyage of Yongala because I wanted the public to know that scientists have understood the basics of climate change since 1905.”*

[Read YONGALA today](#)



## Heart of Bone

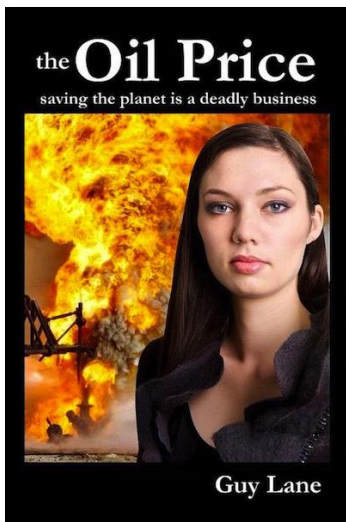
Rebecca is a personal assistant to billionaire poison merchant, Gilly Clay, and she's trapped in a ruinous employment contract.

Her life flashes past through a mane of ginger hair and stress. Rebecca keeps her sanity through a secret love affair with psychologist and author, Tom Snowdon. Snowdon's new book - *Sustainability and the Superclass* - gets inside the heads of the powerful men who run the world so poorly. One day, Clay adopts an 8-year-old boy, Montgomery Earle, and grooms him as the heir to both the business empire

and his defective moral compass. Seeing this, all of Rebecca's certainties slip away, and she's forced to make a choice. She can either keep silent and watch the young boy being corrupted or risk everything by speaking out.

*“We live in the age of a global Superclass, where half of the world’s wealth is controlled by as few people as could fit on a single corporate jet. They are so unplugged from reality, that we can’t rely on them to lead a transition to a sustainable future. Instead, we need to take matters into our own hands.”*

[Read \*\*HEART OF BONE\*\* today](#)



## The Oil Price

Danny Lexion easily meets his two life goals: he looks good and makes lots of money. One night, out on the town, he

falls for the stunning environmental activist, Bren Hannan. Bren's mission is to save a tiny island from a ruthless oil company called Peking Petroleum. To do this, she needs to get to a UN Conference in Dubai. Danny offers to fly her there, thinking that it might lead to some romance in an exotic city. In Dubai, Danny learns that Bren's story doesn't check out. He finds himself in the cross-hairs of the mercenary

security firm - Storm Front - who are protecting Peking Petroleum's interests. As the bullets fly through the streets of Dubai, Danny learns that saving the planet is a deadly business, and the real price of oil is blood.

*“The Oil Price is my first novel and something of an ensemble piece of characters and themes around the oil industry and the blocking moves of environmentalists.”*

[Read \*\*THE OIL PRICE\*\* today](#)





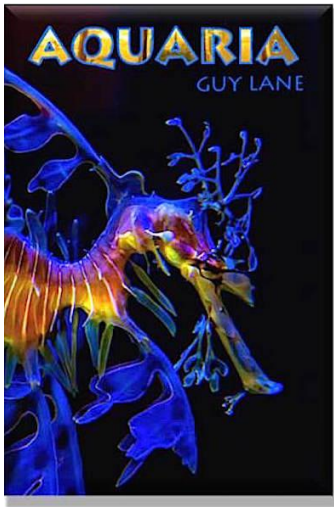
## Intervene

Anton Vorlov runs the world's biggest company, Between Destiny, from an island off the coast of Dubai. Officially, he's a billionaire from Ukraine, but he is actually a trillionaire spaceman - and his real name is Zem. He never sleeps, and his vast organisation spends \$100 billion a week financing the restructure of the global economy to make it sustainable. Zem is trained to handle complicated international negotiations and the inevitable interference of the oil industry. However, when his personal assistant - a feisty Earthling called

Megan - decides that she wants his attention, Zem gets right out his depth.

*‘In twenty years of world-watching, I have yet to be convinced that there is an individual or an organisation that has the influence to alter the destiny of human civilization. I created a fictional spaceman to do the job, to foster the idea that collectively, we might all intervene, ourselves.’*

[Read INTERVENE today](#)



## Aquaria

Lucy Callahan (38) is known as the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay due to her reputation for risk-taking, showmanship and thinking big. She's the founder of Aquaria, the world's most popular public aquarium and marine science precinct. One day, an oil rig ominously parks offshore. Callahan learns that Expedient Energy plans to drill for petroleum in the Aquaria marine park. The threat crystallises when the oil firm take over the Aquaria board, and the extent of their plan becomes known. Callahan dives into battle, prepared to

risk everything – even her own safety – to protect her life’s work. However, when her boyfriend, Sam, starts running interference, Callahan realises that winning the battle against the oil firm may come at a personal cost, a relationship and possibly a family. How will the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay respond to this dilemma? Will she give in to her partner’s wishes, or fight to the bitter end, even at the risk of her own life?

*“Climate change, ocean acidification and plastics are killing our oceans. The fossil fuel industry, and particularly the oil industry, is to blame. Plastics are made of oil, afterall. We must all become ambassadors of the ocean if we want it to survive. Fortunately, we needn’t juggle white sharks and stonefish, like Lucy*

*Callahan, to play a part.”*

Read **AQUARIA** today