CONSIGNED TO THE COLONY

The life story of Martha Ford Goodman, a Convict sent to Van Diemen’s Land

Submitted by Jan Westerink, MPsyh (UNSW), PhD (Wollongong)

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Certificate of Authorship

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Jan Westerink

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Acknowledgments

This is a work of fiction, based on real events and characters. It is the story of convict lives under a strict colonial administration. To tell this story I created a narrative that brought to life the day to day activities of the main characters – an imaginative interweaving of fact and fiction.

I am vastly indebted to my two supervisors, Dr Mark Macleod and Dr Jared Van Duinen. Both have been exceptionally encouraging and supportive. Dr Macleod has taught me more about creative writing than any other. I will be forever in his debt. Dr Van Duinen was generous and quick to respond to queries and always gave very valuable feedback. I thank them both.

Martha Ford Goodman was my great-great-grandmother and it was fascinating to research her life and that of her second husband, my great-great-grandfather William Guest. My extended family were interested in this research and I am grateful for their support.

John knows how much I value his encouragement and strength. He has been beside me all the way.
Abstract

*Consigned to the Colony* is a work of fiction based on the life of Martha Ford Goodman. She was a survivor who, as a 17-year-old, was charged with stealing fustian in Saltash, Cornwall. She was found guilty and sentenced to transportation. Her husband, William Gregory, was a co-accused but found not guilty. She gave birth after her conviction, leaving a newborn boy with her parents. She served time in Hobart. On receiving her ticket of leave, she remarried and began a new family. She and her second husband, William Guest, became innkeepers in Hobart and later, in New South Wales. They were also gold miners and gold sellers. Despite those initial hardships, she went on to become a wealthy businesswoman in Bega. She died a respected member of that community. Martha’s story is of a convict woman, just one of the unsung many who were workers, family builders and shapers of the new colony.

In writing this, I have tried to understand the challenges that she, and other early women colonists, faced and overcame. I believe that interpretative fiction adds depth to her story through an imaginative reconstruction of her inner life. This novel demonstrates that some female convicts became stalwarts in the development of Australian society; dispels the myth that all such women were sinning, drunken whores; and shows that many of them brought, and used, skills needed in the colony.
Exegesis

Finding Martha Ford Goodman

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Preface

Finding Martha Ford Goodman

I finished a piano lesson with my grandmother and walked outside musing over the story she had told me about her grandfather. There I met my cousin Paul. Fresh with the excitement of discovery, I shared my news with him. His reaction surprised me. ‘He might have been in Berrima Gaol, but I’ll bet that he was never governor,’ he challenged. Shocked and curious, I wondered what gave him the push to question her story. We were both about seven- or eight-years-old and Paul had that superiority which comes from being a year older and a boy. Under the heat of the sun, with the glare of white pavement in our eyes I remember both his grin and his skinny knees. I was left to wonder what he knew or whether he was just guessing. I asked myself, why would my grandmother lie?

The question bothered me for a while, then was put aside under the pressure of schooling, career, marriage and children, but it didn’t go away. It was only later, in more mature years that I found time to look for the truth. Research unearthed the story of a convict sent from London to Van Diemen’s Land – certainly never the governor of Berrima gaol! He was William Henry Guest, born in London, a young man who volunteered to fight in the Carlist War in Spain. There he was wounded. His indent records:

Marks: Scar each side of left arm from wound of musket ball. Scar on left side. Has been a soldier. Remarks: Queen of Spain Service
British Legion 18 months.¹

He would also have had mental scars as a result of that war, because the ship’s surgeon on the Emily during his voyage to Hobart described him as ‘unsettled in his mind – well behaved’.² In 1850 he married Martha Gregory (née Ford Goodman) in Hobart. Uncovering details of his life was exciting, but I was left wondering what my great-great-grandmother’s life had been. Soon after beginning the research I realised that, by and large, convict women and their daily lives were invisible to early historians – other than as sinners or whores.³ Why were there stories about her husband and none about her? I questioned how and why she became invisible.
My grandmother, Marion Martha James née Guest, told stories about the family but didn’t mention her or the convict stain. Had the family history been tidied up? I wanted to know: who Martha Gregory was; what she was like and how she met my great-great-grandfather.

I needed to know more about convict women and, in particular, Martha Gregory. There was little to go on, although there were a few clues. My father and sister researched William Henry Guest’s convict records 20 years ago and found his marriage, which led them to Martha’s convict record. My sister wrote to a contact in Cornwall in 1993, and received a letter from Dorothy Pidduck of Saltash, a descendant of Martha’s brother and a member of the British Genealogy Society. She replied, in part:

The family arrived in Saltash during the 1700’s. Henry Goodman married Elizabeth Ford at St Stephen’s Parish Church on 8/9/1810. Martha Ford Goodman was born on 19/12/1824 one of 5 children. She married Richard Gregory on 5/4/1842. She was tried for theft, found guilty etc., the trial was held on 21/10/1842. Her husband was found not guilty. So it seems my great great great grandfather was your great great grandmother’s brother. … it appears unlikely that her background was from the criminal classes. Her father had a trade as a shipwright, one of her brothers, Henry, was in the navy and another brother George was a local dignitary. Her mother ran a grocers shop in Fore Street Saltash. Fore St was the central core of Saltash and still is the main shopping centre today.4

Here was an indication that she had not in fact come from a criminal background. I wondered what she was like and what challenges, sorrows and joys she encountered.

To learn more about Martha and her times, I spent hours in the Mitchell Library, days at the State Archives, weeks trawling through Trove, a virtual visit to Saltash through Google Earth. I contacted historical societies in Moruya and Bega, undertook trips to Hobart and Nerrigundah including visits to sites where the family lived. I discovered a great deal about Martha, her family and associates.

My challenge now became how best to write her life.
Chapter 1
Beginning the Research

Living in Saltash, Cornwall

I began by learning more about Saltash and the Goodman family. I found that in Georgian times the district was home to approximately 39,000 people. The census records of 1841 show that there were many shipwrights, mariners, watermen and fisher folk; but also tradesmen such as carpenters, painters and stonemasons, shopkeepers (grocers, bakers and fishmongers) and a few professionals.

In 1841, Martha’s family lived in the main street, Fore Street. Her father was Henry Goodman aged 50, a shipwright, her mother Elizabeth (known as Betsy) aged 50, a grocer, and her sister Mary recorded in the census as aged 15. In 1841 Henry’s trade was in demand because the Royal Naval Dockyards were nearby. In 1851, he worked there and by 1861 he was head shipwright.

In the 1841 census, families registered in Fore Street on either side of the entry for the Goodman family were: George Dunsford, shipwright aged 45, his wife Catherine also 45 and their children, William 13, Elizabeth 11, Benjamin 10, Henry 1; on the other side lived Wilmot McKenny aged 30, of independent means, with two children, Mary aged 7 and Wilmot aged 2.

Other key figures in Martha’s future were Richard Gregory and Ambrose Peters. Gregory’s home was in Fore Street, but some distance away. He was 30, a stonemason and lived with his wife Mary; they had two children – Eliza 3 and Charles 1. Peters was a mercer and tailor aged 40 and shared the dwelling with Judith Berrell, 70, of independent means and Martha Chappel, 20, a fish seller. He lived close to Martha’s parents as the 1851 census records their house as number 58; his was 61. Reading about the families and occupations listed in the census of 1841, 1851 and 1861 was fascinating. This, taken together with the material I discovered about the history of the dockyard and the Plymouth area, made me feel as though I was walking up Fore Street.
In 1841, Martha was 17 years old and lived in Tamar Street beside the Tamar River in Saltash. She was a grocer and shared the house with Hannah Blake, a fish seller (both were recorded as aged 15), Harriet Hosking aged 30, a fish seller, and Jane and Harriet Hosking aged 6 and 9 respectively. Given Martha’s trade was ‘grocer’, it is likely that she worked in her mother’s shop. I wondered why she’d left home.

Another woman in Saltash was Elizabeth Collings (later her co-accused). She was a house and nurse maid, 4 feet 11 inches tall. Her hair was brown and her eyes were hazel. She had a mark ‘E.C.W.E.’ on her left arm. Her relations were: husband, Dennis on board the Rodney (a Royal Navy ship); her father, Phillip Parsons, four brothers and two sisters – Thomas, Henry, Joshua, Phillip, Susannah, Jane.

The archivist of the Saltash Heritage Museum and Local History Centre supplied an approximate address for the Goodman home. He sent other information which showed that the town was sizeable and he included a sketch of a large boarding school, the Saltash Academy, at the top of Fore Street. The 1841 census showed that the headmaster was Philip Roberts and the Academy housed his family, several teachers, servants and 45 boy boarders aged between 10 and 15.

Searching for personal mementoes

I checked with family and managed to source several photos, but Martha left no diaries or letters. Most of the stories handed down in the family were about her second husband, William Guest, so there was little evidence on which to build her own story. Therefore, reconstructing her life could be done only by reference to official records and contemporary reports. I wanted to write a biography based on historical records, but the meagre details I found left me wondering who she was.

It was frustrating to have no access to her inner life and I asked myself many questions. Was she guilty as convicted? Why was she living away from home before her marriage? She was 17 years 4 months when she married a 30-year-old man, widowed just six months earlier and burdened with two children – so why marry? Was she a naïve teenager, or was she pregnant? The wedding was on 5 April 1842 and the 1851 census records that she gave birth to a boy who was ‘born at sea’. His birth must
have been sometime between December and 5 February 1843 when the ship sailed. Her father’s petition for clemency has her about 7 months pregnant in late November.

In later life she became an independent businesswoman, a dealer in gold, an innkeeper; she bought and sold property and built an emporium in Bega. At the time of her third marriage, the law defined a wife as *feme covert*, meaning she was subordinate to her husband. In other words, husband and wife were regarded as one and the wife’s property was surrendered to her spouse. Before her marriage, Martha was canny enough to draw up documents ensuring that her property remained hers and did not go to Michael McNamara.\(^20\) By that time she’d been twice widowed and managed businesses and properties. Clearly she’d come a long way.

As I began to pull information together, I sorted printouts and notes and began a folder based on her life in Saltash. Then I researched social and political conditions of the day, which led me to examine the environment in prisons and on the transports.

**Life as a convict**

I filled other folders with information from colonial records and modern historians’ interpretations of events. The ships surgeons’ journals told of the hardship on board, but also revealed their attitudes towards their charges.

Once Martha left the convict transport in Van Diemen’s Land, she was under the control of the colonial government, so I began to research Hobart from the 1840s on and then New South Wales in the gold rush era. This opened up a wealth of material – reading newspapers of the day gave insight into politics, economic difficulties, crime and punishment, gossip, society and scandals. There was a mountain of information which created the dilemma: what to keep and what to omit.

**Seeking the best way to write her story**

I questioned how best to write her story: issues of style and genre arose. Martha’s story could be told in several ways, as biography, history or fiction. When examining these options I found debates, disadvantages and advantages in each approach.
Chapter 2
Issues in Interpreting Records

Othering

Much of what I discovered about Martha was recorded by officials. As a convict, she was not of their class. Said (2005) argues that othering is a marker of difference that is imposed. He writes of the West’s patronising representations of the Orient (people of Asia, North Africa and the Middle East) and links this to imperialist and colonial power relationships with those people. He describes the features of Orientalism (a pervasive example of othering) and points to possible distortions inherent in such dogmatic generalisations. He identifies three issues to be considered:

Firstly, othering is based on a distortion of corresponding reality; Secondly, ‘… ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their … configurations of power, also being studied’, and he writes that the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power or of domination; Finally, Orientalism is not a fantasy, but a created body of theory and practice.21

This combination of domination and a body of practice reminded me of colonial officials’ relationships with their convict prisoners. At that time, power was with government and its representatives. They were the ones who developed and/or promulgated the notion of the other class – records at the time of transportation tended to record them as criminals. Martha would have been ‘other’.

Surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth describes his cargo of 109 women and 8 children on the Lady Penrhyn as ‘an abandon’d set of wretches.’22 The Bigge Report, commissioned by the British government, reinforced the negative view of female convicts. Bigge writes that poor accommodation in the colony afforded ‘an excuse for their resorting to indiscriminate prostitution.’23 Many historians in the 19th and early 20th centuries accepted the notion of a ‘criminal class’. But was it a myth? Oxley (1996) writes that as early as 1921, Wood’s review of convict records shows that many were victims of an unjust legal system.24 Nicholas (1988), an economic historian, analyses and challenges:

How did Australian historians get it so wrong? In place of a cross section of the British and Irish working classes they saw a criminal class; rather than an inflow of literate and fit young men and women with useful skills they emphasised an uneducated, vice-
Nicholas is of the view that most transported females were ordinary working class women possessing useful skills. In other research, using a sample of 2000 cases, Oxley (1996) analyses female convict occupations and finds that the majority were first offenders and that they brought with them skills which contributed to the development of the colony. Her research points to bias in colonial records. I believe that this was because colonial documents relating to convict lives were recorded by men writing within a Eurocentric, patriarchal and imperialist framework.

Clues to the experiences and concerns of women living in that period may be gained from published letters and journals. I was disappointed to discover that most of these are by free, middle class women. Martha left no written documents, except her will, and her life was quite different from that of free settlers. Her history was in official records. Therefore, writing a biography which included her daily life experiences would be impossible.

There are few convict autobiographies. Carter (1987) notes Ingleton’s comments on the lack of narratives written by convicts or the rank-and-file seamen and soldiers sent to accompany them – the First Fleet chroniclers were ships surgeons and officers. Carter states the problem:

The ‘convict’ who comes down to us in the pages of his oppressors is a social and political construction: he exists as a reflection of a body of rules, as a personification of transgression, a figure of speech necessary to the ruling class’s self-justification and the perpetuation of its power.

Anderson (2001) writes that convicts’ voices were silenced in order to remind us that they were of low status and penal labourers. She argues:

The absence of convict voices in the archives should not disconcert us… subaltern silences are meaningful in themselves… In other words, in the context of his/her status as a penal labourer, a convict might be reduced to a record of a financial transaction returning them to servitude.

This was precisely what I discovered in searching official records about Martha. What was there related to her punishment and servitude, but there was nothing about her daily life. The words used to set up our early history are those of authority. Carter uses the term ‘his’ oppressors and therein lies another
problem because there was not much written about female convicts; the stories are predominantly male oriented. He also believes that by reflectively interpreting those early journals, it may be possible to ‘recover that dimension of the convict’s existence which imprisonment and transportation were designed to exclude: his occupation of a historical space.’ He argues ‘it is necessary to listen to aspects of the language that the written records may contain … their meaning must be revealed, and this involves recreating a context in which they once again speak and signify.’ So I decided that I should weigh the information that I had against colonial social conditions.

**Time travelling**

To make sense of what I learned about Martha, I felt a need to understand convict and citizen lives. But that raised other issues. Clendinnen (2006) writes that we ‘cannot post ourselves back in time. People really did think differently then.’ She criticises writers who claim to use ‘applied empathy’. She argues that confidence in empathy runs the risk of overlooking significant differences between past and present. In the same vein, Dening (1998) writes ‘The most unhistorical thing we can do is to imagine that the past is us in funny clothes.’ I questioned what I would draw from colonial records, and whether I would be able to tell Martha’s story.

The novelist Margaret Atwood recognises the multiplicity of interpretations when she explains the difficulties she encountered writing *Alias Grace*, the story of an 1843 murder. She was industrious in researching details but concludes that ‘a different writer, with access to exactly the same historical records, could have – and without doubt would have – written a very different sort of novel.’ Just as there are different possible interpretations, Atwood also believes that there are problems with the accuracy of historical records, due to witnesses forgetting, being biased or having distorted memories. She concludes:

**Re Accuracy**

The past is on paper … Paper must be taken care of; archivists and librarians are the guardian angels of paper. What is on the paper? The same things that are on paper now. Records, documents,
Atwood’s argument hit home – I questioned the accuracy of what I had discovered; reflected on how best to confront the evidence (which was sometimes contradictory); and acknowledged my own potential bias. Should I present several options and argue for one, or perhaps leave the reader to decide? If I did so, how readable or interesting would the narrative be?

**Truth, psychoanalysis and postmodernism**

Even presenting options and arguing for them will not overcome the question of what is the truth. This has roots in the question: how much do individuals know of the self. Phillips (a psychoanalyst and author)\(^38\) writes that Freud was disturbed by biography and cites him as believing that ‘truth-telling about lives, such as it was, could be done only by the person himself, through the method of free association, responded to by a psychoanalyst.’\(^39\) He says that Freud goes further in his denigration of biographies when he argues that:

> Anyone turning biographer commits himself to lies, to concealment, to hypocrisy, to flattery, and even to hiding his own lack of understanding for biographical truth is not to be had… Truth is unobtainable…\(^40\)

Psychoanalysis is a method of discovering subjective truth through free association (that is, say whatever comes into your head). That approach could, in my view, lead to fragmented discontinuous speech which when reflected by the analyst may lead to changes in the initial associations. Phillips writes that with this approach: ‘a new story is told out of an old story differently told.’\(^41\) So, where lies the truth?

Postmodernism also casts doubt on the concept of the grand narrative, of an absolute truth. Lyotard (1984) defines it as ‘… incredulity toward metanarratives.’ He asks, ‘where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?’\(^42\) Foucault (2006) also questions narratives and truth when he writes that ‘knowledge of the kind we call scientific basically presupposes that there is truth, in every place and all the time.’\(^43\) He argues
that truth is contingent on the ways we discover it, the categories we use to think it and the language required to formulate its propositions.\textsuperscript{44} His view of power, resistance and the role of relationships is that knowledge (truth) may change as a result of these interactions.\textsuperscript{45}

Nelson (2007) refers to the views of Foucault and Said and she writes that, ‘… history plays itself out in a moral struggle over the meaning of the past, a site of contestation, perhaps, but more often one of manipulation in the service of politics or capital.’\textsuperscript{46} Recent political events have brought this home. Extensive use of social media combined with an acceptance of ‘alternative truths’ has accentuated the debate on the reliability of ‘facts’.

Hutcheon (1989) addresses problems met when drawing ‘facts’ from events:

\begin{quote}
Among the consequences of the postmodern desire to denaturalize history is a new self-consciousness about the distinction between the brute events of the past and the historical facts we construct out of them. Facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events… Postmodern fiction often thematizes this process of turning events into facts through the filtering and interpreting of archival documents.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

She enlarges on this and quotes LaCapra,

\begin{quote}
In so doing, such postmodern fiction underlines the realization that ‘the past is not an “it” in the sense of an objectified entity that may either be neutrally represented in and for itself or projectively reprocessed in terms of our own narrowly “presentist” interests. … We only have access to the past today through its traces – its documents, the testimony of witnesses, and other archival materials. In other words, we only have representations of the past from which to construct our narratives or explanations. In a very real sense, postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the products of previous representations.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

Hutcheon believes that facts do not speak for themselves; the teller speaks for them, making fragments into a discursive whole. But the ‘teller’ comes to the construction of the story with a past that may, consciously or unconsciously, direct her selection of ‘facts’. As a psychologist, mother and feminist I would probably attach importance to evidence of female strength and independence, more so than Martha may have.

I recognise that life teaches and changes us so experiences that Martha saw as important would be different as she matured. Jung (1933) writes:
It seems to me that the elements of the psyche undergo in the course of life a very marked change—so much so, that we may distinguish between a psychology of the morning of life and a psychology of the afternoon. As a rule, the life of a young person is characterized by a general unfolding and a striving toward concrete ends... But the life of an older person is marked by a contraction of forces, by the affirmation of what has been achieved, and the curtailment of further growth.49

Erikson posited a series of life stages. Those relevant to my story of Martha were: stage 6, intimacy versus self-absorption (ages 21-40 years); and stage 7, generativity versus stagnation (ages 40 to 65). Erikson believed that meaningful work, procreation, and recreation within a loving relationship represent utopia.50 It seemed to me that Martha fulfilled these stages positively: as a young adult, she married and gave birth to two children, while helping her husband build a business; as a more mature woman she was widowed but continued to raise her children while running businesses (innkeeper, property investor and gold buyer). With no insight into her conscious or unconscious life, the fragments that I selected would form a narrative that would be merely a shadowy representation of Martha’s life.

**Writing creatively**

Dening (2000) expresses a wish to write true stories with creative imagination.51 He recommends that the writer should: explicitly and consciously explain when extending or breaking the usual rules for writing history; be creative in structure; write indicative dynamic sub-titles.52 This is good advice but I believed that, because I had no insight into Martha’s subjective experiences, by constantly reflecting and questioning, my narrative would be interrupted. Dening recognises that risk and warns against having readers feel they are being dragged off on some paper chase.53 I wanted to avoid this, yet meld history and storytelling.

On the other hand, Clendinnen (2006) believes that historians are custodians of memory and points to the danger of using ‘stories’ as weapons, as they tend to be simplifications wherein a great deal is lost.54 She argues that empathy and intuitions about the past can be misleading.55 She points out that historians:

> can’t do conversations; we can’t (usually) do monologues. But what we can do is become increasingly knowledgeable about the contexts in which particular actions, including the writing of particular words, took place. We do this not by empathetic time-leaps … but by reconstructing as delicately, as comprehensively
and as subtly as we are able, not only the material but also the cultural settings in which other people, once living, now dead, lived out their lives.56

Her critique sends a warning that the writer should be careful about details and wary of empathy. Yet these are the skills that Carey, Grenville, Malouf and others cite as helping them to grapple with their subjects’ inner lives.57

Felski (2008) remarks on the differences between history and novels and points out that:

**Third person fiction allows the narrator an epistemological privilege that accrues neither to real life nor to the writing of history: unrestricted access to the inner life of other persons … Bound by criteria of verifiable evidence, historians reference the inner lives of their subjects only when authorized to do so by letters, diaries, or memoirs.**58

**In defence of fiction**

Griffiths (2016), a historian, discusses the difficulty inherent in emphasising research over fictive qualities when he writes that we mustn’t value fiction for its non-fiction; we ‘mustn’t make research the thing that matters about fiction.’59 Bradley, a novelist, suggests that the qualities which make fiction live are:

an appreciation of the possibilities of language; the power of words to grant a kind of life to the presences which inhabit the text; its capacity for transformation and metamorphosis.60

Atwood argues that novelists can supply those intimate details that are of interest to readers:

History may intend to provide us with great patterns and overall schemes, but without its brick-by-brick, life-by-life, day-by-day foundations it would collapse.61

She expresses a longing to write about the dead and regards the underworld as a quarry rich in pickings:

All writers must go from now to once upon a time; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else reclamation, depending how you look at it. 62

Malouf wants to stimulate his readers’ imaginations:

Our only way of grasping our history … the only way of really coming to terms with that is by people’s entering into it in their imagination, not by the world of facts, but by being there. And the only thing really which puts you there in that kind of way is fiction.63
Julian Barnes (2000) privileges fiction above official records and criticises much history writing, saying that it ‘strikes the general reader as theoretical and overly academic’ and that historians ‘who believe in the fictional virtues of narrative, character, style and so on, are rarities’. In *The Noise of Time* (a novel about Shostakovich), Barnes includes an Author’s Note where he confesses ‘truth was a hard thing to find, let alone maintain, in Stalin’s Russia.’ He mentions some of the rich resources he used to inform this work – including drawing on biographies and interviewing Shostakovich’s son. Barnes has pilfered the lives of other famous people, from Flaubert to Conan Doyle, producing great novels. He states:

> [Literature] is the best way of telling the truth; it’s a process of producing grand, beautiful, well-ordered lies that tell more truth than any assemblage of facts.

... I think a great book … is recognized by those who read it as telling new truths [my emphasis] – about society or the way in which emotional lives are led, or both – such truths having not been previously available, certainly not from official records or government documents, or from journalism or television.

**New truths**

Nelson (2007) suggests that fiction may be used to challenge beliefs and that the ‘bogus’ writing of fiction may present us with new truths and with ‘a way of intervening in the discourses of reality – of questioning the discourses (like history) through which reality constructs itself.’ The concept of new truths was used by Kim Scott (2010) in his novel *That Deadman Dance*, which sets out to direct attention to new truths about the Noongar people. It was inspired by history but is not an historical account. Instead it tells of the people’s confidence, inclusiveness, readiness to adopt new cultural forms and their sense of play. He is partly extrapolating from his knowledge of the Noongar people in the present – he could not have written such a novel if he had restricted his story to information stored in colonial records. Reflecting on this, I wondered whether Martha’s success was a ‘new truth’ which could be used to challenge colonial discourses about convict women.

**Finding the beginning and end**

The details of convict life that emerged from my research were interesting, but they needed to be framed into a story. How best to do this? Originally I
planned to cover Martha’s life (1824-1896), which included four husbands, three children and many grand-children – but that narrative was rambling and directionless. So I looked to Hayden White (1973), who argues that historians write a kind of fiction, pointing to their use of plot, character, voice and tone in constructing narratives and analyses. He identifies four main archetypal plot structures used by historians (romance, tragedy, comedy and satire).70 He writes that reports of the state of affairs must have a beginning, middle and an end; the latter are artificial decisions and he believes that this process may direct the reader to a specific genre, which will influence interpretation.

Davis (1987) also examines the similarities between novel and history writing, arguing that both share a faith in plot, which he describes as the sequence of events of the story.71 He believes that narrativity is not simply confined to novels but is a feature of history. Human events can be seen as having a tale that can be organised through narrative and this helps readers believe that there is order in the world.72

This led me to wonder if Martha’s life was best written as a romance centred on her marriage to William Guest. Or was it a tragedy based on her crime, transportation and separation from first husband and child? Perhaps it was a bildungsroman ending with success in the colony.
Chapter 3
Biography

Writing her life

How would Martha have told the story of her life? Smith and Watson write that:

life narratives, imaginative acts of remembering always intersect with such rhetorical acts as assertion, justification, judgment, conviction, and interrogation. That is, life narrators address readers whom they want to persuade of their version of experience.73

As recently as 50 years ago, many families regarded convict heritage as a ‘stain’ – as shameful. My grandmother’s tales were of gold rush towns and bush life, with never a mention of convict history. So did Martha hide her past? Were her children aware of her crime? Her life’s journey went from child, to young bride and convict; it ends with her as a wealthy businesswoman. Whitlock notes that life changes us ‘for you see your life differently at different stages, like climbing a mountain where the landscape changes with every turn in the path’.74 As Martha grew from a convict to a free woman, she would re-evaluate.

I wondered if she modelled herself on her mother, a businesswoman who ran a grocery store. At that time in England, there were many small businesswomen who were daughters inheriting from their fathers (or mothers), or widows continuing the family business.75 Showalter (1987) directs attention to Horney, a psychoanalyst who stresses the sociocultural influences on females and points to the importance of motherhood for female psychology.76 Developments in Anglo-American psychoanalytic theory postulate an object relations approach to female development, rejecting the Freudian phallocentric orientation and emphasising the role of mothers, who have primary responsibility for childcare under many social arrangements:

Mothers who mother well – good enough mothers – give their daughters the gift of an identity more secure than that of sons … And they give them the maternal virtue – relationality.77

Betsy Goodman’s example may have given her daughter a thirst for both independence and ‘relationality’. Also, her brother became a local
dignitary, so there may have been a thrust towards independence and leadership within the family.

**Living as a woman in Victorian times**

Issues of gender and society in Victorian times would have shaped Martha’s point of view. Spacks (1989) cited by Heilbrun, argues that 18th century women’s autobiographies were often transformed into confessions of inadequacy and that, whereas the face a man turns to the world typically embodies strength, the only acceptable models for women involved self-deception and yielding. However, I find it hard to believe that the woman who bought and sold properties and went on to build the impressive Bega House emporium would write her biography in that way.

Parke (2002) believes that biographers of women should be true to the details of both the individual life and the condition of women in history, since the meanings, limits, and ideology of women have been defined by the patriarchal system. She argues:

> Feminist biography makes a different kind of person eligible for examination, an obscure or minority figure, by virtue of the way this form interrogates conventional biography’s selection of publicly lauded, typically male, individuals … The template of feminist biography characterizes the individual’s life as metonymically representative of larger group structures and conditions affecting the subject as a member of this group.

The story of Martha as a female convict belongs to what Parke terms ‘minority biography’; she believes this requires greater emphasis on the contexts of the groups in which the subject lived in order to pay attention to the ‘structural and institutional forces that define and sustain a culture and hence to probe elements assumed or repressed by the dominant form.’ To write Martha’s story I needed to understand her social environment.

Times were different then and part of her story lies in its historical context and the tendency for many to regard women in Victorian England in a limited way – as submissive and locked in domesticity. But, there is evidence of women’s power in Steedman’s analysis of contemporary notebooks. She cites Joseph Woolley (a stocking maker) whose diaries show that ‘many women caught up in domestic and sexual conflict gave as good as they got, or at least, did what they could by way of retaliation.'
Porter (1991) has a similar view and argues that ‘through controlling the household, the children, the farmyard or kitchen garden, working women must often, in fact, have ruled the roost, especially those whose husbands were away as migrant workers, soldiers or seamen.’

Felski (2003) quotes Poovey who, based on an extensive sample of historical materials (parliamentary debates, medical lectures, periodicals), writes ‘that the ideology of separate spheres (men venturing in the hurly-burly of public life, women guarding hearth and home) was influential but also shaky and unstable’; and that it was open to different interpretations enabling men and women to draw on these ideas to further their own interests in the multifaceted picture of the workings of gender in Victorian England. Martha would have been aware of her mother’s business and, as she grew up, must have discovered the advantages this brought to the family. I began to picture a young woman who planned a working future, perhaps running a shop, alongside family life. But this was supposition.

Given the distance in time and the circumstances of Martha’s life, there is a challenge in reconstructing her inner life on the basis of available evidence. I’m aware that my interpretation will be coloured by my point of view, which has been shaped by my life and work.

To summarise, if I attempted to write her biography, I faced several challenges:

- First, the information I discovered was recorded by officials and gives the broad sweep of her life as a convict, but not the minutiae;
- Second, without letters or a diary written by her, I had no clue as to her reactions to life as a convict, or how those may have changed over time;
- Third, these events occurred nearly 200 years ago and, as social norms have changed, I would be interpreting her life events with a different mindset from hers.

Interpreting Records
Interpreting records involves creativity as well as research. I asked myself how much fact, imagination or fantasy is involved in looking at a life lived 100 years ago. Merwick (2000), a biographer and historian, argued that her
writing was a cultural artefact and questioned those who believe that historical writing is apolitical, objective, driven by a search for truth. She argued that western historians are experiencing a paradigm shift, are heterophilic and not essentialists. She turned to postmodernism, which she believes provides a space for ‘problematising those certainties.’ She acknowledged that conditions of cultural production may change and that it is the task of creative imagination to meet the new needs. In a biography of Adrian van Ilpendam, she writes:

> How he would otherwise tell a different story of himself from the one I tell, I don’t know. I do know that, like me, he would pull it together from fragments. He would draw on bits of memory, records, perhaps the oft-repeated anecdotes of others. He would shape it to suit his audience. Some facts of memories he would call upon if he were testifying in court. Others were good for yarning with friends. His selection would satisfy the occasion.

Martha played many roles in her lifetime: wife, mother, convict, goldminer, innkeeper and in each one of these she probably presented a different persona to the world – the one she wanted others to see and the one she needed to be to succeed in each. As Clendinnen (2006) puts it, ‘in human affairs there is never a single narrative. There is always one counter story’. I wondered what part of her life Martha might wish to tell. Judging from my grandmother’s family stories, it seemed likely that she would emphasise her life in New South Wales and add respectability through the fiction that her husband was Governor of Berrima gaol, whereas he was more familiar with the cells of Braidwood gaol.

Regarding speaking for the dead, Steedman (2013) believes that historians have started to question their relationship to their subjects. She asks ‘who owns history and who has the right to speak for the dead’, arguing that Holocaust history and sociology are keys to recent emphases on these questions. She believes there is a moral imperative to speak for those who have been rendered voiceless. So, with this in mind, I searched for stories told by convict women and found almost none. I believe that the voices of convict women are, for the most part, ‘missing’. Wyschogrod (1998) examines the case for the ‘missing’ in history through examination of the Holocaust. She discusses ethics, the nature of and problems in historical reflection and ‘re-membering’ (this term she defines as bringing back what was previously encoded). Her desire to ‘re-member’ is similar
to Michelot’s wish to ‘restore life to them’.\textsuperscript{94} She calls the historian who is driven to speak for the dead the ‘heterological historian’ and acknowledges:

> Her ‘truth’ is deictic: ‘I, here, now vouch for what I say’. She is aware of the aporias of deixis exposed by Hegel, Derrida, and others but allows it to remain in office, as it were, to guard her promise.\textsuperscript{95}

Like Foucault, Wyschogrod believes that slippage can occur between past truths, truth in reporting, and the historian’s viewpoint. ‘In retrieving the past, not only is the historian’s task affected by her interpretations of temporality but also by how she views individual and collective memory.’\textsuperscript{96}

Michelot takes a very different position and is deliberately selective in the dead he has chosen to resurrect. He makes it clear that those he is speaking for are not chosen at random; rather they are those lives and sacrifices which made possible the French Revolution. He is politically motivated and believes that he can ‘say what they “really” meant and “really” wanted, since they themselves “did not understand”.’\textsuperscript{97} His politics, culture and epoch possibly combined to lead him to produce statements that may not represent the dead he selected.

It is possible to take a more cautious approach and Nelson (2015) examines several biographies and suggests that these works move away from the forensic historiography approach, are creative and reflective, with authorial asides. She describes them as ‘pre-eminently literary works, in the sense of being deliberately ambiguous, and open to a range of interpretations.’\textsuperscript{98} In a similar vein, Brien (2015) describes the advantages of speculative biography. She argues that these can produce biographies that are appealing and thought-provoking. She writes that:

> By suggesting possibility (an informed idea of what may well have happened) instead of asserting certainty (what must have happened) in some aspects of the biographical narrative, further exposes the potential of investigating and revealing the subjectivity, creativity and fallibility of the biographer in his or her task of narrative construction alongside the more human aspects of the biographical subject.\textsuperscript{99}

She cites Trueblood’s view that the historian has a right to infer thoughts and feelings, but that these should be limited to the available facts.\textsuperscript{100} She quotes him as believing that the historian who ‘carries the use of fiction too far, so that he disregards the truth … loses both worlds; he has neither the freedom of fiction nor the substance of fact.’\textsuperscript{101}
That left me in a dilemma because the information that I had about Martha was mainly recorded by officials, and those documents would reflect the writers’ attitudes in terms of what they chose to record and what was left out. What was not written, that is her subjective life, was what was most interesting to me. To infer her possible emotions and motivations from colonial records seemed to me to be a journey too far. Like Michelot, I wanted to ‘make the dead live again’, but her past was too remote. In addition, I became concerned that if I continually identified my creative speculations to the reader, then these intrusions might become distractions and would break up the narrative.

Martha’s past truths were that she was a young bride and mother, convicted of a felony, transported to Hobart, freed to become a successful businesswoman. If she wrote her autobiography, what would she tell her descendants? Would it include her convict past? Would she be able to recognise her amazing success and rise in society? Could she take pride in her achievements? I had no answers, and this led me to ask:

- Was I entitled to make public what she kept hidden?
- How would my viewpoint influence what I selected to write?

Perhaps the answer would be to write a historical narrative, but that would be directed less towards the personal and more to the social conditions of convict women and would mean moving away from my initial purpose.
William Eden Guest
in school uniform, 1875
William Henry Guest’s grave, Nerrigundah 2012

The main street in Nerrigundah 2012
Constable Miles O’Grady’s memorial is at the bend in the road
Bega House, Carp Street Bega 2012.
Bega House is the one with iron lacework

Obelisk in memory of Martha McNamara
and Martha Cowdroy, 2012
Chapter 4
Historical Narratives

Writing history
The approach taken by historians varies depending on their orientation: some wish to bring events to life and others insist on sticking to facts. This argument harks back to the different approaches of Herodotus (c.484-425 BC) and Thucydides (c.460-395 BC).\textsuperscript{103} Plutarch (46-120 AD) followed in the tradition set by Herodotus, believing that small matters give the best analysis of character.

For it is not so much histories, that we are writing but lives, and there is not always in the most outstanding deeds a revelation of virtue or vice, but often a little matter like a saying or a joke hints at character more than battles where thousands die, huge troop deployments, or the sieges of cities.\textsuperscript{104}

These insights are missing from Martha’s story. Therefore, if I wanted to understand her life I would have to extrapolate from the few scraps of information available about her work, family and times. Martha lived almost 200 years ago, when women over long days worked the pump, carried water, churned butter, kneaded bread, cooked, swept, washed, bore babies and cared for them.

The mind-set of rising in the morning, knowing the heavy physical and unpleasant labour ahead for middle or lower class women is hard to imagine. Steedman (2009) gives examples: one chore for servants involved the disposal of household waste.

The emptying of chamber pots and other containers, the carrying of bucket and pails – to a cess-pit, to a necessary house, to … a water closet or slop-sink; … is probably what the mid-century guides to domestic service meant when they warned servants about the many little menial tasks they would have to perform in the course of their work.\textsuperscript{105}

As a convict servant Martha would have been busy from morning to night. Beeton (1893) gives advice on domestic matters – her suggestions about everyday meals indicate that the servants’ days were long:

The servants should be allowed time for their breakfast before that in the dining-room commences (no later than nine o’clock); and for them to do this it is absolutely necessary that they rise betimes. Children also should have an early breakfast…. Where there are little ones and several servants, a dinner must be served in the
middle of the day; but it is generally necessary to have some cooking done later when the master of the house returns.\textsuperscript{106}

She concludes ‘there is an innate love for housekeeping in most girls.’\textsuperscript{107}

From 1803 until 1844, female convicts were assigned to employers to work as servants. They were unpaid workers and could be returned if they proved unsatisfactory or were no longer needed. From 1844 convicts were placed on probation and after six months they were classified as probation pass holders and hired out for an annual wage.\textsuperscript{108}

Maynard (1994) writes that convict women were issued with coarse clothing, including petticoats, aprons, jackets, neckerchiefs, chemises, stockings, shoes, a bonnet and caps.\textsuperscript{109} Second and Third class were distinguished by a yellow ‘C’ as a dress label – on the left sleeve for Second Class and the back of the jacket for Third Class. Martha probably had to wear this uniform when she first arrived.

On 12 April 1844 her convict record shows that she was Second Class and on 6 September 1844 she was Third Class. The class levels indicate the degree of supervision and privileges allowed. Third Class was criminal class; Second Class was for those working their way out of third class, or those convicted of minor offences. I have double checked the dates on the original record and it appears she was demoted from Second to Third Class, but no complaint, misbehaviour or conviction was recorded.\textsuperscript{110} Perhaps this was due to the changeover from assignment to probation. Muster records show her working for ‘Mr Barratt, Hobart’ in 1845 and again in 1846.\textsuperscript{111} She doesn’t seem to have moved around and has no disciplinary actions on her indent. What her duties were with Mr Barratt is not recorded, but would probably have been as a house servant.

She was independent and earning her own living before conviction, so I wondered how she felt about having her life so controlled. I tried to imagine what Victorian laws and attitudes did to Martha’s self-image. Contemporary culture frames and filters our perceptions – what were hers? Taine (2005) identifies three influential aspects of culture: race (our innate and hereditary dispositions), surroundings (nature, fellow humans, physical/social circumstances), and epoch (recognising that one time is different from another).\textsuperscript{112} Martha’s culture was different from mine and I
knew that what I selected to write and emphasise about her would be informed and framed by my own views and experiences.

Byrnes (2012), discussing the nature of history, stresses two points:

that history – what we understand by ‘the totality of the past’ – is never fixed and stable, but is constantly subject to change, contingent upon the ways in which we re-read past events in the light of the present…While it is true that historians are…”servants of the dead”, they are also deeply involved in the business of myth-making. This does not mean to suggest that all history is merely conspiracy or a series of untruths: rather, history is always a partial and one-sided view of events. It also means that some versions of history have come to be seen as more accurate and more ‘truthful’ than others.113

Following Byrnes’ point about partiality, and given my interest in a convict woman, I was attracted to the movement which emerged in the 19th and 20th century when some historians began writing about specific groups – those often overlooked in more traditional histories. Prominent were Michelot (1798-1874); Thompson (1924-1993); Samuel (1934-1996). The latter listened to the voice of the oppressed and ‘dedicated himself to telling the story of those who had been denied historical representation.’114 Samuel (2012) also cites Michelot’s wish to ‘give voice to the voiceless’ and sees ‘E.P. Thompson’s notion of history as a gigantic act of reparation, rescuing the defeated from the “enormous condescension” of posterity.’115

Research confirmed the challenges faced in speaking for the dead:

• bias was probable, due to time, cultural differences and my own conscious and unconscious predilections;
• the narrative would be determined by the voice I chose to use;
• without personal letters or diaries, the subject’s inner life was inevitably speculative.

If I wrote using only what my research uncovered, it would place events in the foreground and Martha’s voice would be muted among the throng of other convicts recorded by colonial officials. So what did the records show?

**Martha’s conviction and deportation**

**1 Conviction**

In 1841 Martha was single and a grocer; her convict indent in 1843 records that she married Richard Gregory. He was widowed – the death of Mary Ann Gregory was registered in Cornwall in the quarter October-December
He and Martha married on 5 April 1842 and gave their address as 27 Mount Street, Stoke Dameral (part of Plymouth). After marrying, she and Richard must have returned to Saltash, because seven months later she was arrested there. Her convict indent and records from the Cornwall Liberty Sessions fill in the details: she was a native of Saltash Cornwall, her name was Martha Gregory. She was charged with stealing fustian (calico) from Mr Peters. Her co-accused were Richard Gregory (aged 28), Elizabeth Collings (19), and Hannah Blake (17).

Chesney (1970) argues that it was the practice of many shopkeepers to display stock outside the store and he describes the way thieves operated:

There was a class of bold female thieves who went in for stealing large things like rolls of carpet and calico put on the pavement in front of dealers’ doors. They would examine the goods like desultory shoppers, perhaps during a dinner hour when there was only a dozy lad minding the place, and at the right moment signal to one or two male confederates – said to have usually looked like costermongers. With their help they would ‘quickly and dexterously’ get the spoils out of sight and onto a waiting cart.

Three others were arrested alongside Martha, which fits this pattern of theft. I wondered whether the women distracted the shopkeeper while Richard Gregory made off with the bolt of cloth. On the other hand it could have been one of the women who hid the fabric under her skirts. Martha, with her pregnant belly, may have been best suited to conceal it, or perhaps she came under suspicion because of that swelling.

The main gaol for that part of Cornwall was Bodmin, but the accused were held in Saltash Prison according to the petition for clemency written by Martha’s parents (Appendix 1). The trial was at Saltash Liberty Sessions on 21 October 1842. By this time Martha would have been about seven months pregnant, given that her parents’ petition states that, and the dates I estimate for the birth of her first child being between December 1842 and 5 February 1843. At the trial Richard was acquitted. Hannah’s record has a notation ‘Admitted Evidence’, whereas the record for Elizabeth was ‘married’.

Like many others with convict ancestors, I didn’t want to believe she was a thief and found it hard to come to terms with the guilty verdict. What was even harder to digest was that her husband was found not guilty
and that Hannah Blake received no penalty. Hannah gave evidence that left Martha and Elizabeth convicted. What was it?

Martha and Elizabeth were sentenced to seven years transportation. It was a first offence for both. At this time, appeals were coming from New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land for women to be sent to redress the gender imbalance and prevent ‘unconscionable’ acts. The *County of Cornwall Register of all Persons charged with Indictable Offences at the Assizes and Sessions held within the County during the year 1842*, includes all cases from Bodmin, Penzance, Falmouth and Saltash. Data from 28 June 1842 to year’s end shows 123 males and 49 females were tried. Most women were teenage or early twenties. Sentences ranged from one week to 15 years. Transportation sentences were given to approximately 3 per cent of the men and 10 per cent of the women.

2 Deportation on the *Margaret*  
It is possible that Martha was in the third trimester of pregnancy at the time of the trial. I couldn’t find a birth registration for her son, William Ford Goodman. He was baptised in St. Stephens by Saltash on 16 April 1843. Combining William’s christening date with Martha’s death certificate (he was 53 in 1896) and as the census records him as ‘born at sea’, it is probable that he was born in January 1843 on the *Margaret*. There are no records of when Martha was sent to the *Margaret*, but all the women were on board before the end of 1842.

William was raised by Martha’s family. He did not use his father’s name until 1861, when he was listed as William Gregory aged 17, apprentice carpenter living with his grandparents in Fore Street. In the 1871 census he was still living with his grandmother in Fore Street.

There is no surviving record of how Martha and Elizabeth travelled to the *Margaret*. The journey would have been uncomfortable as convict women were often ill-prepared for the voyage, bringing insufficient clothing, and many travelled in leg irons and handcuffs. Elizabeth Fry’s memoirs (1847) give insight into the transportation of female convicts: women travelling to London for deportation came under care of a turnkey and were transported by rail, riding on the outside of stage coaches, by smacks or hoyss, or any method that was on offer. I tried to imagine
how Martha managed the rough travel when pregnant. Did her parents travel to London to see her on the Margaret and take the child?

Bateson (1988) describes the Margaret as 365 tons, built at Chepstow in 1829 and probably square-rigged. In 1834 Lloyd’s Register was established and surveys of ships were begun: the Margaret was rated ‘A1’. Naval authorities examined the ships to ensure a reasonably high standard of seaworthiness – however, the surgeon on the last journey of the Margaret complains of damp and leaks. Originally she sailed on 5 February 1843, but Wilkie (2015) describes storm damage, and the Sydney Morning Herald of 18 July 1843 reports that, after she sailed, she put back to port to repair some damage. This was her fourth journey to the colonies.

McAvoy was the ship’s surgeon from 8 November 1842, and the Margaret sailed on 5 February. Therefore, the vessel waited at Woolwich for 90 days. The delay is relevant, because I believe it likely that Martha gave birth to her son during this time. It was common for there to be many days between surgeons taking their post and the sailing of a transport. Some examples: Hope (42 days); Garland Grove (47 days); Woodbridge (49 days). There is no record of a birth – but McAvoy retired at the Cape of Good Hope and writes, ‘illness prevented me filling this journal.’

I wondered what Martha was able to take on board to ease the journey. The surgeon on the Royal Admiral, which left around the same time as the Margaret, decries the condition of the women as they came on board; many were in a distressed and filthy state. Convicts arrived from the country in small parties, at irregular intervals.

On board, the women were grouped according to similarity of age and criminality. They were subdivided into messes of six. Each class had a monitor chosen from among the women themselves. In 1842 Fry agitated for the employment of suitable ladies as matrons to be in charge of the convicts from embarkation to arrival in the colony. There is a record of a matron on the Margaret – the surgeon’s report on Ann Appleyard describes her as ‘Bad, extremely insolent to the Matron.’

Martha was on board some time before the end of 1842 as the vessel had its full complement by Christmas. The Margaret’s ship’s surgeon journal
comes in two parts: written by McAvoy and later by Mould. These journals give a fairly clear idea of what the journey was like. Surgeons were responsible for the welfare of the convicts and were given instructions that emphasised the need for cleanliness, proper ventilation and healthy diet.  

Surgeons’ journals vary in the amount of detail they give: some concentrate on illness and hospitalisations, while others include daily activities. Routines varied slightly on these ships; in some, the women went to needlework or lessons during the day; sometimes they were encouraged to enjoy singing and dancing as exercise; in others, they were locked below early in the evening. Some surgeons write about preventing scurvy by daily administering lime juice, sugar and water made into a type of sherbet, as well as wine. Overall, the journals show an emphasis on cleanliness and, apart from seasickness and bad weather, life on some of the transports may have been better than gaol in England.

An idea of what the atmosphere was like on board can be gained from the surgeon’s records and from a report on the Margaret which appeared in the Courier 2 June 1843:

The Margaret, female convict ship, the arrival of which has been so long eagerly anticipated, was lying off the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, on 28th December, waiting for sailing orders for Van Diemen’s Land. The females, to the number of 160, were supplied on Christmas Day with a large piece of plum-pudding and a gill of wine each, in addition to their usual allowance of fresh beef and good broth. One of the number – a female convict from Liverpool – has been appointed to act as boatswain, and it was pleasing, say the English journal from which we take this account, ‘to witness her take her whistle from her bosom and pipe the others to dinner.’ Amongst the female convicts on board this vessel is Madame le Grange, whose case has recently excited so much interest in London by the ‘stylish manner’ in which she succeeded in swindling several of the West-end London tradesmen. All that she appears to regret is the separation from her little daughter now in Paris.  

[Note: the figure above is 160, 4 died on the journey and 156 arrived in Hobart – so all were on board by Christmas. Infant deaths were not recorded by McAvoy – hospital records show a 10 day old infant died in April 1843, but was not included in the summary of deaths on board]

Lloyds Illustrated London Newspaper, 1 January 1843 reported:

The female convicts have full liberty of enjoying the pure air on deck without any restraint, unless their own decidedly bad conduct and annoyance of the peacefully disposed should require them to be restricted to the space allotted to them below.
The rather jolly atmosphere in the Courier’s description of Christmas festivities is at odds with the summary report by McAvoy the surgeon, which lists many illnesses prior to sailing. Managing cross-infection in the close quarters of the ship would have been difficult. In addition, he complains about the conditions on board in his ‘General Remarks’ at the end of his service at the Cape.

Indisposition prevented me filling this Journal, but, I have given the most prominent diseases, and it is a cause of regret that in the cases which terminated fatally I was not able to pay them the attention required. They were aggravated if not called into action by the wet and leaky state of the ship. … The passage to the Cape of Good Hope was long & protracted, the wind unfavourable added to the wet & leaky state of the Ship [sic] made it anything but comfortable.154

Surgeon John Mould took over for the journey from the Cape, by which time four women had died. He complains about ‘moisture from the Prison Deck and the beds of the Convicts being frequently wetted by leakage.’155 The surgeons reported on each woman’s ‘Ship Character’ at the end of the journeys and the Margaret’s report was finalised by Mould. Martha’s is ‘fair’ and Elizabeth’s is ‘Idle. Constantly among the Men’.156

Martha was formerly a member of a respectable middle class family in Saltash, but she was now an outsider and of the ‘lowest’ class. I tried to understand her life at this stage as seen through the eyes of others – the dominant males in society who now controlled her fate. The elite were the ‘exclusionists’ who excluded emancipists from their society; the lowest were the convicts.157 Cunningham’s 1827 account includes value judgements and condescending descriptions of female convicts:

The women are more quarrelsome and more difficult to control than the men, their tempers being more excitable, and a good deal being calculated on by them in respect to the usual leniency shown their sex. They are certainly more abandoned in their expressions, too, when excited; but this probably arises not so much from greater profligacy of disposition, as from their having less control over their passions and their tongues.158

Lt. Ralph Clark’s diary records an incident wherein a convict (Elizabeth Barbur) complained that Doctor Arundell sexually harassed her. She was not believed. He writes:

The captain enquired and She was order on a pair of leg irons … She begane to abuse Capt. Meridith … She cald him every thing but a Gentle man and Said She was no more a Whore than his wife … the Capt order her hands to tied behind her back and to be gact
Living in Van Diemen’s Land

1 Arrival

As early as 21 April 1843, the Courier carried news of the arrangements for the women on the Margaret:

The women of the Margaret, daily expected, will be sent to a house in Liverpool-street (the nursery) opposite the hospital, where they will be classed, and undergo a probationary term of imprisonment prior to being allowed the privilege, for such it may be considered, of being sent to private service. The mode of employment has not yet transpired, and will, in its practical operation, be found far more difficult than is that in the management of the men. We do not augur much good from the new arrangement with respect to the prisoner women, until the Government are better prepared with a penitentiary or place of confinement, and employment remote from the incidental and accidental temptations of a populous town.

Here again, is an expressed opinion that women are ‘more difficult than men’ and a wish to keep them away from town.

Later, the Courier reports the arrival ‘she brings 156 female convicts and government stores.’ If the newly arrived convicts had access to the newspapers they may have drawn heart from government notices listing names of convicts granted tickets of leave or pardons. They may also have looked at employment opportunities: various advertisements sought a housekeeper, cook, maid, laundress and governess. The classifieds would have informed them that Hobart’s aesthetic and spiritual needs were catered for: Miss Clare, a milliner, dressmaker and staymaker advertised her establishment in Brisbane Street; notice was given of a performance of La Sonnambula at the Royal Victoria Theatre; and the governor was to deliver a lecture at the Independent Society’s Rooms, On Penitence.

When the Margaret arrived in port, Sir John Franklin was lieutenant-governor and opinions of him varied. He was a controversial figure: some saw him as a hero, because he served under Nelson at Trafalgar. But he faced budget crises and, though some citizens complained about the noisy atmosphere of the inns, he was forced to rely on liquor taxes and tolerate heavy drinking. Sir John Eardley-Wilmot succeeded Franklin and he too faced budget deficits. Despite these problems,
Hobart was a busy town – newspapers published many ship arrivals and departures and the front pages were filled with advertisements for goods, services and real estate.

If the women on the Margaret dreamed of escape, they may have looked longingly at the six ships that were listed as leaving soon: the Eudora for London; City of Sydney, Rajah, Falcon and Waterlily for Sydney; and the Flying Squirrel for Melbourne. Arriving on 16 July was the Agenoria from Port Albert with stock and passengers; the Swan River Packet from Port Albert with sheep; the Scotia from Port Albert with stock; the schooners Industry and the Flying Squirrel from Port Phillip, both with sheep and passengers; the brig Ann from Oporto with wine; the schooner Falcon from Newcastle with coal.

The women did not leave the Margaret immediately. The handover of convicts to local authorities required extensive checks. Typically, ships’ passengers were examined for infection and disease requiring quarantine. Clerks recorded the convicts’ work skills. Although Martha was a grocer in Cornwall she now declared that she was a housemaid. Perhaps she thought this would give greater employment opportunities. The superintendent of convicts questioned each one and details were recorded in the convict registers. Martha was described as four feet ten inches tall, with a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair. Her face was small and she had a mole on her right shoulder. During the convicts’ servitude these records were updated to include events such as infringements, punishments or changes in class.

2 Working in Hobart
I could not discover how long the women were in the house in Liverpool Street. Many female convicts who remained in Hobart went straight to service. Those not doing so went to Brickfields or a receiving house. The list of women sent to Brickfields is incomplete; Martha Gregory’s name is not on surviving records. I don’t know what Martha’s fate was between the time when she landed in Hobart and 1845. There is no prison notation – the records simply show her classification and finally service with Mr Barratt, Hobart, in 1845. In the Convict Muster of 1846, Martha was in the employ of ‘Mr Barratt, Hobart’. There are many Barratts recorded in
Tasmanian papers: Joseph, James, Maurice, William, Jemmy, Benjamin, Thomas, Frances, John, H.S., Mrs E. and Lieutenant Barratt.
The earliest mention is 20 November 1829, when Joseph Barratt is listed as the licensee of the Mermaid in Brisbane Street.\(^{176}\) I could find no mention of the Mermaid or Joseph Barratt after that date.

In August 1836, James Barratt is described as a very respectable innkeeper who complained that his landlord, Peter Miller, assaulted him.\(^{177}\) There is no indication of this James Barratt’s address, nor could I find it under licence renewals.

A James Barratt received prisoners on assignment from December 1836 – but a report 4 May 1839 describes him as ‘James Barratt, Tamar’.\(^{178}\) Therefore, he was in the north and not Martha’s employer.

On 28 February 1837 Joseph Worthington was charged with robbing Jemmy Barratt of a handkerchief.\(^{179}\) This report is written in a jocular fashion so it may be that ‘James’ became ‘Jemmy’ for comic effect. This is the only mention I found of Jemmy Barratt. In 1843 a conditional pardon was granted to Benjamin Barratt who arrived on the Woodford in August 1828.\(^{180}\) It is possible this is ‘Jemmy Barratt’. Martha’s employer remains elusive.

On 26 January 1847, Martha Gregory and eighteen women from the Margaret were granted tickets of leave – a privilege based on good behaviour.\(^{181}\) A ticket of leave allowed her greater independence as she could seek employment independently – though she was unable to leave Hobart.\(^{182}\) A Conditional Pardon gave the convict the status of a free person, except for some travel restrictions.\(^{183}\) Martha’s pardon was recommended on 9 November 1847; approval came on 30 January 1849.\(^{184}\)

3 Marriage: Martha’s second husband
On 22 May 1848 Martha Gregory applied for permission to marry William Henry Guest, a convict from the Emily.\(^{185}\) Permission was refused.\(^{186}\) Both had been married in England and English common law provided that if a person had not seen or heard from his/her spouse for at least seven years, then that person was considered free to marry.\(^{187}\) Martha had not seen Richard Gregory since 1843 and William had not seen his wife since 1842 – not quite seven years for either. Martha’s daughter, Mary Ann, was born on
10 December 1848, meaning that the couple must have been cohabiting by March 1848. Around that time William was working for James Jacques, cab proprietor of Davey Street. He worked there from 23 March 1848 until 3 July 1848.\textsuperscript{188}

Martha and William applied several times for permission to marry but were refused until January 1850.\textsuperscript{189} At this time Martha was ‘free’. William’s ticket of leave was approved on 19 February 1850 (his conditional pardon came on 13 July 1852). The couple were married by F. Brownrigg at the Anglican Church of St George’s, Hobart, on 23 April 1850. Their witnesses were James Scott and Susan Mumford.\textsuperscript{190} Martha and William must have wanted respectability, because when they registered the birth of their next child in 1861 they stated that their marriage was in 1848.

William Henry Guest is an interesting person – he was born in London on 17 August 1816, and was a cab proprietor\textsuperscript{191} and landlord of four houses in Weymouth Street, Vauxhall – all inherited from his father, together with an amount of money deposited in the Bank of England.\textsuperscript{192} In June 1835 aged nineteen, he joined the British Auxiliary Army of 10,000 men recruited in Britain, at the request of the Spanish government. This war was a disaster for the British troops.\textsuperscript{193} After many months fighting the Carlists in Spain, William returned to London in 1837, bearing scars from musket wounds on each side of his left arm and on his left side.\textsuperscript{194} The Spanish promised pensions but they were never paid and the British government declined to pay or pursue the matter.\textsuperscript{195} In November 1837 William married Harriet Cook and in January 1839 twin daughters (Sarah and Harriet) were born. Sarah died soon after birth.\textsuperscript{196}

In 1841, he appeared before magistrate Cottingham. William was described as a ‘well-dressed young man’.\textsuperscript{197} The prosecution alleged that he and a friend were lingering in an alley when a businessman called police and William was arrested and charged with carrying a ‘life preserver’.\textsuperscript{198} He was sent to the House of Corrections for six weeks\textsuperscript{199} (Appendix 2).

He was again before the court on 26 March 1842, charged with breaking, entering the home of Robert Breese at Saint Mary Newington and stealing one brooch value three shillings, one breast pin two shillings, one shawl, thirty shillings and one piece of the current gold coin of the realm called a half-sovereign.\textsuperscript{200} He was sentenced to 15 years transportation and
was deported on the *Emily* on 28 June, arriving in Hobart on 24 November 1842. He was 26 years old, five feet seven and a quarter inches tall. He had an oval face, blue eyes, a long thin nose and a broad dimpled chin. His hair was dark brown and he was clean shaven. The ship’s surgeon describes him as ‘Unsettled in his mind. Well behaved.’

His first two years in Hobart were troubled. It is likely that he suffered from what is now called posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following the war in Spain. Symptoms include intrusive distressing memories, avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event, heightened arousal leading to irritability and problems with concentration and sleep disorders. Many sufferers have nightmares and hyperarousal, which frequently leads to shortness of temper and premature aging; they tend to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol and maintain a lingering anger just below the surface. Family members also suffer: in a study of Australian Vietnam war veterans with PTSD it was found that those families experienced more conflict, distress and anxiety than a control group. The evidence of William’s heavy drinking and brushes with the law in later life indicates that Martha’s home life was probably less than peaceful.

On 11 May 1844 he was a third class prisoner at the probation office Southport. There he was charged with being absent from barracks and being found naked on the beach at night. I wondered if he was hoping that, without the convict uniform, he might be able to slink into Hobart, steal new clothes and become a free citizen? Or did his ‘unsettled mind’ drive him to behave in this strange way? The average minimum in Hobart in May is 7 degrees Celsius. He received a 12-month sentence in chains and was sent to Impression Bay on the Tasman Peninsula, emerging on 30 November 1845. William’s first assignment after the chain gang was in 1845, indicating that he was put to work immediately. His employers are listed below, together with disciplinary charges.

1845: Lord, Macquarie Street [charge ‘Insolence’ – punishment 4 calendar months imprisonment and hard labour. This was served at Macquarie Harbour prison, which re-opened briefly at this time];
1846: E. Shoebridge, Glenorchy;
1847: E. Shoebridge, Glenorchy;
Barton, Doughty Anstey;
R.J. Smith, Hobart;
James Jacques, Davey Street Hobart;
Hospital as wardsman;
John Oakley, Collins Street Hobart;
Mr Ivey, Hobart [charge ‘Insolence to his Mistress’ – punishment 10 days solitary];
James Smith, Collins Street Hobart;

1848: James Jacques, Davey Street Hobart;
Thomas Moon, Collins Street Hobart [charge ‘Misconduct gambling in a public street on Sunday’ – punishment 2 months imprisonment and hard labour];

1848: 10 December Martha Gregory gave birth to Mary Ann Guest, daughter of William Henry Guest;

1849: William Bateman, Liverpool Street Hobart;
C. Lopdell, Hobart;
Thomas Moon, Macquarie Street Hobart [charge ‘Misconduct driving a licensed cab in Hobart Town, not being licensed to do so’ – admonished];
Alex Cheyne, Macquarie Street Hobart;
George Britton, Liverpool Street Hobart.

Setting up as innkeepers

1 Operating an inn

In August 1853, the Courier listed publican’s licences granted at the quarterly meeting of justices, when William Guest received permission to operate the Blue Bells of Scotland, Murray Street,207 which is located uphill and directly behind Sullivan’s Cove. The Blue Bells of Scotland was first licensed in 1832 and rebuilt in 1848.208 The name was changed to the Waratah Hotel in 1894.209

From 1853 it is likely that William, Martha and Mary Ann lived on premises. Wright (2014) argues that women played an important role in making inns ‘home-like’ by introducing some of the comforts of domestic life.210 Hotels also served the community by providing meeting rooms and entertainment, such as ballrooms and billiards.211 Martha must have been involved in checking and supervising these activities. And later, once
William went prospecting for gold, she may have managed the inn while he
searched for riches.  

I tried to imagine Martha’s workload. She would have to work hard: 
draw water and carry it in buckets – filter some for drinking and cooking;
heat water for other uses in a fuel fired copper; wash by hand, probably 
using soap made from tallow; wring even heavy items, such as sheets, by 
hand, unless she was lucky enough to have a mangle; clean and empty 
chamber pots; dust and sweep; clean and re-set fires in hearths; make beds 
and shake and air the covers. 

Her kitchen was probably built separate from the house (to prevent 
fires spreading) and there she would cook on a fuel burning stove. If clothes 
needed ironing she would use a solid iron heated on the stove – perhaps 
spitting on it to test the heat. Maybe she had a few chickens to keep the 
family in eggs and probably a cat for ratting. She must have been busy from 
early morning until after the evening meal. 

William relinquished the licence for the Blue Bells of Scotland in 
February 1854 when he took over the Butchers’ Arms. It was opened in 
1836 and was a simple building on the north east corner of Patrick and 
Argyle streets. William promoted the advantages of a visit to the 
Butchers’ Arms where he established a reading room. A large classified 
advertisement appeared in September. 

Argyle Street Reading Rooms. Butchers’ Arms Inn. The undersigned being determined to afford a rational and 
intellectual source of enjoyment to his customers during the 
evenings, he has established a Reading Room at his inn, where will be found the most informative and popular literature of the day, 
including light reading now so much sought after. The following periodicals and newspapers will be regularly filed and in the 
reading room – The Hobarton Mercury, Colonial Times, 
Courier, Cornwall Chronicle, Launceston Examiner, Sydney 
Morning Herald, Sydney Empire, Bell’s Life in Sydney, Bathurst 
Free Press, Melbourne Argus, Melbourne Herald, Melbourne Express, Adelaide Despatch, Wellington Independent, Moreton 
Bay Courier, Illustrated London News, Bell’s Life in London, 
Englishman, Home News, Blackwood’s Magazine, and every other newspaper whereby the latest news may constantly be obtained. 
[sgd.] William Guest, September 17th. 

The literacy of this entry surprised me, given what I guessed to be 
the level of education of many poor Londoners of that time. I searched the 
district where William was baptised and found the records of St Mary 
Rotherhithe church. This was where William’s parents were married on 4
September 1815. There is a Charity School associated with the church which was founded by Peter Hills and Robert Bell in 1613. The school was open to local parish children until the 1930s. In the early 18th century it enrolled 65 girls and 77 boys. I thought it likely that, given the Guest family’s close association with the church, this would have been where William received his education.

On 14 October 1854 William advertised for ‘A smart, steady honest lad from twelve to fourteen years of age to serve in the bar of an inn.’ He was prepared to pay £25 per annum plus board and lodging to the successful applicant. By December he was thanking his customers for their ‘extensive support’ and bragged that his reading room carried the usual supply ‘of the latest English and Colonial newspapers’.

Many colonists had a love-hate relationship with alcohol. In the early 1800s, the colonial government, with no other source of revenue, relied on the excise on rum. There were fourteen public houses in the Hobart area in 1818 and the number increased as the population grew. Governors Franklin (1837-1843) and Eardley-Wilmot (1843-1846) faced regular budget crises because, by 1840, much of the land in the colony had been given away for little return, and those with entrenched wealth resisted increased taxation.

Taxes on licensed premises and duties paid on liquor became a major source of revenue. But there were protests because some premises offered noisy musicians and dancing which led to calls for their suppression and Quaker missionaries were in the colony lecturing on the evils of drink.

Financial threats to innkeepers were on the horizon in 1854 when magistrates in charge of administering licences were considering reforms. A public meeting was held at the Waterloo Hotel in July 1854, where Mr Guest moved and Mr Chapman seconded the adoption of a petition to be taken to the lieutenant-governor and the city’s justices. William Guest was in a sub-committee of about 20 men selected to seek more signatories. A new Licensing Victuallers’ Act was put before the Legislative Council in October 1854 and a further petition, signed by W Guest among others, was sent to the mayor of Hobart, calling for a public meeting.
William was restless and decided to move on – in May 1855, the licence for the *Butchers’ Arms* passed to John Talbot Cockram. By the August 1855 Transfer Meeting, William was licensee of the *Shipwright’s Arms*. That inn was opened in 1843 and was frequented by builders and waterfront workers. He moved from there in November 1855. By May 1856 William was the licensee of the *Albemarle Arms*. In August 1856 the licence was transferred to John Presson, while William took control of the *Good Woman* inn Argyle Street. The *Good Woman* was a more substantial building – two storeys with a large street front. I questioned how Martha and Mary Ann coped with these constant relocations. Did William spin tales of opportunities at the next licensed premises? Perhaps the *Good Woman* appealed to his sense of humour – over the front door was a statue of a woman holding her head under her arm.

In 1857 there were again rumours about changes to the licensing regulations and William penned an ironic advertisement about a ‘humbug loto’. The prizes were alcohol, described in unpleasant terms as accumulated useless stock. He called it a ‘Brummagen Loto’, and re-advertised on 16 January 1857; there was a reply on 19 January (Appendix 3). The pseudonym has the same joking tone he used in other advertisements. The government was considering extending the number of licences so William published a letter to the attorney-general in the *Hobart Town Mercury* (Appendix 4).

The temperance movement was strong, so William took out an advertisement to lampoon it. He makes a case for fewer taxes and restrictions on public houses (Appendix 5). Once more, there is a jocular tone to the letter, as well as to the pseudonyms of the signatories. William has a point when he argues that there are too many licences, because by the time of the licensing meeting in December 1858 there were 12 inns listed in Argyle Street where the *Good Woman* was established. A tally of applications at the licence court meeting shows that there were 176 applications in Hobart and 48 in the country. Of the 224 applicants 19 were female. Women were not allowed a licence, but widows were exempt.

On 7 May 1856, William’s debts were £567.17s and assets £465 – Mr Graves was solicitor and Mr Tonkin assignee for bankruptcy. William argued that the cause of the insolvency was ‘an unfortunate speculation in
the purchase of property, and being pressed by my creditors at a time when I am unable to meet their demands." On 15 May an advertisement was published by Henry Tonkin, assignee for W. Guest’s estate, calling on creditors to meet him at his office on Friday 16 May. There followed a series of meetings and by 28 May 1856 arrangements were finalised and Mr Graves applied to the commissioner, arguing as ‘the insolvency was virtually superseded, for His Honour to dismiss the petition.’ William and Martha escaped bankruptcy this time.

In 1857, there was trouble between William and a neighbour, Mr Whelan, about access to the lane behind the Good Woman. A brawl followed.

ASSAULT – Mr. William Guest appeared before the Magistrates (Messrs. Burgess and Grealey) to answer a charge of assault preferred against him by Mr. Whelan. This case arose out of the disputed right of way to a passage between the “Good Woman” in Argyle-street, and an adjoining premises occupied by the complainant, the particulars of which will be found reported in our police columns. Mr. Guest called witnesses to prove that the assault complained of was the consequence of a most cowardly one committed upon him by the complainant and several others, who threw him down and kicked him unmercifully – confining him to his bed for several days. Another case of assault – in which Mr. Guest was complainant, and Mr. Whelan was defendant, arising out of the same dispute was then heard – the bench determined to hear them both before they decided upon either. After the evidence had been taken in this case – which was similar to what had been already given – the bench under all the circumstances, dismissed both the cases.

In September 1857, the courts were again interested in the goings on at the Good Woman. Two tenants, Jessie George and William Thomas, woke Martha late at night, called for something to drink and Jessie gave Martha a roll of notes to mind. The next day when Detective Constable Dorsett passed with the prisoners in custody, Martha gave him the notes. In court, she testified that she did not think there was anything wrong when Jessie asked her to mind the notes, but her ‘husband was vexed with her’ for having taken them (Appendix 6).

2 Family fame and pedestrianism

William Guest had been a coachman, landlord, soldier, convict, an innkeeper, a goldminer – but there was more to his character. He expressed opinions about political issues and he was energetic and impatient with
authority. William was irritated by the temperance movement. He issued a challenge to teetotallers in 1857.

CHALLENGE – GROG VERSUS WATER.
I, WILLIAM GUEST, aged 40, publican and first-rate Drinking Man, hereby challenge any man in the colony, whatever his age or height may be to WALK from ten to fifteen miles, for the sum of twenty pounds – Man and Money ready at the Good Woman, Argyle-street.
N.B. – One hundred Yards’ Start given to any member of the Total Abstinence Society.
Ye Valiant Teetotallers – Ye Champions of the Pump!
And all white Choker’d gentry, and ye that mount the Stump, A boasting son of Belial you are challeng’d now to meet, To prove which is most vigorous and nimble with their feet.

In walking to a distance of ten or fifteen miles, To see which does it quickest and is the best of styles, So get your PUMPS in order, lads, and see they hurt no toe, For BILLY GUEST, the publican’s no ordinary foe!

You ought to get the storm up with the water that you drink, And best this Vaunter easily, upon my word, I think! So put your best leg forward, lads – for now’s the time or never To defeat this bragging Boniface, and silence him for ever!
TEMPERANCE HALL – TO THE RESCUE

He followed up the first advertisement two days later with a shorter version.

CHALLENGE
GROG VERSUS WATER
I, WILLIAM GUEST, aged 40, publican and first rate Drinking Man, hereby challenge any man in the colony, whatever his age or height may be, to WALK from ten to fifteen miles, for the sum of twenty pounds – Man and Money ready at the Good Woman, Argyle-street.
N.B. – One Hundred Yards’ start given to any member of the Total Abstinence Society.
And I wish it to be understood, This is not vain talk, If I get a customer, I mean to walk. 21st September 1857.

Walking races or ‘Pedestrianism’ began in the 18th century when aristocrats wagered on races between their footmen, who were required to walk at the speed of their master’s carriages. By the 19th century there were foot races and exhibitions and they too were labelled ‘Pedestrianism’. Distances varied – one famous feat was when Captain Robert Barclay Allardice walked 1,000 miles at Newmarket in 1,000 hours for 1,000 guineas between 1 July and 12 July 1809. Ten thousand people watched. Other walkers had different goals: a popular one was 100 miles in less than 24 hours and those
who succeeded became known as ‘Centurians’. In Australia, some races were relatively short at one or two miles, while others were more like marathons; for example, one race between a champion amateur and a professional was for 10 miles with a wager of £100. Perhaps William repeated his ‘Grog versus Water’ challenge and maybe there were other races, but I could find nothing until 1859, when a well-known pedestrian, Allan McKean, agreed to a match.

Pedestrianism - To-day at two o’clock the match between Allan McKean, the celebrated “walking man”, and our flying Boniface, Mr. W. Guest, comes off at Glenorchy, the start to take place at Tom Workman’s, the Green Man. McKean gives Guest one minute’s start in five miles, and lays him £30 to £25, and the course selected is from the six mile stone to the one mile stone near the Eagle Hawk. As the weather promises to be fine a large concourse of spectators may be expected. “We may mention that the money was duly posted last night at the Duke of Clarence, Murray street.

McKean’s feats included walking many miles in a fixed period of time. The race created interest and papers in Hobart and Launceston reported the result; thousands watched the match (Appendix 7). The crowds and excitement that this match attracted must have brought many customers into the Guest inn, especially after William won. But McKean was not prepared to accept defeat easily. He issued a challenge on 9 September 1859.

CHALLENGE
ALLAN McKEAN will walk William Guest or any other man in the Island of Tasmania Five Miles or over from £50 or upwards in two weeks from the time of the first deposit. To be heard of at the office of this paper or at Mr. Charles Wright’s Lord Nelson, corner of Macquarie and Campbell streets, Hobart Town.

Unfortunately for McKean, William left Hobart on the steamer Tasmania on 20 September. He returned in October and accepted the challenge. The match was for a shorter distance than the five miles proposed. The match was advertised in the Hobart Town Daily Mercury on 13 October 1859.

2 mile Walking Match
At half past three o’clock on Saturday afternoon,
At the Amphitheatre, Murray-street
ALLAN McKEAN
Feeling dissatisfied at his late defeat, having expressed a desire to walk Mr. GUEST upon his own platform to decide which is the quickest walker, Mr. Guest accedes to his request, and the match
I couldn’t find a record of the result of this match. However, William was well known in the colony and, at a hearing regarding his insolvency in 1860, one of the solicitors asked him whether he was the well-known pedestrian. William replied that the question was irrelevant.

3 Financial problems

In 1859 a notice appeared at the court house listing William Guest as insolvent. This was an error and William was cocky enough to fight back.

TO FIELDING BROWNE, ESQ.,
Insolvent Commissioner.
Per favour of the Hobart Town Mercury.
Sir, - Passing the Court House this morning I observed my name William Guest amongst the list of Insolvents to appear before you on Wednesday, this day. Not being at present in the predicament of an Insolvent I cannot conceive by what mistake you should have inserted my name in your dismal list; true, it may be that misfortune may reach me as well as others, but until it does I think it premature on your part to anticipate the evil day.
Yours &c.
William Guest
Good Woman, Argyle-street.
22nd November, 1859. 261

The mistake was rectified and on 23 November the list for hearing before the Insolvent Court was ‘John (not William as inserted in the list) Guest’. John Guest was not related to William. 262

In the same month, despite these troubles, William showed that he was a sympathetic and generous man when he offered to adopt an abused child. Although the paper reported that William made the offer, it is likely that he needed Martha’s support to do so. The child was Elizabeth Waddell, ‘a pretty, delicate little girl 7 years of age.’ 263 Elizabeth was in the care of Mrs Wilson (not her mother) as her mother was in Sydney and her father disappeared after he was accused of cattle stealing.

Wilson lived with John Duncan and the court heard that she undressed Elizabeth and beat her with nettles for wetting the bed. Wilson and Duncan beat her with a rope and a horse whip (which broke during the beating), all the while threatening to beat her more if she cried.

The child’s injuries were discovered by the Guests and Whelans when she visited them – possibly to play with Mary Ann and Maria
Whelan. A constable and Dr Keen were called and Keen examined the child’s injuries. When the case came to court, he described her treatment as ‘inhuman’ and reported that:

He found a number of bruises on her left shoulder and arm, the left side and the left thigh. There was one bruise on the hip broader than the others. His opinion was that the marks were caused by a tolerably severe beating, and that they had been inflicted about four or five days before.

Wilson denied the charge, saying she was simply punishing a naughty child. The magistrate dismissed the case and hoped that ‘Mrs Wilson would be more lenient to the child in future.’ The paper reports:

Mr Guest now came forward and asked the Bench whether he could not retain possession of the child? He had as much right to her as Mrs Wilson. Mr Tarleton (magistrate) said they could give no opinion on the subject. If Mrs Wilson had a legal right to the child she had her remedy for its abduction and if any liked to run the risk of keeping her, they could do so.

William’s financial situation was dire and it seems that he decided not to run the risk. By April 1860 bankruptcy was upon him. The first evidence is the sale of a parcel of land ‘formerly purchased by William Guest’. How did Martha view the threat of bankruptcy? I imagine she would have turned over in her mind all the hard work she had done and would have felt resentful. On 25 April 1860, William applied to the commissioner of insolvent estates for distribution of his assets and a meeting of his creditors was called. Other meetings were held. In May 1860 the estate went to auction.

Friday, May 4th
Wm. Guest’s Estate,
“Good Woman,” Argyle Street
Stock-in-Trade, Furniture, Utensils and Effects

MR. WORLEY
Is instructed by John Wilward, Esq.,
Assignee to the above Estate, to sell by public auction, on the premises, on FRIDAY, May 4th, 1860, at eleven o’clock,
WITHOUT RESERVE

UTENSILS IN-TRADE, Spirit Kegs, Glass Tub and Drainer,
Pewter Measures, Tin Measures, and Funnels.
HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE –
BAR, Eight-day Clock, Chairs, Oval Looking Glass
BAR PARLOR – Cedar Table, Three Chairs, Sofa Matress, and Pillows, Fender, and Pictures
BEST PARLOR – Three Tables, Six Horshair Chairs, Three cane bottom do, brass fender & fire-irons, Chimney Ornaments, Framed Engravings, Blinds, Curtains.
BEDROOMS – Four-post Bedsteads, Bed and Bedding, Chest Drawers, Chests, Stretcher and Bedding, Washstand, Towel Horse, Chairs, Window Blinds, Table, etc.
KITCHEN and YARD – Table, Meat Safe, Dresser and Shelves, Chairs, Cooking Utensils, Crockery, Knives, Water Casks, Lumber, &c, &c

Terms – Cash.

I found this list both sad and impressive: sad to see the family’s possessions dispersed in such a public way; yet impressive to see how much William and Martha now owned. In 1844 they would have been issued with the convict uniform, a blanket and a few eating utensils. Martha obtained her ticket of leave in January 1847 and William received his in February 1850. To have acquired so much by 1859 they must have worked hard.

In June 1860, William Guest arranged a meeting to consider discharge. If granted this would allow him to move on and make a clean start. He was interested in searching for gold. Stories about gold finds in Victoria and also in Tasmania were printed in the Hobart newspapers. Between 1851 and 1856 there were frequent stories about gold finds.

4 Heading to the gold fields

In August 1851, gold was found at Ballarat and soon there were 5,000 diggers there. And in December 1852, William signed a petition in support of the protest about the ‘Victoria Convicts Prevention Bill’. The Act was an attempt by the Victorian government to prevent undesirables entering the colony and was introduced after many convicts came in search of gold. His protest led me question whether he was hoping to join the search for gold in Victoria.

In August 1852 the Courier published information on the protest about the Victoria Convicts Prevention Bill, and in the same issue there were advertisements relating to gold searches in Van Diemen’s Land. Talk of gold must have been buzzing all through the colony.
It is likely that in August 1853, William and Martha read the report from the Tasmanian gold fields which was printed just above the list recording his licence for the *Blue Bells of Scotland*. It was good news: fine examples were found and from one hole miners extracted 500 ounces, including a nugget of seven ounces.  

On 23 May 1856, the *Colonial Times* published a lengthy article describing an expedition to Fingal, Tasmania, to ascertain whether there were workable diggings in the area. A Fingal Gold Exploration Committee was established and they published details of what they offered, including equipment (tents, buckets, etc.) as well as food.

The Gold Exploration Committee had a considerable investment at the diggings.

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**THE GOLD EXPLORATION COMMITTEE** hereby notify that PRACTICAL DIGGERS (beyond the number supplied gratis by their Superintendent) can procure Food and other Necessaries at their Stores on the Diggings at the following prices:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>£</th>
<th>s</th>
<th>d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tents, 10 x 8ft. with poles complete</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do. 9 x 7feet, do</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour, per lb.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea, black or green, per lb.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar, per lb.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco, per lb.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton, per lb.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haines; patent shovels, each</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do. Do. Picks, each</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt, per lb.</td>
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Tin dishes, crow bars, cradles, frying pans, camp kettles, pannicans, buckets, axes, materials for making Californian pumps, and all other necessaries at cost price.

By order of the Committee,

GEORGE WHITCOMB, Honorary Secretary.

Exchange, Hobart Town, 9th June, 1856.

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In July 1856, William wrote to the *Hobarton Mercury* stating that he had been to the gold fields for the past month (indicating that he went mining soon after that advertisement) and that ‘I and my party have sunk’ a number of holes and found no gold.’ He writes there were gross inefficiencies in expenditure of monies supplied by the Committee. He concludes with a recommendation that the Committee should follow Rev. Clarke’s advice and work the banks of the Gordon River (Appendix 8).

Several things are interesting about this letter: the first is that William was so prompt in going to the gold fields; the second, he saw
himself as the leader of men; and the third is that Martha must have
managed the *Good Woman* inn for the month he was away. That he felt free
to leave for an extended period gives some indication of Martha’s
capability.

Fingal was a disappointment and William’s ambition led him to seek
riches elsewhere. On 20 September 1859 he left Hobart for Sydney on the
steamer *Tasmania*. He travelled in style: in a cabin, not steerage. Martha
and Mary Ann are not recorded as being on board. Gold fields dotted much
of New South Wales by this time and on 17 May 1860, Lt. Colonel A.H.
Freeling wrote to the commissioner of crown lands about access to the gold
diggings in the Snowy Mountains area where rich seams had been found.
He recommends a route through Twofold Bay, Eden, for travelling to the
fields. He describes diggers finding gold:

> On the Delegate, a place about 70 miles by the road from and lying
> West of Twofold Bay, a few diggers are at work, making wages
> and raising a very fine and pure gold.

This information was widely circulated and appeared in many papers,
including the *Empire* (28 May 1860) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (28
May 1860).

**Moving to Eden, New South Wales**

I could not discover when Martha and Mary Ann travelled to New South
Wales. I checked shipping records for vessels leaving Hobart and
Launcestont for Sydney from 1 January 1858 to May 1861, but couldn’t
find mention of them. That record only shows ships to New South Wales
so maybe they came to New South Wales via Melbourne. As the auction of
William’s estate, including the stock and fittings of the *Good Woman* inn,
didn’t take place until 4 May 1860, it may be that they stayed in Hobart to
oversee preparations for the sale.

William probably returned to Hobart in time for the auction as he
was there on 23 June 1860, advertising that he wanted to purchase the
framework of a large booth. He may have adapted the ‘large booth’ for
use as a store, because he was back in Eden on 13 July 1860 and staying at
the *Red Lion* when he advertised the sale of a wooden store.

For Sale
To Arrive, or upon Arrival
Evidence that you can’t keep a good entrepreneur down came a month later when he advertised:

A Subscription Ball
Will Be Held At
Mr. GUEST’S New Building Market Square, Eden
Thursday Evening, 23rd August,
Commencing at 8 o’clock.
Gentlemen’s Tickets, including a lady’s admission 5s,
Ladies’ Tickets 2s 6d. can be obtained at the Red Lion Hotel,
or at the Drapery Store, opposite.

I wonder whether this was the ‘wooden store’ that he offered for sale in July. The licence for the Red Lion was transferred from James Roberts to Sampson Courtney Boyland on 20 March 1860. This means that William and Martha were not the licensees. Perhaps the family lived or worked there. Alternatively they may have run a business from ‘Guest’s New Building Market Square’.

Martha was in Eden on 29 April 1861, where she gave birth to William Eden Guest (later known as Barney Guest). At the time she gave birth, it is possible that William was dividing his time between the family on the coast and inland gold diggings. That same month the gold yields at the Gulph were good.

In May and June that year ‘Correspondent’ reported in the Empire on the gold finds and township of Nerrigundah. In May he writes that there were so many people that there is a smaller township, named by locals ‘Philadelphia’ on the upper reaches of the river. But all was not well – in June he reports:

Acts of rowdyism are still of daily, nay, almost hourly occurrence. I had occasion some time ago, to extol the promptitude of the authorities in sending down a sufficient police force, commanded by a zealous and able officer, but I am sorry to say, that as the rowdies, awed by the presence of the police, drew in their horns and refrained from any overt act of violence during the period of the inspector’s visit, it was deemed unnecessary to station so large a force here, and subsequently they were withdrawn, with the exception of two, who however zealous and willing, are unable to repress the turbulence of so great a number of disorderly characters and are unwillingly compelled to be witnesses of continual acts of violence and ferocity, which are enacted in defiance of them.
By 1862 William Guest was successful in the Gulph\textsuperscript{289} at Nerrigundah, yet he returned to Hobart in November 1862, when there was a report in Tasmanian papers about an expedition to the area near Lake St. Clair in central Tasmania.

We mentioned recently that it was in contemplation to associate with the expedition a party of practical gold miners, who would probably be procured from Ballarat or some of the other Victorian diggings. Since then Mr. William GUEST, well-known to most of our citizens, has arrived in Hobart Town, accompanied by several miners from the ‘Gulf diggings’ in New South Wales, where Mr. GUEST has for the last year or two been profitably pursuing the avocation of a miner. He and his comrades join Mr. GOULD’s party.\textsuperscript{290}

The family moved to Nerrigundah sometime before mid-1863, where they opened the \textit{Free Selection Inn} in Nerrigundah. Between 1859 and 1863 William moved from place to place. I tried to discover whether Martha travelled or stayed to manage the business, but there were no records.

\textbf{Summary of William’s travels 1859-1863:}

1859: September left Hobart for Sydney
1860: possibly in Brisbane date unknown – however it could have been another William Guest\textsuperscript{291}
1860: 25 April in Hobart. Applied to Commissioner of Insolvent Estates
1860: 4 May in Hobart. Auction of his estate
1860: 23 June in Hobart advertised wanting to buy the framework of a booth
1860: 13 July in Eden at the \textit{Red Lion}. Advertised sale of a Wooden Store
1860: 21 August in Eden. Advertised a Subscription Ball tickets at the \textit{Red Lion}
1861: [29 April, Martha gives birth at Eden] William was probably mining gold in the Gulph
1862: 19 November in Hobart. Returned to Hobart with miners from the Gulph
1863: 23 August in Nerrigundah. Charged with vagrancy, sentenced to one month in Braidwood gaol\textsuperscript{292}
1863: 12 September in Nerrigundah. Granted a billiards licence at the \textit{Free Selection Inn}. This is the first evidence the family were settled in Nerrigundah and if William was in Braidwood gaol, Martha may have appeared in court regarding the licence
1863: 23 November supporting the cause of a local politician
1863: 5 December in Nerrigundah, William in court and found guilty of ‘Fight at Large’ - fined 5/-

\textbf{Innkeepers in Nerrigundah}

The town of Nerrigundah is built on the gold field known as the Gulph, located in the hills behind Narooma. Today the distance between Eden and Nerrigundah is 168 kilometres, mostly over well-made highways – except for the last section, which is a winding mountain road that cuts up through forest and then goes down towards the river beside which the town was
built. In Martha’s day the journey would have been by a horse, coach or buggy and the team would have struggled up steep hillsides.

In April 1861, ‘Correspondent’ describes progress.

In the township itself, improvements are taking place, commensurate with the progress of the diggings; a good substantial store has been erected by Jones & Co., styled the ‘Southern Cross’. These gentlemen have set on foot a private mail communication, a convenience which seems to be appreciated fully by the diggers.  

And in May 1861:

at present almost deserted, save on a Saturday night, when the outlying parties troop in from the secluded gullies and guls of the neighbouring hills to lay in their weekly supplies, and, in too many instances, to dissipate their week’s hard earnings.  

‘Correspondent’ reported the gold yield – sometimes it was up, at others down; the weather sometimes was dry and the creek low, at others raining, the creek in flood and diggings washed away. Miners were building infrastructure in the shape of wheels and pumps along the bank and the Cowdroy party were engaged in damming the creek in order to improve the value of their claim.  

By August 1861, the population was around 700, and there were hotels, stores, churches and police. Mr E Smith became the first postmaster in 1861. Smith owned the Free Selection Store in August 1862. The name probably originated from the way the land was purchased. The system of free selection before survey allowed an entrepreneur to select a portion of land, put down a deposit, and pay off the balance over a number of years.

Nerrigundah offenders were often sent to Braidwood prison and, in August 1863, William spent time in there for vagrancy. The Act is ‘An Act for the more effectual prevention of Vagrancy and for the punishment of idle and disorderly Persons, Rogues and Vagabonds and incorrigible Rogues in the Colony of New South Wales,’ and dates from 1 December 1851. Considering William’s later offences, he was probably using obscene language and may have been drunk as well. Sometime between May and September 1863 the Free Selection Store became the Free Selection Inn, because on 12 September, William Guest was charged with allowing billiards in his premises without a licence. Finance to set up this business must have come from wages or finds on the gold fields. The inn was close to Gulph Creek. Martha’s will made in 1895 shows that she owned more
than one block of land in Nerrigundah at the time of her death. Which one of these was the location of the Free Selection Inn is uncertain.

Taking a young family to the gold fields may have worried Martha. A woman’s point of view comes from Clacy (1853), who published a diary covering time spent at the Victorian diggings. She describes a rough life in tents and threats from bushrangers. Schaffer (1988) puts forward an alternative view of those who fear the unfriendly bush. She argues that these images are created, not so much by the bush itself, but by the fantasies of those who view it. However, threats of violence in Nerrigundah were not fantasies, and it is clear from Correspondent’s reports that the town was rough and there were threats from local ‘rowdies’ as well as from bushrangers.

William was in trouble on 5 December 1863, and was found guilty of ‘Fight at Large’. He was fined five shillings. He was allowed a billiard licence on 8 February 1864. A month later William was charged with ‘Breach of Publicans Act’ when Mary Elizabeth Scrivener complained that she heard a loud dispute, obscene language, card playing and disorderly conduct between Saturday 27 and Sunday the 28 February until 5 o’clock in the morning. A female servant supported Mary’s evidence, saying that she too heard ‘Guest’s voice screaming’. William was found guilty and fined 40 shillings.

The Scriveners were publicans and ran an inn across the road from the Free Selection Inn. William took revenge on Mary a week later when he abused her. It was on Saturday afternoon and William saw Mary in the street and called her a bitch – he went away, only to return several times and call her ‘a yellow faced old bugger’. Mary insisted to police that she did not provoke him. William was found guilty and fined 40 shillings or 14 days imprisonment.

Another hearing followed four days later, when he was committed to the lock up for six hours for using obscene language in court. In June 1864, William re-applied for a publican’s licence, but approval was postponed for a week. The licence was granted a week later.

In Hobart in December 1859 the Guests offered to adopt an abused child. Their concern for child welfare may have contributed to the poor relations with the Scriveners because, in the Nerrigundah Bench Book, just
under William’s 1864 licence entry is another for Regina v. FW Scrivener, who was charged with deserting children and remanded to Central Petty Sessions in Sydney. William appears to have been a complex person, an intelligent man who, despite his mental health problems, may have cared about others.310

The next month, September 1864, William was charged with permitting swine to stray in the street. He was fined 5 shillings and costs.311 On 21 September 1864 he was charged with having billiards without a licence but was granted a licence on 24 September.312 Things went smoothly until 18 August 1865 when William was again before the bench for wilfully using insulting and abusive language on the street. He was sentenced to one month imprisonment in Braidwood gaol.313 Constable Miles O’Grady was scheduled to escort him to Braidwood on 24 August, but reports he could not do so ‘on account of him [William] suffering from the effects of drink.’314 William sobered up by 25 August, when Constable O’Grady took him to Braidwood.315 Things remained quiet until February 1866, when William was fined 20 shillings with costs for assaulting Robert Drew.316

By now Mary Ann was 18 years old and William Eden 5. I had questions about the quality of family life: What did the children make of their father’s behaviour? Did Mary Ann hide after one of these episodes? If Mary Ann had suitors, would she have invited them home? Was Martha managing the business and trying to keep the peace? The Guest shame was soon overshadowed by events in April 1866, when bushrangers came into town.

**Bushrangers**

The police diary for 1 April shows Constable O’Grady ‘sick and confined to his bed, he having the colonial fever. His horse drawing few rations as there was grass in the paddock.’317 There were two police in Nerrigundah under the command of Sergeant Hitch. Their duties included escort for gold deliveries, issuing licences, such as for slaughter, billiards, licensed premises, and mining.318 Hitch had gone to Moruya, and Smith and O’Grady were the only police in town when the bushrangers arrived.319
There was an empty hut out of town, on a junction of two roads near Gulph Creek and the Clarke gang of six hid there from Sunday until Monday afternoon. The gang held up several people before shooting and wounding John Emmott. Four members rode into town and held up Wallis’s pub; two went on to Pollock’s store, which was the local post office and bank. They demanded that Mrs Pollock hand over the keys to the safe, but she managed to throw them away.

There are several versions of what happened next. My grandmother’s tale comes from her father, Barney, who claims that he was standing in the street and the key fell at his feet, so he stood on it, grinding it into the earth. He would have been around five – his story has him with Jock, the inn rouseabout, sent by William to warn town folk and alert Constable O’Grady. The police record states that the gang rode into town about 10.00 pm, which makes it hard to believe that Barney was wandering the streets. However, a rough map drawn by local resident, Maureen Burdett, shows the Guest properties close to the police barracks, so perhaps his story is true.

Despite illness, O’Grady left his bed and went to arrest the gang. One member, Fletcher, was in a doorway when O’Grady fired. The bushranger returned fire. O’Grady was shot in the hip. Fletcher died shortly afterwards while O’Grady lingered for three hours.

William was in trouble often after 1863. He was abusive, used obscene language and drank heavily. His wild behaviour continued and on 22 September 1866, he was charged with ‘exposing his person’. The charge was withdrawn and the case dismissed, but no reason was given.

I could find no further reference to William or Martha Guest until 28 February 1867, when William Henry Guest, Innkeeper, died at Nerrigundah from the ‘effects of intemperance’. William may have been drinking heavily for some days prior to his death as the coroner certified that the duration of the illness was ten days. Death due to intemperance was a common finding in coronial inquests in the district of Sydney in the early days of the colony. In 1840, 15 per cent of the deaths were attributed to intemperance. It seems likely that heavy drinking was rife among the miners in Nerrigundah.
There are two family legends about William Guest:

The first is that he was governor of Berrima gaol. This is untrue and I wondered whether the couple invented a respectable background. I found descendants of Mary Ann Cowdroy and they knew nothing of the convict history. Therefore, it is likely that Martha and William kept their past secret once they obtained their tickets of leave.

The second was that he was killed when thrown from his horse while crossing a creek. After considering William’s life, I think that perhaps the story about his death is true. He was a heavy drinker and a handler of horses and may have felt confident on horseback, even though drunk or hungover.

William was wild and there must have been many times when Martha took over management of the family. But he was more than just a town drunk: he was a complex character, outspoken and with a sense of humour. He was extravagant, but with charisma sufficient to be seen as a leader of men. William is buried in the old cemetery at Nerrigundah where Martha erected a sandstone headstone.329

Managing after William’s death

In 1867 Martha was a widow with two children – Mary Ann was nearly nineteen and Barney was almost six years old. Two maps were made in 1869 of the town of Nerrigundah.330 One shows that Martha Guest owned three lots of land; the other indicates that there were buildings on all of them. She ran the inn and there was other income – my father told me that she was a gold buyer.331 Henry, (H.O.T.) Cowdroy, Martha’s future son-in-law, owned a block beside hers.

Life was quieter for the family with William gone – the Nerrigundah Bench Book for the Court of Petty Sessions covers the period 1 July 1862 to 28 October 1870 and no Guests appear before that court after William’s death. Given William’s alcohol abuse, I believe Martha was probably running the inn prior to his death. She had help – the family employed a rouseabout.332

Mary Ann married Henry Cowdroy on 25 January 1869 at Kyla Park in the Moruya District and the couple’s first child, Henry Mellifont Cowdroy was born on 27 October 1869.333 He was the first of ten children
born to Mary Ann and Henry. The couple stayed in the district and Martha provided a bond for Henry to become postmaster at Nerrigundah in March 1870. Martha again provided a bond for Henry on 1 July 1870.

In May 1870, days of heavy rain ended in a flood that devastated part of the town. The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s details the extent of the flood, the physical layout of the inn and Martha’s losses (Appendix 9).

Martha was confirmed as the innkeeper for the years between 1 July, 1870 and 30 June 1874. Other Nerrigundah official records between 1870 and 1873 relating to Martha are relatively uninteresting, covering three licences for timber getting ‘hardwood only’; two ‘temporary’ licences at 8 pence; and three for dog registrations. In 1872, *Grevilles Post Office Directory* records Martha Guest as Innkeeper, Nerrigundah. Martha’s son-in-law, Henry (H.O.T.) Cowdroy, became a magistrate in the town in 1873.

Re-marriage and Bega

The details of her life that emerged from my research were interesting, but one aspect bothered me: she married for a third and fourth time when she was already wealthy – why? Wright (2014) explains that at that time, there was a debate about women running hotels. In Victoria in 1880 the *Age* editorial states that the law reads human nature correctly when it holds:

> that the wife will always be under the dominion of her husband … it seems to be in the very nature of things – in the difference and situation of women [innkeepers], which has a disposition to look up to and depend upon someone stronger than herself.

This logic was based on the assumption that women harbour a natural wish to be subordinate to their husbands. Bishop (2015) points out that legislation left the decision for granting a licensing to magistrates and this meant that “… often local idiosyncrasies, or the whim of a licensing magistrate, had more influence over who was granted a licence than the letter of the law.” So I asked myself, did Martha fear that her livelihood would be at risk if she remained single?

On the other hand, Bishop writes that widows who remarried lost their licences to their new husbands. Martha ran a profitable inn and was used to working hard; did that make her attractive to local bachelors? Thomas Jones and Michael McNamara were both younger than she,
although her age in her obituary stated she was younger than her years. Perhaps she fell in love, or maybe felt the need for male support in a frontier town.

On 31 October 1873, Martha Guest, aged 48, married Thomas Jones, a miner aged 33. At the time of her marriage Martha held the publican’s licence for the *Free Selection Inn*, but after the wedding Thomas Jones became the licensee. Records of yearly licence renewals give a hint of the life Martha and Thomas were leading. Jones obtained in 1874 a billiard licence; in 1875, the publican’s licence; in 1876, a billiard licence; and in 1877, the publican’s licence.

In 1875, when Barney was 14, Martha sent him to Sydney Grammar Boarding School. The school archivist confirms his attendance. He was back in the country by 11 November 1878, when he became postmaster at Eurobodalla – he was 17. This must have been about the time Martha was planning to move to Bega.

In November 1878, Joseph Latty was allotted the billiard licence for the *Free Selection Inn* in Nerrigundah. It is likely that Martha moved to Bega and took over the *Club Hotel* in 1878. However, she retained ownership of the Nerrigundah land and building. In Bega on 9 September 1879 Mary Ann Cowdroy gave birth to a daughter ‘at the residence of her mother’ at the *Club Hotel* Bega. This shows that, even though remarried, Martha retained ownership of the *Club Hotel*. On 30 May 1880 Thomas Jones died at the *Club Hotel*, of acute inflammation of the lungs. In September 1880, Martha took over the billiard licence. The hotel was one of the largest in the district in 1882 and when Martha applied for a licence she stated that it offered 22 rooms for guests, exclusive of family usage.

Martha’s family was growing. William Eden Guest (Barney) married Catherine James on 28 February 1881. Barney was not quite 20 years old, so the marriage required Martha’s consent. By June 1887 Barney was insolvent. Martha was faring better – she advertised in the *Bega Gazette* on 11 January 1882.

The Club Hotel Bega
Mrs. Jones
(Late Landlady of the “Free Selection Inn” Nerrigundah)
Has much pleasure in informing her friends and the public generally that she has taken the above house at the Corner of Carp and Church Streets. Mrs. Jones assures her customers that they will meet with every attention and nothing but A1 Liquors from the Best House in Sydney. First Class Billiard Table, under the management of an efficient marker. Good Stabling and visitors can depend upon their horses being properly cared for.357

By 1882 Martha had seven grandchildren from Mary Ann: Henry 27 October 1869; Alfred 28 November 1871; William 20 March 1874; Frederick 23 July 1876. These babies were all born in Nerrigundah. The next three Cowdroy children were born in Bega between 1879 and 1882: Martha 1879; twins – Eyde and Minnie 30 April 1882. On 5 May 1882, Barney’s first child, Martha Marion Guest (my grandmother), was born in Nerrigundah district. Both Mary Ann and Barney named their first daughters ‘Martha’.358

In December 1882 Martha was expanding:

Tenders are invited on or before the 7th December next, for the erection of a Store and Dwelling House in Church Street, Bega, for Mrs M. Jones. Plans and specifications may be seen at office of Mr. Thomas Rawlinson, Solicitor, Bega.359

The deadline for submission of tenders was extended until 30 December. Martha continued as innkeeper and received a licence for billiards on 16 March 1883.360

Martha (aged 59) married Michael McNamara (aged 43) on 12 April 1883. It was a second marriage for Michael.361 At that time, the law defined a wife as ‘feme covert’, meaning that husband and wife were regarded as one person and the wife’s property was surrendered to her husband. Martha had an indenture drawn up before her marriage: the parties were Martha Jones, Michael McNamara; Robert Ritchie and William John Lane. A number of land lots and buildings are mentioned, and the agreement shows that Martha owned these in her own right and retained that right.362

By September 1883, the ‘store and dwelling house’ Martha called tenders for in 1882 was finished and Henry and Mary Ann Cowdroy moved to Bega.363 They opened the store in 1884. Martha’s will shows that she owned the land. It is probable that Martha and Henry Cowdroy were in partnership because Martha owned the land, yet Henry named the store ‘Bega House’ and claimed he’d spent £5,000 on stock.364 In 1885
Cowdroy’s store boasted large floor space, imported goods and dressmakers.

In July 1887, a wild fire raged through Bega. The *Club Hotel* stables were damaged and also Cowdroy’s store (Appendix 10). Tenders were called for repairs and by February 1888, ‘Mrs. MacNamara’s new and substantial brick building was making rapid progress and in another month or two will leave it ready for occupation.’ It was opened in May 1888.

Martha made her will in Bega on 10 December 1895. She left Bega for Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney the next day. She died there on 1 January 1896 of ‘recurrent malignant disease – maxillary glands.’ Her death was reported in local papers.

Word came from Sydney on Wednesday that Mrs. Michael MacNamara had succumbed to ailments that had been of long standing. On the 11th December she went to Sydney for medical advice, but did not benefit by the journey. Deceased was a native of Devonshire, her maiden name being Goodman. For many years past as Mrs. Guest she was known to residents of Nerrigundah, and of late years as Mrs. Jones and Mrs. MacNamara, had conducted the Club Hotel at Bega. During the closing months of 1895 she had been at the Royal Hotel. Throughout a long sojourn in this district deceased was a good friend to many poor people, who, in common with numbers of old inhabitants of the district, will sincerely say they regret to hear of her death. We believe her age was 65 years.

Michael McNamara was not mentioned in her will. Her children are listed as: ‘(1) William F. borne of first marriage – 53 years living; (2) Mary A. 46 years living; (3) William E. 34 years living; No issue of third and fourth marriages.’ Martha’s assets were sold and divided between her two Australian children. Martha was buried in the Church of England cemetery Bega, 7 January 1896. The family erected a large obelisk in her memory. Her grand-daughter, Martha Cowdroy, died in 1905 and was buried beside her.

A property title search shows that Martha owned properties in Nerrigundah from 1868. As a married woman she would not have been entitled to possess land in her own right while William was alive. After his death, she purchased properties: in 1872-1877 she owned two properties at Petersham; between 1878-1882 she bought two more properties at Petersham; land at Cobargo; 11 acres in Bega; part of 62 acres at Wallagool; land in Flinders.
Street Eden; 40 acres in Wallagool; a parcel of 11 acres in Bega. This is an extraordinary portfolio. Comparing the list with titles in her will, it is clear that she was an active investor who bought and sold.

Properties listed in her will are:

11 acres, 2 roods, 340 perches County of Auckland, Parish of Bega, Crown Grant, Vol. 699, Folio 173

48 acres, 3 roods, 17 perches. County of Auckland, Parish of Wallago, Certificate of Title Vol. 872, Folio 78

2 allotments at Nerrigundah

35 perches Town of Bega on which is erected the Club Hotel

2 roods, Church Street, Bega, part of Allotment 1 of Section 34, on which are erected Cowdroy’s Store, Council Chambers and Tobacconists Shop

Vacant allotment Carp Street Bega

Lot 1 of Subdivision of Allotment No. 1 of Section 34 Carp Street, Bega – Coach Factory

Lot 2 of Subdivision of Allotment No. 1 of Section 34 Carp Street Bega – Tailors Shop

Vacant Allotment Auckland Street Bega

Vacant Allotment Auckland Street Bega

40 ac. C.I.? Land, County of Dampier, Parish of Nania?

There was an amount to be paid to the estate of Robert Ritchie, probably for mortgages over land parcels.

**Timeline of key events**

1810, September 8  
Henry Letherby Goodman married Elizabeth Ford

1824, December 19  
Martha Ford Goodman born in Saltash Cornwall, fifth child of Henry and Elizabeth Goodman

1842, April 5  
Married Richard Gregory in Plymouth

1842, June 28  
*William Henry Guest a convict on the ‘Emily’, sentenced to 7 years in Van Diemen’s Land*
1842, October 21 Charged, tried and found guilty of stealing fustian
1842, November 24 William Henry Guest arrives on Hobart
1842, December-February Gave birth to a son, William Ford Goodman (Gregory)
1843, February 5 Convict ship Margaret sails for Van Diemen’s Land
1845-1846 Employed by Mr Barratt, Hobart Town
1847, January 26 Ticket of Leave granted
1847, November 9 Pardon recommended
1848, May 22 Applied for permission to marry William Guest: refused
1848, December 10 Gave birth to a daughter, Mary Ann Guest
1849, January 30 Pardon approved
1850, April 23 Married William Henry Guest at St George’s Hobart Town
1853 (approx.) Innkeeper
1859, September 4 William Guest’s pedestrian race
1860, April 25 Bankrupt
1860, May 4 Auction of Hobart property
1861, April 29 Gave birth a son, William Eden Guest
1863 (approx.) Innkeeper at the Free Selection inn, Nerrigundah
1866, April 9 Bushrangers rob Nerrigundah
1867, February 28 William Henry Guest dies
1873, October 31 Married Thomas Jones, a miner in Nerrigundah
1878 (approx.) Moves to Bega and owns the Club Hotel
1880, May 30 Thomas Jones dies
1882, December Martha Jones advertises for contractors to build Bega House
1883, April 12 Martha Jones married Michael McNamara
1895, December 10 Martha McNamara sings her Will in Bega
1895, December 11 Travels to Sydney for medical treatment
1896, January 1 Dies at Royal Prince Alfred hospital, Sydney
Chapter 5
Writing her Life as Fiction

Writing fiction appealed to me, provided I stuck to what had been recorded, yet used the novelist’s licence to represent the inner life and interactions of my characters. In addition, such an approach would facilitate the introduction of minutiae that history did not record.

Tuite (2010) argues that women writers are attracted to fiction and cites Madeleine de Scudéry’s 17th century view that ‘the intrigues of war and peace are better, many times, laid open and satyriz’d in a Romance, than in a downright history, which being obliged to name the persons, is often forc’d … to be too partial and sparing.’ Tuite writes that, particularly for women writers, there is an emphasis on the private life behind the public stage and that this produces an integrated social, cultural and psychological realism. Woolf is also of the view that novels correspond to some extent to real life and she suggests that the values of women differ from those of men.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) argues that novels do not exercise the understanding and regulate the imagination. Rather that the reading of novels ‘… makes women, and particularly ladies of fashion, very fond of using strong expressions and superlatives in conversation.’ She decries novels as ‘flimsy works’, ‘a muddy source’ and cites an example of how women, not led to proper study, become ‘overgrown children.’ Perhaps she is a little harsh.

In 19th century historical novels there was often a focus on the common people and an emphasis on the minutiae of everyday life. Tuite quotes from Edgworth’s preface to the historical novel Castle Rackrent published in 1800:

\[w\]e are surely justified in this eager desire to collect the most minute facts relative to the domestic lives, not only of the great and good, but even of the worthless and insignificant…[so] that we may take a nearer view of the actors and actresses of history.

This blend of a broad sweep of history and the details of the everyday life of individuals appealed to me as it was precisely what I wished to do with Martha’s story.
Some novelists hope to get inside the experience of their characters with what might be called ‘imaginative understanding’. Grenville (2006) encountered problems when she gathered historical facts for *The Secret River* and then tried to incorporate everything that she discovered about Solomon Wiseman. She took notes and wrote drafts, but finally had to face her dilemma:

> The main problem … was something I was reluctant to face. I was determined to write a book of non-fiction, but the only parts of this ‘assembly’ that were interesting were the ‘flights of fancy’ where I’d created the flesh to put on the bones of research. Where, in a word, I’d written fiction.378

Like Grenville, I was fascinated by what I’d discovered and initially tried to include every detail. This resulted in an overlong and rambling text – but what to leave out? I asked myself which events best told of her life, but also what made an interesting novel. Some dramatic experiences after the death of William, such as a flood in Nerrigundah and a fire in Bega were regretfully sacrificed because they seemed to belong to another story. I began to develop a clearer picture of Martha as young wife and mother. Dessaix cites Garner’s approach as ‘first you simply transcribe. Then you ... try to make leaps and leave gaps. Then you start to trim and sharpen the dialogue ... You ... produce a horrible-looking manuscript ... What is it, though? Have you got the gall to call it a novel?’379

Writing Martha as a personality in my novel was hard. Grenville had the same difficulty. She writes that the Wiseman character was her biggest problem and that she wanted to get him right, but found that he was ‘out of focus’. Her solution was to picture him, not as her ancestor, but as ‘the Wiseman character’.380 She drew back from the historical details and changed the lead character’s name to William Thornhill. This sent her in a different direction:

> Changing his name changed my relationship to the character. My great-great-great-grandfather had stepped out of the book, taking his name with him…[his story] wasn’t the one I was telling.381

From there she went on to build the Thornhill character imaginatively, along with his family and other minor characters (such as neighbours and children), incorporating selective elements of Wiseman’s story. She had moved some distance from factual history and into fiction.382 She felt free to pick and choose what to include. Johnson (2011) quotes Grenville:
History, for a greedy novelist like me is just one more place to pillage … What we’re after, of course is stories. Having found them, we proceed to fiddle with them to make them the way we want them to be, rather than the way we really were. We get it wrong, wilfully, knowingly. 383

Although I admire _The Secret River_, I did not want to move too far away from Martha. I didn’t know her, but I did have a few family stories. My grandmother wrote about her own life, the Australian bush and the Clarke robbery. Some details were passed on to her by Barney. I remember meeting him when I was about four years old. He was an old man in work clothes, wearing muddied gumboots, and he lived on a farm. Together we walked through a dusty paddock to a shed, open back and front. Inside there was a horse and cow corralled by roughhewn timber rails which divided the space into a stall and storage area. I’ve often wondered why that memory remains so clear to me – perhaps because of a photo my father took. Barney gave me a small canvas bag. It held three tiny rocks flecked with gold. The stones glimmered along rough cracks at first but faded with time. Later, my father explained that Barney had gold fever – ever-ready to go fossicking. The thought of gold fields and my family history intrigued me.

Writers like Atwood, Barnes, Carey, Garner and Malouf use documented facts, and then in-fill subjective experience and conversations. This method involves investigating the subject and then inventing small and large narrative units in order to convey the continuum of personal experiences while striving to strike a balance between what is known and adding human interactions. I decided that whatever I created about Martha’s life would be instructed by my research, yet incorporate what I imagined would have been her psychological reactions and conversations.

Subjective experiences require both a narrator and dialogue. I wondered about Martha’s voice and how I would create imagined conversations. Strohm (2014) writes that, in the English language tradition, a writer as early as Chaucer notes that speech changes over the centuries make the reconstruction of daily lives a challenge. 384 As an example, I found Martha’s choice of ‘deplore’ on William’s headstone at odds with current usage and changed it to ‘lament’. 385 As I was attempting to go back
150 years and imaginatively inhabit the character of Martha, I asked myself to what extent I would need to research and include distinctive idioms.

One dilemma was whether with characters from the past or different cultures, I should use my ordinary 21st century language. Readers might not relate to what Grenville calls ‘slightly antique’ words. I resolved to try to use contemporary terms where possible, but needed to re-assess at times. For example, when it came to the ‘Brummagen Loto’ I did not know what it meant, but a dictionary search found that it is a vulgar form of ‘Birmingham’ and was used cynically to indicate that an article, such as those made at Birmingham, was rubbish. I decided to retain that term as it was part of a direct quote. I’ve refrained from using other ‘antique’ words as I believe that language should be chosen with discretion to give authenticity without confusion.

Research gave some insight into work and social norms through the use of words that were unfamiliar to me. For example, I didn’t know how society in Martha’s day dealt with human waste and was delighted to come across the term ‘necessary house’ – for a garden dunny – in Steedman (2009). It added historical accuracy, yet didn’t need interpretation. That term has disappeared from our lexicon yet the meaning was clear and would be useful in telling Martha’s story. This approach avoided creating an extensive glossary or using in-text explanations which could make reading a burden.

As well as appropriate language, I needed other characters to flesh out Martha’s social life. I knew something about her family and Saltash, but needed to develop a life on board the Margaret and social networks in Hobart and New South Wales. Convict records contained details of the women on that ship, so I researched these in order to introduce fellow travellers into the fiction.

I began with Madame la Grange. She was Louisa la Grange, aged 26, a governess. Colonial officials recorded the distinctive features of all convicts. This was designed to be useful in identifying them, especially if one escaped. They described Louisa as having brown hair, light blue eyes, a scar under her chin and a face that was slightly pockmarked. She spoke French, knew some Italian and could teach fancy work. She was tried at the Central Criminal Court in October 1842 for, among other things, stealing
diamonds worth £200 from the dwelling house of Mr Metcalf in Pall Mall.\(^{390}\) She claimed she was the daughter of a captain in the French navy and came from Bordeaux. Her sentence was 10 years.\(^{391}\) For me, she was a gift, larger than life and one who charmed officials resulting in greater freedom.\(^{392}\) Though I don’t know whether Martha ever met her after they landed, I decided to use her; making her a go-between for Martha and a fellow convict. In addition, her memoirs gave descriptions of Hobart at the time Martha was there.\(^{393}\)

Louisa was not typical. Many on the *Margaret* came from poorer classes.\(^{394}\) Ann Baker was a laundress aged 35, who was tried in July 1842. She had a dark complexion, hair and eyebrows. Her eyes were hazel and she was five feet one and a half inches tall. She was sent to Van Diemen’s Land for seven years – her crime was stealing bacon from Mr Harris.\(^{395}\) She was married with four children, pregnant when arrested, gave birth after conviction, and took that child with her.\(^{396}\) The surgeon was ‘dissatisfied’ with her. In Hobart she gave birth to an illegitimate child in November 1845.\(^{397}\)

Sophia Dobson, housemaid, stole a jug and a pair of scissors, but had been arrested before for stealing clothing. She was 48 years of age, five foot three and a half inches tall. She had black to grey hair, grey eyes, faint blue marks on her left hand, a scar at the corner of her left eye and another at the corner of her mouth on the left side; the surgeon reported her as ‘dirty’.\(^{398}\)

Younger women were Matilda Bond,\(^{399}\) Ann Curtain,\(^{400}\) and Mary Briggs.\(^{401}\) Bond was 22 years old, with a fair complexion and freckles on her face. Her hair was brown and eyes hazel. She was a housemaid from Connemara, but was tried for stealing a watch in Liverpool. On board she was ‘noisy, quarrelsome and disobedient’.

Ann Curtain came from Spitalfields in London. She was an unmarried housemaid aged 23, with brown hair and hazel eyes. Her arms were tattooed. She was convicted for shoplifting.\(^{402}\) The surgeon wrote that she was noisy and talkative. I changed her name to ‘Minnie’ in the novel to prevent confusion with Ann Baker.

Mary Briggs was an Irish ‘nurse girl’ from Galway. She was 17, five feet one inch tall. Her hair and eyebrows were red, eyes grey, nose small,
chin dimpled, face and arms were freckled. The surgeon reported her behaviour as ‘middling’.

Then there was Elizabeth Collings (Martha’s co-accused) – the surgeon noted she was ‘idle, often among the men’. Working from this, I described her behaving in a flirtatious way in the Saltash court – in contrast I wrote Martha as modest. Perhaps unconsciously I wished to protect my ancestor. It seemed to me that her early family shopkeeping background made it unlikely that she’d rob a neighbour’s store.

I decided to use these women’s backgrounds to create social interactions and add interest to the sea voyage. But I felt free to invent and add others, for example, stories about those who died on the voyage – deaths at sea were common. I knew from clinical practice that people respond to death in different ways: there are those who love the deceased and experience grief; others may feel little or nothing; a few might rejoice because of envy or some such negative emotion; and others may be glad to be alive. So, I wrote of conflict and callousness following the deaths.

In order to build on Martha’s experience in Van Diemen’s Land, I researched social conditions, using colonial records and contemporary newspapers. I decided to pillage Hobart politics and scandals to add zest to her suburban existence. Convict records gave details for William Henry Guest (her second husband), and local records told of their marriage and licences as innkeepers. Most of their story follows the records, but there were three instances when their daughter Mary Ann was mentioned: her birth; her injury when out walking; and her appearance at court in a child abuse case. The last two happened a year apart, but I decided to collapse the time frame because it seemed that, having introduced her, the events belonged together.

Once the couple moved to New South Wales, there was a wealth of information available through the Moruya Historical Society, and the Bega Valley Genealogy Society. In addition, newspapers and family stories informed the text. I felt an obligation to acknowledge these details, but knew there was a risk that faithfulness to the records might not allow the fiction the kind of energy readers expect.
As Atwood points out, the specifics of everyday life were not written down, because ‘everyone knew them’. Once I decided to write Martha’s life as fiction, I read the Hobart papers, memoirs, diaries and letters of the times while trying to get an idea of what her daily life was like.

Eventually there came a time when I thought that her story was just about finished but, on re-reading, realised that William Guest’s character was not fully developed. So, although I initially set out to demonstrate that Martha, a mere convict, was able to contribute to the development of the Colony, I came to believe that the fiction was incomplete without William Guest’s back story to explain the challenges he brought to the marriage; that is, the text needed the drama of William’s war experiences to give insight into his later erratic behaviour. His psychological state would have impacted severely on the family and this meant that, in addition to Martha’s other problems, she had domestic conflicts to deal with. Hence, upon discussion and agreement with my supervisor, I decided to begin the novel with the story of his time fighting in the Carlist war in Spain (around 10,000 words). This gives the precursors of his deterioration in later life. That narrative is an updated and edited version of my earlier original work which was a small part of a Masters in Interpretative Writing that I completed through Charles Sturt University in 2011.
Chapter 6
Reflections

At this stage, I questioned whether I’d got it right. Was Martha a thief and a liar? Was William simply an abusive robber and alcoholic? I knew I could be biased; so I reviewed the evidence. It was meagre and what wasn’t there was just as interesting as the official reports.

Martha was convicted of theft. The records show:

Martha Gregory
Convict record: Goal report before convicted ‘Bad’ on her indent, yet the documents with her petition show ‘supposed to have been honest’;
Placement with Barrett; ticket of leave; permission to marry; pardon.
In New South Wales she was licensed as an innkeeper and land titles show that she bought and sold property as well as being a developer, building Bega House

There is no evidence of criminality in her family or later life. Her family pleaded for clemency and her mother left her money in her will. There are no details of what she did for Barrett. There were no crimes or misdemeanours recorded in Australia.

As for William, his London criminal history at first led me to believe that he was poorly educated, yet this image did not fit with the humorous challenges and letters he sent to Hobart newspapers.

William Guest
1841 newspaper report: well dressed in court; police describe him as a ‘man of very bad character’; sent to the house of corrections
1842 convicted of housebreaking & larceny; sentenced to 15 years transportation
1843 Ships surgeon ‘well behaved, unsettled in his mind’; there is a notation that he was a soldier
1843-1849 various offences in Hobart – for example, refusing to work on a plea of inability; absent without leave; misconduct; driving a cab without licence
1863 vagrancy; billiards without a licence; fight at large
1866 exposing his person but the charge was dropped

There were no clues to his education; details of where he served in Spain; why he stole when he owned a cabriolet and four houses in London; what he did with the funds in the Bank of England (£200, a lot of money at that
time) that his father left him; what the surgeon observed that led him to
describe William as ‘unsettled in his mind’.

In completing this exercise I tried to look through the spaces between the
‘facts’ and see sufficient light to justify building an account of Martha’s
life. Based on her later career, I decided that Martha was probably strong,
independent and a clever business woman who cared for her family.
Whereas, William seems to have been intelligent, a man who liked
challenges and adventure, but one who was flawed, quick tempered and
who probably suffered as a result of his Spanish war experiences.

I cannot claim that the Martha I have created is someone that she
would recognise. But I hope that my research has helped me come close to
what Griffiths’ suggests is the essence of good history, that is a ‘… balance
between empathy and perspective, intimacy and distance’.\textsuperscript{405} My work is
fiction and I acknowledge that, although it is based on historical records, I
cannot be sure how closely it resembles her life.

This journey has taught me that there are always multiple
interpretations, there is never one story, and as Merwick and Atwood both
point out, interpreting history is difficult. I cannot be sure that Martha
would write her story this way, nor whether she would approve of what I
have written. Given early colonial attitudes to convicts it is probable that, if
she wrote her story, she would gild the lily and, like Louisa la Grange,\textsuperscript{406}
would invent a respectable explanation for her journey to Hobart.

From the status of convict, Martha went on to achieve a lot and I
believe should be given credit for that. She contributed to the development
of colonial society: both in business and raising a family. Oxley (1996)
writes that in 1840 convict and ex-convict women accounted for 43% of the
labour force.\textsuperscript{407} She suggests that some historians had a blind spot about
female convicts and argues that, rather than being immoral harlots, it is
likely they ‘did contribute to colonial development’.\textsuperscript{408} She asks:

Who bore the children? Who suckled them and coddled them?
Who worked the big and little houses? Who made the meals? Who
worked the nurseries? Who made the clothes? Who laundered them? Who battled at the frontier?\textsuperscript{409}
By 1896 when she died, Martha had established businesses and owned a property portfolio. She, like many other convict women, worked, nurtured her family and helped the colony prosper.

This exegesis contains some of the recorded details of her life; the fiction fills in my characters’ thoughts and interactions.
APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Petitions for Martha Gregory and Elizabeth Collings
[Transcribed from Female Convicts Research Centre Inc. web site.]

First Petition

The prisoner’s parents represent the affliction into which they are plagued by the misconduct of their daughters, and pray as this is their first offence and on consideration of their youth that their sentence may be mitigated.

To the Right Honourable Sir James Graham, Her Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State.

Saltash Cornwall, 24th October 1842

The Petition of Philip and Elizabeth Parsons and of Henry and Elizabeth Goodman of the Borough of Saltash in the County of Cornwall.

Most Humbly Sheweth:

That your Petitioners are the parents of two daughters who are married and whose names are Elizabeth Collings and Martha Gregory.

That your Petitioners said daughters were convicted of larceny at the Quarter Sessions recently held at the said Borough and have been sentenced to transportation for the term of seven years.

That your Petitioners note on the [       ][         ] impugning the conduct of the Magistrate yet [      ] with grief and bitterly deploring the degradation and ruin which the [       ] of their unhappy daughters had thus brought upon themselves venture most humbly to state for your merciful consideration:

That the offence of which they have been found guilty is their first.
That they are both young, Elizabeth Collings being only nineteen and Martha Gregory who is far advanced in a state of pregnancy, is not yet eighteen years of age.
That your Petitioners most humbly and earnestly implore your merciful consideration of the case of their said unhappy daughters and earnestly pray that you will be pleased to grant a mitigation of their punishment, thereby hoping while such a mitigation [     ] punishment might satisfy the offended laws of the country, the consequences of [     ] may be impressed upon their feelings as to produce a thorough [      ] of their future lives.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray
Philip Parsons and Elizabeth Parsons, Parents of Elizabeth Collings
Henry Goodman and Betsey Goodman, Parents of Martha Gregory

Second Petition

To the Right Honourable Sir James Graham, Secretary of State for the Home Department.

The most humble Petition of Henry Goodman father of Martha Gregory, a prisoner in Saltash Gaol. Saltash Cornwall near Devonport, 24th November 1842

Sheweth:

That your Petitioner with extreme regret for being thus troublesome, but begs leave to state
That his daughter is now in Saltash Prison Cornwall under the sentence of transportation for 7 years for stealing of calico from a shop in Saltash.
That she is about 7 months in the state of pregnancy, 18 years of age, the first time in that state it being the first year of her marriage.
Your Petitioner therefore asks humbly [and] prays your Honour will be graciously pleased to take the case into consideration and grant her to be allowed to lie in there, or to be placed in the Penitentiary for her accouchement and there to remain if it should seem meet, when she may make herself useful, and be the means of her repentance and caution her from the evil of keeping bad company in future, and restore her to her former good character, that she may be again useful to society and be a guide to her future conduct.

Imploring sympathy with compliance and an answer and a forgiveness of this intrusion in consequence of her age, and very unpleasant and deplorable present situation, mercy is solicited.

And your Petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray.
Henry Goodman

Reply
Let the prisoner proceed on her voyage

Medical report of her pregnancy
She is fit for the voyage tho’ pregnant and would be taken care of if delivered, it is the present course.

Embarked for V.D.L. Transport – G.G
Martha Gregory aged 19 and Elizabeth Collings aged 19, Caltash Quarter Sessions, October 1842. Larceny. 7 years transportation for both.
Goal report = Collings – character bad
Goal report = Gregory – supposed to have been honest

Available at http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/docs/petitions/MarthaGregory_ElizabethCollings_Margaret1843.pdf
APPENDIX 2

UNION HALL – Yesterday William Guest, a well-dressed young man, was brought before Mr. Cottingham, charged with being found on the premises of Mr. Evans, in Tooley-street, under the following circumstances:-

Mr. Evans stated that on the preceding evening as he was going into his counting-house, he observed the prisoner and another man standing in the passage, and they tried to elude his observation, but he went forward and asked them what they were doing there. They, however, gave him an evasive answer, upon which Mr. Evans threatened to call the police, then the prisoner said they were waiting for a gentleman whom they appointed to meet there, and at the same time pulled a life-preserver out of his pocket, and, with an oath, said that he would strike Mr. Evans with it. Witness, however, called for the police, when both the prisoner and his companion took to their heels, and on being pursued the latter was secured, after having thrown the life-preserver away. The complainant added, that he was in the habit of having large sums of money deposited in his office, close to which he found the parties standing together, and that there was only one clerk in attendance there, who might very easily be overpowered by men, one of whom carried such a deadly weapon.

A witness stated that on hearing the cry of “Stop thief,” and seeing the prisoner run down Tooley-street, he stopped him, and saw him drop the life-preserver, heavily loaded at both ends, at his feet.

Mr. Cottingham asked the prisoner what explanation he wished to give on the subject, and what business he had on Mr. Evans’s premises, especially with a life-preserver, with which he threatened that gentleman.

The prisoner said that he was a cab proprietor, that he was the owner of the houses, Nos. 17, 18, 19 and 20 in Weymouth Street Vauxhall, all of which had been bequeathed him by his deceased father, and that he and his friend were waiting for two young ladies, to take them to the theatre, when Mr. Evans came up, and addressed them as if they were thieves.

Mr. Cottingham asked the prisoner if his friend or the young ladies whom he asserted they were to have met to take to the theatre were in court.

The prisoner, looking round, said that of course the ladies were not there and that he could not think of even giving their names, in case they should be published, and their characters would then be at stake.

Mr. Cottingham – Write down the names of the young ladies. My only object is to ascertain whether there is any foundation for what you say.

The prisoner declined doing that, on the ground of not wishing to expose the daughters of a respectable tradesman.
Mr. Cottingham – The circumstances under which you were taken into custody are fraught with suspicion, and before I can think of letting you go I must know something more of your character.

The prisoner said that he held up the key of one of his houses to Mr. Evans, and not a life-preserver, of which he knew nothing.

A policeman of the L division stated that he knew the prisoner to be the associate of thieves; that he was well known amongst the ‘swell mob.’

The prisoner said that there was no use in disguising the fact any longer; that he was intimate with several of the gang termed the ‘family men’, but that he was never in custody himself before. He added, that every syllable he had uttered about his being a cab proprietor, the owner of four houses, and everything else he had said was true.

Several policemen belonging to the L division here entered the court, who stated that they knew the prisoner to be a man of very bad character.

The magistrate said that he required no further proof of the prisoner’s real character, and committed him for six weeks to the House of Correction.
APPENDIX 3

The Courier, Hobart, 10 January 1857

The Ministerial Crisis

THE Finance Minister having failed in his scheme to give satisfaction to the Public, in compliance with the request from certain Heads of Departments, the undersigned begs to suggest a plan to extricate this gentleman from his difficulties by recommending the formation of a ministry by a Loto scheme. A certain sum to be paid by all parties requiring a place, the tickets to be shuffled in a bag, previous to the drawing commencing so that the undersigned may stand as good a chance for the Premiership as anyone else.

As proof of good faith should the Finance Minister adopt the suggestion, the undersigned is willing to go halves with him in his undertaking provided the Finance Minister approves, and will go halves in the Humbug Loto, now going on according to the following plan. A prompt and polite reply is of course expected, as to acceptance or rejection of the proposed co-partnership in the above schemes.

Humbug, Humbug, Humbug.

GUEST’S GRAND ANTIPODEAN HUMBUG LOTO.

The Undersigned being anxious, in these hard times to dispose of a useless stock and accumulated rubbish, has resolved according to the convenient fashion of the day, to hold a GRAND ANTIPODEAN HUMBUG LOTO.

With ALL PRIZES and NO BLANKS and the lowest prize to consist of a pint of excellent swipes.

The list of prizes is too long for the limits of a mere advertisement, and it is probable that the proprietor, if he meets with encouragement, will publish a catalogue for extensive circulation prior to the drawing. He subjoins a list of the most valuable and costly articles:-

The highest prize will be a bottle of superior port wine, very black and very bitter. Loto value, 10s.; shop price 2s 6d; intrinsic cost, 9d. Cape Madeira sherry, slightly brandied, warm in the mouth and full flavoured, and peculiarly adapted to the taste of the fair sex. Loto value 9s; shop price, 2s; intrinsic cost, 8d. Real Jamaica rum, manufactured of the worst East India arrack – a first chop article. Excellent Colonial bottled beer, branded Bass, Taylor, Gunners, &c., in pints, quarts, dozens, and half-dozens – a much admired drink and in great request.

In short GUEST’S GRAND LOTO will comprise any number of prizes, in pots, pints, gills, glasses, nips, and nobblers, and any purchaser, by paying a “Bob” may be accommodated.
with a “drawing” from 6 am to 10 pm daily. Sundays excepted, which is carried on incessantly by the proprietor in person.

N.B. – Any article whose Loto value is 10s may be purchased at the counter, in accordance with the rule adopted by the proprietors of the Brummagem Loto for 2d 6d, and every other article in the same proportion. This rule will be strictly adhered to in consequence of the great expense of advertising, printing satin bills, posters, &c. &c.

The Proprietor would add, that he has been induced to bring forward this GRAND HUMBUG LOTO from motives of pure philanthropy – to advance the morals of the community – and to set a praiseworthy example to the rising generation by engendering a spirit of reckless gambling, and to increase the business of the publican and pawnbroker; also as the best mode of benefiting the regular trade of the legitimate shopkeeper.

Tickets may be had, price one shilling, on application to

WILLIAM GUEST,
Good Woman, Argyle-street.
Hobart Town, January 10

The Hobarton Mercury, Hobart, 19 January 1857

Country saved at Last. Copy of a letter from
The Dust Collector, Free Man
to Mr. William Guest.
Back Side, Friday
Evening,

To William Guest, Esq.,
Good Woman Hotel.

My Dear Guest,
I take the earliest opportunity of thanking you for the earnest solicitude shown by you in this day’s Mercury, on my behalf, by devising so wise and statesmanlike a scheme, to extricate me from my present most embarrassing position.

Upon a careful perusal, I fully concur in your admirable suggestions.
With regard to the co-partnership I should be happy to fall in with your
views, were it not that I fear you would require me to be as prompt with the money as with my reply to your offer. The fact is, my dear Guest, you know the Treasury Chests are empty, and I lent all my available cash to a very particular friend, only three weeks ago, to enable him to get his spirits out of bond, he having by means – not necessary now to explain, smelt, (pardon the vulgarity of the expression) a rat! But if you would do me the pleasure to dine with me at the Back Side to-morrow, we can, after the removal of the cloth, further discuss the matter. Permit me, my dear Guest, to subscribe myself,

Your very grateful,

And much obliged,

The Dust Collector

Free Man
APPENDIX 4

The Hobart Town Mercury, Hobart, 22 May 1857

THE LICENSING ACT

To Francis Smith Esquire M.H.A. Attorney-General, &c.&c.
(Per favour of the Mercury)

Sir, Having heard from your own lips that it is your intention to prepare an Amended
Licensed Victualler’s Act, and believing also, that you desire such an Act not only to be a
just one, but an Act that will give satisfaction both to the Licensed Victualler and to the
public.

I – at the risk, perhaps of being considered presumptuous, – beg leave respectfully
to submit for your consideration, a few crude ideas which have presented themselves to
my mind upon the subject.

Now, Sir, in order to begin at the beginning; – In large and civilized communities
like ours, licensed houses are either necessary or they are not, and I have the authority of
wiser heads than mine for asserting that even houses of a far more questionable character
are, in large and populous cities, as necessary as Parish Churches. If it be admitted that
public houses are requisite – and admitted it must be, or where the necessity for legislating
with regard to them? I contend that the holders of them ought not to be subjected to
harsher restrictions than are imposed on any other class of tradesmen.

If the traffic be a legitimate one, and, as it is sanctioned by law it must be so, why
should the Government, in the exercise of its paternal authority, render it degrading by
enacting an enormous tribute, imposing heavy and crushing penalties, and surrounding the
Licensed Victualler with a dyke of restrictions alike injurious to his interests and
humiliating to his character.

Not only is the holder of a licence subjected to these unnecessary and injurious
restrictions but he is afforded no adequate protection from competition after he has
embarked in this trade. If you insist upon it that John Barleycorn, the publican, shall, at his
own expense, burn a light for the benefit of passers by; and if you subject him, at all hours
– night and day, to the surveillance of the police, and to many other painful annoyances
from which all other tradesmen are exempt; and, if the said John Barleycorn submits
himself to these and performs all things required at his hands; - surely, surely, in return for
his obedience to, and compliance with, these regulations, the Government ought to see,
that, in all other respects, his interests were kept inviolable. But, instead of this, how
cruelly are these interests sacrificed! Equity, Sir, one would think, should prevent the
perpetuation of a system which, to say the least of it, is not honest. If you take the annual £50 from me for a licensed house, upon what principle of fairness can you, immediately afterwards, thwart my view and destroy my prospects by granting a licence to my next door neighbour? By doing so you not only divide a loaf barely sufficient for one, but you divide a loaf for which I have already paid you £50.

This system, Sir, of granting licences, indiscriminately, to all who may apply for them, is a great error in all cases; and, in most, it is a grievous wrong. It is the fruitful source of many of the complaints made for breaches of the Licensing Act. A publican, who has every shilling he is possessed of involved in his house, and is probably in debt besides, is driven, by this practice, to shifts he would otherwise scorn. It compels him submit to many insults and annoyances, and to have recourse to greasy pole climbing, dog fighting, cock fighting, fancy balls, masque balls, and other “forced meat balls”, in order to eke out a living for himself and his children, which living he would far rather obtain in any other manner. Indeed, I feel convinced, that there is not a publican in the Island who would not infinitely prefer taking £20 per week in an orderly and decent way, than a much greater sum, in the same period, by keeping a riotous and disorderly house.

Such being the case, Sir, I would respectfully submit that a clause should be introduced into the New Act, depriving the Bench of the power of granting new licenses, unless it be proved beyond a doubt, that such another house is absolutely required in the locality for which the application is made. By so doing you will perform an act of justice to the freeholders of public house property; many of whom have, at a great expense, erected and fitted their premises for this branch of trade only; and you will confer a lasting benefit to the present holders of licenses as well, many of whom by years of industry and economy acquired the means of entering into this business in the hope of earning a subsistence for themselves and their families. Nor should it be forgotten that many of these were induced to do so upon their belief in the assertion made by the Government, some two years and a half ago, to the effect – that it was its intention to diminish the number of licensed houses rather than increase them. They thought the Government was less mutable than it has shown itself to be. At the last annual meeting of Justices every Jack, Bill, and Tom, who made an application for a license had it granted, to the manifest ruin of the older publicans, to the injury of their creditors, the benefit of the Insolvent Court, and the still further debasement of the lower orders of society.

A certain gentleman who shall be nameless, held out as a bait (unreadable words) and was old enough to say that it would be a boon to society if the number of public houses were doubled, and the license fee reduced by one half. Now I happen to hold a contrary opinion, and, I believe that most of my fellow tradesmen, as well as the whole of the religious body, will concur with me in that opinion. I think that it would be a great benefit if the present number of public houses were reduced by one half, even if the “License Fee” were doubled. Society would be benefitted by this; and, there are some who
hold the opinion, that, if several of the present licensed houses were abolished, the
community would not object to compensate the present landlords of them for any loss they
might sustain. I am not in a position, however, to assert this; but one thing I can assert, Sir,
and that with much emphasis, that to grant additional licenses, without their being
demanded by the rapid growth of our city, or an unexpected augmentation of our
population, is opposed to all principles of equity and good faith; and is an unjust
interference with those rights and privileges, to the enjoyment of which the holders of
licences became entitled upon the payment of the annual fee to Her Majesty’s
Government.

In conclusion, Sir, depend upon it, that the respectability of the Licensed Victualler
will never be secured until he is enabled to get an honest and sufficient living by the
exercise of his craft or calling.

Yours respectfully
WILLIAM GUEST
APPENDIX 5

The Hobart Town Mercury, Hobart, 30 November 1857

To the Benevolent

We the Undersigned Total Abstainers, in making this appeal on behalf of the suffering publicans, submit the following facts for the consideration of the Benevolent:-

We find that the total Revenue of the Colony is estimated at £179,541, and that, of this sum the vendors and consumers of strong drinks directly or indirectly, contribute no less a sum than £120,000 or thereabouts.

We believe that the existing number of publicans might still have managed to pay this enormous proportion of the General Revenue; but we fear that any addition to the present number of public houses would prevent them, and cause the ruin of both new and old. It is to avert this sad calamity, until a more enlightened Legislature takes the place of the present one, and does them justice, that we now solicit and on their behalf. If they cease to pay the vast sum exacted from them, we shall be called upon to pay our fair share towards supporting and carrying on the Government. It is this which induces us to make our appeal; for, without the drinking portion of the community having paid so much, we could not possibly have, hitherto, paid our share.

Our consistent Legislature has passed a Bill to restrain drunkenness; and, immediately afterwards it says – Let us make a free trade of it! Let there be as much competition as possible; and let every attraction be held out to tempt people to drink. And the Publicans also say – “Make a free trade of it; but – knock off the licence Fee, and all other restrictions, and make us as free from penalties as the Grocer and the Draper.”

Further – we wish it to be distinctly understood that it is not from love of the Publicans that we are induced to make this appeal, but – because we foresee in their ruin our own downfall. In other words, we shall have not only to pay the two-thirds of the Revenue which they now provide for, but what is much worse, we shall be robbed of our grievance when they fall – we shall have nothing to abuse!

Finally – We are afraid that we have gone too far. We have petitioned against them; we have hired persons to give lectures against them; we have preached against them; and we are afraid that we have utterly ruined them; and, should such be the case, who will
then have to pay the piper? Who will provide the vast amount of Revenue the Licensed
Victuallers now contribute?

To avert such a calamity, we make this appeal on their behalf. The smallest donation will
be thankfully received by the self-elected Treasurer –

William Guest, Good Woman, Argyle-street.
James Pump, Thomas Cistern, William Well, Charles Rivulet, Henry Water, Robert
Bucket, Daniel Milkpail, Sarah Teaurn, Emily Coffee, Charlotte Pop, Ebenezer Coldblood,
Timothy Freezebelly, Augustus Gipes, John Tank, Obediah Snowball, Zephaniah
Tealeaves.
APPENDIX 6

The Hobart Town Mercury, Hobart, 7 September 1857

POLICE OFFICE – FRIDAY
Before Messrs. Tarleton and Giblin.

Robbery – William Burgess, William Thomas, and Jessie George were charged with robbing, on the 1st of this month, Isaac Chapping, of the sum of £38. The robbery took place in Warwick-street. The prosecutor stated that he had been in the London Wine Vaults, where he saw the prisoner Burgess and engaged him to go to the Huon. Immediately prior to this he had drawn £38. 9s from the Bank of Australasia, all of which he had, and a few shillings besides, on his person at the time. It was in his left hand trousers pocket. Subsequently he went with Burgess to some place or other, but he had no recollection of where it was. He remembered the two other prisoners being there, before whom he took out his money, and gave a note to some one to pay for drink; and he remembered, also, asking for his hat, but after that he remembered nothing for a long time.

Something must have been placed in his drink. The first time he remembered anything he was in the street. It must have been then near four o’clock in the morning. He saw the two male prisoners walking close to where he was. He spoke to them after he had felt and found his money gone, and told them that he had been robbed. He asked them what they were doing when they replied that they were waiting to help him to put his things on board the barge. He met a constable and gave him information. He then made the best of his way home, and next morning gave information to D.C. Hamilton, who told him to be at the office again at nine o’clock [The notes were here produced by D.C. Dorsett, and several of them were sworn to by the prosecutor.] He could positively swear he never gave the money away.

Mr. E.H. Bulmer deposed that he was teller of the Bank of Australasia. The prosecutor Chapping had an account at the Bank. He remembered his having called on the 1st of the month, and drawing out £38 9s. The money was given to him in £1 notes. He should not be able to recognise the notes again. The prosecutor was quite sober when he drew the money.

Mrs. Martha Guest, the wife of Mr. William Guest, the Landlord of the Good Woman in Argyle-street, deposed that the prisoner (Jessie George) came to her house in the middle of the night. She could not state the hour as she had been asleep. She was aroused by a knocking at the front door which she took no notice of for some time. At last she went down and Jessie George and the prisoner William Thomas came in, and called for something to drink. They asked her (Mrs. Guest) if she would take care of some money for them until morning. She promised to do so; when Jessie George gave her a roll of notes saying, that there was six and twenty Pounds in it. Witness did not count them. They then
left the house. She saw nothing of the Prisoner Burgess. About half-past six o’clock Jessie George came again and had something to drink. Whilst she was there the other two prisoners came in and also had something to drink. Whilst they were drinking D.C. Dorsett came in and apprehended them, but she could not say for what. She did not hand to him (Dorsett) the roll of notes then. It was some time after that she saw D.C. Dorsett coming by again, with the prisoners with him, when she called him, and handed to him the roll of notes exactly as she had received them from Jessie George. Dorsett counted them in her presence. There were thirty-six or thirty-seven one pound notes – she could not say which. One of the Notes was torn. It did not strike her that there was anything wrong at the time, although her husband was vexed with her for having taken it.

Mr. Tarleton said that Mrs. Guest had acted perfectly right in what she had done. The money had been given by her to the Police as soon as she had found that there was anything wrong.

Examination continued: The prisoners Thomas and George were tenants of hers. She could not say whether they had sent for any drink on the evening before as she was from home.

Detective Dorsett deposed that he had apprehended the three prisoners in Mr. Guest’s House in Argyle-street on the morning of the 2nd, in consequence of information he had received. He told them the charge against them - viz. stealing about £39. They said nothing. He searched them but found nothing but some small change upon them. He then took the prisoners to their residence in Warwick-street where he found some silver and an umbrella. On his return, as he passed Mrs. Guest’s she called him and told him that the prisoner had given her a roll of notes- which she handed to him in the presence of the prisoners. Mrs. Guest stated to him that the prisoner Jessie George had told her that there was six and twenty pounds in the roll. He then counted them and found that there was six and thirty. Jessie George then admitted having given the notes to Mrs. Guest, but denied having stolen them. The prisoner Thomas said that he would bring her – meaning Jessie George – out of it on account of her children. Burgess said he was drunk and knew nothing about it. The notes produced were the notes he received from Mrs. Guest.

The Prisoners were remanded for the evidence of Mr. William Guest. After which they were fully committed to take their trial; the female stating that the Prosecutor had given her the money to take care of.
APPENDIX 7

*The Hobart Town Daily Mercury, Hobart, 5 September 1859*

PEDESTRIANISM

On Saturday afternoon the much talked of walking match between Mr. William Guest, mine Host of the Good Woman, Argyle street and the celebrated pedestrian Allan McKean came off from the sixth mile stone on the main line of road to Launceston. This match, which has created a large amount of interest, was made on the following terms: McKean gave Guest one minute’s start and bet him £30 to £25 that he would be at the one mile stone first. Before arriving at the trysting post, from McKean’s well known Victorian and Sydney reputation, the betting was all in his favour: and, in some instances, three to two in “fivers” and five to four was offered and freely taken. Just prior to the start, however, when Guest stripped his wiry appearance induced a change to come o’er the spirit of the dream, and some difficulty was experienced at getting on at “evens”. By this time a large number of vehicles of all descriptions had arrived, and the excitement, aided by the scorching rays of Sol, ran up to fever heat. At this moment there were at least five hundred persons present.

About 10 minutes past 3, the Umpires and Referees having been chosen, and Mr. F.D. Hamilton, the Starter having been duly supplied with a stop-watch, the pedestrians were brought to the starting post, and whilst the Starter was regulating his watch Mr. Guest gamely stepped forward and offered to back himself at “evens” for a “score”.

> “Thus spake the Chief,
> And proudly eyed the foe”

But there were no takers! At the proper signal Guest went away at score shewing at all events that his powers had not been overrated. He walked at least from 160 to 180 yards before the minute had expired for his opponent to follow. The minute allowed having expired McKean bounded away at such a terrific pace as made the Guestites look exceedingly cerulean; and in the first mile narrowed the distance between them by from 60 to 80 yards. The walking of McKean at this time was truly magnificent shewing him to be a thorough artist in his profession. Ten to six was loudly offered upon him but no takers.

The crowds of spectators now began to increase considerably and by the time the second mile was accomplished the number present had increased to over one thousand.

During this mile Guest slightly improved his position, his up-hill work being superior to that of his antagonist; and that position was maintained with but slight alteration on either side till they arrived at the top of the rise from O’Brien’s Bridge, when Guest shewed over
four Telegraph posts ahead of his rival who was now being “nursed” by several of his friends. All along the Race Course flat Guest gradually drew ahead; and by the time he had reached Cooley’s he had widened the distance from four to nine telegraph posts. It was evident now, barring an accident, that McKean had no chance; and any reasonable odds were offered upon Guest without effect. At this point the excitement was very great; both sides of the road were literally thronged with carriages and pedestrians, some of the former containing many of the elite of the city with Members of both Houses of Parliament; indeed the numbers continued to increase up to the one mile (winning) stone at which spot there could not have been less than five thousand persons congregated.

From the Maypole Hill, which Guest ascended in splendid style, the match was considered over, for McKean, who showed great distress, evidently being in anything but trim for walking a long distance, dropped his arms, and seemed to consider that as far as the race was concerned it was already settled. And so the result proved, for Guest came gallantly down the hill and was declared the winner, amidst the ringing acclamations of the crowd. McKean arrived between two and three minutes after his opponent.

The time has been variously estimated, some maintaining that Guest walked the five miles in 51 minutes, others believing it was under, and others that it was over that time. A similar difference of opinion exists as to the difference of time between the arrival of Guest and McKean at the winning post, some stating it to have been two minutes, and others three. As we came in with McKean we are unable to say which is correct. In the evening the stakes were given up at Mr. Pear’s Duke of Clarence, when Mr. Guest generously presented his opponent with five pounds.

Great credit is due to the city police under Mr. Superintendent Hamilton, for their endeavour to keep the road clear for the rival pedestrians, a task not easily accomplished, in consequence of the excited state of the spectators. This is certainly one of the most interesting sporting events which has occurred in Tasmania for some time.
Fingal Gold Field

To the Editor of the Hobarton Mercury

Sir, – Having returned from the Fingal Gold Fields after a sojourn of four weeks, I feel it my duty to record my opinion on a subject, at present exciting so much feverish interest in the public mind; and, more especially so, as so many reports are in circulation, calculated to mislead the community. I am anxious, in the first place, to lay before the public a few irrefutable facts and statements, as to the improvident manner, in which the public money is expended, as well as to the modus operandi, at present adopted by the diggers; the mode in which the stores are issued, and in reference to the general superintendence of the encampment &c.

With regard to the expenditure of the public money great dissatisfaction prevails, and a general opinion exists, that tenders ought to have been invited by the Committee for the various articles required, as such a course would have been fair and beneficial not only to the settlers but to the Diggers. It is asserted, but with what truth, I cannot say, that the Committee have purchased flour at £30 per ton, when a far superior article could be supplied and delivered at the diggings at £28: the Committee, also, have been paying £3 for cartage from the coast, when the settlers are giving £1.2s 6d. for the same: that damaged tea has been bought at Auction for £2 per chest, but shipped to the Committee at £6, while the picks, which had been promised at the invoice price of 4s.6d., were charged, and I presume paid for, at 7s.6d. Mr. Stanfield, likewise, has stated, that he can supply much better mutton at a much cheaper rate. These rumours are in constant circulation amongst both diggers, and settlers, but, as I have already stated, I cannot vouch for their accuracy.

The greatest evil, however, exists in the manner in which the men, after being supplied with tents, tools, and provisions, are allowed to work when, where, and how they please, and the Superintendent himself, admits, that he has no control whatever over them. It is a common thing for men to draw whatever they require from the stores, and, then, not do one stroke of work, to further the objects of the Committee, but to betake themselves up the creek, where gold is only found in small quantities, scratch together an ounce or two of the precious metal, and, having done so, return to town.

When I left, there were thirty men working at the creek, all of whom were receiving rations from the Committee Stores, and not one of them was using a single effort to
discover a payable Gold Field. It is thus obvious, that the whole management is bad and erroneous. Men ought to have been hired by the Committee, for, at least, three months, and have been paid a few shillings per week, to enable them to procure tobacco, soap, some necessary articles of clothing, and salt; for although the Committee supply meat, they do not find salt to “season it withal.”

With respect to the Superintendence, men who arrive at the diggings receive a tent, rations, and tools, pitch their tent where they please, and are not seen again by the Superintendent until they show themselves for their next week’s supply of food. In short, you may depend upon it, Mr. Editor, that the Government grant is being, and will be, entirely frittered away, without any beneficial result having been derived, from efforts which ought to have been wisely and efficiently directed.

I have now to refer to the buckets, respecting which your correspondent has made a very just complaint. I learn that Mr. Cox selected at Hobart Town a number of these essential articles, every way calculated for the work required; but, when the order arrived at Fingal, the buckets were found so small as to be not adapted for the purpose for which they were intended.

I and my party have sunk holes to various depths, and I have seen many holes sunk in various directions by other parties, and with the same result – no gold. My opinion therefore is, that the existence of gold in payable quantities in the present localities is very problematical.

If the Committee are wise, they will, before their means are exhausted, shift some, at least, of their parties to those places so specially pointed out by the Rev. Mr. Clarke, and particularly to the banks of the Gordon River, as indicated by that experienced geologist; for, if Mr. Clarke’s opinion was worthy of being asked, it is certainly worthy of being followed.

Yours &c.

W. Guest

Hobarton, 23rd July
APPENDIX 9

The Sydney Morning Herald, Sydney, 30 May 1870

On the east side of the main street, and abutting upon the creek were the butcher’s shop of Messrs. Pitfield and Fury, the Free Selection Inn, the store of Ah Sun and Co, stable of Mr. Pitfield, and, lastly the residence of Mrs. Burrows, widow. On the opposite side of the street were the stores, butchers’ shops, &c. of Mr. Cowdroy, together with the post-office, the Mining Registrar’s office, Mr. Pitfield’s store, and, lastly, the residence of Mr. Robertson. The Free Selection Inn had a long room at the rear of and parallel to the principal building, used as a billiard-room, in which there were two billiard tables. At the south end of the billiard-room was the kitchen. About 9 o’clock on Thursday evening, Mrs. Guest, the proprietress of the Free Selection Inn, began to entertain fears that the flood would encroach upon her premises. She accordingly set about taking down the billiard-tables, for the purpose of removal, and also to remove her stock and furniture to the Court-house. She succeeded in getting her stock and most of the furniture and the best billiard-table (a new one) out of the premises; the other table was strung up to the beams of the building and escaped unhurt. The water was still rising and all left the building to its fate. Mrs. Burrows narrowly escaped drowning; she had retired as usual, not heeding the rising waters, but when they began coming into the Free Selection Inn some one thought of her, and went to her residence to arouse her. She slept so soundly that they were unable to awaken her, and were compelled to break in the door, and when she did awake she had to step from her bed into a couple of feet of water. About 2 o’clock on Friday morning came down an extraordinary rush of water, as if some pent-up reservoir had been let off above, which struck first the residence of Mrs. Burrows, that being the first barrier opposed, carrying it together with the stable of Mr. Pitfield and the store of Ah Sun and the southern or lower half of Mrs. Guest’s billiard room with the kitchen away. Mrs. Burrows’s house and Mr. Pitfield’s stable were swept away. Mrs. Burrows’s house and Mr. Pitfield’s stable were swept entirely away. A portion of Ah Sun’s store and some of the zinc roof lodged against a strong fence running between his and Mrs. Guest’s premises, which no doubt assisted much in saving Mrs. Guest’s hotel from further destruction. At the same time the debris of their buildings, so firmly lodged against the fence, caused the rush of water to shoot across the street with such force and power as to burst the front door of Mr. Pitfield’s store and the front door of the Mining Registrar’s office, and all the efforts of Mr. Pitfield and two others were unavailing to close it. All they could do was to stand by to prevent things from floating out. The water at this time was about three feet deep in the street, and running like a mill tail, sweeping casks, timber, and every movable object before it.
The extent of loss is not yet known. Considerable property lodged in the scrub on the right bank of the creek below the town. All were engaged yesterday and to-day in recovering their lost goods, and in clearing away the deposit of mud left in the flood. Mrs. Burrows has lost all. Ah Sun lost nearly all; what he has saved or rescued is in such a damaged state as to be nearly worthless. Mrs. Guest’s loss is not known. Mr. Pitfield lost his stable, and had a few articles of stock slightly damaged. The Mining Registrar lost all of his books and papers. Mr. Cowdroy’s loss is not known – but thought to be under £100. Four Chinamen, living at Cockney Flat have been drowned. There were six in the party. Two succeeded in saving their lives. Two of the bodies have been found.
APPENDIX 10

_Bega Standard, Bega, Wednesday 20 July, 1887_

Disastrous Fire
Hotel Stables Consumed. Stores & Goods Seriously Damaged. Narrow Escape of Club Hotel

A fire of considerable magnitude, but the result of which was at one time expected to be much more serious, occurred early on Sunday morning. The constable on duty, it appears, had been talking to several persons at the corner of Church and Carp streets, at about 12 o’clock, and then proceeded on his round down Church street, up Bega street, and thence into Auckland street, along which he had only proceeded a short distance when he heard the cry of “fire”. On arriving in Carp street again he saw a considerable flame bursting out from the roof of MacNamara’s stables, at the rear of the Club Hotel. By this time the alarm had been given in several directions by people shouting “fire”, while the bell of St. John’s Church was rung to arouse the sleeping populace and summon assistance. A high westerly wind had previously been blowing for several hours, occasionally in very heavy gusts, and as the stable loft contained some twenty tons of hay, beside maize and other fodder, it was concluded at once that the Club Hotel, a two-storey wooden building, and a small wooden shop adjoining, were bound to be devoured by the rapidly increasing flames. In a short space of time, a crowd of two or three hundred persons had arrived upon the scene, the flames every minute increasing in volume and roaring a fitting accompaniment to the howling of the wind. Everyone immediately realised the extreme seriousness of the position, and woefully realised, too, that Bega was utterly unprovided for such a visitation, in the way of the slightest equipment for dealing with a fire. The Club Hotel was, of course, minus its inhabitants in double quick time, as were a number of the adjacent buildings, and many willing hands immediately proceeded to remove all available goods into the street.

The stable was a large building, extending in length towards Auckland street over 100 feet, and running anglewise towards Carp street an additional 30 feet, at the eastern end. It was in the latter portion that the fire broke out, and it rapidly made its way round the angle and backward along the building, which it consumed in its unimpeded course, the flames and showers of sparks meanwhile leaping toward the hotel and a wooden building forming part of Cowdroy’s store. A quantity of spirits, furniture, etc., had by this time been removed from the hotel, and a large breach being made in the wall of the billiard room fronting Carp street, the two billiard tables were dismantled and removed. An opening, recently made by removing a building forming part of the Carp street end of the stable, caused a current of wind through it to direct the flames rather towards Cowdroy’s buildings, the result being that the wooden one, on the south side of the main building was soon in flames. By this time an indication of organisation began to manifest itself, and a
strong rope being secured to the top of the building, a portion of the front was pulled down, and a quantity of the contents mostly hardware removed.

The fire here rapidly proceeded in its work of destruction, and only the most persistent, strenuous, and sometimes plucky efforts saved the Club Hotel from being destroyed. As it was the walls were scorched, and here and there charred, but with the aid of ladders and a continuous supply of water in buckets, the exposed walls were drenched, and after a time the danger in this direction was comparatively over. Buckets of water had often to be thrown over the men engaged at this work, so great was the heat during part of the time. By this time the flames had fastened on to the balcony of Cowdroy’s main building, which is of brick and two storied, and also made its way under the eaves, setting fire to the rafters between the ceiling and the roof. Some volunteers had previously gone upstairs and succeeded in lowering the piano and several other articles of furniture from the balcony to the street, but in the excitement several valuable articles were tumbled over pell mell, and of course were seriously damaged. The wind continued to blow in fierce gusts, carrying showers of sparks over the roof of the Commercial Bank, and away on to the roofs of buildings beyond, some of which ignited but were speedily put out. Attempts were now being made to pull down the burning end of the balcony, but with little success, and as the smoke upstairs had become very dense, it was thought nothing could be done to check the flames, which were rapidly making their way along the rafters above the ceiling.

At length Mr. G. Haslingden pluckily succeeded in getting out upon the roof, and thereby demonstrated that the danger was not so great as many imagined. Several volunteers then forced their way upstairs and managed to break through the ceiling when it was seen that the fire had not got very far on its work of destruction. A continuous supply of water was passed up and discharged on the flames, and a sheet or two of iron meanwhile being dislodged from the roof, and water thrown on from this point, the burning rafters were very soon extinguished. The fire had also reached the cupola, in the centre of the building, but this Mr. Haslingden soon extinguished. The burning balcony too was soon mastered, and in a short time all danger from the fire at this end was over. At one time the flames appeared to have taken such a hold of the balcony that it was thought the whole building would eventually go. Acting upon this belief a number of enthusiasts attacked with axes and rope a wooden structure between Messrs. Cowdroy’s and Banfield’s stores, occupied by Mr. Reynolds, who recently commenced business there as a chemist. His stock was first carried to a place of safety, before the work of demolition began, but by the time several parts of the building were torn away, the adjacent fire had been got under control as already stated, and further danger was at an end; so the axe and rope men were called off, and turned their attention elsewhere. Mr. Reynolds’ fittings were roughly handled, and glass cases broken in the hurry – for which there was no occasion to remove his goods.

During all this time there was very grave danger in the other direction, as the end of a wooden building adjoining the Standard office on the west, ran right up to the burning
stable and was joined by other wooden buildings. Willing volunteers attacked the one referred to with axes, and removed the portion nearest the fire, which was rapidly making its way thither, being fed by the hay, chaff, etc., which the stable contained. Fortunately there were tanks of water at the rear of this office and Mr. Harrison’s property, and these were largely drawn upon, a number of willing hands passing the buckets to two or three persistent fire fighters, who stuck manfully to the work of beating the flames back.

At one time it was thought that some of the wooden buildings could be saved and an attempt made to pull down a shed at the rear of Mr. Harrison’s failed, principally through the rope not being strong enough. At this stage we thought it about time to look after our stock-in-trade, and a number of volunteers assisting us, nearly the whole of our type was removed, under the superintendence of Messrs. A. Prescott and T. Harrison, with an amount of care we could not anticipate and for which we tender our most sincere thanks to McMillan’s smithy across the street. Our safe, a quantity of stock of various kinds, and a number of valuable documents and books were also removed to the same place with safety. We then had time for just a breathing space, and found that our brave fire fighters had actually succeeded in beating the element so far, although there was still considerable danger.

Every now and then the wind swept belches of flame and showers of cinders into the breaches at rear of the wooden buildings, and it was only by dint of perseverance and untiring watchfulness that the frequent attacks of the fire king were repulsed, while he gradually marched on his destructive way to the end of the long stable, from which there was open space to Auckland street. Here the wind howled its loudest, as if urging the devouring element on to a final effort, but after two or three expiring struggles to leap forward again, it gradually got lower and lower, till there was left but a solid mass of red and still blazing fire, bestrewn with red hot sheets of galvanised roofing. The fire fighters stood by, bucket in hand, till long after crescent moon was obscured by the light of the Sabbath morning, and then only was the danger fairly over.

As the most sanguine never conjectured that the Club Hotel could be saved, some of those occupying the wooden buildings at the opposite side of Carp street commenced to remove some of their effects, and Mr. Allen, of the Imperial Hotel, was relieved, by the vigilant thief, of several cases of grog and a quantity of wearing apparel. A small wooden shop, nearest where the fire broke out, occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Locket, had a marvellous escape, for the chimney even of this was of wood, and on the saving of the building depended the safety of the Club Hotel. Mr. Locket however stuck to his post with buckets of water and managed to keep the flames at bay till the fire passed on round the angle of the stable. Constable Wood, with some assistance, and considerable pluck, succeeded in removing two horses from the burning stables, although the mane of the first was singed by the flames before it could be got out of the building.
When the fire was at its height the streets were a sight to be seen; from the School of Arts to Curran’s new shop in Carp street, and from the Club corner to Hughes, Jones and Co’s store in Church street, were strewn and piled a heterogeneous mass of furniture and general stores of every possible description, from silks and satins down to the poor man’s bed and blankets. Before the church bells rang out their first peals for the morning service, however, the streets had been cleared again, as if by magic, and there was nothing to indicate the condition of a few hours before, except here and there a few remnants of broken crockery and cases; and when the smouldering embers of the fire were finally extinguished, there was nothing but the breach left by the devouring element, and the dilapidated buildings, to tell of the startling and terrifying scene that had closed with the light of anew day. “Man’s adversity is fellowman’s opportunity” (new proverb), and a number of mean spirited wretches seized the occasion and pillaged quantities of light goods, Mr. Cowdroy alone estimating his loss in this direction of £40 or £50.

There were many who rendered invaluable assistance, working systematically and orderly, and sticking to their various posts like Spartans, and there were others who ran hither and thither, in an excited sort of way, and only served to do more harm than good. It is impossible to obtain the names of all who did excellent work, in some cases giants’ work, so we refrain from giving publicity to those we have knowledge of, lest some of the most deserving should be omitted.

Mr. H.O.T. Cowdroy is the greatest sufferer by the fire, as his handsome brick building, erected close upon three years ago, has been seriously damaged both within and without, and this alone will take some hundreds of pounds to repair. The stock and furniture, too, have been damaged to a large extent, while his wooden store and nearly all its contents, were totally destroyed. Mrs. MacNamara loses her large stables, sample room, etc., valued at several hundred pounds, besides injury to stock and furniture, and Mr. French’s wooden building will have to come down and be rebuilt. The damage to Messrs. Neilley and Harrison’s property is not very great, and can soon be adjusted. The total damage done will probably reach well on to £3,000. We are informed that Messrs. Cowdroy and MacNamara’s properties are insured in the National Mutual Company of New Zealand, the former, in all, for £3,250, and the latter for £1,500. Mr. French’s building was insured with the Victoria Insurance Company, Mr. Neilley’s with the Norwich Union, and Mr. Harrison’s with the Colonial Mutual. The first named insurances are distributed among several other companies, including the City Mutual and Commercial Union. Great sympathy is expressed on all sides for the sufferers, and the absence of any organisation or appliances to attack a fire were lamentable felt on all sides, a matter to which we have drawn attention more than once, and perhaps something will now be done in this direction. As it is we can congratulate the townspeople that the result was not more serious, as it was at one time thought half the town would ultimately be in ruins.
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Endnotes

1 CON18/1/34
2 CON14/1/17
3 Oxley cites Robson’s statistical analysis of 1248 convict women from which he decided that they came from the criminal class. She points out that this evaluation was accepted by many historians. Oxley, D 1988, ‘Female Convicts’. In Nicholas S (ed.) Convict Workers– Reinterpreting Australia’s past. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.85
4 Letters from Dorothy Pidduck in Saltash to Margaret Wildermuth (my sister). 26 May 1993 and also in 2011
7 This age is incorrect, she would have been closer to 20. From the records it appears that many ages were rounded to the nearest divisible by 5.
8 United Kingdom Census 1841, 1851, 186. http://www.ukcensusonline.com
9 United Kingdom Census, 1841, 1851, 1861.  http://www.ukcensusonline.com. Though living with an elderly woman in 1841 by 1851 Ambrose Peters aged 57 was married to Mary aged 27. They had two children: Mary seven, Albert one. In 1861 Albert eleven was a student, Mary seventeen, was an assistant draper to a man who may have been her stepfather. He was Thomas Corber aged 37 ‘Draper & Grocer’ married to Mary aged 37 – she was probably Ambrose Peters’ widow who inherited the business.
10 United Kingdom Census 1851.  http://www.ukcensusonline.com
11 The ages in the early census were often incorrect as this one was for Martha
13 CON40/1/4, CON15/1/2
14 HMS Rodney (1833) was a 92-gun second-rate launched in 1833, converted to screw propulsion and rearmed with 70 guns in 1860, and broken up in 1884. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Rodney
15 CON15/1/2 and CON19/1/2
16 He wrote that he couldn’t precisely identify their home as the street had been re-numbered several times
17 Saltash Heritage Museum & Local History Centre, 17 Lower Fore Street, Saltash, Cornwall (email from the Archivist, 26 May, 2012).
19 William Henry Guest was born on 17 August 1816 in Rotherhithe London. He died on 28 February 1867 in Nerrigundah, New South Wales
20 Martha (aged 59) married Michael McNamara (aged 43) on 12 April 1883. It was a second marriage for Michael. Martha had an Indenture drawn up before her marriage: the parties were Martha Jones (of the first part), Michael McNamara (of the second part); Robert Ritchie and William John Lane, of the third part, regarding properties in the Bega District. A number of properties are mentioned, and the agreement shows that Martha owned these in her own right and retained that right.
24 Oxley, D 1996, Convict Maids: The Forced Migration of Women to Australia, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.4
26 Oxley, D 1996, pp.190-120

28 Carter, P 1987, *The Road to Botany Bay – An Essay in Spatial History*, London: Faber & Faber, p.295. Even among the early recordings of life in the colony there are differences in emphases – Surgeon White noted the severe storm soon after their landing, but did not report the sexual licentiousness other surgeons recorded (one of whom was not on land to witness what he reported). Instead White noted the marriages that occurred a few weeks later, showing that there were differences in points of view.

29 Carter P 1987, p.295


31 Carter, P 1987, p.295


34 Clendinnen, I 2006, pp.20-21


37 Atwood, M 1997(b), pp.31-32

38 Phillips is author of several books on psychoanalysis and editor of the new Penguin modern classics translations of Freud


40 Phillips, A 2016, pp. 60-61. He explores Freud’s attitudes to biography in the context of Arnold Zweig’s request to write Freud’s biography

41 Phillips, A 2016, p.63


44 Foucault, M 2006, p.236


48 Hutcheon, L. 1989, pp.350-351


52 Dening, G 2000, pp.46-47

53 Dening, G 2000, p.52

54 Clendinnen, I 2006, p.41

55 Clendinnen, I 2006, p.23
Two are well known: Mary Reibey succeeded in business and was accepted by society when she married a ship’s officer. Margaret Catchpole is another convict who made a home in New South Wales and was accepted, though not wealthy. See Karskens, G 2010, *The Colony – A History of Early Sydney*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin. The notorious Madame le Grange also published but, though a convict, she was unique. See Wilkie, D 2015, *The Journal of Madame Callegari*. Historia Incognita. http://historiancognita.net


Wyschogrod, E 1998, p. xiii

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Anderson, B 1991, p.198


The 1841 United Kingdom census gives his age as 30, whereas the court records show 28. The census tended to ‘round’ the ages.

The name appears at times as Collings and at others as Collins. Her parents’ petition spelled it as Collings.

England & Wales Criminal Registers, 1791-1892. County of Cornwall Register


Martha’s parents’ petition for clemency mentions that she was held in Saltash (Appendix 1)

England & Wales Criminal Registers

‘Admitted Evidence’: This phrase refers to the case where a defendant admits to something, therefore there is no need for the Crown to prove it. For example, a person may be tried for murder where part of the Crown’s evidence includes having to prove that the person was at the scene of the crime. The accused may be willing to admit to being there and that there were others also at the scene. Their defence then would be that someone else committed the crime and hence the Crown would not have to prove it because it is admitted evidence.

CON40/1/2 and CON19/1/2. However, notes on the Petitions of October and November 1843 record Martha ‘supposed to have been honest’ and Elizabeth as ‘character bad’

CON40/1/4 and CON15/1/2

Villiers, A 1974, Vanished Fleets – Sea Stories from Old Van Diemen’s Land, University Printing House, Cambridge pp.293-294

See - Criminal register for Saltash in England & Wales, Criminal Registers, 1791-1892, County of Cornwall Register of all Persons charged with Indictable Offences at the Assizes and Sessions held within the County during the year 1842

Bateson, C 1988, The Convict Ships – 1787-1868, Sydney: Library of Australian History. The Margaret was classed as a Bark (Barque) by Bateson, p.366. A Bark is a three-masted vessel, with fore- and main-masts square rigged, and mizzen-mast fore- and –aft rigged

Letter from Dorothy Pidduck – family descendant living in Saltash

The Courier 2 June 1843. Described Christmas celebrations, writing there were 160 (the full complement) on board in 1842

United Kingdom Census

Fry, EG 1847, Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Digitally printed version 2011, p 443

Hoys were principally passenger or cargo boats. They were sloop-rigged and carried a mainsail. Many were working in the Thames Estuary and the southern parts of the North Sea

Fry, EG 1847, p.443.

A1 rating was given for vessels ‘…which had not passed a prescribed age, had complied with the standard laid down for this class, and had been kept in the highest state of repair and equipment.’ Bateson, C 1988, p.89

McAvoy, B Surgeon, Margaret, 5 November 1842 – May 1843, Journal

Bateson, C 1988, p.367

Wilkie, D 2015, p.87

The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 July, 1843, p.2

Bateson, C 1988, pp.354-357 and pp.365-367


Lardner, J Surgeon, Woodbridge, 1844, Journal

McAvoy, B. Surgeon. Margaret, 5 November 1842 - May 1843, Journal

Roberts, JR, Surgeon, Royal Admiral. Journal 1842, wrote ‘The majority of these women were brought from distances by railroad, the rapid movements of which, not allowing time for the necessary [1 word indecipherable] of natures offices, many arrived on board in a distressed and filthy state … In several instances, they came with only the clothing they had on their persons, being informed at the prisons, that if they took more, … they would be either taken from them or destroyed, depriving them thereby of many essentials during their voyage. …The thinly clad state of many of these women in travelling, … induced subacute mucous inflammatory action and rheumatism to prevail in them, and
before quitting the anchorage, a variety of them had been under medical treatment.’


149 Ann Appleyard CON40/1/2

150 A report in _The Courier_ on 2 June 1843 records Christmas celebrations on board the _Margaret_ and it is clear all convicts were on board at that time.

151 Surgeons instructions were that the ’tween-decks, sleeping quarters and the hospital were swept and scraped daily, that at least twice weekly the bottom boards of the berths were carried on deck, washed with salt water, and thoroughly dried before being replaced, and that all bedding was aired on deck daily. He was enjoined to properly trim the windsails, to keep on the air scuttles and to have the air machines working. He was to see that the sick were given free access to the deck, and was to report to the master when prisoners, because of illness or debility, should have their irons removed. He was to issue medicines and comforts to the sick, to see that the hospital was kept neat and clean, and on no account to return a discharged patient to the prison without first having thoroughly fumigated his clothes ‘with the vapour of burning brimstone and the oxygenic gas’...each prisoner was admitted to the deck at least twice in every 24 hours ... the ’tween-deck was regularly fumigated... [and] to issue lemon-juice, sugar, sago, rice, oatmeal, peas and bread, with a proportion of wine and tea, to any persons showing signs of scurvy or other disease...’ Bateson, C 1988, p.47

152 The _Courier_. Hobart, 2 June 1843

153 _Lloyd's Illustrated London Newspaper_ London, 1 January 1843

154 McAvoy, B. Surgeon, _Margaret_, from 5 November 1842 to 13 May 1843. Journal

155 Mould, J. Surgeon. _Margaret_ written in Hobart Town, 1 August 1843. Journal

156 Mould, J. Surgeon. _Margaret_ 1 August 1843. Journal

157 Cunningham, P 1827, pp.108-109

158 Cunningham, P 1827, pp.261-262


160 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 April 1843

161 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 July, 1843

162 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 July, 1843

163 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 July 1843

164 _Colonial Times_ Hobart, 11 July 1843.


167 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 July, 1843

168 At that time, Port Albert was a newly established port in Victoria not far from Melbourne

169 The _Courier_ Hobart, 21 July, 1843

170 CON19/1/2


172 Female Convicts Research Centre Inc. Results collated from a transcription of Appendix D of the inquiry into prison discipline held 1841-1843. (AOT, CSO 22/50 pp.420-422)

173 Female Convicts Research Centre Inc.

174 Martha probably worked as a housemaid with Mr Barratt. Working conditions for domestic servants in the late eighteen and early nineteenth century has been described by Steedman. See Steedman, C, 2009; and Steedman, C 2013


176 _Colonial Times_ Hobart Friday 20 November 1829

177 _Colonial Times_ Hobart Tuesday 23 August 1836

178 _The Cornwall Chronicle_ Launceston 4 May 1839

116
William Henry Guest was born in London on 17 August 1816. He was baptised at St. Mary’s Church Rotherhithe Surrey on 1 September 1816. Source Parish Register obtained through the Church of Latter Day Saints microfiche library. He was convicted of theft in London in 1842 and deported on the Emily.


‘For protection, cracksmen frequently carried a weapon known as a Life-Preserver. Although the term could apply to any sap or blackjack, the cracksman’s version consisted of a small lead or steel ball attached to a short length of rope or gut that fastened to the wrist. The weapon thus remained handy while freeing the cracksman’s hands for such tasks as picking locks, cracking safes, and scaling walls.’


209 Information from the website of the Waratah Hotel, 2012. See also Dennison, CJ 2008, p.37

210 Wright, C 2003 Wright, C 2003, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge – Australia’s Female Publicans*. Melbourne: Text Publishing, p.108. Wright makes the point that many inns were ‘… literally, a house half-way between home and the next destination. For the perpetually rootless – transient single men moving to find work – such establishments were home.’

211 Wright, C 2003, p.109. Wright argues they were centres for civic, community and political life.

212 Wright, C 2013, *The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka*. Melbourne: Text Publishing. On p.130, explains Wright that many women supported their husbands on the diggings in Ballarat. They worked as storekeepers or innkeepers. Given William’s absences it is likely Martha did the same.

213 The *Courier* Hobart, 7 February 1854

214 Dennison, CJ, 2008, p,141

215 The title of the *Mercury* changed over time: *Hobarton Mercury, Hobart Mercury, Hobart Daily Mercury*

216 The *Courier* Hobart, 27 September 1854. His stated aim was ‘…to afford a rational and intellectual source of enjoyment to his customers during the evening.’ Many similar advertisements appeared over several months, including one in the *Hobarton Mercury* on 2 December 1854, alerting Hobart citizens of additions to his Reading Room at the *Butchers’ Arms* Inn.

217 Parish Register of St Mary Rotherhithe, obtained on microfiche through the Church of Latter Day Saints. William’s baptism is recorded in the register on 11 September 1816 and states he was born 17 August. Births of his siblings are recorded in 1818 and 1819

218 St Mary Rotherhithe web site at stmaryrotherhithe.org

219 See: information about the school at – waymarking.com/waymarks/WMDJGP_Former_Free_School_Rotherhithe_London

220 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 14 October 1854

221 Boyce, J 2008, p.137

222 Boyce, J 2008, p.220

223 Boyce, J 2008, p.220

224 Boyce, J 2008, p.220

225 Boyce, J 2008, p.219


227 The *Courier* Hobart, 15 July 1854.

228 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 25 October 1854

229 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 9 May 1855

230 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 7 August 1855

231 Dennison, CJ 2008, p.78

232 *Colonial Times* Hobart, 6 November 1855

233 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 7 May 1856

234 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 6 August 1856

235 Dennison, CJ 2008, p.142

236 The *Courier* Hobart 10 January 1857 and The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 16 January 1857


238 The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 19 January 1857

239 The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 22 May 1857

240 The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 30 November 1857
McGuire, P 1952, *Inns of Australia*, Melbourne: William Heinemann, p.58. The first inn in Hobart opened in 1807. Women had a role as innkeepers early in the colony – by 1816, Mary Hayes was licensee of *The All Nations Tavern*. That year she married William Stocker, who then took over the licence.

The *Courier* Hobart, 7 May 1856. The unfortunate speculation was probably Lot 75 3, 53a. 3r Op, adjoining lot 753 in the Parish of Lansdowne, County of Monmouth – a county close to Hobart. This land was sold in April 1860 and was listed in the sale as ‘formerly purchased by William Guest’. See *The Hobart Town Daily Mercury* 7 April 1860.

The *Courier* Hobart, 15 May 1856

The *Courier* Hobart, 28 May 1856

The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 4 February 1857

The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 6 February 1857

An orphan by the name of Ann Thomas (orphan number 5301) was admitted to the Orphan School aged 5 years and 5 months on 3 June 1861. She is recorded as the daughter of Jessie George and William Thomas. She was discharged 9 May 1869. Given her age, in 1848, it is possible that she was also staying at the Good Woman Inn. [http://www.orphanschool.org.au/showorphan.php?orphan_ID=5301](http://www.orphanschool.org.au/showorphan.php?orphan_ID=5301)

The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 7 September 1857

Belial comes from a Hebrew adjective meaning ‘worthless’. It appears in the Bible. The idiom "sons of Belial" (בְּנֵי־בְלִיַּﬠַל beni beliyaal) appears 15 times to indicate worthless people. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belial)

Boniface is a proper name and was the name of the jovial innkeeper in Farquhar’s *Beaux’ Stratagem* of 1707. It came into use around 1803 to refer to innkeepers. Source: [*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*](http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/boniface), 1973

The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 21 September 1857

The *Hobart Town Mercury* Hobart, 23 September 1857


The * Mercury* Hobart, 2 September 1885

*Boniface* has been the name of eight popes, one antipope, and one saint, but none of those had anything (directly) to do with the English word *boniface*. The word *boniface* comes from the name of the jovial innkeeper in George Farquhar’s 1707 play ‘The Beaux’ Stratagem’. It is likely that William’s occupation prompted the journalist to give him this name.


The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 3 September 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 5 September 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 9 September 1859

New South Wales Government Mariners’ Records

William travelled in a cabin, rather than steerage – so he must not have felt obliged to save money after his race win.

The challenge was issued on the front page of the paper on three days: 13th, 14th, and 15th. See, *The Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 13, 14, 15 October 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 22 November 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 23 November 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 9 December 1859. The abuse was reported on 29 November and the case heard December

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 9 December 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 9 December 1859

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart, 7 April 1860

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart 18 April 1860

The *Hobart Town Daily Mercury* Hobart 3 May 1860


The *Courier* Hobart, 15 December 1852


The *Courier* Hobart 15 December 1852

The *Courier* Hobart 1 August 1853

*Colonial Times* Hobart, 23 May 1856

The *Hobarton Mercury* Hobart, 9 June 1856

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Martha was in Eden by April 1861 when she gave birth to William Eden Guest

William Guest had been mining in the Gulph for ‘the last year or two’.

Mr JP Sweeney’s claim in the Gulph was averaging 12 ounces of gold per day while others were mining 21 ounces each week. The Gulph was attracting a rush. A week later Correspondent reported that 45 ounces were retrieved. Empire 19 May 1862 estimated that 1000 ounces of gold left Nerrigundah each week.

In some cases this area is referred to as the ‘Gulf’ and at others, ‘Gulph’. Apart from direct quotes, I’ve used the more common Gulph

An advertisement appeared in the Moreton Bay Courier, 8 December 1860 – ‘If William Guest, late of Hobart Town, and last heard of as living with John Coonan, near Brisbane will call at the Bank of Australasia, Brisbane, he will hear of something to his advantage.’

Braidwood Gaol Admissions Register 1856-1899 does not record William as being there. However, the book for the period 1864-1866 lists William Guest as prisoner no. 232. His height 5.8 ½ inches, his hair now grey, but his wounds were still apparent: ‘gunshot wound through left arm & breast’. This was for a later offence. http://members.pcug.org.au/~ppmay/cgi-bin/gaol/gaol.cgi


An internet history resource

The act mentions those who are idle with insufficient means, but includes those using obscene language in public. The latter offence has a maximum penalty of gaol for a period not exceeding three calendar months.


Riley, C 2012, Land Research for Family Historians in Australia and New Zealand, St. Agnes, SA: Unlock the Past , pp.46-47

New South Wales Government, Nerrigundah Bench Book. New South Wales State Archives. 5 December 1863, p.70


New South Wales Government 1864, Nerrigundah Bench Book. New South Wales State Archives. 8 March 1864, p.103

New South Wales Government 1864, Nerrigundah Bench Book. New South Wales State Archives. 8 March 1864, p.112
William and Martha offered to adopt a neighbourhood abused child in December 1859. The child was Elizabeth Waddell aged seven. The Hobart Town Daily Mercury Hobart, 9 December 1859

There is evidence for these duties to be found in the New South Wales Government, Register of fees collected for fines, court fines, licences, etc. [Nerrigundah Court of Petty Sessions] records. File 1/3373 New South Wales State Archives

The tombstone says 48 years, William Guest was 50 – born 17 August 1816
Information from the Moruya Historical Society about the Post Office at Eurobodalla and district

The Sydney Morning Herald Sydney, 30 May 1870

New South Wales Government Gazette. The Treasury. 9 September 1873, p.2466

Greville’s Post Office Directory, 1805-1876,

New South Wales Government Gazette 1873, p.2409

Wright, C 2003, p.56


New South Wales Government State Archives, Register of Births Deaths and Marriages

New South Wales Government. The Treasury, New South Wales, Return of Publicans’ Licences. 9 September 1873

New South Wales Government Gazette 1874, p.2656

New South Wales Government Gazette 1875, p.2768

New South Wales Government Gazette 1876, p.3664

New South Wales Government Gazette 1877, p.3375

New South Wales Government Gazette 1878, p.4576

Bega Standard and Candelo, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Wolumla and General Advertiser Bega, 13 September 1879

New South Wales Government State Archives, Register of Births Deaths and Marriages

Bega District News Bega 6 February 1933. Reporting from the Old Bega District Times file of 1880

New South Wales Police Gazette 1880, p.4856

The Bega Gazette and Eden District and Southern Coast Advertiser, 26 April 1882

Marriage registered New South Wales State Archives

Bega Standard and Candelo, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Wolumla and General Advertiser Bega, 4 June 1887

Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser Bega, 11 January 1882

Martha Cowdroy died of pneumonia when aged only 24 years. She is buried in Bega beside her grandmother, Martha McNamara.

Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser Bega, 6 December 1882

Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser Bega, 28 March 1883

Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser Bega, 9 February 1884. Michael McNamara was a member of the Bega Council in 1884.

Original photocopy obtained through professional title research agent. It is no. 671 of book 267 and dated 17 April 1848.

Australian Town and Country Journal Sydney, 8 September 1883

Bega Gazette and Eden District or Southern Coast Advertiser Bega, 4 October 1884

Bega Standard and Candelo, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Wolumla and General Advertiser Bega, 13 August 1887

In several publications the name is spelled ‘MacNamara’, however Martha’s will uses ‘McNamara’ and she signed her name that way

Bega Standard and Candelo, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Wolumla and General Advertiser Bega, 15 February 1888

Bega Standard and Candelo, Merimbula, Pambula, Eden, Wolumla and General Advertiser Bega, 9 May 1888

Pambula Voice Bega, 10 January 1896. That she was at the Royal Hotel may indicate that she had been ill for some time and was unable to continue managing the Club Hotel, or had she separated from Michael MacNamara?

I found an extract of an entry in a Register of Deaths, General Register Office, Edinburgh, obtained 30 May 2007. Which gave more information on William Ford Gregory. He died in Glasgow on 15 October 1917, aged 74, leaving a son, George Gregory.

Death certificate New South Wales State Archives
374 Adams, H and Searle, L 2005, p.446
375 Adams, H and Searle, L 2005, p.446
376 Tuite, C 2010, p.241
377 Tuite, C 2010, p.243
378 Grenville, K 2006,p.154
379 Dessaix, R 2008 (April), ‘Helen Garner’s The Spare Room. The Monthly
380 Grenville, K 2006, p.185
381 Grenville, K 2006, p.188
382 Grenville used the same approach in The Lieutenant. The story is based on the work of William Dawes, a marine and astronomer on the First Fleet. She changed his name to ‘Rooke’. In an Author’s Note, she confesses that she made extensive use of historical sources but writes, ‘This is a novel; it should not be mistaken for history.’ Grenville, P 2008, The Lieutenant. Melbourne: Text, p.307
383 Johnson, A 2011, p.10
384 Strohm, P. 2014, The Poet’s Tale: Chaucer and the Year that made the Canterbury Tales. London: Profile Books. p.13. Strohm argues that Chaucer points out that historical characters were both unlike and like us, ‘… for all their seeming oddity of speech or custom they got on with the business of life and achieved practical consequences we can still appreciate and understand.’
385 The words Martha chose for William’s tombstone included: ‘Thou art gone to the Grave but we will not deplore thee’. In the last 100 years our understanding and use of ‘deplore’ has changed
386 Clendinnen I, 2006, p.18
387 Some valuable sources relating to social conditions are Porter, R 1991; Steedman, C. Others relate to contemporary language such as: Forster, HW. (ed.) 1970; Laugeson, A 2002
388 Steedman C 2009, pp.99-104
389 Louisa la Grange wrote a diary and, after she received her ticket of leave, she travelled internationally. Eventually she returned to Paris where she was friendly with Alexandre Dumas. He edited that diary around 1855 and, when published, it became a best seller. She omitted any hint that she had been a convict, but her account of Hobart and a picnic in the mountains make interesting reading. See Dumas, A. 1945, The Journal of Madame Giovanni. (trans. ME Wilbur). New York: International Collectors Library. and also Wilkie, D 2013
390 CON19/1/2
391 CON15/1/2
392 Wilkie D 2013, pp.3-24
393 Dumas, A. 1945, pp.16-50
394 Jackson, R 2005, pp.161-164. Jackson researched records of 2,444 English female convicts sent to New South Wales. He was interested in the relationship between height, poverty and early nutrition. Most in his sample were shorter than the average Australian female of today. Looking at examples of the diet of the English ‘working poor’, he concluded it was likely that they had insufficient calories and protein. In addition living conditions left them subject to diseases. He also writes that Surgeons’ sick lists were shorter at the end of the journey than at the beginning, which he believed showed convicts’ health improved while at sea; perhaps in part due to the generosity of the shipboard diet.
395 CON19/1/2. Ann Baker’s husband (a glovemaker) sent a petition for clemency, pleading his honesty and work history and that he had 4 children to care for. This petition was supported by 14 signatures, including Harris, the prosecutor. See http://www.femaleconvicts.org.au/docs/petitions/AnnBaker_Margaret1843.pdf
396 This infant is listed on her Hobart Conduct Record as named ‘Alfred’ and as being 11 months old (CON40/1/2, p. 131). He was born after her conviction.
397 CON40/1/2
398 CON19/1/2 and CON15/1/2
Matilda Bond worked for a Mr Abrahams almost immediately after arrival. She had a charge of drinking and one of insolence. In May 1849 she sought permission to marry Allen Davis of the *Lady Raffles* in 1849 and the marriage was approved. CON40/1/2, p.130 and CON52/1/3, p. 112

CON40/1/2: Ann had no remarks on her indent and I could find no record of a marriage. For my fiction I’ve changed her name to ‘Minnie’ to avoid confusion with Ann Baker.

CON40/1/2, CON15/1/2, CON19/1/2. Mary had a record with few problems – she was absent from work twice. She applied to marry William Street from the *Elizabeth* in February 1845. The marriage was approved

CON40/1/2, CON19/1/2 and CON 15/1/2

CON19/1/2

Atwood, M 1997 (b), p.32

Griffiths, T 2016, p.5

Dumas, A. 1945 In the Dumas edited account of her travels she spends the first three chapters explaining how she travelled from Mauritius to New Zealand. Chapter 4 is about Hobart and she writes that she arrived in Hobart (a free married woman) around March or April 1845. She does not mention the convict arrival in July 1843. Chapters 5 to 9 are also about Hobart and describe some aspects of convict life. Her account of her life there has her hobnobbing with the gentry, not living as a convict.

Oxley, D 1996, p.240

Oxley, D 1996, p.239

Oxley, D 1996, p. 239
CONSIGNED TO THE COLONY

The Story of Martha Ford Goodman, a Convict sent to Van Diemen’s Land

1 London 1
2 The Carlist War 8
   San Sebastian, August 11
   Hernani 15
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3 London, 1841 35
   Surrey Lent Assize 28\textsuperscript{th} March 1842 40
4 Saltash Cornwall 41
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5 Van Diemen’s Land 96
   The Barratts of Murray Street 106
   Ticket of leave 131
6 New South Wales 181
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Chapter 1
London

‘Lizzie, Lizzie, I’m going to Spain!’

Liza Guest heard the front door slam, then her brother’s boots clattering on the stairs. She counted each step, knew he was taking them two at a time and frowned because whenever he used the pet name he’d given her in childhood, she knew he wanted something. The window was open. Outside was London, a city peopled with many classes: wealthy businessmen and clerks; labourers and craftsmen displaced by the latest mechanical inventions. Finally the unfortunates who shamed the city: the impoverished who begged along the streets or were opportunistic thieves in order to survive. It was June, 1835.

In the pleasant upstairs sitting room, the sun shone through small window panes and curtains fluttered in a breeze that carried on its breath the sounds and smells of a busy city morning. They lived in Nile Place, Redriff, in Thames-side Surrey, so faint sounds of boats, hooting and steaming, were a counterpoint to the clatter of horses’ hooves and the rattle of coach wheels as the city went about its business.

William pushed the door open and waved a printed handbill high above his head. The stillness of the room was shattered as Liza looked up from her needlework to see her brother coming through the door clutching a piece of paper. ‘Just see, they need men to fight for Queen Isabella against Don Carlos and his rebels. I’m going to join the army and be a soldier. It’s all here. I can get a bounty for enlisting, I’ll be paid while I’m there and, best of all, there’ll be a pension when I get back. I can’t lose. What a lark!’

His grin increased the depth of the dimple in his chin and his blue eyes shone as he gave a quick larrikin wink, which emphasised his excitement as he pushed the dog-eared page on top of her embroidery. So close, she could smell the rum on his breath as he leant over her shoulder and she guessed he’d come from the Two Bells. She plucked the stained page from her work, tucked her fair hair behind her ears. ‘Will, be careful,’ she chided. ‘You know I won’t get paid for this if it’s soiled.’
He shrugged off his surtout and tossed it onto a chair near the door. He was a showy dresser and, since inheriting his father’s estate, had been criticised by his stepmother for being Flash. But he was proud of the coat and wore it with a swagger. It was of fine green stuff, chosen to match the colour of his cab, while his neckerchief was bright daffodil, just like the wheels. Now both bore testimony to the rigours of a coachman’s life: the jacket looked a little tired, having lost one wooden button and London dust had found a home along the cuffs, while the neckerchief’s wrinkles showed how often it had been retied.

Without the thickness of the jacket his lean figure showed him for the youth he was, almost twenty years old: chest and shoulders not yet muscled, though he worked with horses and laboured from early morning until dark. His pants were tucked into high worn Wellington boots and were of a pale cloth. There were a couple of smudges probably made by splashes kicked up from the muck in the local gutters. Ma washed and scrubbed the spots, but they were stubborn, staying there to remind him to be careful when helping fat old men down from the cab.

Liza considered the page before her. ‘It might be dangerous; you could be hurt or killed.’

He interrupted with a quick click of his fingers. ‘Don’t be so strict on me – you know life’s a gamble. Nothin’s for sure.’ His mind went to his father, mother and infant sisters buried in the graveyard at St Mary Rotherhithe. His father’s death was a two-edged sword. Now he had money and independence, but he was burdened by his family, with a sister and stepmother entrusted to his care. Home life had been pretty miserable during his father’s last illness – Liza was out of favour and there were frequent arguments and shouting bouts. Will knew that family life could be a trial. He’d managed to stay father’s favourite, mainly by keeping busy and out of the way. He remembered the burial where Reverend Blick quoted lines from the Bible about dutiful sons.

Lost in his reverie, Will muttered, ‘Phish tosh,’ under his breath, then whistled a soft tune to turn his mind from the yoke of these problems. ‘Damn and Blast!’ His friends didn’t have to worry about women in their lives other than to find a girl to lay. His thoughts halted as he realised his sister was talking to him.
‘– and what will Ma Say?"

Glad to be distracted, Will turned his mind to the immediate problems of arranging his affairs and getting the cooperation of the two women in his life, sister and stepmother. He scowled and squared his shoulders. ‘Don’t be such a girl. You know I’ve got to keep money coming in. The army’s promised to pay well.’ He reached across, grabbed his precious handbill and read aloud. ‘Volunteers will receive uniforms, training, good pay.’ Liza said nothing and Will, disappointed she couldn’t see what an opportunity this was, turned on the charm. He smiled and his voice was softer when he spoke. ‘You work so hard, but embroidery doesn’t bring in much dosh. If I go to Spain, it’ll be worth it when you see how much I make. That way you and Ma’ll be provided for.’

He strode around the room as he ticked off what he needed to do. ‘I’ll arrange for the stable-lad, Tom, to take over the horse and carriage for a time. And then there’s rent from the houses in Vauxhall. So there’ll be money coming in.’ He glanced at her, hoping to see her reaction and his voice quickened. ‘They’re recruiting men for the Westminster Grenadiers and there are pamphlets all over the Isle of Dogs. Anywise, everyone says it won’t last long. We’re to be led by General de Lacy Evans who was with Wellington at Waterloo. Well, you know what we did to Napoleon. We can’t lose. I’ll probably have a nice sea voyage and then come home with a couple of months’ pay. Just wait and see.’

Will dragged his bright neckerchief loose and wiped his brow before twisting it once more and knotting it with a flourish, so that it slid between his neck and the collar of his grey shirt. Liza was unimpressed, so she stood up and moved towards the back of the room, where a tray was set with sliced bread and cheese. ‘Have some lunch and let’s talk about it. Ma’ll be home soon. She’s having tea with the Parish Ladies’ Group. You’ll have to explain it all to her and let us know what we do while you’re away.’

‘Ah no,’ he wheedled and got straight to what he wanted from her. ‘You’re good at talking; you can get her on side. I’ll come home when she’s had time to calm down. I’ve got to go and find Charlie and Ed and make sure they come too. They both need money. Times are changing. You know how the omnibuses eat into our cab work and the steam locomotives up north are doing well – they’ll be here soon. Charlie’s not doing so good on
the river. Watermen ain’t getting the same trade since the wretched steamers became popular. Just like us, they’ll both need to make more money. Life on the river and around the streets was better when Pa was alive. We’ve got to do something to keep up.’ As he spoke, Will frowned, reached out and piled a thick chunk of cheese onto a slice of bread. Already he regretted taking off his coat. He grabbed it, threw it across his shoulders and hurried to the door, whistling as he left before his sister could stop him.

Liza sighed and turned again to her needlework. Life was indeed tougher than when Pa was alive, but it was much quieter. Two women surviving alone in London would be no picnic. And Ma was bound to be furious.

Outside, his horse and cabriolet waited; the horse shook its shaggy grey mane and flicked its tail to remove troublesome flies attracted by the dung. Though the insects came with the summer to irritate, the sun warmed the horse’s rump as it shifted lazily between the shafts. When Will whistled, it pricked up its ears as its master bounded up the cab step and grabbed the reins.

‘Hey ho, giddup, get on!’ called Will as he clicked his teeth and urged the horse into action. He was set on getting to the Two Bells as soon as possible to share his news and convince Ed and Charlie that this was a great opportunity – too good to miss. The cab, being light and fast, wove its way through and past the more solid hackney-coaches, carts and omnibuses. Will ignored anyone who tried to wave him down. When he reached the inn he hitched the horse to a handy post. Then he buttoned up his coat, flicked dust off his boots and hurried inside.

The atmosphere inside the Two Bells was lively and the air thick with smoke as men jostled and shouted to one another. Black oak beams overhead seemed to swallow the candle light and the room was dark as Will adjusted to the gloom. Fishermen, coalmen and idlers were the main customers. A hawker was spruiking his pies to a couple of sailors huddled in a corner. The smell of the beer slops that hit the floor hung all about, mixing with the rich oiliness of melting wax. Will trod carefully to the back of the room where candles flickered palely, casting a yellowish light that added to the glow of a small fire hissing around damp wood in the hearth. Ed was sitting low over a pint of porter and, though the light was dim, Will
saw his frown. They were mates and there was a friendly rivalry between them. It had been that way since they met at St Mary Rotherhithe Charity School ten years ago.

He shook Ed’s shoulder. ‘Hey, have you heard about the recruiting sergeant for the auxiliary army? You gotta come with me to the Isle of Dogs and see what they’re offering. We can volunteer and become soldiers to fight in Spain. The dosh is good and we’d be able to save on what they’re offering.’ Ed was slow to take in the message and was clearly unaffected by this enthusiasm, so Will increased the pressure. ‘We’ll have to be quick. I hear that they’re recruiting in Scotland, Ireland, all over the country. Word is they want several regiments from around here, but they say the Irish are flocking to join.’

Ed took a long slow swallow of his drink and then wiped his hand across his mouth. ‘Sounds bloody dangerous. Mebbe get killed.’

But Will could only see the upside of volunteering. He pulled out a stool and sat close to his friend. ‘Look, you know trade is poor and that things ain’t what they used to be. The river steamers have taken the long distance business and they’ll just keep eating into what’s left. The omnibus cads are ruthless in touting for trade and they beat me on price any day. As for gentlemen, you carry them that want a cab, in good weather and bad, take ‘em to wherever they ask, and then they argue about a fare of eight pence. Can’t buy horse feed for what they want to pay.’

He paused for breath and patted Ed on the shoulder before he waved to the barman. ‘A bottle of best rum’ He turned back. ‘You should see what’s going on – I’ve driven around and the army’ve got recruiters near the tower looking for marines and more down at Union Street after artillery. I reckon the Isle of Dogs’d be the one to aim for – we’re bound to find fellows we know. If you come in, then Charlie’ll come for sure. Let’s drink to becoming Redcoats!’

Ed took a pinch of snuff, resenting the way Will seemed to automatically assume the role of leader, but accepted the offer of a drink while he remained non-committal. It took three more tots of rum and a promise of dark eyed senoritas before he warmed to the idea and agreed to join in a search for Charlie. They bought another bottle of rum before heading out to the cab.
Down by the river near the Grand Surrey Dock they saw Charlie leaning against a post. He was taller than average, having grown up in the country with fresh air and farm food. But enclosure of the common land brought hard times and he’d come to the busy-ness of London, hoping to find work and better himself. He put his age up, became an apprentice and worked hard to become a waterman. His long figure was youthful and the beard he’d tried to grow in the belief that it would add years and respectability, struggled thinly on his cheeks and chin. Without conviction his long fingers stroked the wisps as though to massage and encourage more growth. He waited now. Perhaps some London merchant would ask to be ferried to his wharf or warehouse for a few pennies.

‘Hey, ho!’ hollered Will. Ed puckered his lips, blew a loud, shrill whistle and caught Charlie’s attention, while Will tugged on the reins to draw the horse to a halt. Charlie sauntered over, climbed up and squeezed in beside the two of them. Luckily they were all of slight build. Ed pulled the cork from the rum, offered Charlie a quick swig, and they set off for a nearby hackney rank, where they could easily park and chat.

They found a spot beside the Thames near labourers waiting for river custom and tried to shelter from the wind that funnelled and whistled along the banks, reminding them how fickle summer could be. Watermen lounged in dull worn fustian trousers and open necked shirts. Their chests were reddened where the sun had warmed them; their arms and hands roughened by ropes and oars; their faces weather-beaten and wizened behind beards, while those who smoked had the stain of tobacco on beard and fingers. Below them, two urchins slithered in the mud, seeking treasure among the detritus, and laughing as they skittered shards across the water. The smell of mud slightly sickened Will with its foetid air and he pictured the warm splendours of Spain, the sun and the pretty girls he’d meet there. He grabbed Charlie’s arm and the words tumbled out as fast as children freed from Sunday School as he explained the Spanish adventure, all the while offering rounds of rum.

In the background, the river flowed on, the lifeblood of London. It hosted craft, small and large, but most remarkable in their dirty grittiness were the coal barges bringing fuel for the new steam packets chuffing along
the river. Charlie frowned as a boat went past with two young women waving to someone on shore.

    Will nudged him. ‘Hey, I think they mean you.’

    Charlie blushed, muttered an oath and changed the subject. ‘Naw.
Look at the bloody boat – steam be damned! Some say it’s the best innovation ever, that it’s the coming thing and stuff will move much faster and all, but for me it’s hell. Their wash is a bastard. I’ve less work but can’t think what else to do.’ He rolled spittle round his mouth and ejected it into the river in disgust. ‘You know, if I was a lighterman, I’d be able to make a penny or two pinching a bit out of a crate now and then and flogging it.’ He scratched his ear and went on. ‘But us watermen are bound by what passengers want and they can be bloody picky.’

    Will pulled out his recruitment flyer and shoved it into Charlie’s hand. ‘Aw, just think of it. Take a chance, enlist with me and your pockets will be jingling with sovereigns when we come home. Come on, let’s get some ale back at the Two Bells or shall we try billiards at the Duck and Thistle?’ Will, aided by the strength of his excitement, tossed the now empty bottle far out into the Thames – his blood running hot at the prospect of adventure. He shook the reins and the horse trotted off, taking them back to the Two Bells while they talked of Spanish women and weather.

    They must have been several hours at the inn enjoying good company and wine as, by the time Will took the cabriolet back to the stable, evening shrouded the streets. He laid out hay, rubbed down the horse and secured the cab before setting off for home. There was a light drizzle; just enough to find the gap between collar and neck, moisten the cobbles and make them slippery, yet not enough to wash away the muck left after a busy day. Will trod carefully, swaying slightly, feeling giddy in the fresh air. A dank mist, heavy with the smoke of coal fires, was creeping off the river and snaking its way into the nearby streets. The houses he passed had curtains drawn and he could see smoke curling from hearth and kitchen fires, adding to the murkiness of the night. Occasionally a well-dressed traveller led by a lantern man hurried by. At the corner near home, a policeman wrapped in an oilskin cape patrolled. He nodded as he went by. Will dawdled and hoped Ma and Liza would be asleep.

[7]
San Sebastian, Spain
1st August 1835

Dear Liza

Well, here I am in Spain. I should have written earlier, but I needed to get over the rotten voyage. At first, it seemed good. In Deptford, we boarded the Lord Lynedoch and were given uniforms and fed rich soup. A few chaps had their wives along and that made for a merry company with singing and dancing that night.

The first two nights were great. The moon was bright and the sea calm, so we could wander on deck and get away from our stuffy quarters – six to a cabin, but that’s not so bad. There’s plenty worse off in London. One fellow, Louis Bonney, from Spitalfields, told me his whole family live in one room. He’s a decent cove, but I’ll have to watch him as he plays a mean hand of cards, though I did win a few pennies from him at Whist.

The trip quickly went downhill. We were barely out of the Thames and off the Kentish coast near Deal when the captain became ill, took to his cabin. Sadly, he died – may God rest his soul! We had a funeral at sea. We came on deck.
prayed and the body was sent overboard. The first mate took command and things got back to rights. But then the weather got worse, the seas rough and many were sick.

Rations were pretty crook. You could scarce believe it: they served maggoty meat and biscuits with weevils baked in them. We reckon the ship’s crew kept the best for themselves or sold off our stuff and kept the brass. We’d been promised pay and good food, so chaps were pretty angry. It was quite hairy when they rebelled. You know how it is when a gang goes wild. There was yelling, cussing and someone tried to take an officer’s sword. But the rowdies were soon overpowered and about fifty were put on a passing steamer and sent home. Ruddy good luck for us as we had more room on board and the food improved.

That wasn’t the end of misfortune. Tuesday, just before dawn, when we were near the French coast, a fog rolled over us so thick you couldn’t see the seagulls on the mast, let alone the moon or land. Calamity! The ship ran aground. I’ve never heard such creaking and moaning of timbers and hope never to again. We feared we’d drown. Sailors were sweating, swearing and drawing out oars to push us into deeper water. We all prayed and, praise be, God was on our side as the tide came in fast. So with their efforts plus the swell, we floated off – and with no holes in the hull. So,
sis offer a prayer of thanks to the Lord when you are next in St Mary's.

When we sailed close to Spain, I borrowed an eyeglass and saw the wild mountains behind the coast, with little towns here and there around inlets. Then I saw the castle of San Sebastian. It is surrounded by houses and there's a lighthouse on the harbour, all sitting snug beside a huge mountain. When we got close in, the castle cannon fired a welcome and the church bells rang. Such a sound and on a glorious day! What an adventure! We saw soldiers marching around the town – wearing grey coats and round red caps. They were Spaniards on our side.

The harbour was busier than the Thames in high season – being filled with British and Spanish ships. Small boats came to look us over – with men, women and children on board. By the way, the girls are all dark of hair and eyes, wear bright clothes and many have lacy mantillas covering long plaits that hang way down the back. Very pretty! But, never fear, I won't marry one of them. They're Catholics.

We marched into town with bands playing and people cheering, women standing on balconies or in doorways waved handkerchiefs. A couple danced along beside our column playing a tambourine and
castanets. You should have been here. When we
find our billet I'll write again.

Will

San Sebastian, August
An abandoned convent, formerly used by the Jesuits during the Inquisition
was the only barracks available in San Sebastian. The British generals
grumbled and complained, but Spanish authorities appeared not to
understand English and ignored their objections. General Evans sent an
emissary with a stiffly worded note to the Spanish ambassador, but got no
reply. The British auxiliary army had no option but to march uphill and
make the convent their billet.

As they drew close, from the outside they saw what looked like an
enormous brick barn with a tiled roof heavy with extended eaves. Entry was
through a wide portal which led to an open courtyard where roses and
hydrangeas bloomed. A mixture of bougainvillea and jasmine vines had run
wild and were twisting skywards around pillars supporting upstairs
cloisters. They gave the convent the appearance of a deserted tropical
haven. Stone steps and carved balusters wound to the floor above, where
heavy wooden doors opened off broad corridors. There was the smell of
stale disuse even though the courtyard encouraged summer breezes. Beyond
the cloister, there was a chapel, richly ornamented with gilded columns,
altern and frescoes – now smeared with graffiti. Between the columns were
small boxy rooms for confessionals. After checking this out, Lieutenant
Thompson decided to stable his horse in a corner near the main altar. He
ordered the horse rubbed down, and straw and water brought.

When that was sorted he urged his men to find billets upstairs. Those
orders were followed by a loud clatter of boots as a hundred men ran to
claim the best rooms. Charlie’s longer legs meant he reached the top step
first, followed by Ed, Will and Louis. He kicked a door open, then cursed in
disbelief. The room was large enough to hold a company but was bare,
empty, though the windows gaped open and a swallow’s nest hung close to
the top of one. Ed hurried to the next room and found that it too lacked creature comforts. All around, men were muttering about the absence of mattresses, blankets or pillows. Weapons and kit bags were flung on the floor in disgust.

The men were impressed by the convent’s size, but unimpressed by the inhospitable conditions. A sense of malaise hung over the rooms, not yet dislodged by the loudness of an army. For sleeping, the best the men could do was use haversacks for pillows, coats for blankets and the stone floor for a mattress. The officers, whose billets were in more comfortable private homes in town, were unsympathetic and ordered the men to settle in, to make the best of it and be ready for drill on the morrow.

Next morning, Will woke early. Through the window he saw that the sky was clear but the sun was not yet up. He tumbled sideways on the bare concrete floor, scratched away shreds of straw bedding that he’d packed inside his greatcoat as a makeshift mattress. He flapped his uniform shirt loose, reached into his kit and found his blue trousers. He pulled them on and shivered, the room was chilly in spite of it being summer. His boots lay nearby, stuffed tight with damp wadding to stretch and ease the stiff leather. Now he scraped it away, flexed and punched the toes and heels before dragging them on over socks that he’d slept in. Ed and Charlie had already gone outside to relieve themselves and Louis was rustling around searching for a basin for ablutions.

Will and Louis hurried downstairs and soon the four were alongside other men; all moving like ants around a hill as they prepared to fall in. After some bustle and pushing they assembled on the road in front of the convent – carrying packs and ready to drill. At the lieutenant’s command they set off with officers riding fore and aft. Will could feel the heel of his right boot rubbing and prayed his sock were thick enough to stop blisters. Louis mumbled as he rehearsed his Huguenot French, in case he’d be fighting beside the Foreign Legionnaires who’d landed on Sunday. Charlie and Ed trudged along like dumb animals wondering what might come next.

Charlie muttered an oath. ‘It’s just dandy for those officers, sitting on their sodding horses.’ Will sucked in his breath and nodded. ‘The friggin’ muskets are enough without having to carry forty rounds of bloody ammo.’ They puffed their way up a hill, new boots squeaking, bayonets
clinking against buckles. They hoped the sun might not rise too hot and bake their pale English skin. The company sang a marching song to keep spirits up. Then they sang ‘The Grand Old Duke of York’ (a bawdy version popular at the Two Bells late at night) feeling both a sense of irony and fellowship with the ancient army that inspired the jingle.

By midmorning, the road seemed rougher underfoot and the countryside brighter where a heat haze hovered over corn fields. Small white peasant cottages surrounded by olive or apple groves were dotted around the hills; cattle grazed on stubbly fields and the brightness of the landscape filled and dazzled eyes. The sea breeze cooled their sweat, but nothing could ease the weight they carried on their backs. They thought hungrily of the breakfast waiting for them.

Later, back at the convent they greedily swallowed what was offered, but moaned about the unfamiliar food: hard dark bread and small cups of hot chocolate. There was some respite during the heat of the day when the men rested in the convent, keeping out of the sun, until it was time for the afternoon drill. Lying with his head on his pack, Charlie was restless. ‘Whatever happened to the Spanish senoritas we were supposed to be romancing?’

Ed leant against his kitbag and smirked. ‘We’ve been promised leave and then we can head for the inns in town. There’ll be a pretty barmaid or two there for sure.’ Will left them dreaming of the local girls, went upstairs and wrote to Liza.

San Sebastian, Spain
23rd August, 1835

Dear Liza,

We are billeted in a deserted convent. The Spanish have pushed the monks out. They took their cats, but left their fleas. I’ve been bitten so often I’m as speckled as a blackbird’s egg. And,
Oh Lizzie, you should have seen us when we first fell out for drilling. There was such a shifting and shuffling as we tried to form straight lines that we raised the dust of the square. Then my butterfingers let the gun slip. It bounced off my boot – that hurt. We were more like Punch and Judy than an English army.

I'm having fun, learning a lot and being careful. We were given a talk by General Alava (a Royalist Cristino) about how to behave. So we're well warned. I'm on my best behaviour. Our lieutenant is a good cove, about the same age as me. He's had me helping with his mount.

We drill for eight or nine hours a day, rising at five and exercising until nine. Then we have a break while the day is hottest, but begin again for another four or five hours in the afternoon. We are becoming real soldiers. I've got blisters on my feet to prove it and my shoulders are getting broader from carrying my wretched kitbag up and down hills.

Must go, as it is time for drill and already a couple of men have been given the lash for disobeying orders.

Finally, even if it's bragging, I've become a tolerable shot. I can't wait to take aim at Don Carlos's rebel White Caps. Ed and Charlie
said to say hello. I send my love to you and Ma, and tell her I miss her cooking.

Will

Hernani

Days passed in a monotonous routine: restless uncomfortable nights, early morning marches with empty bellies grumbling, a mid-day break followed by more marching. A few supplies filtered in: mattresses enough, but only half the required number of blankets. ‘Spanish promises’ became a curse. Boredom, set in and Will was irritated by the delays. He itched to try his new skills. It was the same for many. As they became more proficient, their anticipation of meeting the enemy grew and it was with great excitement that they heard rumours that General Evans was planning an assault.

Early on the morning of Sunday 30 August, officers roused men and ordered them to prepare to move out. Soldiers gathered haversacks, ensured bayonet tips were sharp, muskets clean and flints ready. Charlie found a small pad and quill. He penned a few lines to his mother, folded the paper and tucked it under a tile in the corner of their room; Will teased him about writing to a lady-love, but Charlie only shrugged and turned away. Trying to look soldierly, Ed puffed out his chest, while Louis grinned. Spirits lifted now that the rehearsal time seemed finished.

They fell in, ready to march in close column. The roads were deserted except for the troops and a mob of locals urging them on, waving and calling down blessings. Young women fluttered handkerchiefs as the more handsome recruits passed. The sky was cloudless and of a brighter blue than in England; sun shone on whitewashed cottages, shocking to the eye, stark and bright, contrasting with the sallow shades of hillside olive groves. The air was heavy with the scent of citrus and apple trees. Will moved his gun higher on his shoulder just as he heard a dog bark – the deep throated bay of a heavy chested hound.

Around 4,000 men tramped along the seven mile road to Hernani; a few camp followers straggled behind. Country quiet was broken by the
steady beat of boots on the road, the creaking wheels of mule carts and the
occasional whinny from an officer’s horse. Dust raised by those marching in
front sent grit to irritate Will’s eyes as he scanned the scene. He was on the
lookout for the enemy, white capped Carlists. Glancing back, he saw eight
stocky mules lumbering uphill with a howitzer and struggling against the
ruts. They were closely followed by more mule teams pulling wooden carts
loaded with barrels of ammunition and stretchers for the wounded. Seeing
these, Will uttered a short prayer. Then a steeple came in sight, barely
visible over the top of the hill. Hernani was close by on the plain below.

The enemy were fighting a different style of war from that favoured
by the British. Rather than attacking in regimental lines, they had secreted
themselves in secure places behind barricades along the road, and now they
took aim from their vantage points. General Evans surveyed the scene and
ordered the howitzer to pull ahead of the column and make ready to fire.

Will’s company watched it pass by just as Thompson barked an order.

‘Men, fix your bayonets, check muskets and powder!’

Then a call came from somewhere. ‘Carlists ahead.’

Thompson turned and raised his sword, gesturing to the men to go
forward, as he yelled. ‘Come, fellows! Don’t be slack. Doggians aint
cowards.’ With these exhortations, he started towards the action, urging on
his recruits. With an ear-splitting boom the howitzer aimed shot at
Hernani’s church steeple. The steeple stayed intact, but a Carlist battery was
blown skywards. Two or three volleys of musket fire from British lines
followed the howitzer. The Carlists returned fire and musket balls began
peppering the 1st and 3rd regiments as they advanced through a field of corn.

Will, Charlie, Louis and Ed ducked and ran, hearing musket shot whistling
around and past them. To the left of the auxiliary army, Royalist and Red
Cap companies pushed forward with bayonets glinting in the sun and,
though under musket fire, drove the enemy from their advance positions
back to the plain below.

From the hilltop, Will saw smoke rising from three different parts of
the plain. He realised that meant close contact skirmishes between the Red
and White Caps. Flashes of musket fire sent shots that pushed dust spirals
skywards as they slammed into the field. The thunder of cannon filled his
senses, almost drowning out the urgings of Thompson, who was still riding
ahead of his company. Two men fell in front of Will and Louis. Will charged on, but Louis stopped to help. As he bent over a ball shattered his knee. ‘God-damn!’ he yelled, toppled sideways and lay low in the corn. He was well concealed and Will continued to advance for a few yards, but then turned back to help, lifting him, holding and half pulling him towards the rear. Together, with Louis’ arm around his shoulder, they stumbled through the corn. Louis hobbled and moaned.

‘Keep going, just a bit more.’ Will urged him on. ‘We’ll get to the ambulance.’ Soon they arrived at one of the small mule carts waiting for the wounded. There he eased Louis out of his redcoat, wrapped it around his leg and knotted it tightly before bundling him on board.

It was midday when Will turned to go back to join his company – his mouth was dry and his heart racing. He checked his weapon and started towards Hernani. As he got closer he passed bodies lying by the roadside and in fields. His eyes skimmed the hill and plain below, alert for friend or foe. He saw musket fire coming from the hill. Looking down towards the plain, he saw the sun reflecting off bristling, glittering Carlist bayonets. At first Will thought that they were retreating, but within minutes he realised that their numbers showed they were enticing the British to advance. A bugle blast rang out and the White Caps turned and began to rush towards the Royalists, Red Caps and British. Will watched their advance, unsure of his next move.

A British howitzer misfired and a rocket flew back among the Royalists shooting smoke, debris and body parts skywards. Will shuddered as he heard the Carlist cheers in response. Cautiously, he moved forward, trying to locate the remainder of his company. He found them close to Hernani, under heavy attack. Through the noise, chaos, shouting and screams he spotted Charlie’s tall figure and ran to his side.

For the first time, he saw the enemy at close range. The Carlists were dark haired men wearing rough country uniforms and white caps. Their kits were light and suited to the rough landscape, allowing them to charge fast. Some were reloading muskets with cartridges held in tubes around their waists; others had bayonets at the ready. Many were yelling obscenities about the British.
Thompson’s men stopped on command, loaded and fired, causing the White Caps to turn back to the safety of their barricades and leave their dead behind. But this was only a temporary withdrawal. Fear and death were everywhere. It was like a macabre dance: fall back, reload, advance and fire. Will thought that the day would never end but he was too alert, tense, for fatigue to seep through. His pants were torn and his jacket covered in dust. By early evening the Carlists sensed advantage and their cannon began a relentless barrage. The auxiliary army was under fierce attack.

The Carlists charged once more and the Spanish general ordered a retreat. What followed was like a pack of cards falling. The Royalists, British 1st and 3rd regiments began to withdraw, with the enemy shouting and rushing after them, firing on the rear of the retreating troops. A company of redcoats from the 7th regiment tried to defend a narrow lane, where they opened brisk fire, trying to check the White Caps’ rush. This stalled them for a while, but the White Caps, being mountain men, took advantage of every shelter along the way, ducking out to fire on the retreating companies, yelling curses and alternating shot with abuse. ‘Dogs! Drunkards! Thieves! Get back to England, go home! British bastards attacking on Sunday.’

In the chaos Will and the few men left in his company managed to cut their way back through the fields, weaving to dodge musket fire and heading towards the road, where the dust was rising under the rush of many military boots. They fell in with some Red Caps – all peasants comfortable with the heat, terrain and skilled in close combat. These men were tall, broad-chested, most were swarthy and begrimed with gunpowder and dust. The column hurried towards the coast, guarding their rear by stopping regularly to prime muskets and send shot whistling towards the Carlist advance. Finally, Will and company found sanctuary as they entered the gates of San Sebastian at nightfall.

The next day in town, generals counted the cost; surgeons tended the wounded and dying; burial details dug graves and Will went searching through makeshift hospitals to find Louis. He found him lying among many others in a large room in the convent of San Telmo. The ward was full and mattresses were spread in three parallel rows on the floor. Louis wore
hospital pyjamas, his right leg was covered with bloodstained bandages and his thigh was swollen. To one side of him lay a man, barely conscious, with a wound to his head where a musket ball had furrowed his forehead and bloodied his eye; and on the other a young bugler whose arm was shattered by shot. All around men were lost in their private miseries – some unconscious, other delirious or half sleeping.

Louis’ face was as white as Ma’s bleached sheets, his cheeks sunken, his hand felt cold to the touch. The energy had gone from his once shining eyes. The smiling card sharp had turned into a frightened boy. ‘Oh God, Will. I’m buggered. My knee’s shattered.’ He bit his lip. ‘The surgeons say they can’t mend the bones and gangrene could set in. They’ll amputate. I’ve saved a few shillings. For God’s sake, take them. Buy brandy or wine to help ease the pain.’ With these words he passed across the coins and his tears fell on Will’s coat sleeve. ‘If I survive, I’ll be in London with a peg-leg. What work could I do? I’ll starve or beg in the gutter.’

‘No, no, the Spanish promised pensions for the wounded. Remember that. You’ll be fine and we’ll work something out when we get back home.’

Louis didn’t answer. He simply pointed to the bloodied bandages and muttered, ‘Get some wine.’

Glad to leave the ward, with its moans and misery, Will hurried to the marketplace to barter for grog. The town was in a flurry. Rumours were flying. Gossips spread the news brought from Hernani; it was said that the Carlists had carried off the bodies of two British soldiers, cut them into six pound pieces and marched around the town with human flesh sticking on the points of their bayonets. People said, what horror, what barbarity! The question on many lips was, ‘What sort of creatures could do this?’

Pushing his way through the groups in the square, Will found a stall manned by a peasant willing to sell a flagon of wine and took that back to Louis. He couldn’t bear to stay. He felt helpless and the sights, smells and sounds distressed him more than news of Carlist atrocities. He shook Louis’ hand and promised to return the next morning.

On Tuesday, 1 September 1835, Louis Bonney died.
Bilbao, Spain
October 1835

Dear Ma,

I don't know what you've heard in London, but things are pretty grim here. I'm writing to you so you can tell Liza only what you think is suitable. War aint pretty. The bellowing of the cannon is terrifying, the whistle of musket balls is bad, but worst of all are the bayonet charges. You meet face to face, look into the enemy's eyes and know that if you don't run him through, he'll do that to you. Oh Ma, such nightmares I've had! My friend Louis got a musket ball through his leg in Hernani. He died. The hospital is a horror of misery, full of dead and dying. Many have delirium, others moan or pray. It is too much to bear. Sadly, many of our troops are now unfit for military duties. I tell myself this war will end and pray I live to see that day. If it please God and the generals, I plan to leave at the end of our first year.

After the Hernani battle we buried our dead. It was sad to leave brave British men in foreign graves. Prisoners were supposed to be exchanged but the Carlists butchered them - they can't be trusted. A few days ago the generals decided we
should go inland so we marched to Bilbao in pouring rain. My greatcoat was soaked and took two days to dry. Most of my friends stayed in deserted convents, but I was lucky as our captain (newly promoted from lieutenant) discovered I was good with horses and asked me to keep an eye on his stallion. It’s a powerful white Andalusian captured from a Carlist general. I’ve been dossing down wherever the horse is stabled – safer from vermin and warmer as I can sleep in straw.

If you can spare it, would you please send some money from the Vauxhall streets rents? Our pay is way behind, our rations are poor and I’d like to buy a little extra food. I would give anything to be able to sit beside a fire in your kitchen and listen to parish gossip. Please give my love to Liza, but don’t tell her anything that will have her worrying.

Will

**Briviesca and Vitoria**

Extra detachments arrived from England and the army, now stationed Bilbao, was once more 10,000 strong. Then, with typical military intelligence, as autumn set in General Evans decided to leave the warm coast and meet up with General Cordova and the Spanish Royalist troops in the mountains. He planned to move the Regiment to Vitoria via Briviesca – a distance of about 35 miles. However, advice came that it was too dangerous to take the direct route and so a circuitous route through Old Castile, a distance of 180 miles was chosen. The officers urged the men on at a cracking pace through rocky mountainous countryside devoid of
vegetation except for small stunted oaks and a few holly and bay shrubs growing wild among the rocks.

The terrain was tough going, as the men had to climb then descend. They cursed their heavy kit on the slopes that left them breathless and with aching legs, and again as they slid and slipped in the muddy tracks on the way down. On the high peaks, wind whistling up ravines and round boulders added to their discomfort and it was only in the few low lying fertile valleys where cattle grazed that the going was easier. The men were supposed to have a hot breakfast every day, but supplies were short and on some days they had no meals at all. Overall, the Basque countryside was as unwelcoming as the natives, who delighted in hiding in hamlets or byways and taking pot shots at the struggling British.

Will and friends were tired, hungry and cold by the time they neared Briviesca. They could just make out the twin belfries of the Iglesia de Santa Maria through rain misting the plain below. Will pointed to the heavy clouds, wondering if snow would add to their miseries. He called to Charlie, ‘Hey, country boy, what do you make of the weather? Snow ya reckon?’

‘Probably. Thank God the town’s nearby.’

Will sighed, hoisted his kit higher on his back and the damp rough wool of his greatcoat collar scraped against his ears. His shoes were wet and squelched as he walked; lifting each foot was now a struggle because of the claylike mud stuck to them. Yet stopping to clean them would risk being a sitting target for a Carlist sniper. He didn’t much care what his billet would be like, just so long as he could drop his kit, change his soaked socks and rest awhile.

In Briviesca Will received the money Ma sent. So, once dried out and settled into their town billet, the three friends were able to indulge in some fun. The second day they rose early and waylaid some market women carrying figs, bread, and wine. Ed tried to flirt with the prettiest and youngest. He winked and grinned as he handed over coins in exchange for a leather bottle filled with wine. He was out of luck. She blushed and hurried on to keep up with the rest of the women. ‘Missed out there, old son.’ His mates teased him. ‘Better luck next time.’

In the centre of town they found an inn which looked poverty stricken compared to the Two Bells. The food on offer was only Indian corn
and boiled beans. But they were hungry and washed it down liberally with the wine. The toothless old woman who served them smiled a welcome but spoke no English. By now they understood a little Spanish, but not enough to chat. They were on the lookout for female companions, but found that the Spanish maids were guarded carefully by mothers or duennas who were aware of the risks their charges faced now that there were thousands of soldiers in town.

The regiment was smaller after the snipers’ toll in the mountains, and soon even smaller due to a feverish illness that many developed. Some were hospitalised, some died. But Will, Ed and Charlie managed to avoid it, though Captain Thompson was ill for a week, leaving Will to exercise the stallion and scrounge supplies for.

Men bartered with peasants for extra food, but the Spanish diet was unfamiliar to British bellies. The men hadn’t been paid for months, so some traded clothes for food. Will swapped a spare belt and a pair of socks for an old hen. He, Ed and Charlie cooked it on an open fire behind their billet and were delighted to savour freshly cooked meat instead of dried beans. Charlie mused, ‘I dunno how they do it. These peasants eat nothing but maize and olives and drink cheap wine, yet they can fight like demons – and without good meat in their bellies.’

‘I’d give anything for some juicy red beef with potatoes and gravy.’ Ed scratched his head and wondered if he had lice.

‘There’s nothing better than mutton pie with boiled bacon on the side.’ Will sighed as he remembered Ma’s meals.

‘Bloody Spanish promises are like counterfeit coins – worthless’ was the word around the camp. Evans wrote to London and to the Spanish ambassador once more. Whispers went around, blaming the Spanish providores for insufficient supplies. Will and his mates decided that among the Spaniards, it was hard to know who was friend and who was foe.

The army stayed in Briviesca for three weeks, taking a welcome respite from the daily marches. When the call came to move on it was late November and the rough mountains appeared softened with snow. Winter had taken hold. They shouldered packs and set out, tramping steadily
towards Vitoria and praying for finer weather. But it remained miserable, cold, foggy with frequent snows. There were occasional thaws followed by overnight frost that turned muddy slush to ice. In the morning there were rock-hard, razor-sharp frozen furrows in the roads. So sharp they tore boots open.

As the troops came closer to Vitoria they passed small outlying cottages. An occasional roadside devotional reliquary or convent reminded them that they were in Catholic Spain. On 3 December they saw the town: a cluster of buildings in the centre of a low plain, with a series of tall mountains hugging the background like giant guardians. The spire of the Church of San Miguel was central, dominating lower buildings which surrounded it like worshipping pilgrims – all showed palely white in the afternoon light. Once the town gate was in sight, they were amazed at the welcome prepared for them. Ed let out a long low whistle. ‘Hey fellows, just look at that! They really want us.’

They stared, and spread across the arch was a large white canvas banner scrawled in English. ‘The generous British who fight for the freedom of nations.’ The words were surmounted by a globe crowned with the flags of Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. Royalist soldiers lined the streets and several regimental bands struck up Riego’s Hymn as General Evans rode into town. There were banners and church bells that tolled a welcome. Will and friends were reassured by this welcome coming so soon after their harassment by the Basques en route. The company marched through the town’s first and then its second main square and they saw streets named after ironmongers, shoemakers and cutlers. There were handsome arcades with arched entrances. Gazing around, they agreed that the town looked promising and winter here might not be too bad.

Though the town’s welcome was warm, the entering army was buffeted by wind-driven showers. Will was given charge of Captain Thomson’s horse while billets were negotiated. The already crowded town was short of space – the Spanish had arrived first and taken most of what was available. Vitoria, with a population of less than 16,000, was ill prepared to cope with 20,000 soldiers. While officers patrolled, most British troops sat in the square in drenching rain, awaiting quarters. The mayor
decided that empty convents and churches would suffice, and didn’t care that they were damp and ridden with fleas, lice and rats.

That evening, Will and his friends tried to forget the mayor’s mean-spirit in allocating half-derelict convents for billets as they watched amazed while the whole town glimmered under a display of welcoming fireworks, let off in the plaza. ‘A little more warmth in barracks,’ Ed grumbled, ‘and less fire in the sky wouldn’t be a bad thing.’

Once again, the men were forced to sleep on flagstones or floorboards because mattresses and blankets were unavailable. They used their wet clothes for covering. Ed and Charlie were less than pleased, but with a cocky grin Will parted from them for the night to sleep in a straw filled manger beside the stallion.

General Evans sent demands to the Spanish government for the supplies he was due. He was promised arms, bedding, winter clothes and back pay, but only a few cartloads of arms arrived. Cynicism spread through the British army and all learned not to rely on Spanish guarantees.

Then the illness that had struck in Briviesca strengthened its grip. Victims suffered vomiting and diarrhoea, then developed fever and dysentery. If they didn’t die in the first few days, gangrene ate into their limbs. Few survived. Medical officers, wives and children also suffered. At first the dead were buried with military ceremony and the dead march was played. But finally, there were so many deaths that naked bodies were simply piled into oxcarts and driven to burial grounds or convent gardens. Graves were shallow because the frozen ground made it difficult to dig deeper. It was so cold and fuel was so short that coffins were an unaffordable luxury – all timber was needed for cooking or heating. With rampant illness and frequent mass burials, the city was like London during the plague. Conditions were so bad that, when Don Carlos sent messages through lines offering rewards for men who defected and brought weapons, some were tempted to desert.

To counter the miserable conditions, Captain Thompson tried to lift his company’s spirits by suggesting they plan for Christmas. However, food was only available for those with funds and Will had long since spent all he had. Ed flirted with a local girl he met at the city market and wangled an invitation to share a meal with her family. They were farmers living just
outside the town and he hoped that he would be able to barter for pork and bread so that he could have a Christmas dinner with his friends.

On the appointed day, he walked three miles under a dark sky, his coat dusted by occasional snow flurries, his breath floating in light clouds before him as he walked. Deep drifts covered the roadside and the snow drained the landscape of colour – the only relief from the sharp whiteness everywhere were dark fence posts and trees with bare black branches.

When he arrived at the cottage, though language was a problem, with gestures and smiles he charmed her family and was invited in. The home had only two rooms, living and bedroom, both warmed by the kitchen stove. There was the smell of baking bread, and a thick stew of carrots and beans flavoured with garlic bubbled on the stove. He shook the girl’s father’s hand and was led to a chair, but had to tread over a lean hound sprawling in front of the hearth. It opened one eye and gave a gentle thump of its tail. The evening went well after he tabled the small quart bottle of wine he’d scrounged. Food was eaten and English and Spanish folk songs were sung. The moon came up as he left, promising to return. He hoped he could buy pork in exchange for a greatcoat, though he was unsure where that would come from – perhaps one of the recent dead. The girl walked him to the gate, but when he tried to kiss her, she ducked her head and shyly moved away.

The next day the town was in an uproar. A baker, Jose de Elosegui, was thought to be poisoning the regiment’s bread as well as enticing men to desert to the Carlise cause. He was arrested and brought to trial for treason. As soon as he heard, Thompson called his men together and asked if any had bought food from Elosegui. None had, so there was no call to give evidence in the hastily convened Spanish court. The baker was tried, found guilty and garrotted, as was the Spanish custom, before sundown. Justice was swift where traitors were concerned. The men hoped that the food would improve.

On Christmas Eve, wearing two greatcoats, Ed went to collect pork from the farmer. He left one coat behind in exchange. This time he slyly found an opportunity to kiss his girlfriend by the garden gate, whereupon she blushed and shooed him off down the road.
That evening, Ed noticed that he’d come out in a few itchy spots. Later a rash broke out all over his body. He felt tired and nauseous. Captain Thompson ordered him to hospital, where surgeons diagnosed ‘fever’. On the second day in hospital he developed diarrhoea and delirium. He suffered for five days, unaware that Christmas had come and gone. Despite careful attention his condition worsened and he succumbed. Will wrote to Liza.

*Vitoria, Spain*

*30th December 1835*

*Dear Liza,*

*I have some bad news. You will recall our neighbour, Ed, and how we all played around our stable. We had some good laughs and we teased him for being a sniffly skinny lad. We were the best of friends. Sadly, he caught fever last week. The surgeons tried to help him, but there was nothing that could be done. He wasted away over five days and died yesterday. He was so ill it was a merciful release. I used to think he’d make a good husband for you and would have welcomed him into our family.*

*My main regret is having talked him into joining me on this adventure. The fever is everywhere. Pray God I may be spared. Please pass my condolences on to his Ma and Pa. Tell them he died a brave soldier.*

*Will*
The misery in the town and the weather, together with awareness of the dead and dying dampened spirits. New Year was celebrated with over-indulgence in wine, rum or sherry. Oblivion was better than reality. But quiet times made the generals nervous and Evans, together with his Spanish allies, decided to attempt to open a pass in the Arlaban Mountains. The British were now in billets scattered throughout Vitoria and nearby villages while they waited for the French and Royalist armies to join them. When they arrived, there were about 8,000 men in all and they began to move towards the heights of Arlaban, where the pass was held by Carlists headquartered in the village of Mendijaz.

As luck would have it, Captain Thompson’s stallion cast a shoe and was lame with a swollen fetlock. He commanded Will to stay and tend the horse, applying poultices. On 16 January, the troops assembled and then moved out. Will watched them leave and he uttered a thankful oath, blessing his charge’s indisposition. He hoped that Charlie would come back as fit as when he left.

On 17 January tales from the front drifted back. Rumours of British bravery, Carlist atrocities and cowardice among the Spanish were rife. No tale lost any detail in the telling and soon there were more stories around the camps than there were soldiers. Casualties brought back tales of attacks on Mendijur and Guievar and bayonet skirmishes on the plains between. Will half wished he could be with his company. He thought of what they were facing and this brought on flashbacks of the Hernani skirmish, leaving him sweating and shaking. He had a sneaking feeling that he was being disloyal. The horse was improving so he prepared to leave the village and join his fellows. But things moved too quickly.

The following day, General Cordova, ordered a retreat, the lines collapsed and Evans had no alternative but to also retreat. The British lines shuffled back to billets, dispirited and angry. Charlie was among them, his uniform tattered and his face smudged with mud and soot. He joined Will for a small meal, which he picked at. His hands shook as he described the sound of muskets and the impact of cannon fire on the column.

‘Oh, Will we were lucky. White Caps were everywhere, in villages and hiding in outlying cottages.’ He wiped his brow. ‘We had some trapped...
in a lane so we pursued, chasing and running after them into woods where another British regiment was prepared to get them on the flank. But fog set in and came down so thick that we couldn’t see them or the rest of the regiment. We were keen to keep going, but then we heard the bugle recall. Anger reddened his cheeks and he spoke faster, slamming his fist into the wooden table. ‘They say we were bloody winning and that the spineless Spanish general gave in too easy. They say he was anxious to get away to go to a ruddy concern in town, and that he had a lady friend he was desperate to meet. I swear you can’t trust the Spaniards!’ Charlie’s voice grew louder and deeper with fury as he thought of the risks he’d taken and the Spaniards skittering back to town for an easy life.

Morale was low. Inglorious defeats and continuing deaths from fever combined to make men restless. Rumour spread among the ranks – Will and Charlie knew that some officers were disheartened and heard of quarrels that led to duels. For their own part, their purses were empty, they hadn’t been paid for two months and wondered what had happened to dreams of pockets jingling with sovereigns. Remembering his promises of wealth for war, Will was too ashamed to write to Ma and ask for more money.

As the days grew longer, winter’s discontent began to pass. Spring approached and the scent of blossoms drifted around town. Evans decided to march the remnants of the Legion to the coast. Captain Thompson remarked to Will as he mounted ready to quit Vitoria, ‘You know, Will, a thousand brave men, who four months ago were full of life and hope, now lie under Spanish sods. Damned war. Curse the Spaniards!’

They marched for ten days and the troops, though footsore and fatigued, found their spirits lifting as they approached the warmer coast. Will and Charlie were with a company assigned to protect the muleteers’ carts carrying supplies and the wounded. Then as a fresh wind whipped clouds above, Charlie insisted that his waterman’s nose could smell the sea and his blood surged. He began to feel almost at home.
San Sebastian

Santander’s peasant huts shone white beside the blue of the ocean, the ozone laden breezes soothed sweating brows, but this was just a temporary stop as the army had to press on. Steamers were drawn up in the bay, men embarked for the journey and finally disembarked further up the coast at San Sebastian. Dismay swept through the ranks, when they saw what had happened to the town. What had been free when they left, was now a city under siege. This arrival was far different from their entry into the city about a year ago. ‘Bugger, where did it all go wrong?’ was Will’s loud complaint. ‘Flamin’ generals marched us through ice and snow to kill half of us with fever, and now back to where we came from and it’s full of Carlists. Bloody smart-arses the lot of them!’

This time there was no salute from the castle, no ringing of bells, no Viva’s from the populace, who had fled. There was a smattering of shot from Carlists hidden in vantage points to the west of the town, swearing as they saw the arrival of the Ingleses. The Royalist defenders had retreated almost to the city’s central square. Their cannons were anchored under grassy embrasures, and the streets were barricaded. Windows were papered over, shops were shut and the central plaza was deserted except for a few soldiers passing through. Where there had been bands and guitars now there was the sound of guns booming from a battery firing towards enemy forces.

To the west of the city, the Carlist lines were embedded along three hillside ranges, in between which were deep ravines. To attack, the Royalists would have had to rush across grassy slopes, climb over rock walls and wind their way through orchards and banks of bushes, all the way under fire. Will gazed around before elbowing Charlie. ‘I reckon you’d hafta be quick or it’s suicide.’

Their earlier convent billet was now a Carlist stronghold and the roadsides where they had trained were under White Cap control. The British watched Red Caps digging trenches and erecting protective mounds among the sandhills beyond the river. Cannonade directed towards the convent had little effect. White Caps jumped on top of their barricades, waved their caps and returned fire towards the town. The enemy was 3,000 strong.
A co-ordinated plan of battle was decided upon. General Reid and the Light Brigade would attack the Carlists from the right; General Shaw and the Irish regiment would take the centre, and the remaining men, under General Chichester would attack from the shore on the enemy’s left. On the night of 4 May 1836, word passed among the men to be ready. At two the next morning bugles sounded. Men gathered, alert and anxious for battle – anything was better than being shot at and not returning fire. The town was wet from a week’s rain when Will’s regiment assembled in the town square, joining others that had lined up in side streets: all were busy dressing, snapping locks, checking bayonets, muskets, flints and ramrods. General Evans was cheered as he rode among the troops. At 3 o’clock the brigade and Red Caps walked out under a moonless sky while low clouds shed showers. There must have been more than 800 bayonets at the ready.

As they advanced, Royalists directed cannon fire at the enemy in the convent. This was followed by a burst of flame and then shots were fired by both sides. Cannon fire, bursting with vivid flashes, lit up the darkness. The convent was on fire. Under cover of darkness, the British advanced towards outlying houses occupied by the enemy. But then as the morning light brightened the scene, the Carlists could see the dusky figures of the gathering battalions. Their aim improved and many British were wounded.

General Chichester and his regiment moved forward quickly and passed General Evans, who was coolly giving orders to his senior staff. Chichester urged his troops on. ‘Forward, men!’ There was a tumult of feet as men with fixed bayonets hurried up steep and slippery roads. The sound of shot and cannon from the White Caps thundered their resistance. On the hillside it was hard for the British companies to stay together. Some scattered, men fell.

Will’s company surged over the first hill and ran down into the next valley. They saw that not more than half their company had survived – the remainder were shot or lost.

‘God’s blood, where the hell are they all?’ yelled Charlie. They skirted along the lower part of the ravine under cover of an apple orchard and caught glimpses of redcoats among the trees. Praying that there was safety in numbers, they ran to join them. The regrouped company moved to
the top of the ridge and saw that the Irish had broken through the Carlist lines. Perhaps there was a chance after all.

They halted beside a building – a former guard house. Gladly they took refuge. Captain Thompson and around 40 men were defending it. Thompson took stock: few men and a house so damaged by cannon fire that it couldn’t be defended for long. ‘Count your rounds, men. Ready your rifles.’ He prepared to fight it out.

Enemy scouts with spyglasses realised how few were at the house and sent a party to dislodge them. Twice they attacked, bearing down with bayonets. Twice they were repulsed with bayonet and shot. Cannon fire damaged the back wall. The wounded lay around and the Carlists retreated up the hill under gunfire.

The Irish sent reinforcements in parties of ten to their aid, but these were not enough. Captain Thompson turned to Will. ‘We’ll not survive. Get to Shaw’s regiment and get as many men as he can spare. Be quick, man!’ Will hunched low and dodged outside and along a hedge until he had the shelter of the breastworks behind the building. Then he took to his heels, sheltered at first by the works, then by low bay bushes, sinking with every step deep into the mud, slipping and sliding, never daring to stop. He reached Shaw’s men, breathlessly delivered the message and then started back to the cottage with 25 men by his side.

Halfway there, exhausted and not as cautious as he’d been on the way down, he heard a shot. At the same time he was spun to one side as the force of the ball tore into his left arm, went through and out the other side. He fell to his knees, swallowed mud, and a jagged slice of shrapnel pierced his side. He put his right hand to his arm – it came away dripping with blood. He lay pretending to be dead, and saw through half closed eyes that clods of earth were being torn up as bullets poured like hail into the ploughed field beside the lane. The sound of bugle and marching feet told him that the rest of the relief column was not far away. He prayed they’d come quickly.

The White Caps retreated as the Irish advanced, and Will struggled to his feet and headed towards safety. He was soon behind his own lines. Hugging his wounded arm, he stumbled back towards San Sebastian, thanking the angels that it was his arm and not his leg that had been shot.
An untidy gaggle of tired and wounded English and Red Caps began to head back to town. Together with others, he staggered along torn up roads and saw bodies all around. Close to the bay he heard the boom of a cannon. The shot came from the navel steamer Phoenix, newly arrived in San Sebastian. She’d joined the bombardment. Soon the Salamander also began firing towards White Cap lines. ‘Thank God for the navy.’

Will, faint from blood loss, feared he would fall by the wayside, when a rough bearded Red Cap seeing his distress, grabbed him around the waist and supported him into the town square. Perhaps he would survive.

San Sebastian, Spain
June 1836

Dear Liza

I’m about to be sent home. There are several steamers here in the bay and as soon as the surgeons say I’m fit to leave I’ll be aboard. So look for me down at the Thames side soon. I’ll be glad to be back home in Rotherhithe.

I have a wound in my left arm, which is beginning to heal. I took a Carlist musket shot, but was lucky as it went straight through. I think the wool of my jacket saved me from extra damage. It means I cannot fire a musket, nor charge with the bayonet, so I’m no use to the army. I’d wish the wound was smaller, but there you are – no bones broken, so I’m safe from amputation.
I can’t say I’m sorry to leave Spain. Most of the men are hoping to quit next month when their first year of service is up. Relations with the Spanish are not good. I wish Charlie could come too. You must remember him from the old days. He’s been a good friend and trustworthy. I hope we can go into some business together when he comes home.

Things here are going downhill and, though the last battle saw us drive out about three thousand enemy, we lost a lot of our own men. The Irish were hard hit. They are brave men and they came to our rescue when we were under fire.

But, enough of war. I’ll be glad to be back with you and Ma, meet old friends, work with the horse and chaise, and walk through London streets. Hope the Two Bells is still serving fine ale and has a spare bench for me. Give Ma my love. I’ll be knocking on your door soon.

Will

A year after his return from Spain, Will married Harriet Cook, a coachman’s daughter. But he was restless and rarely at home. He sought the company of men he’d fought beside. He felt comfortable among them – more so than with other chaps who’d never seen battle. He’d learned that survival depended on being alert; he was on edge and watchful most of the time.
The seats in Union Hall, though hard, were full as the bells of Big Ben rang the time at 2.00 pm. The crowd muttered and shifted on the wooden benches. Some were there out of curiosity, but others came to escape the driving rain that had soaked London for the past two days. Constables stood near the doors and a clerk of the court was at attention waiting for the magistrate, Mr Cottingham, to enter.

At precisely 2.10 the clerk cleared his throat and called loudly, ‘All rise.’ The crowd did so as Mr Cottingham entered through a rear door and took his place behind the bench. The clerk then called, ‘Bring in the prisoner!’

A small side door opened and a gaoler entered, pushing before him a fashionably dressed young man, who hunched his shoulders and scowled as he was jostled towards the dock. Once there, he shook off the guard, straightened his shoulders and buttoned his jacket. Then he scrutinised the court.

‘State the prisoner’s name,’ ordered the magistrate.
‘William Guest, Your Honour,’ replied the constable.
‘What are the charges and who is the prosecutor?’
‘He is charged with being on the premises of Mr Evans in Tooley Street last night, 29 November.’
‘Would the prosecutor please step forward and give evidence?’

With that Evans, a middle-aged thick-set man dressed in black, stood up and took the oath. ‘Your Honour,’ he began. ‘I was going to my counting-house, where I keep large sums of money, and I saw this man, together with another, lurking in the passage-way. I went forward to ask them what they were doing, but when they saw me approach they turned away. I called to them and asked again what they were doing. They mumbled something and looked dodgy, so I said I’d call the police.’ He paused and put his hands to his coat lapels to adjust his jacket, coughed and continued. ‘Imagine my surprise, Your Honour, when this young man pulled a life-preserver out of his pocket; he swore using rough gutter words,
and said he’d strike me. I was afraid for my life so I shouted, “Police, robbers. Stop, thief!” Then I heard footsteps and a whistle.’

The accused stood in the dock, shaking his head in denial and muttering softly as his accuser addressed the court.

Evans ignored the interruption. ‘The two men ran and I saw one throw something into the gutter. Standing so near my counting-house, I guessed they were about to break down the door, gain entry and rob me.’ He finished his account and retired to a seat in the front row.

The court called for the next witness to come forward and George Blake, a local wine merchant, was sworn in. He was tall and thin with a neatly clipped grey beard. When Cottingham asked for his evidence, he answered loudly, frowning at William Guest all the while. ‘Your Honour, I heard the cry “Stop, thief!” and saw the prisoner run down Tooley Street, so I chased him and caught him. As I grabbed hold of his arm, he dropped a life-preserver into the gutter. At that moment the constable arrived and arrested him.’

Cottingham made some notes on his pad. ‘Thank you. Be seated.’ He turned to the prisoner. ‘What have you to say for yourself?’

Will stood with shoulders back and gave a small smile and a bow, before he answered. ‘Your Honour, there’s been a mistake. I’m an honest cab proprietor and a returned soldier. I fought in the British auxiliary army. I own four houses in Weymouth Street, Vauxhall, which were left to me by my father. I was waiting with a friend for two young ladies. We’d promised to take them to the theatre when Mr Evans came up and accosted us, accusing us of being thieves.’

‘Is your friend in court?’

‘No.’

‘Is either of the ladies in court?’

‘The prisoner looked slowly around the court before replying, ‘No, my friend isn’t here and of course the ladies wouldn’t be.’

‘Please tell us their names so we can check your story.’

‘Sir, I could not think of disclosing the ladies’ names in case they should be published and their characters damaged.’

‘Well, write down the names of the young ladies. My only object is to ascertain whether there is any foundation for what you say.’
‘With respect, I cannot do that as I do not wish to expose the daughters of a respectable tradesman to public ridicule.’

Hearing this, some laughed, a few jeered, but one tall man wearing a faded redcoat, called out, ‘Hear, hear! A true gentleman’s reply.’

‘Silence!’ the magistrate thundered. ‘Any further nonsense and I’ll clear the court.’ Then he turned to the prisoner once more. ‘Young man, the circumstances under which you were taken into custody are fraught with suspicion and before I can think of letting you go I must know something more of your character.’

Will put his hands on the bar in front of the dock, leaned forward and cleared his throat. ‘Sir, all I had in my hand was the key to one of my houses in Weymouth Street – certainly not a life preserver.’

Cottingham looked at the police officers in the court. ‘Is the arresting officer here?’

‘Yes, Your Honour,’ said one and he stepped forward.

‘Do you know anything of this man or the company he keeps?’

‘Sir, he is an associate of thieves. He’s well known for running with a group of men we call the ‘swell mob’.’

Will looked at the floor and shuffled. ‘I’m an honest man,’ he muttered.

Cottingham raised his eyebrows as he turned to the prisoner. ‘Now what have you to say to the constable’s evidence?’

Will shrugged. ‘I confess that I do know some members of a gang we call the Vitoria Veterans. They are former army comrades and some have come on hard times. Good men, all. We were promised wages and pensions that never came - though many, like me, were wounded for the cause. They are all brave veterans who like an occasional drink together.’

The magistrate nodded and seemed sympathetic as the prisoner continued. ‘But I must insist that I’ve never been in custody before and every syllable I uttered about being a cab proprietor, owner of houses and everything else I said is absolutely true.’

Cottingham glanced at the constable. ‘Have you anything to add?’

The constable remembered the pickpockets that he’d chased down back alleys, and the abuse that ruffians hurled at him as he tried to do his job. He saw a man he knew to be one of the Vitoria Veterans was scowling
at him from the back of the court. He turned to Cottingham, and cleared his throat. ‘Your Honour, this man has a bad character and he’s a member of a gang of thieves.’ He pointed to two other constables standing in the court.

‘Just ask these officers. I’m sure they’ll confirm what I’ve said.’

The magistrate fingered his pen slowly, then he beckoned one forward. ‘Is what your colleague says of this man true?’

The second constable nodded. ‘Yes. I’ve given him warnings before this.’

Cottingham tapped a finger on the bench. ‘Based on the evidence before me,’ he said, ‘and the probability that you were about to rob the counting-house, I sentence you to six weeks in the house of corrections.’

The gaoler stepped forward and pulled the prisoner out of the dock, nudging him towards the cells at the back of the court house.

‘Blast the government and Spaniards!’ Will cursed. ‘Tell me what’s to become of my horse while I’m locked up. A man’s got to earn a living. I’ve a family to support.’

The man in the redcoat stood to attention and saluted Will as he was pushed from the dock.

Unfortunately the house of corrections did not improve Guest’s behaviour. There he met up with other veterans who had suffered in the war and were out of work, homeless and hungry. This angry band of men felt that a reasonable life was their due and if the government wouldn’t pay, then the country and its citizens owed them. Each one had his own story of danger and injustice. Shared stories fuelled their resentment.

On his release he heard that Charlie was out of work and begging down by the docks. Furious at this, Will searched for him and dragged him back to the shelter of the Two Bells, where he ordered two pints. They drank and belly-ached about their problems.

‘What happened to our pensions?’ Charlie frowned and downed his drink in one gulp.

‘Fill ‘er up again.’ Will waved to the bartender.

‘Didya hear that the House of Lords discussed our claims? That chinless wonder, Lord Melbourne, said that they won’t pay up and that
'anyone who trusted Spanish promises was a fool.' The froth from Charlie’s ale lingered on his top lip and his head drooped further towards his chest.

‘The richer they are, the worse they are.’ Will hissed. ‘Sod it! They don’t care about the likes of us. Selfish bastards, all of them! Wouldn’t throw a bucket of water on the likes of us if we were on fire.’ Together, he and Charlie hatched a plan for revenge. It was time to collect their dues from some wealthy good-for-nothing. Will suggested that they rob a mansion belonging to a man who had recently abused him about the fare he charged for a cab ride – Robert Breese, a tea merchant with connections to the government.

‘If it’s a big house, there’s a risk a servant might catch us.’ Charlie put his glass back on the table and frowned.

‘No. Look, Breese goes to his warehouse every morning and never leaves until 5. He’s used my cab often and he’s as regular as clockwork. His wife’s a socialite and usually out. And the servants’d be at the market if we pick the right time. Around midday I reckon’d be best.’ Will stamped his foot and swore. ‘Bugger, this country owes us!’

Around lunch time the next day Will and Charlie walked down the back lane behind the Breese house. They crept through the service gate and into the scullery. Will moved swiftly towards the front rooms. ‘Perhaps there’ll be some family silver we can sell.’ He gestured to Charlie to follow. But, overawed by the size of the place, Charlie was slow.

Will, hurrying ahead, pocketed some coins and thrust two brooches into a shawl that had been left on a marble-topped sideboard. Moving further up the hall, he tripped on the corner of a loose mat, fell and struck his head on a door frame. Mrs Breese was upstairs, resting with a headache. Hearing the clatter, she opened her bedroom window and yelled for help. Charlie heard her scream and escaped through the scullery door. Will was not so lucky. A passing constable raced through the front door, saw Will and grabbed him.

‘Turn out your pockets,’ he ordered as he shoved Will hard against the wall and threatened him with his truncheon. Will looked over the
constable’s shoulder and saw a crowd gathering outside the door. He realised there was no hope of escape.

‘You’re under arrest,’ the constable growled as he gathered up the evidence and marched his prisoner out the front door.

The case was heard in London in March.

**Surry, Lent Assize, 28 March 1842**

The Assizes were busy and court officials relocated Will’s hearing to the Court of the Exchequer. The *Times* reported the case:

> Before the Hon. Sir Edward Hall Alderson, Knight, one of the Barons of our Lady the Queen of her Court of Exchequer on Monday the 28th day of March 1842. The Jurors for our Lady the Queen found that William Guest, late of the Parish of Saint Mary Newington in the County of Surrey, did on the 22nd March at the dwelling house of Robert Breese, feloniously break, enter and steal: one brooch of the value of three shillings, one breast pin of the value of two shillings, one shawl of the value of thirty shillings and a half sovereign, coin of the realm. His sentence 15 years transportation.

He was taken from court and imprisoned on a hulk in the Thames until a convict transport was available. Early in June he was sent to the *Emily*, a barque recently built in Calcutta. It was under the command of Jonathan Humble. The vessel sailed from London on 28 June 1842 with 238 male prisoners under the care of surgeon, Andrew Henderson. After a voyage of 149 days, the *Emily* arrived in Hobart Town on 24 November 1842. There were two deaths during the voyage. Henderson noted that Guest had been a soldier, had fought for the Queen in Spain and carried wounds from that war. He described him as ‘unsettled in his mind’.
Chapter 4
Saltash, Cornwall

Martha Goodman turned the corner from Tamar Place and hurried uphill in Fore Street, her skirts brushed by the wind. Behind her the Saltash ferry was busy unloading passengers newly arrived from Plymouth. It was a summer morning in 1841. She was late, and breathless as she entered her mother’s grocery shop and she knocked her toe against a tub of flour, one of three lined up just inside the door. She muttered an oath and rubbed her foot as her mother came from the back room with a broom in hand. The store smelled richly of hard cheese, tea and coffee. Bags of rice, dried peas and barley were stacked on shelves, out of the way of mop and bucket when the floor was scrubbed each morning.

Betsy Goodman pushed a few wisps of greying hair into the cap pinned to the back of her head and wiped her hands on her apron. ‘Late again.’ She shoved a tin measuring cup out of her way on the counter. ‘Why can't you be on time? I've been sorting stock and tidying and you should've been here to help the customers. Lordy, Lordy you're not worth your keep.’

‘Aw, Ma, leave me alone. I slept in. Didn't mean to. It was dark and I didn't wake until late.’ Martha turned her back as she pulled off her gloves and dropped them onto a shelf. ‘I'm here – see? I'm breathless from rushing up Fore Street.’ Having missed breakfast, she longed to grab a handful of raisins from the barrel beside her mother’s elbow, but didn't quite dare.

Betsy frowned. ‘Now you’re here, try and work quietly. Mo's asleep.’ Mary Ann, ‘Mo’, her older daughter, had always been sickly: a premature baby who had been slow to thrive and always tiny. The boys, her brothers, Henry Junior, William and George, nicknamed her 'Little Mo' when she was two years old. Now, at nineteen, the family knew her simply as Mo.

Catherine Dunsford from next door bustled into the middle of the argument, always smiling. She and her brood of six children were frequent visitors to the shop. Every morning she’d see her husband, Albert, off to work and come straight in to share the town gossip before getting on with
the day’s chores. The women had been friends for years and over that time had helped one another through births, illnesses and deaths.

‘Ah Betsy, good morning; and the same to you, Martha.’ She settled her generous behind onto a straight backed wooden chair beside the counter, shifted her girth to the most comfortable position and plonked her bag down beside her. She was there for a chat. Catherine welcomed the quiet order of the shop away from the bustle and squabbles of her young’uns. Not that she’d admit to Betsy that her family were sometimes difficult to manage and made her head ache, or that occasionally she came in on a spurious errand just to get away from them.

‘Albert tells me things are right busy at the shipyard. Better’n last year. He's been leaving early of a morning to get in extra hours. The navy keeps the pressure up. How's Henry finding it?’

‘Henry's looking to be made head shipwright and hopes for a raise,’ Betsy leaned forward. ‘It’ll mean I can ease off a bit. Mo isn't strong and can't help out, so I rely on Martha.’ She hesitated and whispered, ‘Just between you and me, she ain't always easy. You know what young girls can be like: so headstrong.’ Catherine was sympathetic. ‘Mmmm. That’s children for you.’

Betsy lifted the corner of her apron and brushed some crumbs off the counter. ‘Times are tough, prices go up, and customers complain. You know, some behave as though I’m to blame when flour costs a few pennies more.’

‘Ah, yes. I reckon things aint the same since we beat Napoleon. Old folk talk about the shipbuilding days when we were fighting the Frenchies. We needed ships and soldiers then. Now, it’s all about selling and sending stuff off to the colonies.’ Catherine nodded as she pulled a shopping list from her pocket. Martha slid away to the back room, where she adjusted her white cotton bonnet, lifted her apron off the hook behind the door and pulled it over her head. She paused and listened to the buzz of conversation from the front room before tightening its strings around her waist, happy to have been spared a debate with her mother about work hours. Back at the counter, Betsy and Catherine had their heads together sorting out local gossip, so she set about stacking tea chests and bags of sugar and salt.
Carefully, she pushed a jar of oil out of the way just as Richard Gregory, a stone mason who lived in a cottage up the hill, came in with his two children. He’d been in before, but not so often since his wife died six months earlier. Most days, his sister Emily shopped for the family. Martha noticed that he walked with an air of confidence and she saw how easily his muscled arms cradled one-year-old Charlie, while three-year-old Eliza dragged at his sleeve. His hazel eyes were set wide apart and this gave his gaze an air of steady gravity. Eliza tugged at his left hand and tapped the silver signet ring on his little finger to attract his attention.

‘Matches, Mauritius sugar, four ounces of tea and do you have any dried figs, miss?’ he asked. Martha turned to one of the shelves behind her and lifted down a box of matches.

‘Will these do? Sorry, no figs today. And how much sugar?’ She glanced up at him.

‘Two ounces of your best quality.’ He leaned forward as Eliza gripped his hand asking for a treat. But Richard ignored her as he watched this slim blue-eyed girl wrap his order. When she handed it to him, he pulled free of Eliza, reached out and his chapped fingertips touched hers, staying a little longer than was proper. Martha blushed and looked down. Betsy grabbed a broom and bustled across to whisk away a handful of spilt flour on the floor near Martha’s feet, so Richard picked up his purchases and left. Catherine followed, waving goodbye.

In the empty shop, Betsy thrust the broom behind the door and turned to Martha. ‘What’re you thinking? He's no good. He’s got two babes ‘n not much work. Don’t set your cap for him. Stop dreaming and get back to work.’

‘You’re imagining things. He's just a customer and much too old for me. You should be grateful – at least I’m here and working while Mo rests.’ Martha glanced towards the upstairs bedrooms before turning to face her mother.

Betsy had her hands planted on her hips as she stood close to her. ‘You know nothing of the ways of the world. You’re a child.’

‘I'm not! I’m seventeen! Not a baby! I live away. I earn my keep and proud to.’
‘You’re a romantic and too young to be thinking of marriage. Get the stars out of your eyes!’

‘Ma, stop nagging.’ She kicked out at a pickle barrel.

‘Martha. Just listen Martha. I’ve seen men hunting for wives before and he’s one of them. He wants a maid to care for his tots.’

‘How do you know? You’re so quick to judge.’ Martha turned as though to walk away, but Betsy stood in front of her and said, ‘Forget him.’

Martha took a deep breath and looked directly into her mother’s eyes. ‘I’m sick of you and Pa telling me what to do. For God’s sake, stop bothering me.’

‘It’s for your own good. You’re a child.’

Their voices had been rising and by now Martha was shouting. ‘Yes – and I’m tied to your wretched apron strings. Dear God, I want to be free.’

‘Don’t give me that back chat!’

‘Just leave me be.’ Martha glared at her mother, muttered an oath and flounced out into Fore Street. A horse and cart racketed past and caused her to stop. She watched it race downhill and remembered the hurt on her mother’s face. She flushed and felt sorry. Ma was all right, Pa was great as fathers go and, if Mo was too sickly to help, it wasn't her mother's fault. Her cheeks were pink and her brow furrowed as she turned back.

‘Sorry, Ma, my tongue lets loose before I know it.’ She bent forward to brush her lips lightly across her mother's cheek. Betsy nodded, but there remained an uncomfortable silence as the two women tidied the stock.

Over the next few weeks Richard came shopping for small items. While he was there Martha kept to the rear of the shop, leaving Betsy to attend to him. But in a small town it wasn’t hard for him to discover where she lived, and he lingered along Tamar Place on fine afternoons, playing with his children at the Sand Cove; at other times he loitered while buying a few cockles from the stalls beside the river. Then one fine afternoon he met her as she returned from work. He doffed his cap and pushed the children on ahead.

‘What a great surprise to see you. You look well.’ Martha plucked at the buttons on her gloves. ‘Miss Goodman – may I call you Martha?’
Glancing at the ground, she hesitated before nodding. ‘Well, Martha, I’d like you to call me Richard. Can we meet and talk sometime? Would you join me for coffee at the Sailor’s Arms?’

She looked sideways along the street, grateful that there were few people around to tattle to Betsy. ‘Maybe, sir.’

‘Richard.’ He corrected her as he held out his hand to shake hers; Martha bobbed a quick curtsey and took his. He let go her hand. ‘Coffee at the inn tomorrow evening?’

She dipped her head and her voice was soft. ‘Yes.’

That first coffee and chat led to another and another. Martha enjoyed his company but was wary of Betsy’s censure, so she decided it would be safer to meet at her lodgings, even though she shared them with Hannah Blake.

Emily was happy to care for Charlie and Eliza while Richard went courting, but not so pleased when he was working in the countryside and she was left in charge of the children all day. On his return, she’d greet him with a list of the troubles they’d caused. ‘Look at me, picking up and cleaning after your babes when I should be out earning. I want to look for work in Plymouth. Yet I’m stuck here. Find a wife, for heaven’s sake! Then I can get on with my own life.’ Richard became more diligent in his pursuit of Martha.

Daily he called on her with a small offering of fresh baked buns and, as he handed them over, he lifted her hand to kiss her wrist. Martha bustled around, smiling as she set the small deal table in the front room. They laughed as they ate and drank. Ever present was the sound of waves and rattling masts blown in on the sea salt breeze. He flirted, praising everything from her cooking to her slim waist and sweet nature, and she never questioned his motives.

Martha looked forward to his visits. There was a frisson associated with keeping the courtship from Betsy and Henry, and it made the autumn of 1841 seem golden. She was light-hearted; she dreamed of him and thought of him each morning as she woke. She was flattered that an older man found her attractive. She laughed when she remembered the way he
looked at her, yet she worried what her parents would say. Hannah was sworn to secrecy.

But in a small town, word has a way of getting around. Henry heard rumours that Martha was being courted by an older man; so he waited at home one morning with the grocery shop locked until she arrived. In the quiet of the darkened room with Betsy behind him he stood tall. When Martha entered he crossed his arms and then fixed his eyes on hers.

‘I've got to talk to you,’ he said in his sternest voice. ‘I've heard stories about you and that Gregory fellow.’

‘Not the town gossips again! They love telling tales.’ She gave a snort of disgust and tried to turn away, but Henry jabbed at the air with a finger. ‘Is it true? I can’t believe what I hear.’

‘Maybe you shouldn’t – folk make such a fuss about nothing.’

‘I want the truth. Have you seen him?’

‘Well, you know it’s a small town. I’ve seen him with the children down by the quay.’

‘Seen? Met? What’ve you got to say?’ He turned to Betsy and thumped the counter. ‘See what your easygoing ways have led to?’

‘We’ve met a few times. Just for coffee and a chat. There’s no harm in that.’

Henry folded his arms across his chest and spoke firmly. ‘Martha, he's too old.’

‘He’s friendly and the children are sweet.’

‘Tosh! Forget him.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s a hopeless match. He’s a wastrel.’

‘Pa, you don’t know him.’

‘And I don’t want to.’

‘But, he’s promised –’ Henry banged his fist on the counter so hard the packets of dried peas bounced, as he interrupted. ‘Promises are easily made. You're young, and'll find a good husband sometime. You’re not to see him.’

Betsy moved closer. ‘You’re pretty and smart. You can do better.’ She put her arm around Martha’s shoulder. ‘What's your hurry? There's plenty of time to think about marriage and children. If you’re always
rushing along, you might miss the pleasures of every day. Take your time. Look around.’

‘He says he loves me.’

‘Who could fail to love you?’

‘Oh, Ma!’

Henry gave an angry grunt, but Betsy pressed ahead. ‘Be patient. Wait and choose someone more your age. Marriage lasts a long time, so why not find a shipwright or sailor? They get the work around here.’

Martha’s cheeks reddened and she clenched her teeth. ‘You don’t understand. Richard's kind. He's generous. He loves me.’

Henry paced up and down and tapped the counter with a finger or two before continuing. ‘No, no. Even if he is willing to work hard, there ain’t many jobs for masons in Saltash. You’ll go hungry.’

Martha narrowed her eyes. She wanted to answer but, before she could think of what to say, her mother took firm hold of her arm. ‘If you marry and have those two babies to care for, you won’t have a future. You’ll be stuck in the kitchen, a complete slave to their needs.’ Martha pulled free.

Betsy's face brightened. ‘If you're lonely, why not have Mo stay with you? She'd be good company and you two have a lot in common.’

‘I’m not stupid, Ma. You want her to spy on me. Hannah's there and our lodgings are tiny. There's no room. Mo's better off where you can take care of her.’

Henry scowled and moved to the window to push the curtains back. He lifted his tool bag from the bench, then opened the door. ‘It’s a hopeless match,’ he insisted. ‘Stay away from him. There's an end to it.’

After he’d gone, Betsy had a quiet last word. ‘I’ll be watching you and what I might miss the town gossips’ll tell me.’ Martha shrugged and gave a non-committal cough before hurrying into the back room, where she swore under her breath as she put on her apron.

She was flattered by Richard’s attentions. He was 30 and relentless in his pursuit. Despite her family’s disapproval, or perhaps because of it, his charm overcame her hesitations. After some weeks, during which time Richard was attentive and generous, she decided she loved him.
Seagulls were wheeling and mewling against an angry sky as Richard walked along Tamar Place. It was early in the morning of 5 April 1842, and the street was deserted. He wore his best cloak and hat and carried a cane and a small bag. When he reached number 6, he knocked on Martha's bright red door. She was waiting inside, dressed in a white cotton frock with a blue shawl across her shoulders and fresh ribbons on her bonnet. The straps of a canvas bag across her forearm were visible where the fringe of her shawl fell above the wrist. She slipped through the door and shut it quietly behind her. ‘Hush, hush,’ she breathed. ‘We can’t risk having Hannah guess. She might tell Pa.’ She was shaking with excitement and tenderness as she felt his touch on her arm.

When they were a few yards from the door, he pulled her into the shadows of a building, took hold of her shoulders, drew her close and kissed first her eyebrows, then her mouth. ‘My darling, you’re sweet and I’m a lucky fellow. I’ll love you forever.’ Then, before they could be discovered, he took her hand and they hurried towards the wharf.

The wind lifted Martha's bonnet ribbons and ruffled the edge of her shawl as they neared the quay. Her shoes sank into damp sand as she stepped past two men repairing dinghies. When they reached the ferry, Richard tucked his hand under her elbow and helped her on board. As the town clock struck 7, sailors hauled in the anchors and the ferry headed into the Tamar. The tide was slow, the trip was short and Richard’s arm felt reassuringly strong around her shoulders, protecting her from the sea wind. On reaching Plymouth, the master secured the ferry beside the wharf as Richard gripped her hand. ‘We’re here, my love. No second thoughts?’

‘No,’ she whispered, yet trembled as she thought of the changes this would bring.

Soon they were walking to St Andrew’s. When they rounded a corner, she saw the great stone church with its gothic timber door open just a crack. In the shadow of the belfry and beside the door Richard's best man waited. John Symond was a squat plain man with ginger hair and freckles. He held out his hand to welcome them, greeting Richard first. Then he lifted his hat to Martha with a slight bow.
‘I’ve told the vicar you live with me in Mount Street. Best be sure he won’t object to the marriage because you come from Saltash. The banns have been read for the past three weeks, so everything’s set and I’ve found a fellow to be witness.’ John pulled forward a tall thin man in sailor's weeds, who was hovering in the shadows and introduced him. ‘Meet Davey Williams.’

Richard took off his hat, shook hands and nodded. ‘Thanks. This is Martha. We’re grateful to you.’ He turned and squeezed Martha's hand and linked her arm through his as they entered the church, followed by John and Davey. The air was still and heavy with the smell of mouldy hymn books and stale incense. In the gloom, they saw rows of pews and the nave under a high vaulted oak ceiling.

At the altar the vicar introduced himself. ‘John Heston. A blessing on you both and congratulations,’ he said.

‘Thank you,’ nodded Richard.

‘Shall we begin?’

Richard replied with a firm yes.

The ritual began. ‘We are gathered together to join this man and this woman – ’

Richard held her hand while Martha listened in a happy half-dream state. This was her future with her man, she was grown up. He edged his silver signet ring tenderly onto her finger and echoed the words, ‘With this ring I thee wed.’

Martha whispered, ‘I’ll love you and keep faith with you always.’ She smiled as she felt the warmth of his hand in hers.

It was a lonely wedding: no church bells or music, just words and two witnesses. When the ceremony ended the vicar closed his Bible, shook hands and wished them a happy and holy future. Richard passed across a jingle of coins as a donation. For a few seconds Martha’s thoughts went to her mother; then Richard laughed and kissed his bride before thanking the witnesses. The wedding party left the church slowly.

Outside the sun shone and the four strolled towards the Duke’s Arms inn, taking a short cut through the graveyard, where newer headstones stood tall and the older ones sank into the soil or listed to one side, like ships offshore in the wind. Leaves, newly grown since winter, rustled above them.
On arriving at the inn the wedding party were shown to a corner table, where they enjoyed a light supper with jokes and congratulations. As the meal ended Richard whispered, ‘I’ve engaged the best upper room. So, here, take one of the candles. Hurry on up, and I’ll join you shortly when I’ve seen John and Davey off.’

Martha blushed and walked shyly to the stairs, with the candle to light her way. At the bottom, she bowed and waved goodbye to the two witnesses, happy as she realised Richard was sensitive enough to allow her time to disrobe alone. Upstairs she changed into a modest cotton night gown before she slipped into the white sheeted four poster bed and waited for him to join her. She was breathless, anxious and excited at the same time, aware that this was a new adventure. Richard promised that better times would come and she prayed that he was right.

Early the next day Hannah hurried into the Fore Street store carrying the note that Martha had left on their dining table. It was addressed to her parents. Henry tore it open. ‘What? What does this mean?’ His face changed from disbelief to anger as he stared at it. ‘Is this the gratitude we get?’ He passed it to Betsy and quizzed her. ‘Did you know about this?’

She turned the note over and read it. ‘Oh my! No. Never.’

He looked accusingly at Hannah. ‘God damn! You must’ve known.’ She shrank back. ‘No, no. I didn’t.’ He moved as though to strike her just as she fumbled with her purse and turned towards the door. ‘I’m so sorry. I never knew a thing about it.’

He turned to Betsy, ‘Why didn’t she listen to us? The chap’s a no-hoper.’ Betsy’s mouth tightened as she thought of what this meant. ‘What’s to be done?’

‘Sneaking around like that – I’d like to thrash him.’ Henry’s hands twisted into tight fists. Seeing his anger, Betsy’s voice faltered as she interrupted. ‘Tush, let’s not be too hasty. It’s not what we wanted, but for better or worse, they’re married now so perhaps we should get to know him before we make a judgement.’
Henry was adamant. ‘I’ll not have them here.’ He tore the note into tiny pieces as he paced back and forth, muttering to himself. Betsy flopped into a chair. ‘My poor baby. I’ll miss her. Why didn’t she tell me?’

The news soon spread around town and Betsy dodged customers’ questions as best she could. It was especially hard for her when Catherine Dunsford, came into the shop to pass on the latest gossip.

‘Have you spoken to Martha?’

‘No. Henry’s stubborn and Martha’s a spirited lass. I doubt she’ll apologise.’ Distracted, Betsy poked at a row of honey jars, pushing them into a straight line. ‘Those pesky grammar school boys fiddle with the stock,’ she complained.

‘Can you arrange to see just her sometime?’

‘It’d be hard. Henry wouldn’t like it.’

Catherine sighed, aware that it would be hard for a wife to go against her husband’s wishes. ‘She’s a determined wee lass and likes her own way. She and Henry are alike, don’t you think?’

‘Mmm, both can be unbending.’

‘And you’re stuck in the middle?’

Betsy turned to face her friend. ‘It’s hard to be a mother. Sometimes I don’t know what’s for the best.’

Catherine leaned forward, eyes as sharp as a blackbird’s. ‘Emma Parsons told me that she cleaned Richard’s cottage in Upper Fore Street last Tuesday. Perhaps they’ll move back here.’

‘Yes, maybe,’ was all Betsy allowed herself to reply before she picked up her mop to swab the floor beneath the shelves. ‘Must get on.’

Catherine hitched her shawl around her shoulders and then stood up with her few purchases under her arm. ‘Bye.’

Betsy felt the separation keenly. She missed the friendly chats she had with Martha as they worked side by side. Mo’s frailty meant she was no replacement for her energetic daughter. She knew it would be simple to arrange a meeting if Richard and the family came back to Saltash. She bided her time and six weeks after the wedding, when she was sure that Martha had returned, she cooked Henry’s favourite meal of lamb sweet breads,
dumpling and beans. The table was set with linen and the best candles; Mo was visiting a friend and that meant the couple were alone. Henry ate well and ventilated his frustrations about problems at the shipyard, while Betsy was soothing and sympathetic. They talked about his promotion. ‘Head Shipwright: now that’s really something. You’re a good manager. You deserve it! We should drink to that.’ She poured two glasses of porter and raised her own. ‘Congratulations.’

Henry relaxed, and when the meal was finished she brought his pipe and passed it across the table. ‘I hear that Martha and Richard are back,’ she said. ‘Perhaps we could meet at the Sailor's Arms for a pint or two, just to see how she’s getting on.’

‘No. She defied me when she chose to marry. I want nothing to do with that fellow.’

‘Well perhaps Martha could drop by some time on her own. Mo would love to see her. And so would I.’

‘No, no.’ Henry spat out the words and he rose from his chair. ‘She’s chosen her way.’

‘Just take some time to think about it, please. Saltash is small and we’re sure to see her eventually.’

‘Not here in my home.’

‘Our home,’ hissed Betsy. ‘I miss her.’

‘No. Next thing Gregory’ll be asking for a handout.’

‘She lives so close. It’d be easy to have her to tea.’

‘Hmm. No!’ His voice was firm. He stood and shook embers from his pipe into the grate before walking downstairs. Outside, he kept walking alone.

Betsy decided to risk Henry’s displeasure and invited Martha to come at a time when she knew he would be at the shipyard. On the arranged day, Martha dressed in a clean fresh gown and left the children in Richard’s care. She missed her family, but marriage was a new adventure. At Betsy’s shop door she hesitated and adjusted her shawl before stepping inside.

Catherine was part of the conspiracy and was there to take care of the customers. She lingered behind the counter, hoping to pick up any
gossip. When Martha entered, she welcomed her. ‘How’s married life? Your Ma’ll be pleased to see you.’ But Martha walked quickly over to the back staircase and merely nodded before she hurried upstairs.

Betsy and Mo were seated in the private parlour and as soon as she entered, she hugged her mother and sister. ‘Oh, Ma, how lovely ‘tis to see you! I’ve missed you all. Mo, come and kiss me.’ Mo kissed her cheek and held her hand tightly for several minutes.

There was an awkward short silence at first, but it wasn’t long before the three were chatting over cordials and happily munching on the scones, jam and cream that Betsy had prepared specially, while in the corner an old Dutch clock (left as surety on a debt by a bankrupt sailor) ticked away the minutes. Mo twisted a silver locket around her throat as she urged Martha to tell her all about her new life. ‘Look at you, you’re a real housewife. How’re you managing? Are the children good for you?’

Martha grinned. ‘Oh, I have such hopes, dreams and being mistress of my own home’s good. The house is small, but it’s bigger than my lodgings, and I can do things my way. Hannah was untidy. Now I keep things neat and just as they should be.’

Betsy took the teapot and poured a cup as she broached the difficult question. ‘And how’s Richard?’ She handed the cup to Martha and then passed across the milk jug.

‘Well. We’re settling into the cottage, but there’s still lots to do.’
‘I’ve been worried and I’ve missed you.’ Betsy replaced the pot on the table. ‘I wish your Pa could see how well you look.’
‘I’m sorry he’s displeased with me. I hope he’ll forgive me some day. But we do well enough for now; life’s quiet and Richard's away working most days, so I’m left with the children. Emily’s gone. You must have heard; she’s in Plymouth.’
‘Isn’t it easier without her around?’
‘Well, yes. There’s just the children. They were shy at first. Charlie’s sweet and no bother, but Eliza? She has a temper, that one. She wants her own way and when she doesn’t get it, she stamps her foot and flops onto the floor bellowing.’
‘And does she get her own way?’
‘No. If she thinks she can wear me down, she’s going to get a surprise! Tell me, what should I do with her, Ma?’ Martha spoke quickly and was almost breathless, but she’d wanted her mother to know how happy she was even though there were challenges. For her part, Betsy was pleased to be asked for advice.

‘Remember they’re just little ones; best stay calm. Your brother George was like that. I’d walk away and when he had no one to impress he’d stop. Don’t give in.’

‘I expected some problems, but mostly things are good.’
Mo listened to the domestic chat. ‘I envy you. You're lucky to be set up so well. I’d like to be married someday.’

A cloud crossed Martha’s face. ‘Find a rich man, then, not a mason. These days work’s hard to come by, so, although Richard gets jobs here and there on things like boundary walls, he often comes home empty handed. He’s skilled and willing to work, but it doesn’t seem to make a difference. Money is tight.’

‘Can I help in any way?’ Mo offered. ‘I have some savings and you’re welcome to them. Pay me back when times are better.’

Martha shook her head. ‘Thanks, I’d hoped to set up a stall down by the quay and sell a few cockles, but with the children I haven’t much time.’ She fingered the few coins in her pocket and shivered. ‘I asked Uncle George about working a few hours in his bar down at the Boatman’s Inn. He said yes, so sometimes I do an hour on busy nights and leave Richard to mind the babes. But the pay’s not good and, what with the children, there are times I can’t go.’

Betsy moved to clear away the teacups. ‘I worry about you. I'll pack a wee hamper for you.’

‘Ta, that'd be great. I’ll pay you back some day. Promise.’

‘Oh no you won’t. I’m glad to be able to help.’

Martha kept what she believed was the best news for last. She blushed, looked at her mother and sister and sucked in a breath. ‘I'm with child.’

Betsy dropped the cups she was holding and they shattered on the floor. ‘How will you manage?’ She clasped her chest. ‘Is there enough work to keep you all fed?’
‘We’ll get by, but I’d like you to help me with the birth. Tell me what I need and how best to prepare.’ The next few months would be difficult.

‘Of course. But, how'll I tell your Pa? He'll have to know; it’s his grandchild.’

‘I'll write to him.’ Martha’s voice was firm. ‘He needn't know I've been here today. I'll apologise and tell him about the child. The babe’s due around Christmas, a time of good will. Let’s pray he’ll be forgiving.’

Mo chipped in. ‘Of course you know Pa loves you, and I reckon he might welcome an excuse to have you visit.’

‘Are you well?’ Betsy was always looking to practicalities. ‘Have you found a midwife?’

‘I'm well, a bit of sickness some mornings, but I'm fine.’

‘And what does Richard think? The babe'll need clothes. Can we help? I'll get wool and begin a layette. Be sure to take care of yourself.’

Betsy bit her lip as she made a mental list. She wrapped her arm around Martha's shoulders and gave her a swift kiss on the cheek.

But Martha’s thoughts were elsewhere; angry as she remembered the scene in their kitchen when she told Richard – he’d frowned, coughed and glanced away. ‘Surely not so soon! What’ll we do? Are you sure it’s mine?’ Martha had bristled and many angry words passed between them. They hadn’t spoken much since. But neither Betsy nor Mo needed to know this.

Martha was relieved that her news was shared before town gossips took it to her parents. She was pleased Betsy had received it so well. With the hardest secret out, it was time to go, so she said goodbye and hugged the two of them. Downstairs, she scuttled past Catherine before she could be quizzed. Upstairs, Betsy and Mo wondered how much to tell Catherine. She was a good friend, but, if she knew about the pregnancy, the whole town would before the morrow.

Catherine looked up as Betsy came to take over the shop. ‘Any news?’

Betsy wiped her hands and put on her apron. ‘It was great to see her and she’s well. Thanks for looking after the customers.’ That was all she was prepared to share.
Later that day Martha wrote to Henry, apologising and telling him her news. Next morning Henry showed the note to Betsy over breakfast. ‘What’ll we do now? It’s our grandchild. I guess we’ll have to see her. What do you think?’

Betsy buttered her toast. ‘She’ll need our help with a first baby and, though Richard isn’t our choice for her, it’s what she wanted. I’ll invite her to tea if you agree.’ Henry was reluctant and merely coughed. So she took this for a yes.

By late July 1842, Martha was short of cash. Mo was often confined to her bed and Betsy was overworked in the shop. Seeing an opportunity, Martha asked if she could work in the shop several hours a day. She would serve and clean and leave the children to play in the back room. ‘They’ll be quiet. Charlie'll sleep some of the time and Eliza's happy if I give her a spinning top and a doll. The extra money'd help and I’m sure I can improve sales. You know I can sell better’n most.’

Betsy was relieved. Mo was frail, Martha would be a help and she might cheer up the place. The young'uns would bring life into the downstairs rooms. From July to September Martha sifted and sorted happily at work. She did not talk to anyone about how life with Richard was, and he never dropped by the store. Some days Betsy thought she looked a little strained. ‘Expecting a babe is tiring,’ was the only half-questioning remark she allowed herself to make. There was no place for a mother-in-law between husband and wife. Routines took over and the chat was mostly town gossip: the church fete, rising prices and the weather.

Clouds hung low over Saltash on the morning of 18 October and a light wind from the south west chilled the air. Betsy huddled in bed and pulled the covers high around her, reluctant to rise. Outside was still dark, as sunrise was not until nearly eight o’clock. But today would be busy: there was that order to fill for the Grammar School up the hill. So reluctantly she rose and got ready.
Downstairs in the shop, Betsy drew back the curtains, opened the door and gazed up and down the street looking for Martha. ‘Late again,’ she muttered as she went back inside. Half an hour later, with still no sign of Martha, she looked again. Fore Street was damp with drizzle, busy with the usual shoppers, but no Martha. Betsy shook her head as she turned back into the store. ‘Pregnant. How much longer would she be able to work? Perhaps Mo should check on her.’ She started towards the stairs leading to the upstairs rooms when Catherine came in breathless, ‘Betsy, Betsy! The whole town’s talking. I don’t know how to tell you. Ambrose Peters has charged Richard, Martha and two other lasses with theft. He claims they stole fustian from his mercery store.’

‘What?’ Betsy snapped. ‘I can’t believe it. Not our Martha. She knows stealing’s serious for shopkeepers. She wouldn’t. I know that she wouldn’t. Ambrose has sold us ribbons and linens. Why, he’s just up the road, a neighbour. He’s a funny chap, but he can’t believe that she’d do it.’ Betsy twisted her apron. ‘This is a dreadful mistake. Someone else must’ve done it.’ She closed the shop door with a bang.

Catherine pulled the curtains shut. ‘Of course. I’m sure she’s innocent.’

Betsy had many questions. ‘Where is she? Is she with the police?’ She turned and called upstairs to Mo. ‘Come down now. You’ve gotta go and get your Pa. Tell him he’s needed at home.’

Mo hurried out as Betsy paced the floor. Where was Martha? What would happen if she was locked up? Where were the children and who was caring for them? If the charge was true, things were serious. Catherine whispered a few comforting words, but knew they were useless.

By evening, Henry discovered that Martha was in the house of corrections and was due to come before the Assizes when the magistrate was in town within a week. The Goodman home was silent and Betsy put a ‘closed’ notice on the shop door. She and Henry retreated to the upstairs rooms to discuss what to do.

Next door in bed that night, Catherine whispered to Albert, ‘I feel sorry for Betsy and Henry. That Martha was always a wild one. You know how they say the youngest child’s always spoiled. Henry should’ve put his foot down about the marriage.’ Albert uttered a grumbled acknowledgment
before falling asleep. After all, he had enough to worry about with his own six kinder, without taking on the Goodmans’ problems as well; it was all women’s business to him.

Catherine settled the quilt around her ample body and felt some satisfaction that, so far, not one of her children was in trouble.

The house of corrections was a grim stone building close by the court house and local folk often crossed the road rather than walk past its doors. It was to this building that a constable dragged Martha, Hannah Blake and Elizabeth Collings, all handcuffed together. The wind had strengthened and the chill from the south west hinted that winter might come early this year. The constable banged with his truncheon on a grey panelled door. The turnkey called, ‘Who’s there?’

‘Prisoners for the lock up.’ The constable looked at the clouds overhead. Martha huddled against Elizabeth, trying to look small. Her eyes were wet and, as she wiped away tears, the rattle of her handcuffs made her shudder. Elizabeth sneezed and shuffled from one foot to another while Hannah tried to hide behind the constable and away from the curious gaze of locals passing by. ‘Be quick there!’ he shouted.

The door opened and the three women were ordered inside. ‘Get along there,’ growled the turnkey as he pointed to a passage leading to the left and the women’s section of the gaol. Here, in a large reception room, Martha was forced to change from her own clothes into a plain cotton shift, as recommended by Elizabeth Fry and the Prison Reform Women. Her street clothes were bundled up, wrapped in her canvas carryall and put into store by the turnkey. The accused were in chains.

A surly frown darkened the guard’s face as he pushed Martha, Hannah and Elizabeth through the iron barred door and swung it to, before plunging a key into the lock and clanging it shut. He was a bearded middle-aged former soldier, with shaggy hair scraping his hunched shoulders and a uniform that was stained and rumpled. He wasn’t about to be kind to young women, criminals all of them, unless he was well rewarded.

The only window was set high up in the wall, so nothing of the outside could be seen, and the wind whistled in and around the cell. A
spattering of rain found its way through with the strongest gusts. Rope mattresses were piled against the far wall, a thrust of straw had been scattered over the floor and, for warmth, a few thin blankets lay folded on the stones near the door. There was no sanitation other than three rough wooden buckets in the corner and, though now empty, they would be unpleasant by morning.

There were six women in the room: Martha, Elizabeth, Hannah, old Mad Mary, who was known to solicit down near the wharf, and two strangers – one about the same age as Martha and an older dark haired woman. The younger one was crying, shaking as she clutched the older one’s hand. Mad Mary rocked backwards and forwards, her feet were bare and she’d torn her bodice so it barely covered her breast. She scratched a large scab on her arm and muttered imprecations liberally sprinkled with swear words.

‘I never done it, no byjasuz. Them sailors bedoozled me.’ She got up and beat the door, her chains clanking. ‘Let me out, let me out, bastards! I done naught. You can’t keep me here.’ She spat in the direction of the guard.

Martha put her hands over her ears and tried to find a place to sit away from her, yet not too close to the others. She rolled out one of the knotted rope mattresses and a grey rat skittled away with threads of chewed fibres hanging from its mouth. Martha shuddered and sat down, feeling the mattress prickle against her ankles. She gathered a blanket around her and turned away. She was disturbed when the turnkey brought the evening meal: slops of gruel, porter and stale bread. She looked at the offering, shook her head. ‘I couldn’t eat, I’d be sick.’ She felt the child move within her as Elizabeth kicked at her feet and muttered,

‘What are we going to do?’
‘Don’t ask me. How on earth did we get into this?’
‘Richard’ll think of something,’ interrupted Hannah. ‘He always does.’

‘What in God's name do you mean?’ snapped Martha. ‘Are you stupid? Don’t you realise he’s locked up somewhere too? He’s got no influence and no money. How well do you think you know him? He’s my
husband, not yours. No one can help us. You’d better pray to the good Lord we're found not guilty.’

Hannah sank back into the corner and lowered her head. Elizabeth chipped in. ‘No good fighting. We must work out what we’ll say to the magistrate. Should we insist we didn’t do it? Is there any way we can throw ourselves on his mercy?’ At this, Hannah turned away and began to cry. Martha and Elizabeth were left to their own thoughts, while Mad Mary hummed a sea shanty.

Martha could see herself setting out to shop with Richard, meeting Elizabeth and Hannah along the way. Fore Street was busy but Ma’s shop was still closed. At the thought of her mother, tears streamed down her cheeks. She huddled over the mattress. Her thoughts went round and round. What might have happened if she’d stayed in bed or if she’d been too busy with the children to venture out? Maybe she should have sent Richard off alone and told him her condition was slowing her down? In vain, she tried to sleep.

Around sunrise thunder groaned across the sky, waking Martha from her restless dreams just as the guard rattled the cell lock. ‘Hey, get up you lot. Get up. Court’s sitting today. The magistrate’ll be here around 9. So get yerselves ready. Quick smart.’ The guard tossed bags containing their street clothes into the room. It was 21 October 1842.

Martha scrambled to her feet and shook out the mattress. It all seemed unreal, like a lived nightmare. Surely she’d wake and find the world was as she’d known it two days ago. Could Richard help? He’d been charged as well. Perhaps Pa could appeal for clemency. But, what was the use? Court was waiting. So she changed out of her prison tunic and back into her own clothes, a dove grey cotton gown with jet buttons over which she wore a small mauve jacket. She was dismayed at how crushed and rumpled her things looked. Without a proper comb, her hair was barely controlled under her lace cap. Her belly was beginning to show her condition and the small swelling distorted the pleats in her skirt. Worst of all she was shackled by the ankles to Elizabeth. The irons bounced against the top of her buttoned boots, making her hobble rather than walk erect. The
girls’ relationship was tense – the co-accused had hardly spoken since being locked up. Martha shrank from being so close to Elizabeth or Hannah, wanting just to get home to be with Richard and be comforted by her mother.

Elizabeth looked slovenly as she’d lost her bonnet and her hair spread rather wildly around her face. Her gown was of cotton print and tight over her plump form; a button was missing from her bodice, leaving her to hold it in place with her left hand. Beside her, Hannah looked a child. She'd plaited her fair hair, drawing it back from her face and her pale lemon dress, though crumpled like the others, at least seemed clean as she tried to shake out the wrinkles.

Magistrate George Barnett was rostered for duty. The idle of the town queued to witness the scandal and some crowded around the door long before the court opened. A lazy mist hung around the windows and doors. The past two weeks had been rainy and the court smelled musty, with the stale odour that came when the room was closed and moist air sat heavily on furniture. Shutters were drawn across the windows and, in the gloom, a flag drooped behind the magistrate’s large wooden chair.

When the clerk at last opened the doors, the public gallery filled quickly. A court official ushered the prisoners into the room. In the dock were Richard and Martha Gregory, and alongside them Elizabeth Collings and Hannah Blake. All four were charged with larceny: stealing fustian from Ambrose Peters, tailor and mercer of Fore Street, Saltash. The weight of the law and authority hovered over the prisoners. Such were the symbols of justice that even the innocent appeared guilty once in the dock, hampered by chains and guarded by uniformed officials. Today, two large shouldered constables stood on either side of the dock ready should any trouble arise. The prisoners, pale and a little untidy, looked crushed by their circumstances.

Things went quiet apart from a little wriggling of feet that raised dust and made Betsy sneeze. Emily sat in the front row with Eliza by her side and Charles on her lap. She and the children were dressed in their Sunday best. Betsy, Henry and Henry Junior were sitting at the back, with Betsy holding Henry’s hand so tight her knuckles were white. She took the scene in; frowned when she saw Martha.
‘I wish I’d been able to take her a clean gown and cap. The guard wouldn’t let me in without a hefty bribe. He wanted a crown just to let me talk to her,’ she said. ‘Lord knows what’s happened while she’s been in gaol. Look at that dress of hers! I’m sure there’s a stain on the bodice and the lace on her cap’s limp.’ She pointed to Elizabeth and Hannah. ‘See, the other lasses don’t look any better. It’s shameful. Girls should be neat. Richard’s clothes are his work clothes.’ She sniffed. ‘But then no one expects a mason to look like a gentleman.’

Feeling helpless, Henry pulled his coat tight.

An officer of the court clicked his heels and stood to attention near the dock. ‘All stand!’ he commanded. Those in the public gallery shuffled to their feet as Barnett entered from a door behind his bench. He was middle aged, a little portly, with brown hair growing low over his ears. He had a greying beard, was moist of eye with small pince-nez glasses on his nose. He was dressed in formal black, but Betsy caught a glimpse of his crimson waistcoat when he tucked away his pocket watch. Today his rheumatism, the cold air and his well-developed cynicism made him frown at the accused. He riffled through case notes handed to him by the constable. It all looked familiar – thieves and vagabonds were everywhere these days. He looked over his glasses at the prisoners, wondering what excuses they might offer.

He addressed them, asking how they wanted to plead. Each replied ‘not guilty’, but everyone was used to that. Penalties were severe and no one in their right mind would wish to be sent to Newgate, or worse still, the gallows. Barnett turned again to his notes, scribbled a few words and asked the constable, ‘Any prior convictions?’

The constable had been curling the corner of his moustache and his voice echoed around the court as he answered. ‘No, sir.’

Barnett beckoned the prosecutor, Ambrose Peters, to come forward. ‘What are the particulars of your case against these persons?’ Peters was dressed neatly, but was short, and those at the back had to crane to see him. He clutched the lapels of his somewhat shiny black jacket and his voice was reedy.

‘Sir, I’ve been robbed before and know what rogues do to honest merchants. Young women mill around the front of the store and pick at my
fabrics. They stand and chat, and when I’m not looking they grab a bolt of cloth and pass it on to some chap who’s been loitering close by.’ As he said this, he wiped his hand across his balding head.

Barnett took notes. ‘Yes, but I want to know what happened this time.’

‘Those women in the dock were close to the door of my shop. I saw that man hanging around behind them. The youngest, the one crying, went inside and asked me about buttons. I had to follow her, but when I told her what each button cost she lost interest and left. I went back outside and found that a bolt of fustian, which had been there, was missing and so were those women and the man. I’ve seen ‘em in town. I’m sure they did it. No one else was around.’

‘Did you actually see any of them lift the fustian?’

‘No, sir, no. But I did see them fingering it. Then the young one over there took all my attention. That’s the way they do it. I had to leave the front and go in with her. There was no one else around but them. The bolt was there when I went inside and so were they. When I came back just minutes later, it was gone and them with it.’ His voice rose and his words came fast as he jerked his head towards the dock. ‘Folk like them’ll make me bankrupt!’

‘Has the bolt been recovered?’

‘No, your worship, but it was those folk that took it. They’ve probably passed it onto a fence, that’s what thieves do. It’s happened to me before. I’ll be out of business unless it’s stopped. The law’s got to do something to protect –’

‘Yes, yes. I sympathise.’ Barnett gazed over his pince nez, taking in the small tailor. ‘How long have you had a store in Saltash?’

‘For years now and never any trouble with the law.’

Satisfied, Barnett decided this was an honest merchant, though perhaps he looked a little Jewish. He called to the constable standing to the left of the dock, who stepped forward and stood to attention before the bench. ‘Do you know the accused?’

‘Not well, your worship. Not before their arrest. They’re locals from Saltash. I’ve seen the women around town. The man travels to the country from time to time. He says it’s for work, but who can tell?’
‘What do you know of their character or conduct?’

‘The women’s conduct in the house of corrections was not good. There was swearing and crying coming from their cell.’

Barnett toyed with the idea of asking for a report from the men’s prison, but his chair was uncomfortable and his list was long, so why delay? He was confident that he was an excellent judge of character.

Richard felt the intensity of the magistrate’s scrutiny and straightened his shoulders. He breathed in slowly, and returned the gaze as any honest man would. Barnett noted that the prisoner’s clothes were clean, and decided the calluses on his hands were probably from hard work.

He peered at the other prisoners. Gregory and Collings seemed a likely pair of crumpled minxes, whereas Blake was blushing and blubbering into a small handkerchief and looked younger than her years, like a waif, a mere child. Her eyes were red rimmed and her sobs were so deep they shook her small frame, giving her hiccups.

Looking around the court, Barnett saw the children wave to Richard and his slow finger-wave back to them. He scratched a note on his pad: ‘a family man, shows concern for his bairns’. He looked at Collings and she glared right back at him. Another note: ‘no penitence and little modesty’. As he looked at Gregory, she went pale. She placed one hand on the edge of the dock and the other on her swollen belly, before fainting to the floor. Betsy jumped to her feet, whimpered and Henry urged her to be quiet.

The constable moved quickly to the dock, while Barnett glared, banged his gavel hard on his desk. ‘Any disruption and I’ll clear the court!’ There was mumbling among the crowd, but they quietened down as Martha tried slowly to rise, pulling herself up with both hands across the bar, until her pale face could be seen above the dock. She was crying. Unable to meet her gaze, Richard looked away.

Barnett was stern as he addressed her. ‘Madam, what have you to say about this charge? Were you at the store and did you steal the fustian?’

‘No, sir.’ There was a hint of hesitation in her voice. ‘No, sir. No I was walking with my friends. I wouldn’t steal from Mr Peters. He shops at my mother’s store and he’s a good neighbour.’

‘Humph.’ He turned to Collings. ‘And you, madam?’
She lowered her eyes and sighed. ‘Your worship, do I look like a thief? I wouldn’t steal if my life depended on it. I’m a respectable married woman and my husband’s a sailor on the Rodney.’ And she leaned forward just enough so he could see the rounded sweep of her breasts tight in her loosened bodice.

‘Humph,’ Barnett grunted as he took notes. He looked hard at the prisoners. Theft was theft and no honest shopkeeper was safe when thieves were around, believing they’d get away with it. The colonies were writing to ask for women of child-bearing age. Scandalous stories of what happened in those new settlements where there were all men came filtering back; there were whispers, but nothing that could be mentioned when polite company was around. These women deserved to be taught a lesson. Time in the wilderness might tame them. But what should he do with the weepy one? Such a child, poor little lass, an innocent led astray, perhaps. Maybe some time in the workhouse would teach her a trade.

He called Hannah to the bench and had a quiet word in her ear. Some in the court sat forward trying to hear what was said, but their voices were too muffled for anyone to make sense of it. Barnett sat back, scratched one ear and then gestured to her to return to the dock. He frowned and made a few more notes on the pad in front of him. She had given him something to think about. ‘Madam, I direct you to tell the court what you told me. Evidence must be written into the records.’

Hannah shrank away from Elizabeth before she spoke. ‘Your Worship, I was led astray. Those two conned me, ‘cause they sent me inside and I swear I never knew a thing about their plan. When I left, me and Richard went further along the street with his children. We was nowhere near Mr Peters’ store. I’m innocent.’ Elizabeth sniffed and reached across, trying to pinch Hannah.

Martha jeered, ‘You lying little toad!’

‘Order! Behave, or you’ll all be back in the cells.’

Barnett looked carefully at Martha and Elizabeth and it all seemed to fit. He cleared his throat and the room fell silent. Martha’s heart thumped. She could hear the blood pounding in her ears. Fear made each second seem longer. Barnett cleared his throat and announced, ‘It is my duty to decide the fate of the four accused and I find Elizabeth Collings and Martha
Gregory guilty as charged.’ At this, a loud ‘Oooh!’ went around the
courtroom. Martha stared down at her wedding ring, twisting it; such shame
she’d brought on Ma and Pa.

The magistrate shifted in his chair, glanced at Richard once more.
‘On reflection, I find Richard Gregory not guilty. I thank Blake for
admitting evidence.’ Martha shook her head, unable to believe what she’d
heard.

Barnett wiped his glasses with a large white handkerchief that he
took from his breast pocket and turned to the clerk. ‘Let the records show
Elizabeth Collings guilty – sentence seven years transportation; Martha
Gregory guilty – sentence seven years transportation; Richard Gregory – not
guilty; Hannah Blake – admitted evidence.’

Elizabeth’s ankle-irons rattled. ‘Bloody lying bitch! If only I could
get my hands on her, she’d regret it.’

Martha glared at Hannah and hissed between narrowed lips, ‘I let
you share my lodgings and this is the thanks I get. You’re a Judas and
deserve to hang.’ She turned to glare at Richard. ‘How could you? Why
didn’t you stand up for me?’ She yelled at the constable, ‘We’re innocent,
you fool! Go and find the real guilty party, or were you paid off?’

Henry's voice was heard throughout the court. ‘I told Martha never
to be involved with that fellow. And by God, I was right. Damnation on
him.’ The way Henry spat out the word ‘fellow’ made it sound like a curse.

Barnett frowned. ‘Order!’ He turned to Hannah, thanked the
sniffling girl for her cooperation and urged her to take better care when
choosing friends in future. He looked a bit like a generous uncle as he
waved her out of the dock. She stumbled down, not looking at Martha and
Elizabeth as they were pushed, cursing, to the cells by the turnkey. Richard
pretended not to see Betsy and Henry, and hustled Emily and the children
out of court.

That evening Barnett dined on roast beef, dumpling and peas,
washed down with two glasses of madeira. He’d completed a good day’s
work and, rubbing his belly, he almost purred like a drowsy cat.
Imprisoned
The turnkey pushed his prisoners down the cold stone corridor. Their shackles rattled and slowed them, so he prodded Martha in the back with his truncheon before grabbing her arm to urge her along. She wrenched free. ‘Hands off! No need to shove.’

‘A coupla crooks like you can’t expect fine manners,’ he jeered. ‘Reckon you’ll be off to Van Diemen’s Land and good riddance.’

Mad Mary and the other two women were gone, but the room still stank of their detention. Elizabeth shuddered as the door slammed behind them. ‘Van Diemen’s Land.’ She sighed. ‘It’s a godforsaken place! So far away, I’ll never see my family, and all because of that useless bloody Hannah.’ She began to sob and curled up in the corner of the cell with her back to Martha.

‘Seven years? It’s unfair.’ Martha spoke her thoughts aloud. ‘Lying little bitch. Why did she side with Richard?’

Elizabeth roused and turned back with a challenge. ‘Didn’t you know that he’s been flirting with her down by the dock? Now you’re pregnant he went out looking for more excitement.’

‘No, not true.’ Martha lunged at her and slapped her face hard, then she slumped to the floor.

Elizabeth smirked. ‘Could’a told you so.’ She sniffed and wiped a finger across the dribble under her nose before she grabbed a blanket and tucked it around her shoulders.

Richard neither showed his face nor sent any message, so Martha’s ordeal was only lightened when her parents visited; the turnkey having demanded a bribe to let them in. He ushered the three into another cell away from Elizabeth. Betsy quickly hugged Martha, who clung to her while Henry stood back, hands in pockets.

‘Martha, my dear.’ Betsy stroked her hair and studied her face. ‘How are you? Do you stay well?’

‘I’m not so bad. But Richard’s abandoned me. He hasn’t called or sent a message. What’s to be done?’ Tears misted her eyes.

‘My poor love. We haven’t seen or heard from him.’ Betsy hugged [67]
her. ‘Hush, hush, you must be brave.’

Martha sobbed. ‘If I’m sent away I’ll never see you all again. Oh, Ma, I miss you.’

Betsy frowned and hesitated. ‘They say it’ll be Van Diemen’s Land – so far away. And the journey’s tough.’

Henry moved forward. ‘I’ve looked high and low for Richard, but not a sign. The bastard’s disappeared, along with the children. And he owes money all over town.’ His voice was rough. ‘But what did you expect?’

‘He can’t desert me like this. I’m his wife!’ Martha pulled back from her mother’s arms and faced him, her face flushed. ‘I trusted him.’

‘I warned you!’

‘But Pa –’

‘No buts, he’s useless. I told you he was no good, but would you listen to me? Now see what’s come of it all.’

Betsy put her finger to her lips and whispered in Henry’s ear. ‘Hush, there’s trouble enough here without adding to it. We need to decide what’s to be done about the baby, now that he’s gone.’

‘I want to keep my baby. I’ve wanted a child and love it already. I feel it moving and I whisper to it.’

‘Stop and think.’ Betsy remembered her own confinements. ‘Get some sense! For God’s sake, how easy do you think it’ll be to give birth at sea, let alone care for it on board? There’s hardship enough on land with a good midwife. There’s no guarantee a littl’un will survive at sea.’

‘I do want to keep it safe. Oh what’s to do?’ Martha took hold of Betsy’s hand and placed it on her belly. ‘Feel it move, Ma. Losing it would break my heart. Perhaps, if Richard took it, then years from now I could come back and be with it.’

Betsy felt the gentle movements and her face softened. This was her grandchild. ‘Ah, yes! That’s a fine strong kick.’

Henry interrupted. ‘Be realistic!’ His voice was firm. ‘He’s gone for good and good riddance.’

But Betsy felt a new tenderness and, without consulting Henry further, looked Martha straight in the eyes. ‘I’m its grandmother. I’ve helped Henry junior and George with their bairns and we can care for this un if you want.’

[68]
Henry grabbed her arm. ‘Don’t be hasty, Betsy! Slow down; think before you promise too much.’ He started to count the difficulties ahead on the fingers of one hand. ‘We’d need a wet-nurse, and there’s the cost of raising a child. And with the shop, how’d you manage with a crying baby?’

‘Pa, I’m sorry. I know it’d be a burden.’ Martha hung her head. ‘I don’t know what’s for the best. Sometimes I’m selfish. I’d like to have someone to love with me when I go. But I know that I should be thinking about what’s best for the baby. But would life here be better for a child?’

Her shoulders drooped.

‘There, there,’ murmured Betsy.

‘They say the voyage is dangerous and that some die,’ Martha whispered. ‘And I don’t know what it’ll be like in Van Diemen’s Land. How would a babe survive and could I care for it? Would the child be taken from me?’ Pain gripped her when she thought of that. She turned to her father. ‘Pa, what do you think I should do?’

Henry paused and walked around the cell as he considered his answer. ‘I’d like to punch Richard, but what good would that do?’ His thick hands clenched into fists. He sighed. ‘Raising a child’s a big job. The problem is that it sounds as though your Ma’s already decided.’ He hesitated, took Betsy’s hand. ‘If you’re really sure, I won’t stand in your way.’ He turned back to Martha. ‘Your Ma’s used to caring for babes so I suppose we’d do all right.’

‘I’d be so grateful if I knew it was safe and not left on the parish.’ Martha looked at her parents. ‘Are you really sure?’

Betsy put her arm around her shoulder. ‘Yes. Your brothers are bound to help and Mo will too. Think on it.’

‘When would I ever see it if I left it here? I’d miss it so.’ Martha shivered.

Betsy hugged her tighter. ‘Seven years – maybe someday you could return.’ Ever practical, she continued, ‘No one knows when you’ll be sent away, so let’s all pray it’s born before you sail. You say it’s due around Christmas. Only eight weeks away, so we’ve got time to work things out.’ She turned to Henry. ‘Please reassure her that you don’t mind taking the child.’

He hesitated and then said, ‘Yes. We’ll help. The babe can stay with
us. Don’t worry love.’

Betsy patted her sniffling daughter’s shoulder. ‘I’ve raised babies and just as I loved and cared for you, I'd be happy to raise this child if you'd trust us.’ Martha hesitated, so Betsy pursued her cause. ‘I’ve been sewing and making wee nightshirts and a wrap for it. I reckon it’d be better to leave the babe behind. I hope that in seven years you’ll come home and be with us all.’ She kissed Martha’s forehead. ‘My poor dear girl.’

‘I can’t believe Richard’s deserted me. What a wretch! I was a good wife. I did my best, but I’ll never trust a man again.’ Martha brushed a hand across her face to wipe her eyes. ‘That cheating Hannah, she traded Elizabeth and me like two sheep at the market. She’s despicable. Desperate to save herself at any cost! Ma, do you think she and Richard planned it?’

‘Who knows? She’s gone. Some say to Plymouth with Richard. The lodgings are empty.’ Betsy’s voice was grim. ‘But she’d hardly come and see us after what she’s done.’

‘Forget about them,’ Henry urged.

Martha took a deep breath. ‘I’ll have to be brave and stand on my own two feet wherever it is I end up. Pray I have the strength. What a mess!’

The turnkey rattled the lock. Henry kissed her cheek and Betsy gave her a last hug. ‘When you decide’, she whispered, ‘send us a message and we’ll see you before you leave.’ After her parents had gone, Martha struggled with questions about what to do, but her thoughts churned round and round, never grinding to a conclusion.

Ten days later and before dawn in the gloom of the gaol, Elizabeth was restless, uncomfortable on the rough rope mattress. She longed to hear from her husband, but consoled herself that he was probably still at sea. His ship, the Rodney, wasn’t due back in port until close to Christmas. Would she ever see him again? Cross, depressed and wishing her life had gone in a different direction, she lashed out, kicking Martha in the shins to wake her.

‘I wish I’d never met you! Think you’re smart, but your husband’s a useless lot. Can’t earn enough to keep a family but good at begetting children. I’ll bet he’s off with another woman, probably Hannah, making
love and more babies. You can’t hope to see him again.’ She laughed and
pinched Martha as she mouthed the word ‘hope’.

Martha, woken from unsettling dreams of boats and hurricanes,
barely restrained herself from striking Elizabeth as she muttered in a voice
as chilly as December snow. ‘You’re no sweetheart yourself. You got me
into this mess, you trollop. If only you’d behaved in court and been more
respectful.’

‘Ah, Miss Holier-than-thou, you were very happy to throw yourself
into Richard’s arms a year ago. Didn’t you know what sort of fellow he
was?’

‘I hate you! You must’ve known what Hannah was going to say.’
She whipped off her shoe and threw it at Elizabeth. ‘I heard you whispering
together and I guess you thought she’d get you off, too.’

Elizabeth jumped to her feet and snarled at her. ‘Not true!’

Martha was not going to be put off. ‘She tricked you and now there’s
no way out for us. I hope we go on different ships. I’ll be glad to see the last
of you. All I wanted to be was a wife and mother, safe in Saltash.’ She
sighed. ‘Why doesn’t Richard visit? You’d think he'd care about his child, if
not about me. What a lesson to learn! Men’s promises are worthless.’ She
began to cry.

Elizabeth couldn’t resist the opportunity to put in another barb.
‘What’d you expect?’ she hissed. ‘He married you to get a Ma for his babes.
What a romantic dolt you were, to be taken in by his smooth talk.’

At that Martha pulled the blanket around her shoulders and shivered,
curled up on the rope mattress, she then moaned as the cold overcame her
determination to be strong. Hearing her distress, Elizabeth grinned, turned
her back and pretended to be asleep.

Martha felt the child move within her.

Possibly half an hour later – but who could tell exactly – a turnkey
came and ordered them to get ready to leave. Martha packed her possessions
in her carryall and was pleased that she was only handcuffed and not
shackled by the ankles to Elizabeth. The two women were hustled down the
hall to the street, where they saw a pink dawn beginning to colour the sky.
Their departure had been organised suddenly when a cheap transport opportunity arose. Both felt blessed that there was no crowd of tittering, jeering locals to see them off. Martha would have liked to say goodbye to her parents, but she no longer expected Richard to be there, and she knew Hannah wouldn’t dare show her face.

A small coach, dun-coloured with muddy wheels, awaited the girls. A pair of mismatched horses stomped and chewed at their bits, jiggling the coach a little, backwards and forwards, making boarding difficult. Three passengers were seated inside and tut-tutted among themselves at the thought of sharing the journey with criminals, while the man who was to be their guard jumped down ready to hand them up. He looked official in a scarlet coat and black trousers, but his hair was wild and his whiskers drooped around his mouth, so they couldn’t tell if he was smiling or scowling. Their gaoler gave strict instructions to the guard about their travel and delivery to the Margaret at berth in London. Elizabeth and Martha were helped up to sit beside the armed guard on the roof. They had to dodge packages and the guard’s rifle muzzle – not an easy task with their wrists cuffed. Martha clutched her skirt, holding it down against the breeze to preserve her modesty.

They were perched so high they could see along the street to the river. Martha stared hard, trying to imprint the scene on her mind. She saw pale sky patches, low slung clouds scudding ahead of the wind, grey water and sea mist, small whitewashed cottages now tinted pale gold in the dawn, beside a wet cobbled stone road. Down by the Sand Cove a few sailors were tinkering with boats and the Saltash ferry was drawn up at anchor, ready for the new day’s trips. The image would be something to remind her of home and family, a memory to keep her spirits up in the dark days ahead. She caught the whiff of sea salt on the air and the smell of coal burning in hearths. Somewhere a door slammed and this part of her life too was closing.

The horses whinnied, harness rattled and clinked, the door of the coach shut behind the last passenger. A bundle of paperwork was handed to their guard and signed for, before the coachman whipped the horses into action, hissing at them to be off. They bounced downhill towards the
London road, bone jarring over the cobblestones. They had begun the longest journey, the first stage the many miles to London.

Over many hours the girls felt the wind in their faces, biting through thin clothing. It left them shivering and eventually clinging to one another for warmth. The coach swayed and bumpy roads dealt unkindly as the iron-clad wooden wheels clattered over and against rocks. At times Martha marvelled that they managed to stay upright and on the road at all. Comfort stops were rare, which was especially troubling for anyone pregnant, and when the passengers alighted at an inn for a meal the girls were often left atop the coach. The horses were treated better than they, being fed, rubbed down and even rested with fresh teams taking over after what seemed like 100 miles.

Eventually the outskirts of London came into view and Martha saw the morning’s smoky haze, hovering like cloud drifts over the roof tops, fed by the city’s industries and kitchen fires. Somewhere down on the Thames was a ship waiting for them: perhaps it would be more comfortable than the coach. Surely nothing could be worse.

In Piccadilly, close by Hyde Park, the quiet of night was giving way to the bustle of the waking city as the coachman pulled the cab close to the side of the road where the wheels grated against the sandstone kerb. He gave a flourish of his whip and leapt down to help the respectable passengers out. The gentleman and ladies dismounted, collected their baggage and hurried away without a backward glance at the two miseries huddled on top. The guard took an angry pinch of snuff before ordering the coachman to push on to the docks, anxious to be rid of his cargo and off home to a comfortable meal and a warming tot of gin. The tired horses seemed as dispirited as the squalid dockside houses they passed, as they trundled on down dirty streets, slippery from rain overnight. Covent Garden markets were nearby and Martha saw farmers leading thin country donkeys harnessed to small carts and shaggy Clydesdales dragging loaded wagons. The road was slushy from the muck dropped by this untidy parade. One or two innkeepers were taking down shutters ready for the coming day. Martha had never seen such a bustle. There were so many people. Gentlemen going about their business walked past clerks and tradesmen as though they were invisible. Women, bearing baskets on their heads, loaded with cabbages or
other vegetables, trudged to the markets, picking their way over the roadside rubbish. A scraggy chimney sweep stooped under the burden of his brushes. There were hapless unshaven beggars on street corners and urchins scurried through the crowds, calling to one another in an accent quite different from home, yet the curses she recognised were the same as common Saltash sailors’ slang. And the smell was of dung, river salt and sour cooking rather like old boiled cabbage.

Finally, as the coach slowed to a trot near Deptford, Martha saw sailing ships and steamers at anchor lined up in ranks, with the river’s wide slow tide moving them at their berths. Lighters carrying coal were busy discharging loads and the coal dust hung in the air, making the sweating shovellers look like immigrants from Africa. Somewhere out there was her destiny and she looked at the rows of masts, silhouetted like hieroglyphs against the sky. Which ship would she board?

They stopped at the dock. Martha watched eddies of muddy water swirl against the river bank as she collected her few belongings from the guard. The chug of steamboats, cries of watermen and the slap of rope and canvas against masts coloured the air. She drew a deep breath and sighed. It had come to this. Her feet were on English soil for the last time. What would be her child’s future? If only. What? She remembered Richard and Saltash. Where was he? Her thoughts were interrupted when the guard gave her a quick shove and said, ‘Get moving – not got all day!’ Nearby, seagulls fought over the stinking remains of a large fish as Martha picked up her bag and followed him.

The guard waved over a sailor, chartered a small skiff and pushed Martha and Elizabeth to scramble aboard. They were still cuffed and under his watchful eye to ensure they didn’t skip. The boat ferried them, rocking against the river’s rush, across a patch of greyish water, mucky with garbage, to be handed up a rope ladder and jostled onto the Margaret, whose movements were limited by the stretch and pull of the anchor. They were given over to the ship’s captain, who stood tall, square shouldered, bristling with the dignity of a uniform and shapely beard. Martha’s life on board had started.

Though the wind was relatively light, the ship shifted with the river’s surge and she had to steady herself on deck. At first she grasped the
rail, and next a door to keep her balance, then she practiced standing and walking, bending one knee then the other, flexing in response to the ship’s movements. She learned to sway and adjust to the roll, shifting from left to right as the tilt of the deck demanded. She remembered her occasional ferry trips across to Plymouth and steeled herself as she realised this changing balance would be her world for many moons. She felt dizzy when she looked at the wharves at the quayside – they seemed to rise and fall as the ship glided on the waves, lifting with the surge and dropping as the wash rolled back. She thanked God for keeping her safe so far, and said a small prayer, asking Him to help her adjust to life at sea.

She and Elizabeth were paraded before the surgeon superintendent, Dr McAvoy, to be classified and appointed to a mess. He looked at their records, and asked Martha about her pregnancy. He took a brief note and then nodded. ‘On board you’ll be in a mess made up of six women. You were convicted together, so now you’ll be separated.’

Hearing this, Martha muttered, ‘Thank God for that!’

‘I expect you to behave.’ He continued, ‘and keep your quarters clean and tidy.’ Elizabeth shrugged and picked up her bag. Martha did the same, as two sailors were ordered to escort them to the prison.

Below deck, she eyed her cramped quarters; saw the bunks lining the walls, hard, austere and uncomfortable. Candles guttered in the gloom, small portholes allowed a little light in. The smell of the bilge floated up from below, making her catch her breath and cough. Gathered around were the women who were to be her close travel companions: Ann Baker, Sophia Dobson, Minnie Curtin, Matilda Bond and Mary Briggs. Martha was pleased to note that, though their clothes were poor, they looked clean.

One of the women came forward to greet her. ‘Hello, I’m Ann and this is Alfie,’ she said as she rocked the babe she carried wrapped to her chest. ‘Here’s Sophia and over near the bunks is Minnie.’

Sophia held out her hand. ‘What's the news from the city?’

Martha was unsure how to reply. She was reluctant to talk about herself to strangers yet pleased to be given a warm greeting. ‘I’ve come from Cornwall and know nothing about London.’

Ann pointed to Martha’s belly. ‘You’re with child?’

‘Yes.’
‘I’ve brought Alfie, but I had to leave my three girls with their Da. I
miss them. I was so used to them bein’ around. I hope they’ll come later.’
Maria dropped her bag on the bunk that was to be hers and she
pursed her lips. ‘You’re lucky to have a good man. Mine betrayed me!’
Ann shrugged. ‘What’re you going to do about the baby?’
‘I’m not sure.’ Maria looked around her prison. ‘I worry. But if we
sail before the birth I won’t have to decide and perhaps that’d be easier. I
think about it all the time.’

She tested the mattress on her bunk, and then looked over and under,
hoping to find a box or locker for her few precious things. She wanted a
safe place for Ma’s last letter, the small wooden box Pa had made specially
for her, Mo’s gift of a linen handkerchief and a card with an etching of
Saltash Sand Cove. There was none. She worried about how to secure stuff.
With so many thieves on board, nothing would be safe. Even her spare
petticoat might disappear in a twinkling if she went on deck. She asked
herself what recourse she might have to justice in this place. There was no
answer.

The captain was awaiting the full complement of convicts, so the
Margaret stayed moored at Deptford for weeks and, during this time, the
women got to know one another. Over the first few days they moved warily
around each other. With this forced intimacy, who could you trust? The
wailing of Ann’s baby often disturbed their sleep. Minnie complained and
the Irish girls, Matilda and Mary, muttered to one another in Gaelic. Ann
apologised and kept putting the babe to her breast to try to ease his cries.
But children do cry and his soiled linens made their quarters smell sour.
Martha saw the difficulties that came with a child on board ship in a close
confined space, and thought about her own child’s future.

The Irish girls found comfort in each other’s company and were glad
they could speak in dialect, but even when they spoke English, their thick
brogues sometimes made them hard to understand. Their gossipy
confidences excluded the others in the mess, who suspected they were
talking about them or planning some mischief. Ann, Sophia, Martha and
Minnie formed a small group and the Irish lasses another.

Occasionally, Mrs Fry and her Quaker ladies came on board to
gather the women in worship. They donated Bibles, tracts and craft
materials. Near Christmas they introduced Ruth Hannan, a solemn
volunteer, who would sail with them as matron. Some welcomed this
supervision, though Martha feared she would be more like a priest and
wondered if there might be too much praying for comfort.

Two days before Christmas a storm blustered in from the Atlantic, hitting
the ship in gusts. Frequent sudden squalls rattled the rigging, whipped up
waves and made the timbers creak and groan. Anchor chains strained and
jerked the ship against the wash as it rode high on the tide. Though still in
port, deep inside the Margaret, some of the women moaned, clinging to
bunks that seemed in perpetual motion, answering to the ship’s rise and fall.
Martha was one of these. She knew her time was near and guessed the
gripping pains and nausea that sent her spewing against the wall were caused
by birth pangs as well as motion. As her suffering grew worse, Ann and
Minnie were by her side, comforting her as she bit her lip and clenched her
whole body against the dragging contractions. ‘Get help please,’ she
begged.

Ann bundled Alfie into Mary’s arms. ‘You’ve been a nurse, girl, so
take care of him. We’ll be busy here for a while.’

Mary took him reluctantly. ‘Why can’t I stay? I’ll help.’

‘No, this is no place for Alfie. Take him to other quarters.’

Mary grumbled and flounced, but Ann ignored the outburst. ‘Go on,
get out!’ And she left to find the ship’s surgeon. He was ill, in bed with
rheumatism and refused to come. Desperate, Ann hurried to the hospital and
pleaded with Louisa Grange, a fellow convict and experienced midwife, to
help her. Both hurried back to where Martha lay.

Louisa had an air of command about her. ‘Set the fire, get buckets,
boil water and find clean linen.’ Ann hurried to do her bidding. Seeing Mary
and Alfie still there Louisa barked, ‘You, girl, take that baby away! There’s
no place for him here.’ Minnie rubbed Martha’s back and muttered soft
cucking sounds. Louisa turned her attention to Sophia and Matilda who
lounged in the background, peering over Ann’s shoulder. ‘The lot of you go
on, out of here! Find yourself beds somewhere else.’
After an hour or two the pains slowly got worse and took over Martha’s body in waves. The pain now was different – she lay feeling helpless and cursed her lot, as she realised that she was just another in the long line of countless women who’d suffered giving birth. Soon the pains came more frequently and stronger, leaving her little time to relax. She felt an urgent need to push. Her body and its demands were irresistible. Nothing else existed; she was aware only of the contractions that drew up the muscles deep inside her belly. She sucked in a slow breath, filled her lungs, pushed for several seconds before the pain briefly eased away. She gasped and groaned while Ann held tight to her hand. Another contraction welled over her body, and she tried to expel the infant. With barely time to rest, it was followed soon after by another. She felt the birthing urge gather force.

Louisa held a bundle of clean linens to catch the child. ‘I see the head, it’s nearly here.’ There was a short time for panting breaths as Martha, tired, gathered for another effort. The contraction came again and she grunted loudly as she pushed the small bundle of mucky covered flesh into the world.

‘By all the holy saints, I ain’t never seen anything like that!’ exclaimed Ann. ‘What’s wrong with this child? Look at its head. What’s coverin’ it?’

‘Hush! Hold the child for me.’ Louisa crossed herself and said a quick prayer before wiping the caul back and over the baby’s head. She placed it in her handkerchief and carefully laid it to one side before crossing herself again. As the daughter of a French sea captain, she knew exactly what this meant and how it might be used to help Martha.

Through her fatigue and over the sound of the high pitched cries of the newborn, Martha heard them muttering. ‘What’s wrong? Tell me, tell me now!’ She begged. ‘Tell me! Is my babe all right?’

‘Nothing’s wrong. Relax, God’s blessed you.’ Louisa stroked Martha’s brow. ‘This will be useful, nay valuable.’

She swaddled the wailing infant, saw he was breathing (for it was a he) and waited for the after-birth. Martha lay back exhausted, and listened to the sound of strong infant lungs bewailing his arrival into an inhospitable world. Flickering candles lit the scene as Louisa and Ann made Martha more comfortable and settled the baby into the bunk beside her.
Martha ran her fingertips gently across the downy hair on his head, relaxing as she saw the steady pulse-beat on his crown. His eyes blinked even in the dull light and his mouth moved slowly. ‘What a miracle!’ She whispered to Louisa, ‘He’s so perfect.’ She lifted him close and put him to her breast. As his cheek touched her, his lips moved in a fruitless search; his head turned. Gently, she held him and eased his mouth to her waiting breast. She gazed and marvelled. ‘This is my child, my son and he’s beautiful.’

She relaxed as she felt his gentle suck. She briefly closed her eyes and when she opened them, she saw Louisa carefully unwrap her handkerchief to reveal the small piece of flesh she’d laid aside at the birth.

‘What’s happened? What’re you doing?’

‘Martha, you’re lucky. It’s a birth caul and sailors believe that having one of these will bring such luck they’ll never drown. If you’re willing, you can sell it for enough money to send your babe back to your parents in comfort.’

Minnie took all this in and though she didn’t know what to do about Louisa’s superstition, she couldn’t wait to tell others. Soon faces pressed close by the bed hoping for a glimpse of the newborn and some snippet of tittle tattle. The news spread fast and it wasn’t long before a bidding war was being fought by three sailors. The buzz around the ship did not disturb Martha’s rest and she drifted to sleep.

The wind dropped, the swell quietened as silent flakes of snow, like a cool blessing, caressed the Margaret. When Martha woke it seemed that the world had heaved a sigh of relief and she said to whoever was listening, ‘I’ll call him William Ford Goodman. Ma and Pa’ll take care of him, so he should carry their name.’

She was not superstitious and decided against keeping the caul; besides, the money from the sale would be welcome. With Louisa’s help, Martha planned William’s future. On Christmas Eve she wrote to Henry and Betsy.

My Beloved Parents,

I have a fine healthy son. He reminds me of my brother, William, so I’ve named him William Ford Goodman and
hope he will grow to be a loved member of our family. I was fortunate as he
was born with a caul and a sailor has bid high for it. Now I have funds to send
him safely home to be with you when the time comes for us to sail.

In the meantime, I am taking as much joy as I can from having him close
by me and loving him. I think of you all often and wish I was home with you.
Please give my love to Mo and my brothers. I miss them all.

I will be forever in your debt and cannot find words to say how grateful
I am for your generosity in taking him. I know you will love and keep him
safe. I hope someday to return and be with him.

I remain,
Your loving daughter,
Martha

p.s. I cannot think what to advise you to say to Richard should he chance to
enquire. I leave that to you as I trust your wisdom. You always knew what sort of
man he was.

Christmas day dawned cold and clear. As the sun rose, the captain called
all hands on deck, where they were joined by a group of Quaker women. He
led with morning prayers. When the last Our Father was prayed, Mrs Fry
stepped slowly to the centre of the deck and addressed the company. Her
voice was clear as she called them to attention. ‘Remember that God is
love and lives in every one of us. Let your thoughts be directed towards Him
who rules us all and allow His guidance to help you. Clear your minds of
worldly things and ask for His strength to support you in the challenges
ahead.’ She stepped back, ‘Bow your heads and think of God’s love.’ Some
women wept as they remembered loved ones and Christmases past.

The captain cleared his voice and started to sing ‘Silent Night’ and
an unlikely choir of men’s and women’s voices rose above the Thames.
Martha sang and remembered St Stephen’s in Saltash. She knew William would be christened there and held him tighter.

The captain insisted the day be celebrated and allowed the women to mingle freely on deck while the cooks prepared a special meal. When it was dinner time, a convict from Liverpool was selected to act as boatswain; she proudly took a whistle from her shirt and proceeded to pipe her fellow convicts to table, where a rich feast of fresh beef, vegetables and plum pudding was served and each woman was poured a gill of wine.

Conversations flowed as they ate and later there was music and dancing. Many women had brought out their best gowns, such as they were, and fraternised with sailors without the captain and Matron frowning. The ship echoed to music and song.

Still recovering from the birth and wrapped in a thick shawl, Martha held William close, sitting beside Ann and Alfie. Louisa danced with a handsome midshipman.

‘See how the men gather round her. She’s a beauty.’ Ann was envious. ‘Look at her gown and see how she moves. They say she’s from Paris. But she’s not happy. I’ve seen her crying in the hospital. Why do ya think she ended up here?’

‘You're right, ‘tis a puzzle. I heard she’s a diamond thief. Some say hundreds of pounds worth and others that it was a king's ransom.’ Martha rocked William. ‘She’s kind though, and helped me. Thank God!’

‘She’s a Frenchie and says her father’s famous – an admiral.’

‘Perhaps she does come from Paris. I’ve never seen a gown so fine before. Look at the lace and beads.’ Martha nodded as she smoothed the shawl around William, wrapping it higher around his head. ‘And she’s pretty and knows how gentle folk behave.’

‘Fine manners didn’t help her, though. I heard that she loved a likely lad. He’s been transported for ten years for theft and enticin’ her to steal. Gossips say he’s a count or duke or something.’ Alfie stirred and Ann rocked him. ‘Shush, little one.’

‘Tis a wonder he didn’t bribe someone to save her.’ Martha lowered her voice. ‘And what happened to her high and mighty friends?’
Louisa and her companion had waltzed over from the far side of the deck and were now near them, so Ann whispered. ‘She told me she had to leave a wee girl behind. Why didn’t she bring her, like I have Alfie?’

‘Who knows? Anyways, I’m happy she’s here. She was good to me at the birth. Without her I’d have been afraid and then, there’s the caul. She knew what to do with it.’

‘Is that lass with the red haired sailor the one who came from Cornwall with you?’ Ann pointed towards the other end of the deck. Elizabeth was laughing up at a young midshipman as she curled a finger through her hair.

‘Yes, and the less said about her the better. She’s a right one. We no longer talk to each other. Heaven knows what she’s up to, flirting with him. She’s married, you know.’

The music and dancing went on as Alfie’s eyelids flickered in sleep, locked in his mother’s arms; while Martha cradled William closer. Both were warmed by the atmosphere and relaxed under the effects of good food, wine and music.

‘All this cheer makes the ship seem almost happy,’ Martha said.

‘Ah yes, if only my man and my other kinder were with me. I worry how they’re faring.’

Back in Saltash, while other families were celebrating the birth of the Christ child, Henry and Betsy Goodman heard the news of the birth. They looked forward to having William with them and Mo was excited at the thought of being an aunt and the part she might play in caring for him.

On board, Martha knew the time for separation would eventually come, so over the next few weeks she took pleasure in giving William her milk, cradling him, telling him how much she loved him. She planned one day to come back so they could be reunited. She rocked him, sang to him and stitched a small medallion on his wrapper – \textit{M.G. and W.G.} – her initials interwoven with his, inside a cross-stitch heart.

Louisa continued to be helpful and made use of friends ashore to advise on recruiting a wet nurse. They settled on Betty Abbott, a woman highly recommended by a family in London. On 3 February, as the sailing
date was close, she came on board to take charge of William, who was now over a month old. The chill of the day matched the sadness in Martha’s heart. She eyed Betty up and down and approved of what she saw – a mid-height, plump woman dressed in no-nonsense garb, a serviceable serge dress and jacket, plain boots and a black bonnet firmly fixed covering her hair. Her smile was pleasant and she clucked at William when she came close enough to hold him. His blue eyes widened and his lips moved.

A hired cab waited at the dockside while Betty gathered William’s few small things into her portmanteau. She vowed she’d take the best care of him. As a farewell, Martha gave him her breast one last time, before folding a short note inside his shawl. It read:

_Dearest Ma and Pa,

Please love him for his own sake, he is an innocent.
Forgive me for the disgrace I’ve brought on you. All my love forever, Martha_

She cut a small fluff of downy hair from near his left ear, wrapped it in satin ribbon and tucked it into the lining of her bodice just above her heart. Her hands trembled as she handed him over for the journey; he slept through the farewell, his belly full of his mother’s milk.

Martha watched the skiff bob away from the Margaret and head for the cab waiting at the quayside. Unblinking, she saw Betty and William helped aboard, but began to weep as the cabman whipped up the horses with a click and a crack and set off for Fore Street Cornwall. She remembered Richard and steeled herself. She took several deep breaths, pulled her shoulders back and willed her eyes to be dry though her breasts leaked. Louisa, ever practical, handed her a calico binder. ‘Wind this tight to dry the milk. It’ll be easier that way.’

All on board were anxious to know when the ship would sail, but the captain remained tight lipped. On 5 February 1843, when the wind was strong and from the right direction, there was a burst of noise – whistles and shouted orders of ‘raise tacks and sheets’, shoes clattered on wooden decks
as sailors ran forward, manning anchors and racing up masts to unfurl sails that creaked as they stretched and took up the breeze.

The women stayed below decks as the ship edged out and away from the Deptford shore, led by a small pilot vessel. The man at the wheel sweated, with shoulder muscles bulging, as he steered against the tide. When the ship reached mid-stream, the wind swept down the river valley, filling the sails and pushing the vessel along towards the sea. The pilot sent a farewell shot into the air and headed back to dock.

Below decks, Martha, Ann and Minnie waited for the swell to hit, earnestly offering prayers for their safe arrival at the end of the world. The women’s thoughts were with those they’d left behind and most knew they’d never see them again.

Martha was distracted – her thoughts were of William and her family in Fore Street. And, though she was now skilled in staying upright on board, she knew that there would be wild weather ahead and she’d need her sea legs if she was to cope when they were on turbulent oceans. She remembered her brother’s stories of gales when men went overboard as they tried to hold fast. Though she knew he bragged a little to show what a brave sailor he was, she also knew that the sea was treacherous and shivered, hoping they would not meet danger.

Once they were in full sail and before they reached the open sea, Matron called the women on deck and when they were all seated, she read, ‘Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’ As the women fell silent, she continued, ‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. And I will shew the salvation of God.’ They all prayed for a safe landfall. Ann wept as she cuddled Alfie, while the Irish girls fell to their knees, made the sign of the cross and prayed for safe passage.

The Margaret sailed towards the open sea; a few stayed on deck, anxious to keep home, such as it was, in sight. But too soon a fog obscured the land, and many cried as England disappeared from view. At sea day after day, the convict bunks, damp while the Margaret was at anchor, were now wet after smashing waves surged over the decks and sloshed below. The sounds of groaning timbers, creaking, stretching canvas and flapping sails accompanied every minute of the day. A large bow wave showed the
power of the hull. Sailors scrambled aloft and swore in bad weather when rain beat down and the swells slid past, bursting with white top spills; but they lingered and smirked at the women on finer days, a few of whom flirted, seeking bunks in the drier sailors’ quarters.

The leaks were worse when gales struck. Waves came rushing, sliding across decks, bursting through gaps. On calm days the upper deck had a chance to dry out a little, but below decks the prison remained dank. Whenever possible the captain had the men set the sails so they pointed below, pushing the ambient air down to the convict quarters, but this achieved little. Beds, clothing and blankets all remained damp bringing on rheumatism in those susceptible. Women with infants suffered most, trying to keep the children warm, dry and free from coughs. Alfie developed colic and then diarrhoea.

Mary stepped in with advice. ‘I’ve been a nurse-girl and back home we feed babes oats. You grind’em up, and soak’em and flavour them with mother’s milk. Try it. Alfie’ll soon look up.’

Ann raised her eyebrows. ‘Are you sure? Wouldn’t fine white bread, like the quality folk eat, be better? Oats are fed to pigs and horses in London.’

‘No, no, babes can have ‘em. But, they’ve gotta be ground real fine and moistened with your milk. So he gets that smell. He’ll do just fine.’

‘Are you sure they won’t do harm?’ Ann persisted.

‘No, take my word. I’ll ask for special rations and show you.’

‘Ah well, it’s worth trying anything to keep him healthy.’

They asked for oatmeal rations, followed Mary’s recipe, and each morn fed him a mash of oats and expressed milk. Slowly he improved. Ann thanked Mary, but deep down felt it must have been her loving care rather than the strange diet.

The women now knew one another better, but trust remained a problem and gossip didn’t help. Sailors tried flirting with the younger women, but Martha wasn’t interested. Elizabeth was flattered and was often to be seen chatting and laughing with one or other of the men. Martha watched her. Fate was cruel, it all seemed so unfair.

Routines were strictly adhered to. Bells called the women to rise at around 6 each morning. They washed and dressed, while convict cooks and
work parties prepared breakfast, cleaned the upper deck and water closets. Turns were taken for the least pleasant jobs – no one liked cleaning the closets – and some fought for the privilege of being the cook as it could mean extra rations. At around 8 o’clock the rest of the women and children were allowed on deck, where breakfast was served. It was often skilly, sometimes oatmeal washed down with tea or cocoa. When the meal was cleared away, the women had to clean their prison sleeping quarters. The surgeon supervised to ensure all was swept, scrubbed and aired (weather permitting). Only after all these domestic duties were finished were the convicts allowed on the upper deck.

Martha chose to go to craft classes and was surprised that Ann wouldn’t join her. ‘No, I can read a little, but can’t write, so I’ll learn while I can. Who knows? It might mean a better work place in Hobarton.’ Ann shuffled and flushed. ‘Schooling wasn’t for girls where I come from.’

The children went to a separate corner, where a convict who had been a nanny took them for lessons. She used Bible tracts for reading practice. Some mothers also took the tracts and used them as curlers.

They broke for dinner around 1 o’clock, and after that the women were free to pass the time as they wished. At first the meals included fresh meat and vegetables, but as time went by, rations changed to mainly dried foods and salt beef. Many women complained and Ann visited the surgeon. ‘I need something fresh for Alfie. He’ll never thrive on such mean rations.’ But he was unsympathetic – after all they were miles from port and the only fresh food was fish caught by the sailors.

In cold or inclement weather the women went below decks at sunset, but as the ship sailed closer to the tropics, the humidity combined with damp quarters made life below uncomfortable, and they were allowed to remain on deck until late in the evening. The sky was like soft velvet embroidered with moon, stars and an occasional shooting comet. Martha looked at the darkness above her and remembered praying in St Stephens. She fancied God was up there peering at her through peepholes made by stars, and she felt humbled by the immensity of the constellations brilliant in the night sky. Sometimes a full moon left her thinking of her family and hoping they were seeing the same glow. But nostalgia brought sadness. Was William thriving?
The weather was not kind. There were frequent tempests. Martha cursed the ship’s timbers that seemed to separate and welcome water in at every opportunity. It was a struggle to keep her clothes and bedding dry and she was thankful that William didn’t have to endure this. Squabbles broke out among the women and several came to fisticuffs when they insisted on changing bunks in order to get drier beds. The captain was firm, allocated places as he saw fit, and set guards on companionways overnight.

Already several children and seven women had been in the hospital: there were coughs and infections among the infants; aching joints and pneumonia among the women. The surgeon was no help at all. His rheumatism plagued him and he took to his bed, too ill even to visit the sick. Matron was overworked and Louisa, burdened with a heavy workload in the hospital, asked Ann to help.

Despite Matron and Louisa’s care, on 19 March, Mary Biggerstaff died, and the next day Jane Agnew. Both had tuberculosis. The damp conditions on board had hastened their demise. The burials were solemn and held on 21 March with the captain officiating. The crew and convict women were piped on deck ready for the burial ceremony. Each body had been sewn into a canvas hammock, and was weighed down with two cannon balls. The makeshift caskets were carried up from below with a detail of six sailors to each one. The women watched as they trod cautiously across the deck; the first six balanced as best they could as they fought against the pitch of the ship. The lead man gently lowered his burden onto two raised planks near the ship’s rail just as a wind gust dashed foam across the deck. Half blinded by spray and caught off guard, he slid sideways and almost lost his balance. His fellow pall bearers scrabbled to grab corners of the hammock, swearing as they struggled. More cautious, the second team followed and brought the other body to rest beside the first.

Matron read a special plea to the Lord to take care of the women’s souls. The captain opened the prayers, kept the ceremony brief as he saw the swell increasing, and ended with, ‘we therefore commit these bodies to the deep.’ At this the bearers moved to the rail, judging the rise and fall of the ship to ensure their burdens didn’t roll back onto the deck. They lifted the boards so that the bodies plunged into the sea with barely a splash. Some
turned away, others saw the sea swallow them. Martha shuddered and was grateful that she was well.

The sailors were familiar with burials at sea and treated the ceremony as just another fact of life. Among the convicts there were few who knew Mary or Jane and even fewer who felt any warmth or fellow feeling, so the few tears that were shed came more from the solemnity of the occasion and memories of lost loved ones or, perhaps, thankfulness for their own survival thus far.

‘Stop, thief!’ The women were returning to their quarters, and froze at the shout from below decks. Matron hurried to settle things. In the prison, Grace Cook, one of Jane Agnew’s mess companions, was being held down by Sarah Thomas. ‘I caught her rifling through Jane’s things!’ she barked. ‘That’s the lowest of the low, stealing from the dead.’

‘I never! I wouldn’t.’ Grace struggled to get free. ‘Jane borrowed my pocket book and I was getting it back. It’s mine, not hers.’ She wriggled and twisted trying to pull her wrists free. ‘Anyway, her stuff’s no use to her now.’ And she spat in Sarah’s face.

Matron came between the two women, forcing Sarah to free Grace. ‘Both of you’ll come with me now and we’ll see what the captain has to say.’ She called two sailors to escort them to the captain’s cabin, while others looked on and some shrieked, ‘Thief, thief!’ as they passed by. Justice was swift. Trouble between the convicts might lead to fights and rebellion, so the captain ordered them to the cells and bread and water rations for five days.

The prisoners were restless and boredom led to squabbles, so to keep the women’s spirits up, Matron organised activities that had them anticipating the Cape. She opened her cupboard and gave those who could write notepaper and pens for letters home. She found volunteers to scribe for those who were illiterate, while for others she gathered sewing groups to make small items that they could sell at the Cape’s markets. Martha was grateful for paper and pen and she scratched a few lines over several days.
Dearest Ma and Pa,

Monday. I’m writing small to save space for paper is precious. I’ll keep a short record so you know how we go. First, how is my William? I pray he thrives. Sadly we have had deaths on board so I’m glad you kept him. Though I know it was for the best I miss him dreadfully. What have you heard of Richard? Our quarters are clean but the sea washes over the decks.

Wednesday. We had a wild blow yesterday and the ship creaked and moaned against the waves. We had to stay below. Many were sick. So damp it was we couldn’t raise fires to cook our meals. Today things have settled and once again the sky is clear. The mornings have been fresh and today I saw flying fish. The night skies are remarkable with bright stars shining clear. Often I see comets shooting fast across the sky. I’m sewing a quilt and hope to sell it at the Cape so I can send money for William. We have sufficient food, but we’ve been at sea for weeks so it is mainly salt. The few chickens left on board lay eggs, but they are soon for the pot.

Sunday. Prayers again this morning. I have made two friends I believe I can trust, Ann and Minnie, both from London. Having someone to talk to makes life a little easier. Please write to me, directing letters to Hobarton, if only a few words to tell me William is well. At night sometimes I think I hear him crying and wonder how that can be. I fear it is a sign that he is dead. I worry so.

Tuesday. Yesterday the wind was westerly and there was a high sea, albatrosses flew over. Today it is quieter and there are small hawks and birds the sailors call pintado hovering. We reach the Cape soon and my sewing goes well. I should get a few shillings for my work.

Thursday. The Coast is near as we see more birds. Some were seagulls but others were land based. The nights are warm and the days hot. The sun burns my skin so I seek a
little shade. Many of the sailors strip off their shirts. I am dismayed at the way some of the women eye them in their undress.

Friday. The Captain says we are close to the Cape and there is a sailor in the rigging all day looking for land. Every night in my prayers I remember you and hope this finds you all well. I send you my love. Please say a prayer for your Martha and give William a kiss from me.

Love, M.

A yell from a sailor high on the mainmast told the ship’s company that land was insight. With a good wind behind her, the Margaret sailed into port just as the sun was setting. The women crowding the deck saw that they were in a wide open bay busy with more than two dozen ships flaunting flags of many countries. There were some bearing the British flag, others from India, South America and at least two with a Dutch flag. On land they saw the grey outlines of buildings and gardens, a castle and fort, as the twilight gave way to night. It was too late to go ashore as the ship had to pass quarantine inspections before they could land, but everyone was looking forward to fresh food and water. Many paced up and down, impatient to be free and walk paved streets and see different faces.

The captain was anxious to get away again because the harbour had no breakwater or secure docks. He was afraid a wild wind or, God forbid, a gale would drive the Margaret from her anchor and against the sand bar. So, next morning, there was an urgency about arrangements for the women to go ashore: jostling and shoving ensued while it was decided who would go first. Hired skiffs took them in groups of six, under guard, to a landing at a small wooden jetty running some paces into the sea. Martha and Ann were in the second boatload and, once on land, they were hurried to the town square. Soldiers, rifles at the ready, were there to ensure no one escaped. ‘March on and keep together, no stopping,’ ordered the sergeant in charge.
Ann whispered to Martha, ‘I’ll try to buy something fresh for Alfie. Oranges would be good.’ She scanned the stalls looking for one that sold fruit.

At first, Martha found it strange walking on solid ground, and not having to steel herself to move with the roll of the ship. She felt almost seasick as she adjusted to unmoving roads. In the morning sun, the lime washed houses bounced bright light back into her eyes until she pulled her bonnet low over her face. As she walked to the market place, she was surprised by the regularity of the streets. They were straight and intersected at right angles – unlike the Saltash roads that straggled up from the river. The scent of dust, animal dung and perfumed blossoms filled the air: dry, sweet and wretched all at once. At the corner a team of oxen passed, six in number, yoked together and pulling a cart that groaned under the weight of massive logs. They were urged on by whip wielding black slaves.

The heat beat down and Martha’s plain gown, high to the throat, was uncomfortably restricting so she loosened collar and cuffs and rolled them back. There were many natives among the throng, some were followed by rangy dogs and others led donkeys bearing bundles. They looked strange to Martha because she was accustomed to British folk. Their skins were dark and glistened with sweat and they wore loose colourful clothes that echoed the brilliance of the sky and the mountains. Their language was exotic and musical. The children had large clear eyes, the whites contrasting with irises as dark as the jet beads on Betsy’s Sunday best bodice.

A small lad Martha guessed to be around five years old sidled past the guard and tugged at her skirt. His wide grin showed teeth as white as coconut flesh, as he opened his fist to show her three polished shells. They were curved like a snail, yet glistened with pearly spots, reminding her of a sultan’s turban. He held up two fingers, begging for coins in exchange. Martha shook her head as she was shooed onwards by one of the guards. Looking back, she saw him kick a stone in her direction.

Between the stalls, urchins chased and joshed one another just like children back home, and their skinny legs and bare feet brought up dust as they played. The women walked with a swagger that would be considered immodest in Saltash. Some carried infants tied to their backs, reminding her of William. His fair skin was so different from these babes. Was he thriving
and mumbling ‘Mumma’ to Betsy? Envy bit the back of her throat and her arms felt empty.

She looked around. The market place was rich with stalls displaying meat, bread and fruit. Many items were unfamiliar. But she couldn’t loiter: she was under guard and business had to be done quickly. Martha stood with the small quilt she’d made draped over her shoulder and right arm, hoping for a quick sale. The sun stung and she was grateful that her face was sheltered by her bonnet. Meanwhile the soldiers counted the convict women, shouldered their rifles and strode between the market stalls.

She was embarrassed to be a prisoner and wished she was free to roam like the white Boer women who strolled around with servants by their sides. Soon a plump matron, wearing a long skirt, floral cotton blouse and a white bonnet, stopped to finger the quilt. She was followed by a small black lad carrying her purchases. The woman looked Martha over and twisted the quilt between critical fingers. ‘Hoeveel?’

Seeing Martha’s confusion at her words, she muttered, ‘Ah, English! How much?’ She looked closer. ‘The stitching could be finer.’

Martha passed the quilt across to the woman. ‘Here, feel the weight. I used best quality wadding.’

The Boer woman took the quilt and examined the back. ‘Hmmm.’ ‘I’ll sell it for 10 shillings.’ Martha watched as she shook it. ‘Te veel! Too much. Not more than five.’ ‘It’s worth at least 15 shillings.’ ‘Too much. Too much!’ The woman passed it back. ‘Seven shillings?’ ‘Well, yes. I’ll take it.’ Satisfied with getting a bargain, the woman paid, took the quilt, and passed it to her already burdened slave.

The English guards rounded up the first boatloads of women. Martha hurriedly took the letter to her family from her pocket and bribed Tom, a sailor from the Margaret, to take it to a ship bound for London. She hoped it would eventually be delivered. The address was –

Henry Goodman,
Fore Street,
Saltash Cornwall
While the convict women went about their business, the sailors were victualling the ship. The captain paid his respects to British officials and, after Dr McAvoy was carried ashore, he searched for a replacement. Questions and interviews conducted by the local government officers ended with a recommendation to replace him with Dr Jonathon Mould, a young physician presently in town. He took up duties on 14 May, and Matron and Louisa were pleased to have skilled supervision in the hospital quarters once more.

The captain’s official duties didn’t take long. Soon everyone was back on board and the brief stop-over ended. Now the Margaret smelled different. There was the scent of hay, oranges and limes. Fresh food including carrots, potatoes and meat filled the hold; a clutch of chickens, a goat and a milking cow were stowed below – clucking and complaining at their strange home. As the ship got underway large waves bucked against the stern, making the ship jump to the rhythm of the swell. Once out past the breakers and into the breeze, however, the sails swelled, pushing the Margaret southward. They were on the final stage of their voyage.

A week later just after sunrise, Tom scanned the sky and sniffed the air. ‘There’s a change coming,’ he muttered as he climbed the rigging. He scoured the horizon for clouds and yelled to a sailor near him. ‘There’s trouble ahead! Feel the stillness: no wind and there’s a different smell to the air. I reckon we’re in for a gale.’

The other man nodded. ‘Check the sheets. Best make sure they’re fixed right.’

The crew knew they were heading into rough weather and the captain strode the deck with his glass to his eye. He ordered the first mate to check their position every hour. The air was warm and the sticky humidity had everyone on edge. The surgeon asked Louisa to secure all medicines in locked cabinets and stack the bedding on the highest bunks in the hospital. The convict women watched and some jeered, ‘There’s no wind, what’s the worry?’ Others were anxious and several asked the crew, ‘What’ll happen? Will we be locked below?’ Those who bothered to reply usually told them they’d be safer there. On deck was no place to be in a storm.
Ann searched for Tom. ‘What if the ship sinks?’ She held Alfie tight as she quizzed him.

‘Pray it don’t. If it comes to that, we’re all done for, luv!’ He was busy and didn’t have time to reassure her. Tension rose and tempers too, so that there were many squabbles among the women. Matron urged calm and tried to distract them with various tasks. She ordered some to clean their messes, others to fold and stack stores securely.

Next morning, Tom noticed that the rhythm of the swell had changed and he squinted as he gazed skywards. High clouds were approaching, pale and torn by the wind. He knew these were the precursors of more and, as he looked, he saw a bar of low clouds appear on the horizon – dark blue and rolling straight for the Margaret. The captain ordered the men to reef the sails. They were secured as the breeze grew stronger. In less than an hour the gale hit in gusts that slammed sheets of rain against the masts, onto decks and penetrated holds. All hands were on deck, ready to do battle. The convicts were below and the hatches secured.

The wild movements of the ship threw the women against walls, bunks or hatchways so that many were bruised. But this was the least of their problems: many were seasick as the ship lurched and tossed, thrown about by the wind. The lower decks stank of vomit and the water closets, filled to overflowing, spread disgusting slops across the floor. Martha tried to stay on her bunk, but it was no use; her clothes and shoes were soiled. Women held cloths to their noses to try to block the stench. In the hold, the chickens flapped and squawked, while the poor cow lay and mooed with a low mournful cry.

The squall lasted a day and a night before it blew itself out. When it passed, the women came on deck, pleased to breathe the fresh air.

‘Thank God. How sweet to see the sun!’ Martha rolled up her sleeves and took off her soiled shoes.

‘I didn’t think we’d survive. It seemed to go on forever.’ Ann stripped Alfie and laid him on the deck in the sun. She bathed him in seawater, took his clean shirt from inside her bodice and started to dress him. Martha washed, changed into clean clothes and dipped her shoes in a bucket of seawater before scrubbing them with a sponge.
It was time to restore order: the water closets were emptied; soiled bedding was boiled and set to dry on deck; the messes were holystoned and fumigated. The surgeon checked passengers and crew and several were sent to the hospital – one with a broken leg and others with cuts and bruises. Matron urged the captain to call all on board to give thanks to God for their survival. He did. And that night, ordered extra rations of rum to celebrate.

The hospital remained busy. Though the cuts and bruises healed, three women came down with pneumonia, four were diagnosed with bronchitis and one amenorrhoea.
Chapter 5
Van Diemen’s Land

On a July morning in 1843, the ship passed a pod of dolphins and sailors took bets on whether one would swim under the Margaret. They were bored after weeks at sea and the weather wasn’t kind – rain at first, followed by fog which hung heavily around the spars, and the canvas sheets drooped. Then a breeze sprang up, weak at first but strengthening with every gust. The swell grew stronger and the sailors’ mood brightened. As the sun broke through, many were wondering when they’d see their new home.

‘Near to land we are, lassie,’ Tom called to Martha as the women and many of the ship’s company stood on deck. ‘Just mark my words it’ll only be a day or so before we see Van Diemen’s Land.’

Tom was a sailor whose family and only love was the sea. It was as though he’d been spawned by the ocean and his red-grey beard often glistened with dried salt spray. His skin was as leathery as porpoise hide, impervious to any weather the seas threw at him. Though his frame was slight, his muscled arms and shoulders spoke of the years he’d spent climbing the rigging. He knew the winds were sometimes as gentle as a loving wife or as cold and cruel as a scolding whore. He trusted the sea more than people, yet he’d taken a fancy to Alfie and often chatted with Ann and Martha. He told them stories of seas he’d sailed and exotic cities visited. Now he leaned closer as he embellished descriptions of Hobart Town.

‘The town’s fair, the river’s long and the harbour wide. There are paved streets and shops aplenty. There’s more soldiers than citizens and they’re on every corner, ready to catch felons and drunks. Some folk who’ve bin there for a bit think they’re better’n the rest. Jumped up snobs, I say. And just wait ‘till you see the bush: there’s animals with four legs that hop rather’n walk. There’s devilish creatures the size of pigs with jaws so strong they could bite off a man’s hand. Even in town there’s snakes longer than your arm that hide under water tanks, and you’d best beware of the spiders. They grow as big as house sparrows.’
He laughed, seeing the fear on their faces, said, ‘Never you mind, you’ll be safe in Hobarton.’ There was no malice in his teasing and he regretted his words when he saw the frown and fear in the women’s eyes. Martha didn’t know what to believe. She liked and trusted Tom, but she’d seen the twinkle in that eye of his before.

He was right about being close to land, though. Within two days a sailor in the rigging called, ‘Land ahoy!’ and slowly, so slowly it seemed to those bored after the long weeks at sea, they drew closer to shore. Once the women glimpsed the land it was hard for them to know what to make of it. They expected forests and wilderness and there they were, but they were grey-green, unlike the rich deep woods of England. The skyline was shaggy and trees grew untidily. The pale bark on some stood out like bleached bones glimpsed through dark leafy shades. Strange to eyes used to oak and elm. They saw smoke from an occasional fire, but never a human.

The ship sailed along the coast, yet far enough out to sea to stay safe and away from the currents that might cast them against the rocky shore. Martha gazed at great grey cliffs attacked by waves tipped with high white breakers that retreated and left the lower reaches suffocating under thick white foam. Sometimes the cliffs gave way to low headlands sprouting brush more like olive-green bristles than the sweet grass on Cornwall’s headland meadows. Where there were beaches, the sand was startling white, clean and pale against the background bush – but devoid of human life. Martha remembered the Tamar, where sailors, shipwrights and cockle sellers worked and she marvelled at the emptiness of this coast. ‘This ain’t the Garden of Eden,’ she said to Ann. ‘What kind of town will we find here?’

Next morning the clouds cleared, the sun came through and a light breeze blew, carrying strange scents. Under sail the ship moved slowly and smoothly. An occasional pod of dolphins shadowed them and Martha hoped this was a good omen. Ann pointed them out to Alfie, who was now sitting up and taking notice of the things around him. He was nearly a year old. He could sit and say a few words: ‘Mumma, bubba, maw.’ The last his mother interpreted as meaning he was hungry. He was a happy child and smiled often. He laughed as he watched the splashing play of the dolphins.
Ann was pleased to see his interest. ‘He’s such a sweet little love. He’s just fine. I miss my other kinder, but to bring all of them would’ve been too much. Every night I’m on my knees to God, praying that they are safe. I worry about Alfie’s fate when we land. If I’m to work, what will happen to him?’

Martha nodded. ‘Yes, that was my worry when I had William. Let’s hope you’ll be together.’

‘I hope so, I’d be lost without him and nobody’d love him as much as I do.’ She kissed his cheek and he pulled at her hair.

‘Perhaps someone’ll need a fine laundress and be happy to keep you both. When the government clerks ask what you can do, you should say how hard you work, even with Alfie beside you.’

‘True, it’s my hope we can stay together. But it means the master'll have to provision not only me, but a growing boy too. Would anyone be so generous?’ As she said this, Ann rocked Alfie. ‘I love you, my dear bubba.’ The frown that clouded her brow showed that her mind was not at rest.

There was no surety about what lay ahead. Martha turned to Tom. ‘How do housemaids fare in Hobarton?’ she said.

‘Sorry, lass, I’m a sailor, not a landlubber. I know the town has lots of taverns and traders. There’s the government’s soldiers and magistrates. Lots of visiting whalers and a few loose women, but I’ve never moved in circles with the gentle folk or farmers.’ He shrugged. ‘You’re a pretty young lass. Best not to work for a man living alone.’

‘Hmmm. Yes, I see what you mean. But will I have a choice?’

‘Mebbe not. They say the government clerks are careful, but some folk bribe to get their way.’

The *Margaret* sailed up the Derwent and Martha borrowed Tom’s spyglass. With this to her eye she called to Ann. ‘I can see tilled fields and there’s a few cabins in clearings.’

She passed the glass to Ann, who put it to her eye. ‘Hey, look! See there’s a hut and cattle.’ As they moved further up river they saw more humble farmhouses and several paddocks sheltering sheep, while closer to town lightermen were busily loading coal onto a barge. By 3 o’clock the
spire of the church on the hill came slowly into view and the women crowded the rails as the ship edged close to town.

Martha took in the sweep of the bay and saw stone buildings, raw and golden in the afternoon sun. Surrounding the more solid structures were small timber cottages and sheds. Roads led beside and away from a main wharf where there was a gang of men working; horses and wagons were moving, and soldiers patrolled along the sea front. A breeze swept down from the peaks behind the town, smelling earthy but fresh and Martha felt the crispness in the air, causing her to gaze at the mountain hovering behind the town. Today, it wore a powdering of snow, peaked and shaggy. She pulled her shawl tightly around her.

Tom pointed out the sights. ‘See there, them big stone buildings are government offices. The army camp’s on the left. See the huts and tents. The gaol’s just near that waterfall. They call it Cascades.’ A palisade of roughhewn logs beside the latter showed that this was indeed a penal settlement.

Martha scrutinized the shore. ‘It seems busy down by the quay. It’s good to see cottages and stores, but the bush is very close. Can it be safe in town?’ As she gazed at the surrounds she thought that the wilderness looked to be pushing in on the settlement: threatening, encroaching, as though coming down from the mountains to reclaim the shore it once straddled.

The Margaret anchored close to shore, and the women gossiped about the many other vessels in port. At least this place was not isolated from contact with the rest of the world. Sail and steam ships rocked at anchor, skiffs ferried cargo from ship to shore where a large warehouse stood with doors open. Casks of rum and madeira were being rowed to the wharf and there was a steamer offloading coal. The harbour echoed to the noisy bleating of sheep from another vessel. The women watched as the flock was slowly led to smaller boats waiting to be taken ashore. A few of the vessels had passengers embarking. Trade was not entirely one way, though, and timber and packs of wool were being loaded onto other vessels.

‘Where are these ships headed?’ Ann said to Tom.

‘All over the place. Some to Sydney, others to Macquarie Harbour – not a place you want to visit.’ He stopped for a moment. ‘Or it might be Norfolk Island, even London.’ Soldiers in uniform were guarding male
convicts, who wore another uniform of ugly grey and yellow rough cloth. They were in a gang, bound together by chains and were slowly hauling giant tree trunks from the wharf to a pile beside what Tom said was the warehouse. In contrast to the dusty shabbiness of the convicts there were clerks, dull in black suits with hats drawn down over their brows as they checked, counted and ticked items in and out of their custody.

‘Where are the women?’ asked Ann.

‘Sorry, love, there aren’t many.’ Tom shrugged. ‘You’ll be welcome. This is a town full of men.’

She hesitated, shifting Alfie from one arm to the other. ‘So, if women are few, what about children?’

‘There’s some families, but a lot’re in the nursery or orphanage.’

‘What do you mean? Where’s this nursery? Who goes to it?’

Tom had only scraps of information. ‘I believe there’s an orphanage for children to stay in while their mothers work. They say mothers are allowed to visit on Sundays, I think. There’s a separate nursery especially for infants and mothers lying in. It’s up that hill.’ He pointed just beyond the centre of the city. Ann sucked in her breath and held Alfie closer as she walked away along the deck, gazing limply at the shore.

While the women and crew took in what they could see of the town, Dr Mould was below in his cabin, busily reviewing the health of his charges. It was his duty to ensure that no one with a contagious disease left the ship. Women were paraded before him in the hospital quarters, temperatures and teeth were checked. His diary recorded the hospital admissions during the voyage and gave an opinion on each woman’s character. His judgement would be a help or hindrance to their future when employers looked over the women to decide who might suit them best.

He interviewed Martha and said, ‘You have behaved reasonably while on board, so I’ve noted that your behaviour was “fair”. I hope you are satisfied with that.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Martha frowned, but what could she do? She hurried to find Ann. ‘I wish he’d given me a better character,’ she grumbled.

‘Although, I suppose it could be worse. You know that I’d hoped to get work in a respectable household, and this might not be good enough.’
Ann had an infected foot that she tried to conceal, but Mould ordered poultices and she improved. However, she had to wait two days for his review of her case. While she fretted, she overheard gossip among the women in Elizabeth’s mess and rushed to tell Martha that he had described her as, ‘idle and often found among the men.’

‘Just what she deserves.’ Martha sniffed. ‘He saw right through her!’

While Dr Mould was checking his report, a bustle of government clerks boarded the *Margaret*. Over the next four days the women’s descriptions and crimes were recorded by the superintendent of convicts. Each woman, in turn was measured, features noted and they were asked about their offence, sentence, their native place and family. These statements were checked against records sent out from the home office. Liars were told they’d be punished, but this didn’t prevent some fabrications.

‘Amazing how many women are now widows,’ sighed the captain as he and the surgeon compared notes. Elizabeth Collings was one, saying she’d received a note at the Cape which left her grieving as it told her of her husband’s death. ‘Swept overboard during rough seas off the French coast,’ she insisted when challenged.

Wearing her best gown, Louisa presented herself for interview with the superintendent. ‘My father’s a French admiral and I’m related to royalty,’ she said as she offered her hand. ‘I worked in the hospital on board the *Margaret*. Just ask the surgeon! I’m here because I was cheated by an outrageous liar. I’m a teacher of French, a needlewoman and a midwife. Please note those skills. I’d like to get a position as a teacher.’ She smiled and bowed slightly.

While these checks were being done, the women watching the shore were uneasy and anxious. Ann and Alfie were often on deck and she told him how much she loved him. She feared that someone would tear him from her arms. Martha washed and dried her clothes so she’d present well.

Only when the government clerks had finished their enquiries and their records were completed was permission given for them to disembark. The women found it tantalising to see the townfolk wake and go about their business over these days, while they remained on board. Tempers frayed as
tension rose due to uncertainty about what lay ahead. There was a degree of security in what they knew, whereas on shore was a fate they could only guess at. Anxious, fearful and some even hopeful, their emotions ran riot and quarrels between the women were common. A few of the hot-heads became involved in physical fights and it took all of Matron’s energy to keep things relatively calm and under control.

The Irish girls decided that the English members of their mess were against them and refused to help clean their quarters. Sophia hardly left her bunk unless she had a friend to guard it. ‘I reckon those Paddies’d steal anything that was left lying around. They’re like gypsies that lot, so I’m keeping an eye on my stuff.’

On 19 July, word came that they would disembark. The captain told them to pack their belongings and present themselves on deck. There was a scurrying and hurrying as women sorted and crammed whatever possessions they had into bags or sacks. When they were ready to leave, the captain ordered them searched to check for theft before they were allowed to go.

‘I hope Mould’ll let me ashore.’ Ann worried as she stood lined up beside Martha. ‘My ankle is sore. I’m limping a bit, but he’s due for a bonus for each one of us that lands, so maybe he’ll turn a blind eye.’ She was carrying Alfie and two bags that held his clothes and hers, but she wouldn’t have it any other way. He was all that was left of her family and she wanted him close.

The convicts were ferried by skiff to the shore. On land, under guard, they shivered in a huddle as a crowd of mainly men calling, whistling and waving gawped at them. Martha felt ashamed and tried to hide her face under her bonnet. Ann, Mary and Louisa stood with her, forming a small circle with their backs to the jeering crowd. It wasn’t long before more than 150 women were packed onto the wharf in front of the government buildings, waiting to be sent to quarters. They stood in the thin wintry sun under guard, studied by curious local citizens before they were lined up in pairs, each woman carrying her bundle of belongings. They were cold despite the sun, as the wind cut through their thin wraps. After so many months on board, their sea legs refused to leave many and they stamped around with an undignified awkward gait as they adapted to solid earth.
While they waited, the governor’s carriage drove up, drawn by a pair of smart grey horses. It was his practice to inspect new arrivals and give a homily on proper behaviour in Hobart Town. He alighted, dressed in a fine naval uniform. He turned back to hand down his wife, Lady Jane Franklin, lifting his cocked hat as he did so. They stood together, a dignified pair, before he walked along the lines and addressed the convict women.

‘You have been sent here to reform yourselves and become worthy citizens. It is up to each of you individually to do as you are told. If you show remorse for past deeds and give no further trouble, in God’s good time you will be eligible to apply for a ticket of leave, and finally for a pardon. But neither of these comes easily. You have an opportunity here to build a new life. So be good and behave. You will be watched carefully and punished if you fail. May God bless you all.’

As he strode back to the coach, a cur held on a loose lead by a local ruffian barked and lunged at him, splashing mud on his fine white breeches. One of the guards rushed up and shoved the man and dog to the back of the crowd, threatening both with his rifle. Lady Franklin saw the scuffle and hurried to the coach. She was aware many citizens carried grudges against her husband. The official party left and the soldiers ordered the women to ‘march on’.

A crowd sauntered around, lining the route. Some youths whistled and hooted while other folk simply stared and pointed. The onlookers were a mixed bunch: lonely men looking for wives, business men seeking servants and a few women hoping to find a cook or housekeeper. The soldiers jostled any stragglers, urging them to keep up.

Minnie and Sophia were walking together. Minnie, used to the crowded streets of London, was not fazed by the cheers and jeers, but this mob was different. She turned to Sophia and pointed to a huddle of men. ‘This crowd ain’t like those at home. There’s no urchins and few beggars. It’s nearly all men: soldiers and convicts. What a place!’

Sophia raised her eyebrows. ‘What’ll it be like living here, so different from home?’

Ann, with Alfie bound tightly by a shawl to her chest, was challenged by the composition of the crowd, but it gave her heart. ‘So few
women and so many men. There’ll be lotsa work for a good laundress in a town like this.’

Martha was not confident. ‘Sure,’ she said. ‘But with few women will there be households needing a maid?’

They trudged uphill in Campbell Street, crossing Macquarie and Collins, dodging carts and horses. Halfway, they passed a small herd of cows being driven with dogs snapping at their heels. They passed assorted cottages and a few shops. Tired though they were, some noticed that there were clothes and shoes for sale in one; in another there was a large display of grocery items such as flour, vinegar and oil.

‘See how many inns there are,’ Ann said. ‘There’s more drinking holes than ordinary stores.’

Familiar with the Tamar riverside hotels back in Cornwall, Martha was dismayed at the poor quality of some establishments. ‘The ones we passed near the quay were pretty rough sailors’ taverns. I wouldn’t like to work in one of those,’ she said. ‘See there in the gutter, those ruffians are sleeping it off and it’s only just past midday.’

They walked on and as they neared Liverpool Street the tone of the buildings and citizens improved. Gazing at the busy scene, Minnie laughed with relief. ‘Look at the shops and houses, see how fine some are.’ She blushed, giggling as they passed Emily Carter’s Staymaker Store, and she pointed to the fine corsets on display. ‘See that lot! I know I’d catch a handsome man if I had one of those. Perhaps we’ll do all right here, after all.’


They kept walking. ‘Ah, this is a better part of town,’ said Martha. ‘I pray I get work here rather than down by the wharves.’ And she pointed to some of the establishments. ‘Look at the inns. The names are reminders of home: The King’s Head, Sailor’s Rest and there’s one named Duke of Argyle.’

The small crocodile of nervous, curious women struggled on until they reached the top of the hill and there, opposite the hospital, was a mansion that had formerly been an orphanage. For some, this would be a temporary home. Filing inside, they were shown to quarters. Some shoved and pushed as they sorted out who would have which bunks. Overcrowding
led to squabbling voices that echoed the same themes: ‘I’ll take the top bunk.’ ‘No you won’t!’ ‘You had the best hammock on the ship, now it’s my turn.’ The bullies and the loudest ended up with the favoured places.

Once sleeping quarters were fixed, the women were allowed to unpack.

When that was done, they were shown the kitchen and the essential house in the garden. ‘What might we find on a visit to that place?’ Sophia shuddered. ‘Remember Tom’s talk about spiders and snakes. What’ll we do?’

‘Can’t hold it in forever,’ teased Mary. ‘Back home in Donegal we used the open fields. What’s up? Think you’re a fine lady?’

Finally the women reassembled in the large formal reception parlour. This was the room where, over the coming weeks, they would be brought to be interviewed by intending employers. Ruth Hannon called on them to join her for a last meeting before she left. She told them to be ‘good girls’ in this new town and, after patting the children on the head and shaking hands with a few favourites, she took her leave.

They ate their evening meal and, before retiring, were warned to be ready for the next day, when they would be issued with convict uniforms. After that, some would be hired out as servants: housemaids, cooks or cleaners. Eventually the house settled into an uneasy quiet for the night.

At 7 o’clock the next morning clanging bells woke them. They had breakfast and were interviewed by guards who went over their records once more. Those convicted of more serious crimes such as murder or assault were assigned to Class 1, and these 52 women were told they would be held in the Female Factory at Cascades.

Many of them complained loudly. Ellen, convicted of robbery with violence in Liverpool, yelled, ‘What the blazes! We only walked up that blasted hill yesterday and now you say we’ve got to get back down to some horrid prison. I’ll not go.’ But in Hobart Town, government officials had the last say, so it wasn’t long before the Class 1 women walked back downhill under guard, complaining all the way.

‘You’ll be working and you’ll have to earn privileges,’ explained the prison superintendent once they were secured in the Cascades courtyard. ‘If you behave, your Class will come down to 2 or 3 and you’ll be given greater privileges.’ Meanwhile, in the Liverpool Street house, those with
The Barratts of Murray Street

The Barratt family lived in a house that fitted their station. It was on Murray Street, not far up from New Wharf. It had two storeys and was solidly built. In the front was a fine English garden, with roses, lavender and an elm tree sheltering just inside a white picket fence. A brick pathway led from the kerb to a solid timber front door with a bright brass knocker in the shape of a lion’s head. Behind multi-paned windows were thick velvet curtains guarding the family’s privacy. The building looked as though it had been hewn from sandstone, but it was made of brick, carefully rendered and painted a pale stone colour. To one side was the carriage drive with wooden gates wide enough to allow easy access to the rear stables. In the back garden, those curious enough to peer over the fence glimpsed fruit trees: apple, lemon and plum.

Every evening when Barratt returned from his warehouse he checked that the carriage gates were locked, wiped mud from the sole of his boots on the iron scraper set near the beginning of the brick path. He’d hesitate a moment and gaze with pride at his home before squaring his shoulders and marching to the door to unlock it with the key affixed to his gold watch chain. He was a business man on the rise, though gossips suggested that some of his methods were questionable. He had a farm up country but lived in a large house in town; he traded from rooms at the New Wharf in Salamanca Place, selling produce and a few select imported items. He and his wife Jane, who was a little delicate, decided to employ a house maid to help with their three daughters, aged from two to nine, Ellen, Charlotte and Emily. So the couple came to the Liverpool Street house on 10 August to look over the recent arrivals.

Four convict women were chosen for interview: Rebecca (a former negro slave from Jamaica), Mary, Ann and Martha. The Barratts waited in the front reception room and rejected Rebecca before she got through the door. Next they saw Mary and, though she had experience minding children, Jane decided she was too young to take on the care of her precious...
daughters. Ann was next and as soon as she entered carrying Alfie, Barratt quickly dismissed her. ‘A baby would be an extra mouth and could spread illness to our children.’

Martha was last and she kept her gaze lowered. ‘She seems a little shy,’ whispered Jane.

Barratt didn’t think it necessary to lower his voice. ‘Yes, but she’s clean,’ he replied. He moved closer. ‘What experience have you had?’ He walked around looking her over as he waited for her reply.

Martha resented his rudeness, but tried to keep the anger out of her voice. ‘I’ve cared for my own home and stepchildren and I worked in my mother’s grocery store.’ She shifted from one foot to another.

Jane touched her husband’s arm. ‘She doesn’t look as though she’s a drinker or been on the town. She seems the best of the lot. Shall we give her a try?’

‘Yes, very well. I’ll arrange for her keep and livery.’ Barratt rose and took his wife’s hand, as she got to her feet. He turned back to Martha. ‘We’ll expect you to start on Monday.’

After they’d gone, Martha told Ann that she doubted her employers would be pleasant. ‘You know, the way they looked me over, I half expected them to examine my teeth to check my age. So rude!’

Ann was envious. ‘But you are lucky to have a position so soon after landing. I wish I could find work in a nice household.’ She continued, ‘Do you reckon that Alfie was the reason they wouldn’t consider me working for them?’ Martha shrugged and patted Ann’s arm.

On 14 August 1843, Martha turned up for work and was issued with the Barratt livery. She was grateful for that, as nothing was worse than the readily identifiable convict issue clothes: dark grey with yellow markings. Barratt supplied a plain long sleeved dove grey dress with a modest buttoned bodice. Handing it over to Martha, Jane explained that too much finery was ostentatious, and that she expected her to be always clean and respectful.

Three days after Martha started work, local gossips were abuzz when the new governor, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, arrived on the prison
ship *Cressy*. His ship docked sooner than anticipated and he had to land as a private person, because the lieutenant governor, Sir John Franklin, was still in residence at Government House. Even up in Murray Street the stories were going around and the cook whispered to Martha that it was all so unseemly. Unable to leave the house, Martha was curious and listened to the gossip of passers-by when she was in the garden.

‘Who’s the real governor?’ asked some.

‘Who makes the rules, who do we defer to?’ others wondered.

‘Scandalous,’ concluded many.

The governor had few friends among the older settlers and there were a number who were happy to find something to criticise. There were budget problems, and landowners resisted higher taxes. So, with an empty treasury, Franklin had turned to liquor taxes to raise money. The number of inns increased, and the courts were filled with many charges of licentious behaviour on premises. A few innkeepers, who were paying the highest taxes, circulated rumours that the governor was getting a kick-back from brewers.

In addition, the better class members of society believed that he was too soft on convicts, complaining that what he called ‘humane reform methods’ were nothing other than going easy on those who needed strict punishment to teach them better ways. What was worse, Lady Franklin often accompanied him on his expeditions inland – riding and camping out just like a man. No true lady would behave like that – it was a bad example for the young free women now in the colony.

In addition, the Canadian Patriots were creating problems. Franklin treated Miller, a solicitor captured in the Canadian War of Independence, as a convict rather than as a prisoner of war. Miller was furious, so he smuggled a pamphlet out of prison, complaining and describing the governor as ‘– a strutting old man, five feet nine inches with a circumference quite out of proportion. He has a short thick neck, broad shoulders, dark complexion, broad low forehead, very large dull eyes, enormous nose, wide mouth, prominent chin. He is a man with an excellent opinion of himself with little wit to uphold it.’ The local sniggerers delighted in circulating copies.
Gossip swirled around great houses, and was muttered inside the low down inns and around the markets. It was even whispered close to Government house, until two days later when Franklin resigned. That day, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot published an invitation to the citizens to come to the city square on Monday 21 August to witness the ceremonial reading of the Queen’s Commission and his swearing in. On that day, from early morning the town was full of life, bustle and activity. Many shops closed before midday and citizens gave themselves a holiday. All wanted to see and be seen, but Martha was refused permission to leave the house – she was to stay at home and mind the children. She peered through the windows to see fine carriages heading for the square and watched with envy as folk of all ranks walked past the house, hurrying to be part of the celebrations.

Barratt closed his warehouse and, with Jane, joined the crowd. In their parents’ absence the children were restless and nagged to be allowed into town to join in the fun. They shouted and teased Martha, and the eldest threatened to tell her parents that Martha had spanked them all, unless she was taken to town.

A uniformed guard of honour stood waiting in the city square, in a double line in front of Customs House ready to salute the new governor. Sir John Pedder, the chief justice, stood on the hustings, his coat tails flapping in the cold southerly, as he awaited the governor’s party. The weather was kind for that time of year and, though there was snow on Mount Wellington, the streets remained dry and the sun shone, taking some of the edge off the breeze. At a few minutes past 2, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot made his appearance, attended by his son, Augustus, whereupon the band struck up ‘God Save the Queen’.

When the vice-regal party reached the door of Government House, Pedder called for silence. His voice was loud and clear as he read the Queen’s Commission and administered the oath of allegiance. The crowd cheered wildly and gentlemen threw their hats into the air as Sir John Eardley-Wilmot and the official party proceeded into Government House. The wintry air couldn’t cool the warmth of the reception as the citizens welcomed the new governor and many mumbled that they – ‘hoped he was
better than the last.’ A chain gang further down the road, near the wharf were heads down working – it was all the same for them, hard work and the lash if they stepped out of line.

Mr and Mrs Barratt stood in the crowd close to the front. They’d hoped to be noticed; it would be good for business. Sadly, however, there were so many folk pushing and shoving that the official party didn’t linger, but left the couple lost among the crush without an introduction.

Barratt turned to console his wife. ‘No matter. We’ll see them close up this evening at the reception.’

‘Yes, of course. You must remember to take your embossed calling card to ensure they know our address.’ Though still smarting with disappointment, they put on a good face and joined other merchant families at one of the best hotels for a celebratory meal.

For the rest of the day everyone was on holiday, and when evening came the streets were illuminated and thronged with citizens. Martha longed to join the parties in the street as she peeped through the drawing room windows to see the fireworks display and hear cannon firing in the harbour. It reminded her of the celebrations five years earlier when all Cornwall had rejoiced in the young Queen’s coronation. The scent of gunpowder came sneaking under the front door and Martha remembered that day in Saltash when naval vessels shot skyrockets at the stars.

Memories of her mother’s shop and her family swam into mind. She put her hand to her breast and said a short prayer for William. Her thoughts turned to Richard and their day in court. Her hands clenched into fists and plunged deep into her apron pockets. ‘Forget him, forget the scoundrel! Best not to think too much.’ She closed the curtains quickly, just as Ellen cried, ‘Mama, mama, where are you? I’m frightened. There’s noises. What’s happening?’

Martha hurried upstairs to comfort someone else’s child, while she felt the loss of her own.

Banks of candles glowed in silver candelabra and cast a warm light over the assembly in Government House, while a small orchestra played in one corner. Sir John stood with his equerry by his side, ready to meet those
select families invited to his soiree. The Barratts arrived early and both were dressed in their finest. Jane’s carefully chosen gown was made of cream fabric, in the latest Paris fashion and she twitched the pleats to ensure the swish of the silk was heard by the ladies standing nearby. Barratt wore a dress suit, white shirt with stiff collar and a smart black cravat. They were there to impress, and to ensure that the new governor became aware of the services his businesses offered. Securing the governor’s patronage would help Barratt develop and diversify. So he approached an equerry, proffered his card and suggested that he may be of some assistance to the new administration. Soon, they were led towards the vice-regal party and presented to Sir John. Barratt knew that fortune was on the side of the industrious, so he bowed, muttered a few pleasantries and offered his services. Before long the couple were moved on to make way for another member of the town’s elite.

The next morning Jane called Martha to her morning room. As Martha walked in she saw the ball gown spread over a loo table. Jane was picking at the pleats and swishing at the dust around the hem. She was frowning. ‘Martha, this needs ironing and brushing. Can I trust you to do that?’

‘Certainly, Ma’am.’

‘It’s fine French silk, so do take care and ask if you need guidance.’

‘Yes, Ma’am.’

‘There are brushes in the laundry and perhaps just a little damp cloth might lift some of the soiling.’

‘Certainly, Ma’am. I’ll take most particular care. It’s a fine gown.’

Martha took the dress in her arms and carried it carefully to the kitchen, where she fingered the luxurious silk. How nice it would be to wear pretty clothes, dress to show off her small figure and flirt with a handsome man. She sighed, picked up a brush and set to work on the scuff marks around the hem. But the bristles were rough and one caught in the fine stitching, pulling it loose and puckering the fabric. Damn, this was trouble! What to do? Perhaps Cook might have a needle. But best not let anyone know about the damage.

Scratching her head, Martha realised that her hairpin might be just the tool to ease the threads. She took it and pushed the point gently under
the hemming, easing first one stitch and then another. When all were neatly back in place, she laid that part of the skirt on a table and pushed hard with her fist, across the damaged spot to smooth out any remaining wrinkles. The gown was cleaned, ironed and returned to Jane’s dressing room before lunch.

Later that morning, Martha washed the children’s clothes, Barratt’s shirts and Jane’s petticoats. This was a challenge, as young Ellen, bored and lonely while her older sisters were at lessons, came bothering her at the washtub. Martha had to chase her away often, and each time Ellen skittered out to the garden, laughing and making rude gestures as she ran.

Martha was tired by the time the clothes were wrung and flapping on lines spread across the yard. During the afternoon she was given various household chores under Jane’s direction. Though it was late winter, the August weather was warm and spring seemed close, so with the wind’s help, the washing was dry by nightfall. As she carefully pulled up the pegs she felt for any damp corners, before she lifted and folded items and placed them in a large rush basket. The sun had long set behind the mountains before she was free to rest.

The household had routines: set times to rise and to take meals; special days for washing, ironing and other cleaning chores. But these were often disrupted by the Barratt children who were active and quarrelsome. When their noisy squabbles became too much Jane took to her bed, complaining about her nerves. At those times Martha supervised the household. She cleaned, kept lists of pantry needs and did the marketing. Jane grew to trust her.

As she cared for the children she often thought of Saltash and her own child, so at Christmas she wrote to her mother and father.

*My Dear Parents,*

*I hope you have had a happy Christmas and pray that William thrives. He must be almost ready to walk by now. Does he stay well? I hope he is a good boy for you and*
doesn’t give any trouble. Keep telling him about me, so that he may know how much I love him. I pray someday to come and be with him.

Things go better than I had hoped. I’m a housemaid with a merchant family and must work for my keep. They are kind though the hours are long. I can be called on to look after their three girls at any time of day or night. But I can’t complain, there are many who are worse off than me. The weather in Hobarton is not unlike England, it is sometimes quite cold and the winds are wild. It is now summer and the days are long and sunny. Sometimes we see smoke from bushfires in the inland. But we stay safe.

I feel embarrassed to be viewed as a criminal when I walk outside the house. But I am luckier than most because I wear the household’s livery and am saved from the humility of the ugly convict uniform. It’s dark grey with yellow markings. Those who mis-behave have a special extra yellow badge added so that everyone can see their shame.

She re-read the note before tearing off the last section. Neither Betsy, Henry nor the neighbours needed to know of the indignities she suffered and she knew her mother would show the note to Catherine. After that the news would be all over Saltash! Shame was not for sharing. She finished with a new page,

Kiss William for me and give my love to all the family.
Please write so I know how things are with you all. My special love to Mo and give her a hug from me.

Your grateful daughter,

Martha

She sealed the note and put it to one side, ready to post when next she was sent to market.

Martha wasn’t vain, but she saw the contrast between her serviceable grey livery and the finer garments the family wore. She fingered the lace on the
children’s clothes, smoothed the soft embroidery around collars, and ironed fine ribbons on caps. She vowed that as soon as she saved a few pennies, she’d buy a blue satin bow to tie back her hair. Now, in her plain gown she was sure she looked more like a house mouse than a pretty girl. She knew she’d not attract any man’s eye looking like this – but, that was all right, because men were trouble! One day she’d be free and it’d be better if nobody remembered her in this sad condition.

She was often exhausted after long hours of heavy work. The laundry was the worst because the children were impossible to discipline and their clothes needed frequent washing. Often they played in the yard, where rain on the newly made garden beckoned them to make mud pies and chase one another through and under the bushes. Cleaning mud spattered smallclothes, socks and skirts took all her effort. She had to draw water from the well, heat the copper with firewood that the stable boy chopped, then boil and swish the soaped clothes around with a long pole, scrubbing the dirtiest spots against the washboard. The vigorous stirring was designed to remove the stains and even in winter it was hot and heavy work, making her arms ache. She’d wring the wet clothes through a mangle (protecting precious buttons on the way) before they were aired in the open.

In June 1844, Jane decided the family might employ a washer woman, saying this would leave Martha more time to help with the children. She consulted her husband one Sunday afternoon after church as they sat having tea in the front parlour.

‘Martha’s been working with me on the shopping lists and tradesmen’s accounts. She can read and write and maybe we should take advantage of that. She could drill Emily and Charlotte in number and spelling in the morning if we had more help. Of course, she’d be free to help Cook with the evening meal, while I give the girls French lessons.’

Barratt looked over the top of the journal he was reading. ‘Perhaps it would be better for our girls to go to school, m’dear.’

‘No, I’d worry. All sorts of families send their children to school. Imagine if Emily or Charlotte had to sit beside a convict child. What might they pick up?’ She reached for the tray and asked, ‘More tea?’ as she lifted a plate of biscuits.
‘No, thank you. Where do the officers send their children?’ He put the journal aside.

‘I’m not sure; some have a governess. And don’t forget that the military families move on, so our girls’ friendships would be broken. It would be hard for them to lose playmates. Charlotte especially feels those things deeply.’

‘We should investigate the Friends’ School. They’re probably select in those they admit.’

‘I doubt they’d take Anglicans! There’s a waiting list and I’m sure they put their own at the top of it.’

‘Do you think so? But we can easily pay the fees.’ As he said this, Barratt pulled his watch from his pocket. Surely it had to be dinner time.

‘Don’t forget that the Quaker woman, Mrs Fry, associates with convicts.’ Jane was in a hurry to make her point and get her way. ‘I’ve thought it over and I’d like Martha to help them with lessons. We’ll get someone to do the washing and ironing, so she has more time.’

‘It might work.’ Barratt was proud of his wealth and hoped that the neighbours would notice an extra servant. He stood and left Jane alone in the parlour as he called down the hall. ‘Martha, come!’

In the back pantry, Martha heard the summons. She replaced a packet of starch on the middle shelf and hurried to the parlour. As she entered, Barratt gestured her to take a seat. ‘Martha, my wife tells me that you have some learning. You seem to be able to look after the grocery lists. What experience have you?’

‘Sir, I did have some schooling in Cornwall. I worked in my mother’s grocery store for a few years. So I can read and write and I do understand accounts.’

‘Ah yes. Could you supervise the girls’ home study? It’d mean checking their letters and numbers.’

‘Yes. But when would that be?’

‘You’d need to set aside time each morning. I know the family make a lot of work, so if I have you do this, I’ll look for a laundress and general help. That would ease your morning duties. In the afternoon your tasks would remain the same.’ As Barratt spoke, Jane nodded.
The proposal suited Martha, as she hoped Ann would be looking for employment and might be able to join her in the Barratt household. On her next trip to market she met Louisa, whose superior airs had gained her favourable employment and a great deal of freedom. Martha stopped and waved to her, quietly noting the fine gown and hat she wore. ‘Have you heard what happened to Ann and Alfie? Do you know where she’s working?’

‘Not lately. When her limp didn’t improve and because of the burden of the babe, she was sent to the factory and Alfie to the nursery at the orphanage. From what I hear of that place, it’s best kept away from. Ann was probably unlucky – they say the washtub at the factory is the worst place and that’s probably where she went. As for the nursery, there’s more deaths there than should be.’

‘Poor Ann. Poor Alfie. I’ve heard about the factory. Can you get a message to her? My master is looking for a maid. Tell her she’d be working for Mr Barratt in Murray Street. And tell her I keep hoping to see her at the markets.’

‘I can get a note to the factory. I’ll do it today.’

Like conspirators, Martha and Ann exchanged notes with Louisa as go-between. Finally, with Louisa and Martha’s help, Ann sent a written application to the Barratts’. On Wednesday, Jane interviewed her at Murray Street. Ann thought it wise not to mention Alfie, or that they’d met weeks ago in Liverpool Street. A convict washer-woman was a nobody to Jane, so Ann seemed newly met.

A few days later, after consulting her husband, Jane sent word to Ann, telling her that she was employed as a below stairs maid to clean, wash and iron. Alfie stayed at the nursery and Ann visited him on Saturdays when the family sent her to the markets. But she couldn’t stay long as she feared Barratt’s anger. Her mood was low when she gave Alfie a last cuddle and tucked him into bed.

Ann was bitter as she told Martha about the misery of the children there. ‘The little ones are bundled together in cold rooms. No one seems to care for them and they are never loved or cuddled. Many are wasting away. Alfie looks pale and sickly.’ Tears filled her eyes. ‘He doesn’t smile and he cries and cries when I’m there. He’s thinner every time I see him. He’s got a
cough and his nose is runny. His eyes are red-rimmed and he’s not holding
down his food. Whatever can I do? They won’t let me stay and nurse him.
Yet, I know I could make him better.’

‘Let’s ask the mistress if you can have him here with you while you
work. Then we can try to feed him up and make him strong.’

Ann and Martha went to Jane that evening after supper. Ann was
hesitant, so Martha spoke up, ‘Sorry for intruding, but may we speak to
you?’

Jane was surprised to see both her servants and put down her book.

‘Yes, what do you want?’

Ann hesitated and Martha turned to her. ‘Shall I explain?’

‘No, thank you.’ Ann bit her lip and twisted her hands together
before looking straight at Jane. ‘Ma’am, I have a little lad in the nursery and
he isn’t well. I would be most grateful if you’d allow him to come here to be
with me.’

Jane could hardly believe her ears. ‘How sick is he?’

‘He’s not growing and he cries a lot. He looks pale.’

‘What is that to do with us?’

‘I’m sorry to trouble you, but I know that with my care, he’d get
better and be the way he used to.’ Ann’s fear for Alfie gave her the courage
to persist.

‘But, what if he’s contagious? We don’t keep a nurse and he might
infect my family.’

‘I can keep him separate in the washhouse and not have him near
the front rooms,’ Ann said.

Martha interrupted. ‘I’d help and I know him to be a good baby.’

Ann pressed her case. ‘He’ll thrive once he’s with me,’ she said. ‘He
won’t be a danger to your family.’

‘No, I’m sorry Ann. I’m afraid that won’t work. While he’s ill, he
can’t come. I’d worry that my girls might catch whatever ails him. Even
when he’s well I’d have to think it over very carefully.’ As Jane spoke, she
folded her hands in her lap and tightened her lips.

‘But I’m so afraid he’ll die if I don’t get him out of the orphanage.’
Ann took a step closer to Jane.
‘No.’ Jane was firm. ‘It can’t be while he’s ill. Come and talk to me once he gets better.’

Disappointed, Ann turned away and both servants went sadly back to the kitchen, where she complained to Martha again about the conditions in the orphanage and the selfishness of the rich.

Over coffee, in the front parlour after their meal Jane told her husband of Ann’s request, adding, ‘A sick child coming into the house might damage the health of our girls and who can say whether a convict child might be a bad influence on them.’

Barratt considered this as he stood in front of the fireplace. ‘Sick, and he’d be of low birth. I’m sure you did the right thing.’ He bent low and kissed her cheek.

Ann was distracted as she worked, and didn’t sleep at night. She feared that each visit with Alfie might be the last. He was sickly and unresponsive to her cuddles when she saw him on Saturday 3 November 1844, and she knew he was sinking. She cuddled his limp body and tried to get him to smile. She told him she loved him and gave him her now dried up breast. But he was too tired to suck and, in any case, she had nothing to offer. She bathed him and packed away his soiled underclothes. The disgusting smell and oily runniness offended the eye and nose, but she would take these small things away to scrub and clean, hoping that next visit he’d feel refreshed in the change she’d bring with her. But there was no next time.

Just before a miserable, drizzling dawn the following Saturday, Alfie died. The matron of the orphanage sent a note to Murray Street telling Ann of his death. When she got the news she was overcome with grief and wept bitter tears. This was her family, her only child, now that the others were in another world across the sea. And he was gone.

When Barratt heard of her loss he called the household together and led prayers for Ann and Alfie. He bought a plot in the paupers’ cemetery and insisted that Ann take a day’s leave to bury her child. Martha had permission to join her.

Early on Sunday morning, Ann and Martha walked to the nursery, past the Anglican church, where free citizens were gathering to prayers. The two women were a drab but neat pair, their livery contrasting with the finery
of the town’s wealthy women. Sunday was a free day, a non-working day and it gave these women an opportunity to display their prosperity. Ann and Martha crossed to the other side of the street ashamed of their status as they passed.

Some fifteen minutes later they reached the orphanage, where they were shown into a bare room at the rear, to one side near the pantry. There lying on a wooden table was a small bulging calico bag. Alfie's body was inside.

‘Just like on board ship,’ said Martha as she recalled the Margaret burials. Ann sucked in a deep long sigh and ran to caress the wee bundle. She tore the calico open and clutched his cold body to her. Holding him close, she rocked him. At first her tears came fast, then deep sobs as the reality of the loss of her smiling babe came home. Martha knew that words would not suffice and simply put her arm around Ann’s shoulders and tried to hold and comfort her.

For some minutes they stood together. ‘He’s stiff and still.’ Ann shuddered as she lifted Alfie’s hand and touched his fingertips. ‘I remember these clutching mine. Oh my sweet love.’ She reached into her bodice, tore off the top button and placed it on his chest. ‘I want something of mine to be with him in his grave.’ She was shamefaced as she explained. ‘I’ve nothing of value, but this has been close to my heart.’ An orphanage nurse came in and bustled around, hurrying them to be away. Ann wrapped Alfie in his shroud and, with Martha, carried their precious cargo along the road to the cemetery. He was no burden.

The graveyard was a dismal place: two rough stone pillars held iron gates, though there was no other formal fencing. A flowering yellow bush bloomed beside the gates its fine leaves feathering the breeze; Martha leaned across and picked a bough. Across this raw field they saw a few markers and an occasional wooden cross. Trees had been removed so the ground lay bare and accessible, muddy and uneven. A wallaby with grizzled red-grey fur hopped away as they approached. Martha lifted her head, looked around and in spite of the desolation, noticed the air smelled sweet with the scent of blooms on the wild trees neither she nor Ann could identify. The graveyard was an eerie mixture of death and spring.
A man of sour countenance, wearing mud stained boots and fustian trousers and carrying a heavy spade walked up to them. He put down the spade and held out his hand to shake theirs, but stopped when he saw what Ann was carrying.

‘You’ve come to bury this ‘un?’ He pointed at the calico bundle. ‘I’ve prepared a grave right over here.’ He led them to the burial place. They walked slowly for Ann was reluctant to be separated from her child.

‘Sorry for your loss, ma’am,’ the gravedigger said before standing back. Ann gave Alfie a last kiss before they carefully lowered his slight body into the bed below. The grave was small: about the size of a badger’s sett. Ann, Martha and the gravedigger stood silently for a few moments. Ann whispered a few prayers in a broken voice. Martha replied with a soft, ‘Amen’, before handing Ann the yellow blossoms which she let slip into the grave and the gravedigger shovelled over Alfie the rich earth of Van Diemen’s Land.

Ann fell to her knees and wept. Martha let her be for some minutes before gently touching her shoulder and easing her to her feet, her gown stained with mud. As they turned slowly away, Ann grabbed her hand. ‘I’m alone, alone! I’ve loved my man and my children. Yet they are all gone. I’m here for stealing bacon to feed my hungry ones and now there are none with me. Why am I still here? What is God about? It isn’t fair! Why take Alfie and leave me?’ Martha knew what it was to leave a living child behind, a husband and child both gone. She simply held onto Ann for a long time. It was a slow walk back to Murray Street.

Cook was a kindly woman and felt at a loss to know what to do to console Ann. So she simply had tea and biscuits waiting for them. ‘Come sit and rest a while,’ she fusses as she pulled out chairs and set the kitchen table. Ann was not hungry and, though she accepted a cup of tea, she crumbled the biscuit that Cook had placed on her saucer. She gazed around the kitchen. ‘I’ve lost everything. No husband, no daughters, and now no Alfie. What’s to become of me?’ Neither Cook nor Martha had an answer.

In the next few weeks, Ann often touched the place where her button had been as she went about her work and it grew ragged with the frequent fingering. ‘It’s like a memorial to Alfie,’ she explained to Martha. ‘I’ll never replace it.’ In nightmares she saw Alfie’s pale face and, on rising,
was confronted with the healthy Barratt children demanding breakfast. She was short-tempered, their play irritated her and as the weather became warmer she often shooed them out to the garden and away from her laundry.

Martha could hardly believe her luck when Barratt decided to take advantage of her experience working in a grocery shop. In February he arranged for her to work at his store down by the New Wharf under the direction of his manager, Albert Johnson. Female convicts like Martha worked for their keep, though there was word from the governor that wages would soon be required. Barratt was wont to walk around the house complaining that the colony would be making money at his expense — even though he acknowledged that the governor was rather strapped for cash since land sales had dwindled, and taxes were insufficient to cover expenses. He reckoned that even if wages did come in, convict labour would still be cheaper than free men, especially as part of Martha’s would be her keep in his household. He was an astute business man, a man of property and a man who knew how to save money. So he fired his youngest clerk, a recent immigrant from Eastbourne, once he was sure that Martha could be trained to take his place.

So, in the heat of late summer, Martha began to work in Barratt’s store. Under the new arrangements, Ann was employed to take over her former duties as housekeeper and child minder under Jane’s direction while Martha mastered business affairs at New Wharf.

The household settled into new routines and they endured a cold winter. Business was good, Barratt prospered, Jane remained delicate and the children grew taller and louder.

As the anniversary of Alfie’s death approached, Ann became more and more depressed. Most days she woke early after a restless night, but found it hard to get up. The liveliness of the Barratt children exhausted her. Martha was away for hours each day and when she came back in the evening, she had little energy left to comfort her.
On the morning of 10 November, Ann was sent to the markets for flour, sugar and other supplies. The scent of lemons and the dry smell of unwashed potatoes hung around the stalls, while the breeze bounced small waves against the wharf in Sullivan’s Cove. Bearded farmers with hands as brown as the dirt they dug stood behind stalls or carts, cajoling shoppers to ‘come and buy’; a lad in tattered overalls led a milking cow past wooden pens holding batches of chickens and ducks scratching and quarrelling in a fluff of feathers, while skinny mongrels sniffed under tables, hoping for food scraps among the detritus; inn keepers bustled around in front of premises and called to regular patrons; uniformed soldiers were sharp eyed as they guarded a shuffling, scowling gang of convicts engaged in building a stone wall at the end of Salamanca Place.

The whole scene was not much different from that of the markets back home. Ann had quite a list and as she wandered from stall to stall, she met a ticket of leave man who offered to carry her basket for her. She accepted his kind offer, and together they walked some distance before tears came over her when a couple of small boys ran past and brushed against her as if they might knock her down.

‘Now, now, don’t cry,’ her companion said. ‘Whatever is the matter?’

‘Alfie.’ She sighed and put a finger to the frayed spot on her bodice. Walking blindly, she stumbled on the kerb.

‘Tell me what’s the matter.’ Joe, for that was the stranger’s name, shifted her basket on his arm and tucked his hand under her elbow to help her along the road. ‘Perhaps if you tell me, I may be able to help.’

She dabbed at her wet cheek and sniffed as she walked beside him. ‘Do you have children?’

‘Yes I do. I left a wife and son back in Liverpool. Do you?’

‘Yes. I had a family in England, but I came with my Alfie. He was just a little lad, a babe really. They sent him to the nursery at the orphanage where he sickened and died. Today’s the anniversary of his death and I miss him so. Why did he have to die?’

‘I’m so sorry.’ Joe shifted the basket higher up his arm. He took her hand and held it gently, while his thoughts went back to his loved ones in England.
‘But that’s not all. He was the one babe who came with me, the only one I kept. There were three others who stayed in London with their Da. I’ll never see them again. And now I’ve lost Alfie.’

They were in front of the Sailor’s Rest. ‘You poor dear,’ Joe said. ‘Come and sit with me a while. I’ll buy a glass of whatever you wish and you can tell me more about him.’

‘No. I should be getting back.’ Ann hesitated and reached for her basket.

‘Just a small glass?’ Joe’s grip on it tightened. ‘Well, perhaps.’

With that, his hand under her elbow became more insistent as he guided her to the door of the inn. Inside the small space, he pulled out a chair for her to sit, placed the basket of groceries on the table and called to the innkeeper, ‘Two large gins, please, landlord.’ It was a long time since Ann had been feted by a man and he ordered another round as soon as the first hit the table, even before they’d drunk it.

The gin was warming and loosened her tongue. ‘You know, Joe, when we arrived in Hobarton, young Alfie was a round laughing baby with bright blue eyes and a shock of curly hair. All he really knew was the boat and he’d watch the sailors in the rigging and point up to the sky. If he’d lived I know he’d have grown up to be a strong, kind man.’

Joe just held her hand tightly.

‘Oh, I miss the girls too,’ she said. ‘I don’t know how they do. I never hear of them. They’re so far away, it seems like another life and I fear that even my man has died. We loved one another, you know, and I’m sure he’d get word to me if he was alive.’

‘You’re right.’ He nodded. ‘There’s not much to be said for being alone. I love my darling Sal and young Tom. He’s a likely lad. Whenever he was in trouble, he’d look me in the eye without blinking, and threaten to run away to sea, though he was only six. He’s a boy with spirit.’ As he said this he shook his head sadly and traced idle patterns on the side of his glass.

‘You must miss them both.’ Ann placed her hand over his. ‘Do you get letters?’

‘No.’ Joe shook his head. Both were quiet for a time. Ann felt warmed by the spirits and sympathy, so after the third round of gin, it
seemed natural for them to comfort one another in an upstairs bedroom. Too soon, though, it was time for her to return to Murray Street, guilty and fearful.

Ann kept that meeting to herself. She didn’t think it wise to share it with anyone, not even Martha.

Ann worked at the Barratts’ until early in April and, though she tried to conceal it, her condition could no longer be ignored. She was with child and she had no father for it. Jane sought her husband’s advice on a cool afternoon as they sat together in the front room.

‘Our maid Ann’s in a delicate condition. She must’ve been going with Heaven knows who. This is not an example that I want for our girls,’ she said. ‘What are we to do?’

‘Are you certain? Have you spoken to her?’

‘No need. It’s as plain as the nose on your face. I don’t want a loose woman in our home.’

‘No. Of course not. It isn’t proper.’ He shifted in his seat. ‘I’ll speak to her and then decide what’s to be done.’

‘Well, be quick about it. Think of the disgrace if the neighbours discover that we’ve been harbouring someone with such low morals. I’ll be ashamed to show my face in the street.’

Barratt twiddled his watch chain. ‘Can’t we put off making a decision until the weekend? If she goes I might have to bring Martha back from the store to keep house and that’d mean more wages for another clerk.’

Jane wanted action. She took hold of his arm, and spoke in a slow clear voice. ‘We shouldn’t delay. I shall call her up and say you’ll speak to her after dinner.’

‘Very well, if it must be.’ He lived in some fear of his wife’s nerves, but he was also aware of the value of a good name. When there were so many villains around he didn’t want to risk his reputation. That would be bad for business.

Later that evening, standing in the front parlour before Mr Barratt, Ann was nervous but knew that it was best to be truthful. He left her standing while he sat in his favourite armchair.
‘Ann, do you have something to tell me?’
‘No, sir.’ She pushed her hands deep into her pockets.
‘Mrs Barratt has led me to believe you are with child. Is that so?’
‘Yes, I’m sorry.’ She blushed and her head was bowed.
‘Do you know the father? Will he stand by you?’
Her voice was low. ‘Sir, I cannot say.’
‘I’m afraid that we will have to return you to the Factory. There’s no place here for a woman about to give birth, nor is there room for a newborn babe. In any case, you’ll need some time for lying in.’
‘Yes. Sir, I’m sorry. I understand. I’ll pack my things tonight and leave in the morning.’
‘Good. I’ll give you a reference about your laundry work, but that’s as far as I can go.’
‘Thank you. You are kind.’ She turned and left Barratt to consider his changed household, while she went to organise her few things and get ready to leave the Murray Street house.

She stayed in the Female Factory to prepare for the birth where she was delivered of a son on 3 August. She did not return to the Barratt household and although Martha occasionally heard news of her, they never met again.

As early as the first week in December, Christmas decorations filled shop windows all up and down Macquarie Street and folk said that they couldn’t remember a time when the town had looked so prosperous. Some complained that the season didn’t seem quite right with the weather so hot and winds blowing dry and dusty. A week before Christmas 1846, Jane gave directions to Cook. ‘We can’t drop our standards, just because we’re on the other side of the world. I’d like a traditional meal, with roast turkey just like we used to have at home.’

Cook was doubtful. This might be too much of a challenge. ‘I’m not sure we can trust the poultry sellers. I’ll do my best, but would duck do instead?’

‘No.’ Jane took out a notebook and scribbled some names on the page, which she tore out and handed to Cook. ‘Try these farmers. They do
business with my husband. I’m sure you’ll fare all right with them. Pay extra if you have to.’

Next, she called the stable boy and sent him to scour the markets for pine boughs suitable for decorating the parlour. Then Jane set the maids to polishing the silver and cleaning the punch bowl. Everything had to be perfect – the past year had been good for business and the family visited Government House often. Barratt had received hints that he was to be made a magistrate before Easter.

On Christmas Eve, the excited Barratt children squabbled and teased each other as they gathered in the front parlour. Ellen reached up to touch the pine branches decorating the mantel above the fireplace. She squealed. ‘Mamma. Look there’s a spider!’ She ran to hide behind her mother.

‘Where? Show me. Father will kill it.’

Ellen peered out, pointed with one hand while the other clutched Jane’s skirts. Barratt grabbed a book from a side table and approached the spot on the mantel that Ellen was pointing to. Thwack! He brought the book down with a thud. ‘There it’s squashed. Can’t hurt you now.’ He pulled his handkerchief from his pocket, scooped up the tangle of furry legs and tiny body. He opened the window and flicked the crushed spider outside.

Envious of all the attention, Emily grumped. ‘Scaredy baby! I saw it first. It was just a wee small creature.’ She pushed Ellen out of the way, while Charlotte sucked her thumb.

Jane was tired. ‘Now, off to bed all of you. We’ve church tomorrow.’ She gently urged them out the door and into the hall.

The next morning Barratt was all good cheer at breakfast, as he handed out gifts to the children before sending a purse of small coins to the kitchen for the staff. The children were dressed in their Sunday best and the family walked in bright sunlight to the service at St David’s. Jane sheltered under a parasol and Martha’s bonnet was some protection from the heat.

While they were at church, fanning throats and loosening collars, Cook prepared a festive meal of cold pressed crab and roast duck for the family. She made side dishes of spinach, parsnips and creamed potatoes; boiled beef, potatoes and cabbage were to be served in the servants’ back room.
In the best dining room, there was much laughter and merriment, so the meal went slowly. Later the family adjourned to the cooler front parlour, where desserts were laid out. Here the family was served apple pudding with custard, while on the sideboard were trays of shortbread, almond macaroons and a bowl of Oxford punch. When the family had finished dessert, the servants were invited in to enjoy the punch. The Barratt girls were laughing and playing. Martha watched – was William also happy? That night she dreamed of the family in Fore Street.

Martha eagerly waited on the daily post and read the Hobart Town papers, hoping to be notified that her ticket of leave had been granted. All through January 1847 she worked at Barratts’ store, but she was ready to make changes as soon as she could. Quietly and without discussing it with Jane, she cast her eye around to see where the best opportunities lay. The family were good to her, though a little inclined to think they were better than most. Now she wanted to live independently, barter for the best pay and be free to select her employer. She had some money put aside and, with this, she bought a few yards of muslin to be made into two modest gowns ready for the day when she would shed the Barratt livery.

The inns around the wharves in Argyle, Macquarie and Davey Streets were prospering and offered good wages. She was especially interested in the Waterloo, a tavern on the corner of Murray and Davey. It was newly renovated and served a better class of patron, and gossip around town had it that working conditions there were good.

The Waterloo was a fine two-storey building, with an upstairs balcony fronting Murray Street. Downstairs the two reception rooms on either side of the hallway were bars: the one to the left was simple, with broad benches, stools and a billiard table in the centre of the room. Racks of cues, a scoreboard with a shelf for chalks hung on the wall, beside a posted notice showing the inn was licenced for billiards and an experienced scorer-chalker was in attendance every evening. This room was designed to attract the dockside workers interested in cheap ale and gambling.

The bar on the right had better fixtures, upholstered chairs, and a corner nook set aside for smoking. A bank of shelves held selected imported
papers, books and journals alongside the local papers. It was a room suited to small gatherings and reflection; a place where local businessmen might meet to discuss the markets or politics.

Facing onto Davey Street, and entered through wide French doors and quite separate from the bars, was the coffee room. This was designed after the London fashion for coffee houses. There were rules about behaviour here, but otherwise this room was democratic – anyone was welcome. Patrons paid a small coin entry fee and could buy coffee, but not alcohol; and gambling was forbidden. The coffee room customers enjoyed sensible debate, which was frequently about politics. Late at night and over successive cups some of the finest wits honed their skills.

Martha’s ticket of leave was approved on 26 January and she lost no time following her dream. She made an appointment for an interview with the licensee of the Waterloo, Mrs Annabel Swift. When she’d asked around the markets, she heard that Mrs Swift was a free settler who had inherited the licence after her husband died of the fever in 1844.

On her free afternoon, she dressed in her best gown and bonnet, walked along Murray Street to where it joined Davey and entered the front door of the Waterloo. Guided by the barman, she was soon standing before Mrs Swift, a rather large woman with greying hair. From her manner it was clear that she would stand no nonsense. Martha gritted her teeth, clutched her purse and hoped she was up to answering whatever she might be asked.

Mrs Swift led her to a small office close by the best bar. The room had the lingering smell of alcohol even though it was quite separate. The atmosphere Martha noted was subdued with velvet drapes and a heavy Persian style carpet absorbing sounds from the bar and street. Mrs Swift gestured towards a chair and invited her to sit down.

She cleared her throat. ‘Mrs Gregory. I’m pleased you are punctual. I believe you’re seeking work as a maid here.’

‘Yes, I saw the advertisement in the Courier last week and I’d be pleased if you’d give me an opportunity to show you what I can do. And I’m keen to learn. I have two references and I’m sure I can get a good character from my current employer if you decide to offer me the position.’

‘What is your experience?’
‘I’ve been a housekeeper here in Hobarton. Presently I’m working in the office of Mr Barratt’s warehouse at New Wharf. Before that, in Cornwall, I worked in a grocery store. I have a reference from the owner, Mrs Betsy Goodman. I’ve also got one from the rector at St George’s, where I attend church every Sunday and have done so for the past three years. I haven’t yet told my present employers I’m applying for this job, but I’m sure I can get a satisfactory letter from Mr Barratt if you require one.’

Mrs Swift liked a woman who came straight to the point. She held out her hand as she reached forward. ‘Perhaps I might see those references, if you have them with you.’

‘Certainly.’ Martha opened her purse and brought out two folded letters. She passed over the one from the Rev. Joseph Peterson first. It stated that Martha was a regular attender at church, was active with the ladies guild in helping clean the church and that to his knowledge she was hardworking and honest.

Mrs Swift read this slowly. ‘Quite satisfactory, and the other one?’ Martha unfolded the more crumpled sheet. It was dated a year earlier, 4 January 1846, and the address at the top was ‘Fore Street, Saltash Cornwall’. The signature on the bottom was ‘Betsy Goodman, Grocer’. She did not think it necessary to explain that Betsy was her mother. The note read:

Martha Gregory has been known to me for many years. She worked in my grocery store for five years. I found her to be honest and reliable. She was cooperative and hard working.

Mrs Swift sat back and examined Martha once more – looking her over from top to toe, weighing carefully what she saw. This was a polite, clean and tidy young woman, attractive enough to be an asset in the bar, apparently able to work hard and Barratt must have trusted her. She tapped her fingers on the table beside her chair for a couple of minutes while Martha waited nervously for a decision.

‘Very well. My offer depends on you bringing a good reference from Mr Barratt. I’ll pay the going rate and I expect loyalty and diligence. When can you start?’
Martha thanked her. ‘I’ll talk with Mr Barratt and hope to finish at the end of the week. I’ll begin here on Monday, if that suits.’

Both women rose, shook hands and Martha walked out with a bounce in her step. The town looked as bright and shiny as the inn’s new paintwork. Now she could begin to look for lodgings, hopefully with a room of her own, and not one shared with a cook who rose before dawn and disturbed her sleep. Life was looking up.

Later that day, she sought an interview with Jane. She was nervous and hoped she would understand. ‘Ma’am, you and your family have been good to me. But my ticket of leave has been approved and I’d like to put the convict life behind me. I’m sorry, but working here, though you’ve been kind, is a reminder of my imprisonment. I’m fond of your girls, but it’s time for me to move on. Mrs Swift has offered me a position at the Waterloo tavern and I can start next week.’

Jane wasn’t surprised. She knew about the ticket of leave and had anticipated that Martha might seek greener fields. Good workers were hard to find, but what could she do – Martha’s leaving was inevitable. ‘I’m sorry you wish to go,’ she said. ‘The girls will miss you. Shall I tell Mr Barratt, or do you want to speak to him yourself? He’ll be home in about an hour.’ Martha was relieved at such an easy acceptance of her resignation. ‘I’d appreciate talking to him. I’d like to ask for a reference. Having a good character from him will help me in future.’

Barratt was disappointed at losing his cheap servant, but saw that it was in Martha’s interest to seek independence. And it was no good trying to hang onto a maid who wanted to leave, so he wrote a reference saying she was hard working, intelligent and knew how to manage accounts.

In her last days with the family, Martha worked as hard as ever during the day, but in the late afternoon she searched for somewhere to live. She avoided places too close to the wharves because she would have to walk to and from work and the streets were often filled with sailors and drunks. She wanted to feel safe in the half light of early mornings or at dusk. It took her a couple of days before she found a room in a boarding house run by Mrs Johnson. This was a simple cottage in Collins Street. She chose a small room at the rear of the cottage. It was away from any bustle in
the street, sheltered from the clatter of carriages and the hollering songs of inebriated sailors in the early hours of the morning.

It pleased her straight away. A multi-paned window was ajar and the curtains wafted on the breeze. The bed was comfortable and had sufficient covers for warmth, even on the coldest nights. Plump pillows and a chequered cotton quilt gave a homely touch. There was a cedar chest of drawers, with lace doyleys and a jug and basin for washing. The floor was timber with a plaited reed mat beside the bed. There was space for her cabin trunk and a comfortable chair. She would have to buy candles or a lantern, though.

Mrs Johnson ran a reputable boarding house for respectable women. Martha’s room cost a little more than others offered elsewhere, but her wages would allow her to move further away from the convict stain. On the evening before she was to start at the *Waterloo*, she settled her things in and went to bed early. Her dreams were of fresh opportunities.

**Ticket of Leave**

When Martha arrived early for work on her first day, Mrs Swift hurried to greet her. ‘Come quickly! Folk from Mr Lowe’s all night party have come in for breakfast. Nobody seems to want to go home.’ She led the way to the coffee room where cigar smoke filled the air; a burst of laughter came from a group huddled in the corner. Beside the fireplace, a man was holding court. ‘Did you watch the boat race yesterday?’ His voice boomed across the room. ‘Whatta race! You know they rowed eight miles in 35 minutes. The *Cupid* was in the lead all the way. I felt sorry for the fellows in the *Rose.*’ He leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece, pulled a handkerchief from his pocket with a flourish as he boasted, ‘I don’t mind saying that I won a tidy sum backing her.’ While conversation buzzed around her, Martha brought refreshments and collected soiled cups. Eventually around mid-morning the party broke up and the last of the revellers left for home.

The customers at the *Waterloo* were a varied lot and Martha enjoyed the liveliness of the front bar, but she also found time to listen to the debates in the coffee room. This was where the politicians came to refine their arguments and she developed a cynicism about their motives. She learned
new skills as she became adept at drawing beer; developed strategies to deal with troublesome customers and flirted just a little with likely lads who might leave a generous tip.

William Guest was one of those. She noticed him the first time he tethered his horse and cart up outside. It was 4 o’clock in the afternoon and the horse was sweating as though it had worked hard. She saw a young man jump down with a flourish and knot the reins around a post beside the water trough, before striding into the billiards bar with a swagger. He was neatly dressed, of medium height with brown hair and bright blue eyes that had a glint in them. Walking up to the bar, he put one foot on the rail and lifted his country style hat in a mock bow, smiling so that the dimple in his chin grew deeper. ‘Hey ho, a pint of your best.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Martha turned and pulled the ale while he brought two coins from his pocket, placed them on the bar and smiled at her once more. He liked what he saw, noting how Martha lowered her head under his bold gaze.

He took the tankard she handed him and sat near the door watching passers by most of the time, occasionally glancing back at her. On finishing his drink he walked over to the cue rack, selected one, chalked the point carefully before sauntering to the billiard table. There he lined up a red and white ball along the centre dots, took careful aim at the white ball, which shot up the table, knocking the red off centre and spinning into the top right corner pocket. His eyes twinkled and with a grin and a wave to Martha he replaced the cue. He whistled a soft tune as he left.

Hurrying to the door, she was quick enough to catch the signage on his cart, ‘Jacques’ Carts and Coaches’. He was back three days later and again asked for a pint of the best.

‘Certainly Mr Jacques.’ Martha nodded.

‘Oh no, I’m not Jacques. That’s the name of the owner of the cab.’

‘Sorry, my mistake. What should I call you?’

‘I’m just the worker, plain Billy Guest. But you can call me Will.’

Will became a regular, frequently dropping in for a pint, occasionally with a friend to play billiards. At first he just winked at Martha, but gradually over several weeks he stayed at the bar and talked of the weather and the latest gossip. Once he saw that she was interested, he told her he came from
London and had arrived in 1843 – almost the same time as she. He hurried over why he was in Van Diemen’s Land and that was fine by Martha because she wished to forget her own past. One afternoon, a few weeks later, he waited until it was time for her to finish work. He’d come in Jacques’ best cabriolet that was now tied up in front of the tavern. ‘The sky looks threatening,’ he said. ‘Let me drive you home when you finish here. It’ll keep your feet dry.’

Martha stopped and looked at him carefully. She remembered the first time he’d been in and thought of the many times he’d visited since. Though on one or two occasions he’d been a little tipsy and let out an oath, he’d never been rude to her or violent, and he had a way with words that seemed to draw other men to listen to his stories. He had a bit of a swagger and perhaps was somewhat inclined to hold the floor when he got excited about something, but there was no harm in that. And, after all, it was just a lift home and it did look like rain. So she said, yes.

He waited, playing a few billiard shots, until closing time. Martha gathered her bonnet and shawl and walked with him to the waiting coach. He opened the door and handed her up. There on the seat was a bunch of red roses, tied with a bright ribbon. A card was tucked in between the blooms, and on it was written just one word: ‘Martha’.

She smiled and felt warm inside. This was the first time any man had brought her flowers since, well, when? How long ago had it been? She couldn’t be sure. It was hard to remember Richard, and she didn’t want to anyway. But she was sure he’d never made such a romantic gesture. She sniffed the sweet perfume of the flowers. Will might be a convict, but he knew how to treat a girl.

When they arrived at her lodgings he handed her down from the carriage, escorted her to the door, lifted her right hand, turned it over and placed a kiss in her palm. He curled her fingers back over it and grinned as he said, ‘I’ll be seeing you again.’ Martha knew he would.

Will was polite, attentive and charming when he came courting. He waited patiently for her to finish work and escorted her to her lodgings; along the way he sometimes bragged about his skill with horses or recounted the
latest gossip from the wharves. At her door he’d give her a farewell kiss before he left. Occasionally he hinted that he’d like more, but when she blushed and shook her head he retreated.

She worried, was this love? She felt a knot tighten inside her. Like drafting a disordered balance sheet, she wondered what that might mean: Richard deserted me. She was earning and doing just fine on her own. Did she need a man? Will was a convict. Was it true what he told me about his past? He’d been a soldier and seems brave, or was it cocky? Marriage? Should they? He was an assigned servant – so where would they live? There were lots of villains around – finding a decent man wasn’t easy. Did she need one? He worked hard, but he played hard. Was he too charming? Best not to commit too fast, but he wouldn’t wait forever. He was a cheeky lad and other girls would have him. What a mess!

Will had owned cabs in London and his skills were broad and in demand. He drove carts for Jimmy Jacques and Tommy Moon. He worked horses for David Lord and on the Ivey farm near New Town. All went well until October 1847, when Will was employed at William Ivey’s stables. He couldn’t help himself; he had to boast about Martha to a co-worker, who promptly offered him a celebratory draught from his hip-flask. The burning liquid tasted good as it went down his throat, so he took another deep swallow, quickly followed by another. Unfortunately, the spirits loosened his tongue and when Mrs Ivey directed him to be prompt about his tasks, he told her very frankly what she could do with the work.

Mrs Ivey complained to her husband about his attitude. ‘He’s so insolent, that Will Guest. The cheek! I couldn’t repeat the words he used to me today. Have you seen the proud way he looks you straight in the eye? And he don’t worry about showing respect!’

Neither Mr nor Mrs Ivey tolerated insults. They had a standing in society that had to be acknowledged. So Ivey had Will charged with insolence. The authorities decided appropriate punishment was solitary confinement for seven days. He was resigned. Solitary wasn’t too bad. The magistrate could have ordered him back on a chain gang, or worse 100 strokes of the lash. On Sarah Island he’d seen men wilt into unconsciousness with a back like mashed pulp, shreds of skin hanging loose under the attentions of an enthusiastic whip wielder. It had puzzled him how
a surgeon, supposedly a healer of men, stood by as witness. And he reckoned that solitary confinement was uncomfortable but not unbearable.

Will was held in the lock up in chains, fed only bread and water during his imprisonment, and this gave him plenty of opportunity to think of Martha and the happy times in the billiard parlour of the Waterloo. He longed for release so he could see her again. So he guarded his tongue and obeyed every command that the guards barked at him, even though that was hard at times.

While he was in prison, Martha watched as others played billiards and she thought that none had the skill and flair that he had. She looked for him each afternoon, surprised at how much she missed him, and hoped that somehow he’d be granted an early release. Eventually at the end of the week he was freed and he went straightaway to the Waterloo. As he walked to the bar she saw that he looked paler and thinner than before. He ordered a pint. ‘My love, I’m sorry I don’t have the carriage today, but you must let me walk you home.’

‘I’ve missed you,’ she said, as she reached forward and touched his fingers. Then she picked up her cloth and quickly wiped smears off a jug that had been left beside the tap. ‘You look pale. How did they treat you?’

‘Could’ve been worse. I’m glad to be out.’ He ordered a tot of rum and sipped it while he waited, gazing at the clock every now and then. ‘Just checking that you leave on time,’ he teased.

When her shift finished, he took her arm, guided her out the door and walked beside her to her lodging in Collins Street. The journey didn’t take long and he was reluctant to separate from her once they had reached her door. Martha turned and shook his hand. ‘I can’t invite you in, I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘Lodgers aren’t allowed to have visitors.’

‘But I want some time just with you to talk and tell you how I’ve missed you. Let me come in for a few minutes.’

Martha had been lonely and was happy to feel his hand gently on her arm. She was pleased to be with him. She glanced around quickly to check whether her landlady was at home and remembered that it was Thursday, the day Mrs Johnson went to visit her sister at Sandy Bay.
‘All right, just a few minutes. But you might have to dive out my window if Mrs Johnson comes back.’

Will grinned. ‘Climbing out a window holds no fear for me if it means I can be close to you.’

They crept as quietly as possible to her bedroom, where she took out her key and slowly opened the door.

‘Look, it’s not luxury. I’m sorry it’s not a fine room, but it’s the best I can afford.’

‘Don’t apologise. I can’t see anything except you.’ And it was true; he hardly looked around the room. Instead he took her hand and pulled her down to sit on the side of the bed. There he stroked her cheek. ‘I’ve missed you so much, you know. It was miserable in gaol – you were all I thought of.’ His fingers gently traced the outline of her face. She relaxed under his caresses, felt the warmth of his breath and the tenderness of his lips against her ear as he whispered, ‘I love you.’

He kissed her, sitting close, body to body, his chest firm against hers. She kissed him back. Such happiness. His hands moved to caress her breasts. His breath was warm on her cheek and smelled of tobacco.

He stayed, longer than planned until Martha heard the sound of Mrs Johnson’s footsteps in the front hall. ‘Quick, you’ve got to go,’ she said as she opened the bedroom window wide. Will eased himself over the window sill, lowered himself to the ground and ran crouching through the backyard and then climbed over the fence. He gave a last wave before disappearing.

They met regularly on Thursdays and Martha looked forward to their time together. She loved her exciting larrikin. She listened to his bragging and found his tales of London exciting; Saltash seemed tame by comparison. He boasted of his skills with horses and she wasn’t surprised when he challenged one of Jimmy Jacques’ drivers to a coach race – the pair started from Salamanca, raced around Davey Street and on up to the Waterloo, with Will cracking his whip. ‘Hey ho, get on, get on,’ he yelled as his cart surged to the front. She was waiting at the finishing line, cheering, pleased at his success. Winning was exciting, so he shouted the bar. For his part, he delighted in this pretty young woman and was fascinated by her spirit: she
took no nonsense, she spoke up to him, she had ideas for the future and he saw a bright life together with her.

One Thursday he drove up to the Waterloo in an open carriage and waited for her. When her work was finished he wrapped his coat around her shoulders before helping her up. ‘I’d like to be with you each day and night,’ he said. ‘I wish and hope you’ll agree to marry me.’ This declaration did not come as a complete surprise to her. She’d felt the urgency of his love and thought that perhaps this was one man she could trust. She said nothing, but listened as he continued. ‘Come with me and look at a cottage I’ve found that’s for rent. I’m earning a little now and hope to get a ticket of leave. If you marry me we’ll have a good life together.’ He glanced sideways at her and winked. ‘Come on, you know we’d do well together.’

Martha was still wearing Richard’s wedding ring – it had been handy for keeping away unwanted suitors. That part of her life was gone, though, and she thought that there was a better life ahead; so she twisted it off and threw it over her shoulder as she answered with a laugh. ‘Yes, I’ll marry you.’

‘I’m a happy man!’ he yelled. ‘But, we’ll have to get permission to marry.’

‘Do you think it’ll be hard?’

‘I don’t know. Let’s give it a go. You’ve got your ticket of leave and you’re working. My record might stand in the way. My 15 years won’t be up till ‘57’.

‘My friend, Louisa, married four years ago. She’s now Mrs Callegari. Even Lizzie Collings was allowed to marry early last year. She wed Henry Noble from Ireland. Though, they say he was single and she said she was widowed, they didn’t have to wait.’

They applied on 22 May 1848, but Will’s record was against them and his occasional rash behaviour didn’t impress the authorities. Permission was refused. Martha was young, healthy and realistic. She and William wished to make their life together, so she changed her name and became known as Martha Guest. They moved in together, living in a small two-room timber cottage on the road to New Town. It wasn’t long before she was pregnant.
and she gave birth to a daughter, Mary Ann, in December. Will was proud of his growing family and worked harder than ever to provide for them.

Martha was granted Conditional Pardon late in January 1849, and their hopes for permission to marry went up. They re-applied and permission was again refused. They were bitterly disappointed. Will was quick to anger and he raged about the government having no right to be in their bedroom. It seemed hopeless, but they were in love and beginning to prosper in this new land. Will laboured long hours and his skills with horses meant he was always busy. Eventually in January 1850 they again applied and received permission to marry.

The wedding was set for 2 o’clock on Saturday, 23 April at St George’s church. Easter celebrations were over, the town was getting back to normal and the rector was happy to perform the ceremony. He saw his mission as bringing former sinners back to God and, though Martha was one of his parishioners, he hadn’t seen Will on many Sundays. He reasoned that with a wife to guide him, he’d attend.

In New Town that morning the Guests’ small cottage buzzed with excitement, and Mary Ann was toddling around getting underfoot, not understanding what was going on. She was in her best lace dress and Martha had to keep sharp watch to make sure she didn’t soil it before the ceremony. Susan Mumford, her bridesmaid, arrived early to help tidy the cottage and keep an eye on Mary Ann. Martha had a new gown of pale blue voile, a small modesty draping of cream silk lined the collar; Susan was in pale pink muslin. By 1 o’clock, the two women were satisfied that they and Mary Ann looked their best.

From early morning, Will and his best man, Jimmy Scott, a fellow cab-driver and ticket of leave man, scurried around town buying in food and drink for a celebratory supper planned for that evening. When they returned, they set the refreshments up on a damask-covered table in the second room. The couple had only four chairs; they borrowed extras from friends and neighbours.

Just before it was time to leave, though, Mary Ann decided to help herself to the cakes. The table was high, so while no one was looking, she took hold of a corner of the table cloth with both hands and yanked on it to pull herself up. A bowl of small cakes went flying to the floor. Mary Ann
squealed, but she continued to crawl towards the nearest one – her eyes fixed on a sticky cake with chocolate icing. Will and Jimmy raced in: Will swooped and grabbed her while Jimmy tried to straighten things on the table.

‘Is the wedding cake all right?’ Martha checked it for damage as she pushed it back to the centre of the table. ‘Look there’s a crack on the side. What’ll we do?’

‘We’ll bring out the booze first,’ said Jimmy. ‘Folks won’t notice and, if they do, they won’t care.’

Will handed Martha and Susan bunches of lilies and ferns for bouquets. There were sprays of leaves for the men’s button holes. The men set a small fire in the fireplace so the cottage would be warm and welcoming on their return and the whole house smelled clean with an overlay of fresh baking.

When all was ready, the men brushed their jackets, buffed their boots for the last time; the women fluffed up their skirts, gathered bonnets and cloaks ready to go to the church. Susan carried Mary Ann in order to make sure that her shoes were not soiled by the dusty path. Will now owned a pony and a small cabriolet which he’d scrubbed and painted. Today it looked splendid with red wheels and the sides embossed with swirls of gold, making it, as he teased Martha, fit for a princess. By a quarter to 2, Martha, Susan and Mary Ann were sitting proudly inside, Will and Jimmy mounted the vehicle steps and Will took the reins; he urged the pony on. ‘Hey ho, giddyup,’ as he cracked the whip.

Around twelve people waited for them outside St George’s church, just a few close friends standing in the sun beside the main doors. Seeing them, Martha thought how fine a day this was. She whispered to Susan, ‘Aint it grand that the wretched wind has dropped and the sun shines on us.’ She held Mary Ann while Will tied the horse to a post beside another carriage, then helped his passengers down. Jimmy took Susan’s hand, leading her to stand beside Martha and Mary Ann.

Annabel Swift stepped forward, impressive in a French crimson taffeta gown and white bonnet. Martha greeted her warmly. ‘Ah, thank you for agreeing to give me away. Without my Pa, you’re the closest thing to family I have here.’
‘Thank you, I’m delighted. So pleased you thought of me, though it is a bit unusual for a woman.’ She changed her reticule to her other arm, and shook Will’s hand. ‘It’s a happy day and I hope you’ll both prosper.’

There was a small thrill of conversation, while people admired Martha and Susan’s gowns. Mary Ann was passed from one to another. Will turned to Jimmy. ‘Who’ve you got to mind the horse?’

‘Damn! I forgot about that.’ He stamped his foot as he swore. ‘Hell, maybe it’ll be all right,’ he said, as he saw a youth walking down the street.

‘Hey you! Want to keep an eye on the horses for me?’

‘Ow much?’

Jimmy reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin. He tossed that to the lad. ‘Here’s this for now and the same when we come out.’

The boy caught the money, bit it and walked slowly over to the horse. ‘Sure!’ He sat on the church steps near the hitching post. ‘Thanks.’

Satisfied that all was safe, the guests drifted inside and settled in the front pews, while Will and Jimmy went ahead to meet the rector. At the main entry doors, Susan took Mary Ann’s hand; Annabel stood by Martha’s side as the first notes of the organ sounded and, with Susan and Mary Ann in the lead, Annabel and Martha followed.

When they reached the altar, the rector smiled, Will shifted from one foot to another with nervousness and Martha took his arm. Susan, Mary Ann and Annabel moved to sit in a front pew – Mary Ann wriggling between them.

The organ fell silent and the ceremony began. The words were familiar to Martha, because she’d heard them all before, but she tried to put that out of her mind. Richard Gregory and Plymouth didn’t belong here. This was a new world and a new life. The service didn’t take long and the guests waited while Martha, Will and the witnesses retired to the vestry to sign the marriage register. Of course Mary Ann was indignant at being left behind. ‘Mamma!’ she cried and tried to run after them.

In the vestry, the rector brought out a large black-bound book. ‘Sign or your mark?’ he asked.

‘We both sign.’ Will passed the pen to Martha first, before he scrawled his name. A blob of ink dropped from the pen, thankfully just
missing the register. They shook hands all round before trooping back into
the church, up the aisle and through the main door.

Susan and Annabel waited there with handfuls of rose petals ready
to throw over them. Martha giggled and Mary Ann raced to grab her
mother’s skirts. Soon all of the party were out on the street again. Will,
Martha and Mary Ann climbed into the cab; Jimmy handed another coin to
the waiting youth before he took the reins. ‘Thanks, son.’ The lad skittered
off towards the harbour. Annabel and Susan threw the last of the rose petals
over the happy couple as they drove off, while the guests discussed who
among them had a carriage and could offer a ride to others.

It was soon sorted and the rest of the party headed to the cottage in
New Town. The day was warm for that time of year and the guests looked
forward to a glass or two of cordial or ale. Jimmy was pleased to offer
porter, brandy and wine. Annabel had brought champagne and offered it
around. ‘I’m pleased and proud to have had the honour of giving Martha
away. Let’s drink a toast to the happy couple.’

Jimmy topped up glasses, people cheered and drinks flowed. As
he’d promised, nobody noticed the slight damage to the wedding cake.
Night closed in and the jokes became a little bawdy – the women tutted and
tried to make the company respectable.

That night as Martha lay in Will’s arms he whispered a few of the
minister’s words, ‘comfort, honour and protect.’ She felt treasured. She
knew the warmth of his body and was nourished by his love. Joy and
pleasure lay in giving and sharing. Life as a married couple had begun.
Perhaps their convict past would be forgotten.

Over the following years they worked hard and saved for a brighter future.
Martha helped out behind the *Waterloo* bar and Will drove carts and cabs,
but he was always on the lookout for opportunities. Taverns were popular:
people congregated to eat and drink; country visitors and newcomers to the
colony needed rooms to stay. He decided that, with Martha’s skills and his
energy, they’d make money as innkeepers, provided he found a place to fit
their budget.
Late in the winter of 1853, he found just the place he was seeking—at the right price and in a working class neighbourhood. It was the *Blue Bells of Scotland*. The legalities were finalised before Martha had a chance to look the contract over. He showed it to her on a windy Monday, when the clouds raced across the sky, hardly stopping to drop a smattering of sleet upon the town. Together they walked up the hill to inspect. He was proud and excited. As they neared the small single storey building he clutched her hand. ‘Ain’t it grand? It’s just two years young. And it’s ours,’ he said. ‘We’ll build up trade and make it something really great.’

‘You’re in such a rush. Why didn’t you ask me first?’ She frowned and walked more slowly. ‘What if I don’t like it?’

‘Look, I know it’s small, but it’s a start. Trust me,’ he said as he strode up to the front door. They both turned and looked back down Murray Street to the city. The houses at this end were smaller, poorer and local folk were workers, not gentry. This was a bit out of town and away from the quay, but they had to start somewhere. He pointed to the smudged bluebells painted on the transom and grinned before he pulled a brass key from his pocket, put it in the lock and turned it. The panelled door whined on its hinges as he pushed it open. ‘Needs oiling but that’s easily fixed.’ He bent down, scooped Martha up and staggered across the threshold with her laughing and kicking.

Inside, he set her down and she saw that she could throw a ball straight from the front to the back door and out into the garden. ‘It’s a shotgun house.’ She laughed. ‘And only two rooms wide and two rooms deep.’

‘Yes, yes, but it’s cosy.’

‘Is there a cookhouse out the back?’

‘Of course, it’s separate and safely out of the way in case of fire. It’s big, you’ll like it. But I’ll show you that later. First look here, come with me! Here’s the tap room.’ He pointed to the room to the right of the front door. He waved her to go in. ‘Here, see?’ He squeezed her hand. The room still smelled of the ale the last innkeeper must have spilt on the floor. She looked around. It was small by comparison with the *Waterloo*, but it would be much easier to keep clean. There was a cedar bar freestanding close by the fireplace. Above the hearth was a sturdy shelf and above that again, a
framed sketch of Mr Lord’s champion stallion, *Blackwood*. Behind the bar was a lockable cupboard for storing measures, tankards and wine.

The window was small paned and the afternoon sun glinted through a few ripples in the glass. It had no curtains. Martha ran her forefinger along the stone sill. ‘Dusty,’ she muttered. The fireplace on the far wall hadn’t been cleaned, and as the breeze blew through the house a few motes of ash or dust drifted out. ‘This room needs a good sweep and dust.’ She sneezed.

Will’s enthusiasm wouldn’t be dampened by a bit of dirt. ‘Of course, that’ll be easy. I’ll help. Look – here’s the trapdoor to the beer cellar.’ He bent down near the bar, grabbed a brass ring and lifted a wooden hatch. ‘See? We can lift the kegs straight up to the bar.’

She was impressed, but hardly had time to comment before he pulled her across to examine the room on the other side of the hall. ‘Come on. We can make this the parlour.’

The other front room was a mirror image of the first, except that here there were white lace curtains on the window; they were a little yellow at the edges. There was an iron grate in the fireplace, but it too was dusty and rats seemed to have made a nest in it.

‘Let’s get padded chairs for this room. Stools will do for the bar,’ she said. ‘There’s plenty of second-hand on sale down by the harbour.’

‘And a table and lamp for a reading nook.’

‘I’ll scrub the floor and you can oil it.’ Martha shook the curtains. ‘These’ll come up with a good wash.’

‘Come and see the back rooms.’ Will took her elbow and dragged her back into the hall. ‘We’ll put a door in the corridor halfway along. It’ll keep our quarters separate and private and we’ll only open the dining room when we need to.’ In the hallway, wide floorboards led the way to the two back rooms. Martha admired whitewashed walls, trailed a finger along the dado and examined the cornice for spider webs. At the end of the passage Will turned the knobs and then thrust both doors open. He pointed to the one on the left. ‘This’ll be the dining room and we’ll serve suppers here, along with grog. That way, folk’ll stay longer and drink more.’ He turned to the one on the right. ‘This will be ours. Mary Ann can have a wee cot over
there.’ He pointed to the far corner of the room. He took a deep breath and
laughed with pride.

She nodded. ‘Let me see the kitchen.’ He plunged his hand into his
pocket, pulled out another large key and unlocked the back door. Once
outside, she saw a path leading to a barn. ‘That’s the cookhouse?’ She
hurried towards it, but Will stopped and pointed to the very end of the yard.

‘Way down there, next to the back lane, is the necessary house.’ He
saw her look of disgust and let out a loud laugh. ‘Don’t worry! The night
soil man collects every Monday.’

‘Thank goodness.’

‘We’ll try to keep it mainly for the convenience of the family, and a
yardman can tidy any slops in between times.’

They walked across the yard and into the cookhouse, which was
large, with a stamped earth floor as hard as stone. A brick chimney and the
hearth dominated the room. An iron stove, gritty from past fires, stood
against the farthest wall with a large washing copper close by. A stack of
buckets, a mangle and a locked pantry cupboard made up the rest of the
furnishings. The ceiling was high as were two windows – set open for
ventilation. ‘Ah Will, what luxury. I can cook great meals here, but we’ll
need chairs, tables, lamps, brooms, brushes, soaps, and, oh so much more.
Don’t forget, there’s the cost of the licence and the stock. Can we afford it?’

‘Nothing to worry about!’ He put his arm around her shoulder.

‘We’ve been saving for two years now and we’ll show this neighbourhood
how an inn should be run.’

On Tuesday morning, they both arrived early. Mary Ann stayed at
the Mumfords’ while they worked. With the help of Jimmy Scott and a
hired lad, they swept, scoured, and washed. A chimney sweep called and
cleared away birds’ nests and a flurry of leaves. The lace curtains were
boiled in the copper and hung out for the sun to bleach. Fireplaces and the
stove were swept, scrubbed clean and made to shine with blacking
compound. By nightfall the floors in the front rooms had been oiled and the
bar looked almost ready for patrons. Though nearly exhausted, Will
returned to the cottage in New Town, and loaded the dray with their few
possessions. Reaching the Blue Bells, he had Jimmy to help him and
together they carted everything inside. Meanwhile Martha collected Mary
Ann. When all was done and Mary Ann was asleep in her cot, Martha turned to Will. ‘So, it’s ours. We’ve done it.’

‘Ho, yes. Just wait, though, and see how well we do. I reckon we’ll make lots of money. Folk up here need fun after working.’ He kissed her cheek, and went to get a lantern to hang above the door and act as a beacon for the locals.

That night they fell into bed and slept soundly, even though their aching muscles reminded them of how hard they’d worked.

On Wednesday they set about readying the inn for the opening. The lad chopped wood, while Will scoured second hand markets searching for the few extra furnishings they needed. He bought an armful of newspapers and magazines freshly landed from ships in port and placed these on a rack in the parlour. In the bar he took down the sketch of Mr Lord’s stallion and in its place nailed up a blackboard for scoring, leaving several packs of cards and a jug containing dice on a shelf nearby. Will enjoyed an occasional gamble and recognised that a jovial game might make patrons drink more. Finally, two days later, the inn was ready for customers.

Will hung a large notice board beside the door – ‘Grand Opening, Special Prices, Quality Beverages’. At midday, wearing his best coat and corduroy trousers, he walked up and down Murray Street, ringing a bell like a town crier, calling, ‘Oyez, Oyez, Blue Bells of Scotland now open. The second drink is on the house. Two for the price of one. Come on in for a good time.’ People wandered by, some thirsty and others just curious.

Evenings at the Blue Bells of Scotland were noisy with gamblers betting on cards or dice. Will sometimes took a hand and, if his win was great, he’d shout the bar. Back in the kitchen, Martha cooked meals that had the dining room full most nights. Things were going well and their trade grew. What wasn’t so good was the way Will’s nightmares got worse. The responsibility of providing for his family weighed heavily on him; he felt the need to work harder when the price of liquor licences increased. He became so anxious that it was hard for him to get to sleep some nights and he’d toss in his bed, disturbing Martha and Mary Ann. In his dreams he’d mutter words in
Spanish and thrash about, pulling covers off the bed, while sweat beaded his upper lip and forehead.

One night, close to Christmas, when perhaps the heat reminded him of Spain and San Sebastian, his nightmare was of attacking Carlist guerrillas. Martha was woken by his threatening, guttural grunts. He kicked out, turned and grabbed her by the shoulder and throat. She threw him off. ‘Wake up, wake up. Will! Will, stop it. Stop and be still!’

He struggled to be fully wake. But the dream images lingered and he was shaking. ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’ His voice quavered and his nightshirt was drenched with sweat. He trembled as he stared at the door of their room as though expecting an attacker to enter at any moment. ‘They were coming at me, over the wall and the cannons were booming. Oh Jesus, I need a drink.’

He crawled out of bed, stumbled down the hall and into the bar. There he lit a lamp and sat hunched beside the hearth. One rum was followed by another and another. Despite the drink, many memories came unbidden while he huddled there. He remembered Spain and the enemy; the horror of the killings; being under fire with shots whistling around him; the hundreds who died of typhoid; his friend slowly succumbing to gangrene; the moans and unquiet silences in the hospital; the shock and pain when he was wounded with a bullet thumping into his arm. He shuddered as he recalled fearing that he was done for. He remembered struggling over rocky hillsides and the long marches, followed by exhausted sleeps.

He put his head in his hands. Perhaps that was the solution: if he was extremely tired, he might fall into bed, have a dreamless sleep and wake energised the next morning. By dawn the rum had quietened his mind.

The following afternoon he started to march until his body ached and his mind was numb. By bedtime he felt tired and calm. He decided to do this every day, leaving Martha to mind the bar, while he honed his walking style and put some muscle onto his lean frame. He fancied himself in training to become as famous as those champion pedestrians he read about regularly in the Sydney papers. Grog was his nightly sedative.

Martha tried to get him to talk about his nightmares, but he’d brush aside her concerns with a broad sweep of his hand and a brusque, ‘Leave it alone. I’m doin’ fine.’ Nagging for more information about the British
auxiliary army only ended with him heading to the bar for a stiff drink. He reacted to news of other wars, too. Newspapers carried reports of the Crimean War: descriptions of battles, losses and plagues reminded him of Spain. And, on bad days, he’d stomp around the inn uttering profanities about the incompetence of colonels, and the way governments didn’t support their soldiers.

Another thorn in Will’s side was the way the magistrates kept issuing new liquor licences. ‘Too much competition,’ he complained. ‘Greedy bloody government! How can an honest man make a living?’ The insecurity made him anxious – he slept less, drank more and Martha noticed he seemed to be always alert for any threat.

His restlessness spilled over into his approach to business. He searched for ways to make more money and he decided that bigger premises would bring in more trade and lead to prosperity. One day in June 1854, he could bide his time no longer. He needed to act and went to find Martha – she was scrubbing the kitchen bench. He talked fast, excited – he wanted her to see it his way. ‘It’s time to move on. We’ve outgrown this small place. Mary Ann needs space. And, who knows, one of these days I hope that we’ll have a son.’

‘Whoa, hold on. We need to think about this.’ She slapped the scrubbing brush into the pail of soapy water. ‘We’ve not long settled here and I like our regulars. I don’t want to move.’ She gripped the bench ready for a fight.

Will stepped back apace when he saw the steely glint in her eyes. He tried again, speaking in a slow steady voice. ‘Come on, Martha, we can do better. I know we can. I’ve seen some good places in fine locations.’

‘I’m happy here. Did you not hear what I said? I don’t want to move. And bigger only means more work.’ She turned her back to him.

‘Ah just let me look around for something.’ He moved closer and kissed her on the cheek.

‘But bigger costs more. Where’s the money coming from?’

‘We’d have a bigger bar, more customers and we’d sell more. We’ll get a servant to make life easier for you.’

Martha paused and considered this offer. ‘Hired help? Tis true, I get tired and a lass to help’d be heaven.’ His offer was tempting. She folded her
arms as she thought it over. ‘I’ll consider it if I can have a girl to help in the kitchen. But talk to me and let me see what you find before you sign.’

He went looking every day and soon found a two-storey inn, the Butcher’s Arms, on the corner of Argyle and Patrick Streets. He painted a glowing picture of their future there. ‘We’d have a room for our family, three for paying guests, a dining room, a parlour, a bar and a rear kitchen. It’s closer to the centre of town – so we’ll get more passers-by. It’s bigger so we’ll surely need the maid and I’ll get a lad for the bar.’

‘Let me look first and check the accounts.’ Martha made three visits to the Butcher’s Arms before she finally saw things Will’s way. With a bigger place she would do as Annabel Swift had done and set up a coffee room; while Will could manage the reading room and bar. More patrons meant more money. She made plans to increase their income and broaden the business, jotting down figures of costs and mark ups.

Will went ahead and secured the lease. ‘The reading nook at the Blue Bells was a drawcard, you know,’ Martha said. ‘We can do it bigger and better here in the parlour. People will come in just to catch up on the latest news.’

‘You’re right. Get a pen and we’ll draw up an announcement for the papers.’

She scribbled down their attractions and he had handbills printed. But he didn’t stop there. He was proud of his new place and advertised broadly, buying space in the Courier, where he bragged he had the latest English and colonial newspapers as well as magazines and other works. To keep his material up to date, he often walked to the wharves and checked recent arrivals. He’d shout sailors some grog and buy the latest material that they had on board.

As promised, he advertised for a maid and a young lad around fourteen years. He offered each £25 per annum plus board and keep. He hired a girl from the orphanage, Tessie, and a youth named Ed. Martha was able to relax a little and was free to spend more time with Mary Ann. There were other benefits, because with a new project Will’s demons seemed to have less sway, so the house was a deal more peaceful.
To his friends, he bragged about his reading room and the way it brought in business. But he was not satisfied, and all through 1855 he dreamed of an even grander establishment—though he didn’t share these thoughts with Martha. One morning, just after New Year 1856, his friend Jimmy dropped in and, after a couple of ales and a lot of teasing banter, dared Will to beat him in a game of billiards at the Good Woman Inn. Will couldn’t resist—he knew he was a mean hand with a cue. The feel of blue chalk under his nails thrilled him and he felt more alive as he paced around the table, checking positions and planning each careful move. The game strategy kept his mind busy and away from thoughts of Spain. The coins he wagered and won added to the thrill. Risk raised his spirits and winning signalled achievement.

When they arrived at the Good Woman, the men ordered a pint of porter and started a warm up game at the newest table. Jimmy won the first round, so Will counter challenged for best out of three matches. More grog was called for and they spent several hours happily belting the clicking balls around the green baize table. Will saw patrons at another table, enjoying the game and they were happy to pay for the privilege. Billiards made them thirsty and he watched that party ordering and drinking the inn’s best on offer. This was an attraction and there was a payoff for the landlord. The tables here meant the bar was crowded, men came and stayed. He knew that would add to profit.

The landlord, Richard George, sauntered over to chat. ‘Good to see you. How’s business up at your place?’ he said.

‘Not so bad. I’m doin’ fine.’ Will shrugged. ‘Could be worse.’

Richard complained, ‘I s’pose you’ve heard that the licence fees are going up. Double, some folks say! Those bloody taxes’ll be the death of me. I’ve done the sums and wonder if the hard work’s worth it when there’s other things I’d rather be doing.’

‘True, but they can’t keep milking us. What’s more I reckon, with more people in town now, there’s room for a few good inns.’

‘I’ve had enough. I’m giving up the licence here.’ Richard leaned closer to the two of them, winked and tapped a finger to his nose. ‘I reckon the gold fields’ll be more profitable. Folk say Ballarat’s the place to go. So I’m going, upping sticks here and heading there next month. The missus is
all for it. She’s fed up with drinkers and the vomit they leave on the bar floor. She’s hoping I’ll find a great gold nugget and she can live like a lady.’ He laughed. ‘You know what women are like. She’s got her heart set on a fancy ball gown and a frilled bonnet as soon as we hit pay dirt.’

Will knew that ex-convicts were banned from Victoria, but didn’t mention it in case Richard and his wife changed their minds. Because it had taken him less than a minute, on hearing Richard’s plans, to decide that the *Good Woman* was for him. This was an attractive inn; business looked brisk; it would have to be a winner. His second thoughts were more sobering when Jimmy pointed out that it might be hard to get Martha to agree to another move. They’d settled nicely at the *Butcher’s Arms* and she’d resist his idea. How to get her to agree?

He hurried back to the *Butcher’s Arms* and burst into the kitchen. Martha was making bread and the room was warm with the heat of the oven. Will shouted to get her attention. ‘Hey, hey, I’ve found a really great place – a better place. It’s the *Good Woman* in Argyle Street. The lease is up soon and we can get it for a song.’

Martha raised her eyebrows. ‘What! So how many beers did it take to get to that decision? Look, we’re comfortable here and making a reasonable living.’ She turned away and punched down the dough.

He hardly paused to draw breath. ‘They’ve got two billiard tables. Just think of what that’d do for trade! You’ve been down to Argyle Street and seen the place. There’re more rooms. We can expand and I reckon with the gambling the drinkers’ll pay more, they’ll bring their mates and stay longer.’

She thumped the dough she was kneading. ‘You can’t just up-end the family on a whim. We don’t need to move. I like it here.’ She was ready to argue, but he moved to her side and gave her a hug. ‘We’ll only go if you agree. It’s bigger, there’s space for Mary Ann to have a room of her own and that’ll give us privacy. Don’t you remember what it was like when we were first together before Mary Ann? It can be like that again; we’ll have our own space. I know you’ll love it.’

Saying that, he dipped his fingers into a jug of water standing on the table and collected a few drops in his left hand. Teasing, he winked and sprinkled them on Martha’s head. ‘Dew! Remember Mrs Johnson’s?’ He
circled her waist with his right hand and pulled her close. He slowly waltzed with her – all the while laughing as he sang:

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\begin{align*}
When I was a bachelor, I liv'd all alone \\
I worked at the weaver's trade \\
And the only, only thing that I ever did wrong \\
Was to woo a fair young maid. \\
\end{align*}
\]

He squeezed her hand, continued:

\[
\begin{align*}
I\ \text{wooed her in the wintertime} \\
And in the summer, too \\
And the only, only thing that I did that was wrong \\
Was to keep her from the foggy, foggy dew. \\
\end{align*}
\]

‘I can’t forget how it was then. My love, come and move with me. A bigger place means a bedroom of our own.’ He planted a kiss on her lips. ‘Martha, let me have my way. It’ll be fun. I’m sure it’s best for us.’ His breath was soft on her cheek. She felt the warmth of his palm on her back, the strength in his thighs and the urgency of his love as he held her. She remembered nights in Mrs Johnson’s boarding house and the intimacy of the small cottage in New Town.

She laughed. ‘You’re a rogue, Will Guest. You could charm anything out of a woman. I’ll think about it. But if we move, it’s the last time.’

‘I know you’ve been in the Good Woman, but you should have a look out the back. Take off your apron and come with me now. Richard George is the landlord and his wife Maggie is there too, waiting to show you the kitchen and to talk to you about the sort of customers they get. I’ve had a quick look at the cellar, but you need to see what the cooking and dining arrangements are. Come on, quick. We’ll leave the barman in charge here.’ Martha called the maid to take over the baking and they hurried out, Will dragging her along by the hand.

Together they inspected the Good Woman and she questioned Maggie about suppliers, patrons and the numbers of meals and beds they offered. After much discussion, she was satisfied. Will sold his current lease, and got ready to move once more.
The *Good Woman* in Argyle Street was notorious, because the statue above the main door was of a woman carrying her head under her arm. Refined locals were seen to pass and titter at the image. But Martha, happy with the size and condition of the property, was prepared to overlook that.

Before they moved, Will took Mary Ann to look around. She dawdled outside and found a girl about her own age in the lane beside the house next door. She joined her and they giggled and cheated over a game of knucklebones that the girl took from her pocket. That clinched it for her: fun with a friend. She was all for living at the *Good Woman*, because she’d found a playmate and, besides, it was closer to her school. But Will had found an adversary. During that inspection he saw the gate to the lane that gave access to the inn kitchen was locked. He broke the lock.

Dick Whelan was on the veranda of the house next door. When he saw Will he yelled, ‘Hey, what do you think you’re doin’? This is my place!’

‘No, no. This is the right-of-way to my kitchen.’

‘You’re trespassing. Get off my property!’

‘I’ve gotta be able to get goods in and this is the only way.’

‘I’ll knock your block off if you don’t clear out!’

‘Oh yeah! You and who else?’ Will opened the gate.

An argument ensued. Voices and tempers rose. Dick called up a couple of mates from inside his house. They helped him attack Will, who responded by throwing a few punches, hitting Dick, blooding his nose and knocking him to the ground. Frightened by the swearing and fighting, Mary Ann and Maria ran crying down the lane. A constable heard the ruckus and threatened to arrest them. He ordered both men to be present at the Magistrate’s Court the following day.

At the hearing, Dick accused Will of assault and Will counter sued with the same charge. The magistrate patiently heard each man state his case before deciding to dismiss both charges and ordering them to keep the peace. Will retained the right-of-way.

The lease to the inn was signed and the family moved once more. Will swore on their best black Bible that this would be the last time and that here they’d make a permanent home.
A few weeks after they moved, in May 1856 and just as they were getting to know their regulars, a stranger came into the bar, ordered a bottle of rum and offered Will a small nugget in payment. Three sailors standing nearby quickly gathered around. ‘Where’d you get that?’

‘Up bush. Fingal around the Esk.’

‘You don’t say! Diggings?’

The stranger frowned and growled, ‘I’m sayin’ no more.’ The sailors pressed closer and the stranger turned to Will. ‘I’m heading out tomorrow and don’t want a lot of chaps racing me there. Take that in payment or keep your rum!’

Will took the nugget, tossed it from one hand to another, judging its weight and value. ‘I probably owe you change from this.’

‘Naw. Keep it, just give me the bottle and I’ll be off.’

The stranger wasn’t the only lucky miner to travel to Hobart Town that week. Soon there was much talk about the gold that everyone said was to be found at Fingal. Papers carried reports of the riches in Ballarat and nearly everyone knew someone who had gone to the Victorian gold fields.

Three days later, Martha unfolded the *Courier* as she sat over a cup of tea. ‘Come and read this!’ she called to Will. ‘Look, Mr Mott has a carriage leaving for the Fingal fields every Wednesday morning. And you know George Bell, the one from the *Sawyers Arms*, he’s advertising for a team of eight men to go with him to look for gold.’

Will hurried in carrying a bundle of wood for the fire. ‘Let me see.’ She pointed to the middle of the first page. ‘Look they’re even advertising supplies and a Gold Exploration Committee.’ He grabbed it and read quickly. ‘I reckon I oughta go. This is our chance to get rich.’

That afternoon, in the city’s bars and taverns, the hopefuls tossed around ideas about when and where to go. Stories of nuggets circulated and the size of the rocks grew with each telling. ‘Surely Fingal will bring us riches’ was the phrase on everyone’s lips. Will listened to the gossips, he knew that Ballarat was out of bounds, but if this country had gold, he reasoned it might also be in Van Diemen’s Land.

The women were talking too and Martha heard the stories. She and Susan were sitting in the parlour knitting on Tuesday when Mrs Whelan came in to brag. ‘My Dick’s gone and he’s sent word that already he’s
found enough to keep us for a month. He plans to stay up there for a few more weeks.’

Susan was happy to add what she knew. ‘I heard that Lizzie and Harry Noble were up there, picking up nuggets wherever they looked.’

Martha put down her knitting needles and the ball of wool rolled onto the floor. ‘Never! You don’t mean her that was Elizabeth Collings? That upstart!’

‘Yes. That’s what I heard.’

Will resisted the challenge to go fossicking for a month, but all the while he thought of gold. So on a Sunday morning when the bar was quiet, he led Martha into the kitchen, there he pulled out two chairs and sat beside the table. ‘I want to talk to you about the gold fields. They say there’s easy pickings.’ She shifted in her seat. ‘I know. I’ve heard. And I keep thinking of that wretched Lizzie Noble. Susan reckons they’ve struck it rich. I’ll bet that when she and Harry come back to town, she’ll be showing off with the best gowns and a fine carriage.’

‘Sure.’ He patted her hand. ‘If others can do it, I reckon I can do better.’ He stood and started to pace up and down, hands clasped behind his back; he whistled through his teeth as he thought this over. ‘You’re smart and you manage this place better’n me. If I take this chance, I’ll find gold for sure.’ He sat down beside her again. ‘You’d be in charge here and I’d only be gone for a week or two. I’ve got friends who want to go with me and we’d be a good team. What do you think?’

She was tempted. Perhaps gold and instant wealth might be theirs. ‘I’d need a strong man to do the heavy work while you’re away, though,’ she said.

‘Sure, sure. I’ll look to find someone today, if that’s fine with you.’

‘I want to check out whoever you pick before you offer him work, all right?’

‘Of course. As soon as we’ve got a reliable fellow here, I’ll organise a group of strong men to come with me. With a gang we’ll work quicker. And we’ll camp at Fingal. Digging for gold has to be easier than slinging booze across the counter for the rest of my life.’
Martha had a cooler head. She was sure that she could manage the business, but she had also heard there were others who returned empty handed. 'Don’t kid yourself,’ she said. Digging’s hard work. Sinking shafts and breaking rocks, it would be like being in the chain gang again. And what if it rains?’

Will wasn’t to be deterred. ‘We’ll all be rich and you can have a fine house and carriage.’

‘Maybe we’re dreaming,’ she said. ‘Things aren’t so bad here. Is it worth the risk?’

‘Sure. You know that taxes are getting worse and could ruin us. Gold’ll be our saviour. I’ve gotta go and see what’s there.’

‘And talk lots and drink lots.’ Martha picked at a broken fingernail. ‘I fear there’s more talk than money in this gold rush.’

‘They say there’s nuggets bigger than bricks being found, love. We can’t miss making a fortune if I can just get there quick enough and before it’s all dug out.’ He had gold fever and wouldn’t rest until he got the chance to try his luck.

She frowned when she saw the determination in the set of his jaw. ‘Fine, just don’t stay away too long – no more’n a month.’

He smiled and tickled her under the chin. ‘That’s my girl. Just wait and see. I’ll strike it rich.’ She hoped he was right.

The Fingal inland diggings were rough and she wanted him to be well prepared, so she bought him tough canvas trousers, thick wool socks and stout long boots. She tucked three handkerchiefs she’d recently embroidered with his initials into his spare shirt pocket. These, together with a blanket and provisions for the road, she packed in a hide fastened with leather straps. Will bought a knife and tomahawk to tuck into his belt and a length of canvas, to use as a tent. His gear was heavy, so he arranged that his gang would share mining tools to make each man’s load lighter. Even so, they’d have to hire a dray to carry all they’d need at the diggings.

Martha was efficient, knew how to operate the bar, manage staff and do the book keeping, so trade at the Good Woman carried on as usual. Will was away a month, returning in July – out of luck. She hid her disappointment and comforted him. ‘Trade’s been good. We’re doing fine. We’ll get by without the gold.’
His clothes were grubby and he sat in the bar, glass in hand, while she helped him off with his boots. ‘Fingal diggings are worthless. But maybe there’s gold elsewhere.’

She laughed. ‘Mebbe, but you’re not the only one with bad luck – Lizzie and Harry Noble’ve come back empty handed and what’s more, they lost their tents and two horses as well. Serve’em right!’ As soon as she turned to carry his boots outside, Mary Ann climbed on his knee and tugged at the rough beard he’d grown while away.

That night Will sat down and wrote to the *Courier* about conditions at the gold fields: ‘I and my party have sunk a number of holes and found no gold. I found gross inefficiencies in expenditure of moneys supplied by the Fingal Committee. I recommend the committee should work the banks of the Gordon River instead.’

Martha encouraged him to stay at home, rather than head off to the west coast on another fruitless search for gold. For now, he did as she wished.

It was a hot day in the lull between Christmas and New Year 1857, and a huddle of innkeepers lounged around the *Good Woman*, drinks in hand, smoke from a pipe or two flavouring the air. The talk was earnest and the words ‘tax’ and ‘licence’ buzzed around the room. Will pulled up a keg and complained, ‘I’ve gotta pay tax for the inn and, on top of that, I pay tax on my supplies. It’s too much!’

One fellow banged his fist on the bar. ‘Enough is enough,’ he said. ‘We can’t keep supporting the government by paying taxes if there’s not enough trade. Too many licences are eating our profits.’

Murmurs of agreement came from around the room. One drinker scowled. ‘It’s not as though we aint doin’ our bit. I heard we raise the most. Some feller said the colony gets £120,000 a year from grog. That’s nearly all the government’s money. We oughta get medals, not more taxes.’ Chairs rattled against the timber floor, jugs clinked against one another or thumped on the bar as there was a round of cheers in agreement.
Will stepped onto a footstool, clacked two spoons together and called them to attention. ‘We need a plan of action and we’ve got to stick together.’

A complaint came from the corner. ‘It’s not just the government that’s putting us out of business, it’s them pesky Quakers. They’re all around town, calling meetings and putting up temperance posters.’ More grumblings and complaints followed as each man in turn vented his frustration and bellyached that his licence wasn’t worth the paper it was printed on. Each one predicted he’d be out of business by Christmas.

Another round of drinks was served and the mates agreed that now was the time to do something. But what? While they were protesting in the bar, Martha had been in the parlour entertaining the few widows who’d inherited their husbands’ licences. Now she joined them. ‘The women’ve been chatting and we think we should call a meeting of all innkeepers. Mrs Swift says she’s happy to have everyone meet at the Waterloo because there’s more room there. The bigger the protest the better. We need to round up as much support as we can.’

The men nodded, discussed it and finally agreed to be at the Waterloo next Saturday morning around 9 o’clock, before the busy midday trade. In the meantime, they’d lobby other innkeepers, customers (who certainly wouldn’t want their favourite watering holes closed) and perhaps some of those who benefited from the trade, such as brewers and importers. It was to be a well-planned campaign.

On Saturday morning, Will and Martha closed the Good Woman and arrived at the Waterloo early – Annabel Swift was handing around paper and pens. ‘Here, take a page and pass it around. We can get a petition to send to the mayor.’ By the time the parlour clock struck 9, the rooms were full and some were standing at the door pushing to get to the front to hear more of what was happening.

Mark Johnson, licensee of the Steam Packet, took the chair and called the meeting to order. ‘We are here to discuss the threats to our livelihood and to decide what actions we can or should take to save our skins.’

As soon as he finished speaking a general hub-bub arose and people were jostling to be heard. Johnson banged a silver tankard on the bar and
called for order. ‘If we all talk at once, nothing will get done! Let’s hear one at a time and I’ll select speakers from a show of hands. So hands up those with a point to make. All right, George, you’re first.’

George Saunders from the Duke of Argyle jumped on a chair. ‘Can you at the back hear me?’ When he saw men nodding in agreement, he continued. ‘My place is big and I get a lot of drinkers in, but I’m not making as much as I was a year ago. I’ve had to fire the bar boy. I can’t go on like this.’

After him came others, each one putting forward information about the cost of maintaining premises, the price of liquor, the increase in licencing fees. George Priest raised his hand. ‘Do you know that there’s one licence for every 200 citizens - man, woman and child? It can’t go on like this. There’s too much competition.’

A voice came from the back. ‘The temperance movement’s another threat. They meet and want to shut down our pubs.’

Will had been jotting down the main issues and Mark Johnson called for a vote to have a petition drawn up. Next, the meeting selected 20 men, Will was among them, to seek more signatures. They planned to put their petition before the Legislative Council. Many signed and a few days later it was forwarded to the Council and the mayor of Hobart Town.

Worry meant that Will drank more and slept less. His temper was on a short fuse, so the Monday after the meeting at the Waterloo he decided to vent his anger by making a mockery of the government, especially the finance minister, who he said was an incompetent fool.

That night, the booze flowed fast in the Good Woman and men moaned about paying taxes. Will took to the floor. ‘We can attack this threat with facts and that’s fine and dandy, but best we poke fun at ‘em all. That’s what they deserve. Let’s show how stupid this ruddy government is. Bloody fools all of them.’

His remarks were followed by a few ‘Hear, hear’s’, but just then a loud guffaw came from an already inebriated chap. ‘And where da ya think that’ll get us?’ Rather than argue with a drunk, Will retreated to the back room with a few close friends. They tossed around ideas about how the licensing threat and inroads made by the temperance movement could be subverted. Will put a barrel on tap, Martha brought out two large crusty
loaves and a round of cheese and placed them on the table for the company to enjoy. Suggestions came from around the room.

‘What about making the licensing magistrates look idiots? They’re all upper crust fools anyway.’

‘Why not put out an advertisement to sell alcohol at super high prices and say it’s to pay the licence fee?’

‘Let’s ban the magistrates from our pubs.’

‘Nah,’ said Will, ‘We’ve got to make them a laughing stock. Lottos are all the rage. Let’s advertise a fake, rubbish lotto, a Brummagen Lotto, it’ll make a mockery of it all.’

Martha hurried around filling glasses while some leaned back in their chairs and lit pipes. After two hours of steady drinking and lots of suggestions, some too vulgar to be printed, they came up with the following:

THE Finance Minister having failed in his scheme to manage the Colony’s budget, the undersigned begs to suggest a plan to extricate the government from their difficulties by recommending a Lotto scheme. The tickets to be shuffled in a bag, previous to the drawing so that the undersigned may stand as good a chance as anyone else. As proof of good faith should the Finance Minister adopt the suggestion, the undersigned is willing to go halves with him in the Humbug Lotto.

GUEST’S GRAND ANTIPODEAN HUMBUG LOTTO.

The Undersigned being anxious, in these hard times to dispose of useless stock, has resolved according to the convenient fashion of the day, to hold a GRAND ANTIPODEAN HUMBUG LOTTO. The list of prizes is long. But the proprietor, if he meets with encouragement, will publish a catalogue for circulation prior to the drawing. Below is a list of the most valuable and costly articles:-

The highest prize will be a bottle of superior port wine, very black and very bitter. Lotto value, 10s, shop price 2s 6d, intrinsic cost 9d;

Cape Madeira sherry, slightly brandied, warm in the mouth and full flavoured, and peculiarly adapted to the taste of the fair sex. Lotto value 9s, shop price 2s, intrinsic cost 8d. Real Jamaica rum, manufactured of the worst East India arrack – a first chop article. Excellent Colonial bottled beer, branded Bass & Taylor, in pints, quarts, dozens, and half-dozens – an admired drink and in great request. In short GUEST’S GRAND LOTTO will comprise any number of prizes, in pots, pints, gills, glasses, nips, and nobblers.

This GRAND HUMBUG LOTTO has been proposed from motives of pure philanthropy – to advance the morals of the community – and to set a praiseworthy example to the rising generation by engendering a spirit of reckless gambling, and to increase the business of the publican and pawnbroker. Tickets may be had, price one shilling, on application to

WILLIAM GUEST,
Good Woman, Argyle-street,
Hobart Town, 10th January, 1857
As the conspirators left the inn, each one congratulated Will and slapped him on the back.

The Quakers were advertising temperance meetings all over town, in halls and private homes and their main message was about the evils of drink. This threatened trade and some extremists who regarded grog as Satan were pushing for prohibition. To counter this, the next day Will and friends, all good drinkers, decided they might as well take on the temperance movement as well. Those wowsers needed to understand that the income from liquor taxes supported the colony. After all, land sales and other sources of income were minimal – it was the innkeepers who held society together.

Will brought in a keg. Glasses were filled, suggestions flowed thick and fast and they decided to write tongue in cheek, as though from within the temperance movement. By midnight the text was set. Martha looked it over while Will collected money from the till – enough to pay for a large advertisement in the Courier.

To the Benevolent

We the Undersigned Total Abstainers, in making this appeal on behalf of the suffering publicans, submit the following facts for the consideration of Benevolent Citizens:-

The total Revenue of the Colony is estimated at £179,541, of this sum the vendors and consumers of strong drinks directly or indirectly, contribute no less a sum than £120,000.

The existing number of publicans might still have managed to pay this enormous proportion of the General Revenue; but any addition to the present number of public houses would cause the ruin of both new and old. If they cease to pay we shall be called upon to pay our fair share towards supporting the Government. This is why we make our appeal; for, without the drinking portion of the community having paid so much, the rest of us would have to pay more tax.

It is not from love of the Publicans that we make this appeal, but because we foresee in their ruin our own downfall. In other words, we shall have to pay the two-thirds of the Revenue which they now provide. What is worse, is that we shall be robbed of our grievance when they fall – we shall have nothing to complain about!

Finally – We are afraid that we have gone too far. We have petitioned against them, hired persons to lecture against them. We are afraid that we have ruined them; and, should such be the case, who will then pay the piper? Who will provide the vast amount of Revenue the Licensed
Victuallers now contribute? To avert such a calamity, we appeal on their behalf. The smallest donation will be thankfully received by the self-elected Treasurer –


‘Will yours is the only real name there.’ Martha barely suppressed a laugh. ‘How is that?’ She knew the answer, but hoped he’d recognise how much he loved to be noticed.

‘Good publicity for our inn,’ he said. ‘We’ll make money from it. Folk’ll come to check us out and they’ll drink while they’re here.’ He winked at her and turned towards his band of brothers as he gave his answer. One man clapped, yelling, ‘Hear, hear.’

The proposed ad was so long that the company sent the hat around once more, just to ensure they’d have enough funds for publication in its entirety. No one was willing to cut a word, each having contributed what they saw as good fun.

The next day in the *Good Woman*, there were sore heads as Will packed his papers and set off for the *Courier* to submit the notice. It was published a day later and trade at the inn became brisk. The regulars came in to slap backs and congratulate the couple; the curious came to gossip and some stayed to drink. Money changed hands. Coins tinkled across the counter faster than the ivories of the music hall piano.

The clientele at the *Good Woman* was a cross-section of society: neither upper crust nor the dregs of the city. Martha knew their regulars and managed the inn while Will spent many hours walking around the countryside to exorcise his demons. But, though Hobart Town had many good citizens, it was also home to ex-convicts, ticket of leave holders and ne’er-do-wells. Late at night on 1 September, Jessie George, one of her new tenants, asked her to mind some money. Martha agreed. The next day she was surprised when Constable Dorsett came and arrested Jessie and her friend, William Thomas. Martha knew they were heavy drinkers and recent ticket of leavers. She stood in the doorway. What trouble were they in? She
called to Constable Dorsett as he passed the Good Woman later that day.
‘What’s happened? What’s with Jessie and William Thomas?’

‘I’ve arrested them for stealing £38 from Isaac Chapping. Yesterday they saw him go into the bank and withdraw a bundle of notes. They followed him and offered him ale and they slipped something into his drink to make him senseless. Once he was unconscious they lifted his money.’

‘Oh dear, Jessie came in late last night and asked me to mind some money. I wonder if it belongs to Mr Chapping. Perhaps you’d better have it. I’ll fetch it right away.’ She hurried off, returned with the bundle of notes and handed it to the constable. He counted and found there were 36 one-pound notes.

‘Thank you, ma’am. It’s not often I come across one as honest as you.’

Martha spent some hours worrying and waiting for Will to return from the docks. She remembered her convict days and shuddered to think that others might judge her guilty of being a party to the rumbling of a decent citizen, or of receiving stolen goods. How would she tell Will? What would he say? They’d worked hard and were beginning to feel like respectable folk.

He wasn’t pleased when he heard about this and scolded her for accepting the money. ‘With a bad lot like Jessie George you can’t be too careful. Lucky the police didn’t think we were involved in the theft. You need to take more care.’ She glared at him as she flashed back, ‘It’s fine for you to advise me after it’s all over! If you were around a bit more then the likes of Jessie wouldn’t try to impose on me. I manage this place pretty much on my own, you know.’

He realised that he’d gone too far. ‘I’m just saying that we can’t be too careful. We have to be seen to be honest citizens and fair to our customers.’

She grunted and stormed off to Mary Ann’s bedroom to tuck her into bed and kiss her good night, muttering about men and their ways. But she didn’t stay angry with him for long and, before bed, she made mulled wine and they enjoyed it together in front of the fire.

Three days later, Jessie George and her accomplice came before the court. The constable gave evidence and commended Martha for her honesty,
whereupon the magistrate thanked her. Martha, who was sitting at the front of the court, felt relieved. Will squeezed her hand but said nothing.

Pedestrian races were in the news and almost every week brought a fresh report of some amazing exhibition or race. Will practised his walking, honing his skills; his style was fluid on the flat and energetic on hillsides. Success in races against several of his customers buoyed his confidence. So he decided to challenge the temperance disciples. In 1859, Alan McKean was one and was in town, advertising that he’d replicate the feat of the great Captain Robert Barclay Allardice who walked a thousand miles at Newmarket in a thousand hours for a thousand guineas.

Trade had increased after Will’s last foray into print about taxes and temperance, so he was excited and burst into the parlour to tackle Martha about this new idea. ‘I’ve been walking miles each week and I reckon I’m as good as any pedestrian around Hobarton. I’m as fit as when I was in the army. These Quakers and teetotallers think they’ve got it all sewn up, but I’m sure I can beat any one of them in a race. Grog’s a fine body builder, much better than what those milksops would have us drink. What do you think?’

Martha was reading the latest issue of the *Courier*. She looked up slowly, and took a few seconds before replying. ‘Yes, Will. I know you’re a good pedestrian, but some of those men are champions. I’ve read about them in the papers: they’ve been walking in Sydney and other places. Some even give public demonstrations. What makes you think you’d do as well?’

Will pulled up an easy chair and sat beside her. ‘Look. Remember I won when I challenged Jimmy last week. I beat him to the harbour by a mile. I can do it! I know.’ Martha was doubtful, but he pressed on. ‘I’m healthy. I’ve timed my walks and can walk from here to town in a few minutes. If I challenge and put money on it, I reckon I’ll win.’

She folded the paper. ‘It’s a risk, so how much would you wager? Can we afford it?’

‘A few pounds and even if I lose, think of the publicity! There’ll be some coming in to drink and have a look at us to see if I’m worth betting
on. We'll probably have folk dropping in who've never been here before. Think of the grog we'll sell.'

'Take some time to think about it.'

'No, no. I reckon I'll do just fine.' He stood and took a notepad from his pocket. 'I'll put a notice in the paper. If I offer a reasonable sum for the winner we should get more publicity. The bigger the odds against me, the more I reckon folks'll come in. They'll want to size up their chances before laying a bet.' He was so sure he'd won her over that he turned on his heel. 'I'll go and write it up now.'

'Stop Will! Listen to reason. I do the books and we can't afford to lose. We have to pay for the grog and we need another load of coal. Money doesn't grow on trees.'

He paused, frowned. 'But Martha,' he wheedled as he came and stood beside her, patting her shoulder. 'I'm so fit and I'm ready for it. I can do it.'

Worried and angry, she jumped to her feet and challenged him, 'Remember licence fees are due next month. How'll we pay those if you lose?'

'I won't and, anyway, Jimmy Scott is backing me and together we'll put up the money. It's only twenty pounds; and I'm bound to win.' Will smiled, sure that he'd won and turned to leave.

Martha watched him go and yelled after him, 'No more than twenty pounds, you mind my words.'

He stopped in the doorway. 'Look, we can't lose. Even if I'm beaten, my fame will bring in enough trade to cover it. And, if not, just imagine how much I could win.' He grinned and went to the bar. 'Let's drink to it!' He grabbed two glasses and poured two large tots of rum. 'Come on, drink a toast to the triumph of grog over water!' He had the bit between his teeth and she could no more stop him than a runaway horse.

Martha gritted her teeth. 'You'd better win.' She raised her glass to meet his, though her eyes glinted.

That night in the bar he spent several hours tossing back schooners and laughing at suggestions from the Good Woman patrons, before he came up with an advertisement to be published in the Courier on the following Wednesday. Boldness and bragging were his style.
CHALLENGE
GROG VERSUS WATER.

I, WILLIAM GUEST, aged 40, publican and first-rate Drinking Man, hereby challenge any man in the colony, whatever his age or height may be to WALK from ten to fifteen miles, for the sum of twenty pounds – Man and Money ready at the Good Woman, Argyle-street.

Ye Valiant Teetotallers – Ye Champions of the Pump!
And all white Choker’d gentry, and ye that mount the Stump,
A boasting son of Belial you are challeng’d now to meet,
To prove which is most vigorous and nimble with their feet.

In walking to a distance of ten or fifteen miles,
To see which does it quickest and in the best of styles,
So get your PUMPS in order, lads, and see they hurt no toe,
For BILLY GUEST, the publican’s no ordinary foe!

You ought to get the storm up with the water that you drink,
And best this Vaunter easily, upon my word, I think!
So put your best leg forward, lads – for now’s the time or never
To defeat this bragging Boniface, and silence him for ever!

TEMPERANCE HALL – TO THE RESCUE

N.B. – One Hundred Yards’ start given to any member of the Total Abstinence Society.
And I wish it to be understood,
This is not vain talk,
If I get a customer,
I mean to walk.

McKean saw the advertisement and seized on this as an opportunity to publicise his own feats. He rose to the bait faster than a salmon to a fly and accepted the challenge in early September. He was so confident, as a seasoned walker, he offered Will a one-minute start over a five-mile race and favourable betting odds. The starting place was set at Tom Workman’s Green Man Inn, at the six mile stone marker on the road to Launceston. The race was to end at the one mile stone near Eagle Hawk North Hobart. It was agreed the match would start at 2 o’clock on the following Saturday. Wagers were laid and moneys posted at the Duke of Clarence Hotel in Murray Street.

Will ordered extra grog to ensure that his winning celebration would be well lubricated. Martha and Mary Ann busied themselves so the Good Woman would be spic and span on the day. The maid baked bread and put out pickles, the yard boy scrubbed out the grates and brought in buckets of coal. Martha ordered cheeses and the atmosphere was all optimism and bragging.
On Saturday afternoon the match created a great deal of interest and many bets were placed based on McKean’s well publicised Victorian and Sydney walking feats. Will rode to the starting point and handed his mount over to Jimmy Scott as he started to limber up. Meanwhile Martha and Mary Ann found a place close to the finishing mile stone. The maid and yard boy stayed at the Good Woman, hoping for a win and preparing for a crowded victory celebration.

Initially the betting was all in favour of the expert. However, when Will stripped off his shirt, his wiry appearance produced a change and it became hard for some punters to get ‘evens’. The route was crowded and vehicles of all descriptions were there. At least 500 people were at the start and the excitement was at fever pitch. People chattered, laughed and pointed – some drawing notes or coins from their pockets and exchanging bets with friends.

At ten minutes past three, the umpires and referees brought the two pedestrians to the starting post. The starter checked his watch, raised his arm and gave the signal. Will bounded away to loud cheers from his supporters. He walked at least one hundred and eighty yards before the first minute passed. After one minute McKean set off at a terrific pace as his temperance supporters urged him on. In the first mile he narrowed the distance between them by around seventy yards. The walking of the professional McKean was magnificent to watch, his arms swinging to his stride and his tread sure and steady, showing him to be a thorough artist in this profession.

The crowds increased close by the second mile and the number lining the route here was over one thousand. At this stage Will began to pull ahead, his uphill work being unbeatable. At the top of the hill they reached O’Brien’s Bridge and Will was more than four telegraph posts ahead of his rival, who was showing signs of fatigue. The voices of the mob were loud, cheers and hurrahs echoed all around, but it was hard to tell in all the excitement who was barracking for whom. They came to the flat and Will drew further ahead. It became clear that, barring an accident, McKean had no chance and there were a few groans from the temperance camp.

The excitement led the mob to urge the contestants on loudly. Both sides of the road were thronged with carriages and pedestrians, horses stomping and champing at the bit and raising dust when cheers rang out.

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There were many watchers from the elite of the city including members of both houses of parliament cheering them on. At the Eagle Hawk one mile stone there were five thousand lining the course, anxious to be there to cheer the winner in. Will powered downhill to the finish stone and was declared the winner. Martha and Mary Ann were there, jumping up and down and cheering.

McKean arrived three minutes later, appearing most distressed. His supporters congratulated and comforted him on his great effort. Many shook his hand and wished him better luck next time, while remarking on his fine sportsmanship.

Will was lifted onto his supporters’ shoulders and carried in style, like an Indian rajah, back to the Good Woman. Martha and Mary Ann had to hurry to keep up and finally, the triumphal procession arrived at the inn.

‘Martha!’ Will shouted. ‘Hey, ho! I’ve won my bet. I said I would! I’m truly flush in the pocket today. Aren’t you proud of me?’

‘Always,’ she said and blew him a kiss. ‘Well, nearly always.’ She pinched his elbow as they headed in for a drink.

In the bar the celebrations went on well into the night, with Martha and Mary Ann basking in his reflected glory. Later, when the crowds eventually left and they were alone, Martha rubbed soothing eucalyptus oil into his leg muscles, gently smoothing it over the angry scar on his right ankle – a legacy of the chain gang. She whispered, ‘I’m so proud of you.’

The next day’s edition of the Courier wrote that Will walked five miles in 51 minutes and the editor acknowledged the fine work done by city police in keeping the road clear for the race, pointing out that this was extremely difficult due to all the excitement. It concluded, ‘This is certainly one of the most interesting sporting events held in Tasmania for some time.’

Will and Martha celebrated the triumph of grog over water for the whole of the following week, while hundreds came by to shake hands and congratulate them. Many stayed to sample the grog that was the winner’s staple drink. Business was brisk.
Sadly the economy remained in the doldrums and fame didn’t create a long-term improvement in takings, and the threat of bankruptcy hung over the family. Other innkeepers were regularly in the listings at the insolvency court. So two weeks after the race, Will decided to look for riches in the New South Wales gold fields.

He again cajoled Martha with the promise of gold nuggets and wealth. She knew she’d have no peace until he’d tried his hand and, besides, the town was emptying as many raced to find fortunes on the mainland. She knew in her heart that it would be easier for her to run the Good Woman without his restless fussing. So reluctantly she agreed and looked out the boots and tent he’d used when he went to the Fingal.

On 20 September he sailed for Sydney on the steamer Tasmania. He stayed barely a month and came back bubbling with renewed energy and enthusing about the prospects of new diggings called the Gulph, inland from Eden on the south coast. Even better was that this time he didn’t come back empty handed. She met him at the wharf and he was beaming. ‘Here – give me your hand.’ He reached into his breast pocket, pulled out some small stones and poured them into her waiting palm. They sat there, glinting and gold. Martha grinned. This time Will had been right and perhaps a fortune was there for the taking. These few stones had energised him. They had funds for now, but the economy was down and, though this would help, it was not a permanent solution. The Gulph was calling.

Back home in the laundry, Martha reflected on the situation as she washed his travel clothes. It had been easier to manage in Argyle Street, while he was away. She felt a twinge of guilt at these thoughts and reminded herself of his dancing blue eyes, dimpled chin and charm; she recalled his generosity and she knew that he loved her and Mary Ann. But with this find, she knew he’d have plans and that would mean moving once more.

The oversupply of inns made it difficult for those who held licences to make a living and around the middle of November, the couple were shocked to see his name on the insolvency list outside the court house. They discussed it and agreed that, though things were tough, they would still be able to pay bills.
Will complained and ranted. ‘How can this be? It’s a mistake. Our good name will be smeared. Bloody hell, we’ll have trouble with our suppliers.’

Martha patted his arm. ‘I don’t understand,’ she said. ‘We’re up to date with accounts. I’ll make enquiries.’

Martha consulted the books, double checked additions, and knew it was a mistake. To redeem their good name, Will penned a notice to be placed in the next edition of the _Courier._

TO FIELDING BROWNE, ESQ.,
Insolvent Commissioner.
_Per favour of the Courier._
Sir, Passing the Court House this morning I observed my name William Guest amongst the list of Insolvents to appear before you on Wednesday, this day. Not being at present in the predicament of an Insolvent I cannot conceive by what mistake you should have inserted my name in your dismal list; true, it may be that misfortune may reach me as well as others, but until it does I think it premature on your part to anticipate the evil day.
Yours &c.
William Guest
Good Woman, Argyle-street. 22nd November, 1859

He was pleased with his effort and, just as he put away the ink-well and cleaned his pen, Mary Ann came in and tapped his shoulder. ‘Please Pa, can I go down to Salamanca? There’s a fair with jugglers and clowns. Maria’s allowed to go, so we could go together.’

‘Why not? You can take this note down to the _Courier_ for me.’ He sealed the letter and handed it to her. ‘Now be sure to deliver that first and take care not to lose it.’

‘Thanks Pa.’ Mary Ann was proud to be trusted. She carefully tucked the note into her pocket before racing outside to join Maria.

A warm late November sun shone and many folk were out walking, enjoying the early summer weather, although the brightness of the day caused some women to cover their faces with bonnets and roll up sleeves against the heat. The two girls headed off, skipping along, their heads down, chatting like sparrows. When they reached the _Courier_ office, Mary Ann hurried inside and handed over her note. Back out on the street she found Maria talking to Elizabeth Waddell, a seven-year-old who played with them from time to time.
‘Why don’t you come with us? I’ve got some money to spend.’
Maria dipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out a few coins.
‘Could I?’ Elizabeth was pleased to be seen with the older girls and decided to tag along.
Mary Ann was excited. ‘Perhaps there’ll be a fire-eater as well as clowns.’

Then suddenly there was a raucous ‘Geddup’ behind them. They heard hooves pounding and Mary Ann turned just in time to see a stallion rear above her head, whinnying and panting. The rider cracked his whip and the horse pawed the road, pushing her to the ground. She felt the world was whirling with pain, shock and dust. She screamed! She hardly knew what had happened. All around there was rushing and yelling. The horse and rider galloped on towards the docks.

‘Stop, stop wretch!’
‘Poor little thing.’
‘Rascal rode off. What a disgrace!’
‘What’s the town coming to?’
‘Poor child, is she hurt?’

‘The police should’ve been here to catch the scoundrel,’ put in a small thin housewife as she hung back clutching her basket to her chest.

‘Damnation, don’t just stand around. Help me with the poor girl,’ said John Rogers as he hurried out of his bakery. He lifted Mary Ann to her feet, saw her ankle was twisted and that she couldn’t stand. ‘She’s injured. Who is she?’ Mary Ann was covered in dust, tears smeared her face and the hem of her dress was torn.

‘I swear that’s the Guest’s wee girl,’ said John’s wife, Ellen, as she came to the door to see what the fuss was all about.

Maria and Elizabeth cowered nearby, holding hands. Maria stepped up close to Mrs Rogers and tugged at her apron. ‘She’s Mary Ann Guest, my friend. I live next door in Argyle Street.’

The baker picked up the injured girl and carried her inside his warm shop, sitting her on the counter before brushing down her dress. He turned to his wife. ‘Ellen come and comfort this litt’un while I harness the donkey cart to take her home. I think she’s broken her ankle.’ He hurried out the back as Ellen put an arm around Mary Ann’s shoulder and patted her hand.
Rogers brought his cart to the front of the shop and carefully lifted Mary Ann into the back. She was still crying, but seemed calmer though in pain. He helped the other two girls up beside her, then clicked his teeth and shook the reins. ‘On boy, on.’ Slowly, so as not to shake the injured limb, the improvised ambulance set out towards the Good Woman.

Halfway there, Mary Ann sat up. ‘Hey, there’s my Pa.’

Sure enough, Will had run downhill ready to rescue his daughter, having been told about the accident by a breathless patron only a few minutes earlier. Will, white faced, leaned over the side of the cart to examine his daughter. ‘My special girl, what happened? Who did this? Pa’s here now, you’ll be fine.’ He paused and turned to Rogers. ‘Thanks old man. I owe you a beer.’

He marched along beside the cart, keeping an eye on Mary Ann. He seemed calm on the surface but angry thoughts were crowding his head. He questioned Rogers and learned that Mr Livingstone, a clerk at John Ivey’s warehouse, was the rider and, though called upon to stop, he’d galloped off.

Rogers finished his tale with a disgusted curse. ‘Damn the man! You know that he didn’t even look back, couldn’t stop for a minute to check the damage. What a rascal!’ Hearing this, Will vowed revenge.

Martha was waiting outside her door, pacing. She was still wearing her apron and she twisted the strings, craning to look down the road. She seemed small and lost. As soon as the cart came into view she hurried to meet it. ‘Will, how is she?’

‘Now Martha, don’t fret. She’s fine.’ Will was reassuring. ‘I think she has a sprain. But to be sure we’ll send the boy for the surgeon. I reckon she’ll be laid up, but just for a few days.’ He carried the child inside and sat her on her bed while Martha called the yard boy and told him to get Dr Keen. Will went back to thank Rogers and poured him a pint.

Dr Keen confirmed that she had a sprain and for the rest of the day Mary Ann sat back in her bed, being waited on by Martha and the maid. Late that afternoon, Will came in to tell her that the accident was written up in the Courier. ‘You’re famous – all Hobarton’s heard about you.’ Mary Ann felt proud to know that her misadventure was important enough to be in the paper. As dusk fell Will grabbed his coat and picked up a cane, ready to search for Livingstone, intent on explaining a few truths to him.
‘Don’t do anything rash.’ Martha called and watched as he strode down the road.

In town he was disappointed to learn that his quarry had gone up-country.

A week later, on 29 November, Argyle Street sweltered under a hot breeze and inside the Good Woman patrons complained about the heat and questioned when a cool change might come. Outside, Mary Ann’s friend Elizabeth wandered along, scuffed her shoes against the cobbles and straggled slowly up Argyle Street. She was in no hurry to get back to Mrs Wilson, her guardian, so she dawdled and kicked a pebble along. What Elizabeth really wanted was to go home, to go back to her mother and sisters in Sydney, but it could not be. Dadda was on the run after being accused of cattle stealing and Mumma had too many mouths to feed. So here she was, stuck in Van Diemen’s Land under the charge of Eliza Wilson.

At first, Mrs Wilson hadn’t seemed too bad, she’d taken her shopping and changed her rags for two new dresses and even bought socks and boots, which pinched a little as her feet weren’t used to shoes. They came to Hobart Town by steamer and that had been an adventure, but once there things went sour. Mrs Wilson lived with John Duncan, who was inclined to loud rages; he didn’t tolerate children crying and despised Elizabeth for wetting the bed. Just last weekend he found her trying to hide her wet nightdress and he yelled, ‘Dirty smelly child, you make work; lotsa washing and cleaning up. Mrs Wilson’s kind to you – you oughta be grateful.’ Elizabeth wondered why he was so angry, because he was never the one to do the work. He sneered, ‘Whatta baby, wetting the bed!’

Under his urging, Eliza decided to punish Elizabeth, so she undressed her and beat her with nettles. Duncan sneered as she was punished. ‘Cry and you’ll get more.’

Now, as the sun burned down, it didn’t seem right to Elizabeth to hurry back for more scolds. She knew that her friends Mary Ann and Maria lived nearby and decided to drop in – perhaps she might be lucky enough to get cake or biscuits. So, with head up and a smile on her face, she quickened
her pace and skipped up to door of the *Good Woman*. She found Mary Ann and Maria in a back room playing with knucklebones. Mary Ann had two sets: one had been boiled with beetroot and was pale pink; the other one was white, boiled and then bleached in the sun. The pink was her favourite.

‘Hey, Elizabeth, we challenge you to Jacks,’ said Mary Ann.

‘I can catch two at once,’ bragged Maria.

‘My hands are smaller’n yours, you oughta give me a start,’ wheedled Elizabeth. The three children sat on a rag rug on the floor playing; there were squeals at near misses and hurrahs for fancy catches. This went on until Maria looked out the window and saw the darkening sky. She stood and shook Elizabeth. ‘See, it’s getting late. You best be off home. I’ll walk with you. Come quickly, let’s get going.’

‘I’m in trouble. I wasn’t supposed to dally on the way,’ the younger girl mumbled as she stood up.

‘Never mind. We’ll run.’ So they left in a hurry, calling ‘bye’ to Mary Ann.

Elizabeth didn’t come by for two days. When she did she was limping. Seeing her discomfort, Martha asked her what had happened, and soon Elizabeth was crying and telling how she’d been whipped. She blurted out that, because she was late home after her last visit, Mrs Wilson was cross with her. Martha stooped to listen. ‘What exactly happened?’

‘Mrs Wilson was angry, she undressed me and hit me with Duncan’s rope; then with a horse whip until it broke.’

‘Show me where you’re hurting,’ Martha sucked in a deep breath.

Elizabeth slowly loosened her shirt and exposed her shoulders.

‘Poor Child!’ Martha gasped when she saw the bruises.

Elizabeth lifted her skirt and on her left thigh was a large bloodied weld. Her hips were blotched, blue and black and in some places the skin was broken. Martha was horrified: this was too much, no child should suffer this way. She fumed and called to Will. ‘Come and see this disgraceful thing.’ He joined her just as Elizabeth explained that Maria had walked her home but that she’d left her at the front door.

Will tried to keep the anger out of his voice as he bent close to the small girl and said, ‘Did Maria see this beating?’

‘No, she left before I went inside.’ Elizabeth shook her head.
Will grabbed his jacket and bustled off and soon returned with Dick and Maria. By now Elizabeth was crying and said that she was too frightened to go home. So Dick and Will decided to call both Dr Keen and the police.

A constable came quickly and tried to calm the girl, telling her that she was safe. Dr Keen arrived about half an hour later, examined her and dressed her wounds.

‘This is inhuman,’ he muttered. ‘No one should assault a child. This beating is much more than any discipline calls for. Constable please take note. In my view this is a severe assault.’

The officer took out his pocket book as Keen continued. ‘Whoever did this should be brought before the magistrate.’ The constable recorded Keen’s testimony before questioning Elizabeth. He vowed to charge Eliza Wilson with assault and place Elizabeth into protective custody.

‘She can stay temporarily with a kind family,’ he said as he took Elizabeth’s hand to lead her away.

Will stopped him as he headed for the door. ‘We could have her here with us.’

‘Sorry, but I’d best stick to the rules.’ The constable shook his head. ‘Mrs Wilson might come looking for her.’

The case came before the police court two days later. The magistrate, Mr Downing was in the chair, the solicitor Mr Hamilton was the prosecutor and Mr Groves appeared for the defendant. Downing asked if Elizabeth Waddell was in court. She was led to the stand – a tearful child who looked fearfully around, especially in Mrs. Wilson’s direction. He questioned her. ‘Do you go to school?’

Elizabeth shook her head. ‘No,’ she mumbled.

‘Do you know the difference between the truth and a lie?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, then, please tell the court how you came by your bruises.’

Elizabeth hesitated and slowly described the beatings that Mrs Wilson had given her. Those in the court sat hushed while she spoke. Her voice was soft and some had trouble hearing. As the details came out, some whispered, ‘dreadful’ or ‘too cruel’. One young mother, nursing a toddler on her lap, lifted her arm and shook her fist in Eliza’s direction. Will,
Martha and Dick Whelan sat quietly near the front – Dick holding Maria’s hand and Martha with her arm around Mary Ann. Then the magistrate asked the prosecutor what was Mrs Wilson’s relationship to the child.

Hamilton’s voice was firm. ‘She’s neither the child’s mother, nor her official guardian,’ he said, ‘though she says she has charge of her.’ The magistrate frowned as Hamilton added, ‘Whatever that means.’

Next Mary Ann was sworn in and she too was instructed in how important it was to tell the truth. She told how they had been playing together before Maria walked Elizabeth home. Finally Maria took the stand and she said, yes: she knew that she must tell the truth. She confirmed Mary Ann’s story. Finally Dr Keen was called to give evidence.

After being sworn in he said, ‘In my view, the child is delicate and the blows might have been from a cane or other solid object. I found that there were a number of distinct blows that, in my view, were inflicted at the same time. This beating was much more severe than I would give my own child.’

The magistrate took notes while Keen spoke. He shuffled his papers before turning to Hamilton. ‘How did this child come into Mrs Wilson’s charge? Does she have the right to chastise her?’

Hamilton raised his eyebrows and shrugged. ‘It’s a moot point, sir.’

Hearing this, Will stepped forward. ‘Please, Your Honour, may I address the court?’ Martha stood beside him, her hand tightly gripping his elbow. The magistrate nodded as Will cleared his throat. ‘Sir, considering the cruel nature of the punishment and the fact that Mrs Wilson’s right to the child is questionable, my wife and I would like to adopt her. We reckon we’ve as much right to her as Mrs Wilson. Could the court award custody to us? We’d care for her as our own and she could go to school with Mary Ann and be a sister to her.’ Martha smiled and nodded her agreement.

The magistrate thought for a while and consulted the constable before replying. ‘This is a most unusual case. I fear that it’s not within this court’s jurisdiction to make a decision about the ownership of the child. This situation is most confusing. However, if Mrs Wilson does have legal custody, you should be warned that she would be entitled to charge you with abduction should you take her.’

‘Your Honour, could I discuss it with my wife for a moment?’
‘Very well.’
‘What do you think? Should we try?’ Will glanced from Martha to Mary Ann.

‘It’s a shame, I know.’ She frowned and tightened her arm around Mary Ann. ‘But money’s tight and lawyers are expensive. If we took her, we might not win. Best back off. The police are involved now and I reckon they’ll watch Mrs Wilson. And Mary Ann will let us know how she goes.’

‘Sir, we would like to take the child, but given the risk of court action by Mrs Wilson we will withdraw the request.’ Will gripped his coat lapels as he faced the magistrate.

Martha squeezed Mary Ann’s hand. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll keep an eye on her.’

The magistrate banged his gavel and spoke firmly as he addressed the accused. ‘Wilson, take the stand.’ As she stood there, several in the court room yelled and booed.

‘Silence!’ called Hamilton, then he pointed his finger at Mrs Wilson. ‘Madam, you have chastised this child in a manner the court finds disturbing. It recognises that children need discipline from time to time, but be warned, any further beatings like this and you will be dealt with most severely. The constable will call regularly to check on Waddell.’ He turned to the police officer. ‘Take note and arrange for a regular visit to Wilson’s premises.’ Mrs Wilson looked ashamed. The magistrate finished with, ‘You can stand down.’

She left the dock and took Elizabeth in tow while some in the court hissed.

It was just as well that Will and Martha did not adopt Elizabeth because bankruptcy was just over the horizon. They worked harder, publicised the reading room, but income barely covered outgoings. Will remained optimistic and, in a burst of sudden enthusiasm or swayed by the seller’s persuasive patter, he put a deposit on some land. Martha reproached him. ‘This is a gamble, Will. You should’ve talked to me first.’ When things didn’t improve, they had to scratch for funds to keep up the payments.
Will’s heart simply wasn’t in remaining an innkeeper. Some of their friends followed Richard and Maggie George to Ballarat, while others raced to new diggings in New South Wales and sent back news of their good fortune. He recalled his excitement when he was down a shaft and his pick hit rocks flecked with gold. He’d seen riches drawn from the creek in the Gulph, and pans awash with shiny metal flakes. He was itching to up stakes and join the miners, but there were two obstacles in his way: first he had to convince Martha to come with him and, second, he needed to salvage some funds from the impending wreckage of the Good Woman.

Creditors closed in during April and it was a troubled tearful time for the family. Mary Ann kept asking what was to happen and when she questioned Will, he couldn’t give her a simple, clear answer. However, at night after dinner he’d regale Martha and Mary Ann with stories of gold nuggets, streams awash with gold dust; he’d describe men bending over sluices and he told of how they cried ‘Eureka’ when they found a nugget.

With creditors making life difficult, Martha decided that Will was right. His excitement was contagious. He was all for the move and as they sat before the parlour fire after lock-up, he reassured her that all would be well. ‘We can start again in New South Wales. In just a week or two there I can dig up enough for us to have a stake in a new business. This town is dying in this depression. But, in the hinterland behind Eden I’ll find gold and we’ll never look back. It’ll be for the best in the end.’

Always practical, Martha listed the difficulties. ‘First we have to sell up, Will, and who’s going to buy a bankrupt business?’ She leaned forward to warm her hands. ‘It’s not that easy. Where will we stay? How will we live?’

He stoked the fire. ‘Give it a break, Martha. Don’t you trust me? Remember the wee gold nuggets I found? Well, I’ve hidden two more in the hem of my jacket.’

She jumped up. ‘What! Why in God’s name didn’t you tell me you had more?’

‘I was saving them for desperate times, and didn’t want our creditors to find them.’

‘Seems you don’t trust me either! That was unfair, Will.’ Her jaw was set and her hands had turned to fists.
‘Sorry. Sorry. But listen! I’ve got a plan. I’ll go to John Roberts – I
know I can trust him. When I sell them we’ll have cash for a bit and I’ve plans for what to do in Eden.

Martha stood up, paced the floor and her voice sounded threatening.
‘You tell me now! How long have you had this in mind?’

‘Not long. I should’ve told you. Sorry. Here’s what I reckon we should do –’

‘How much have you decided and when did you plan to tell me?’

‘Just hear me out. We’ll buy a small timber cabin, ship it to Eden and we’ll set up there and take in boarders. It won’t be as grand as the Good Woman, but it’ll be a start. There’s miners, whalers and sailors galore all coming and going around that town. They need somewhere to stay and they won’t be too fussy, but they’ll pay good brass for a bed and breakfast.’

‘Oh Will, I’m your wife. I thought that we shared our troubles.’ She glared at him through narrowed eyes.

‘I’m sorry. I just wanted to save you from worrying.’ Will tried to take her hand. ‘I’ll make it up to you, promise. After the chain gang I vowed never to work for a boss again.’

‘How can I trust you?’ Martha was not to be mollified. ‘You should have told me. You know that I’m good at managing money. After all, I do all our accounts.’

‘I guess I was stupid. I just worried that creditors might seek to take everything that we had.’ Will scrabbled at the hem of his jacket, plucked out the gold and handed it to Martha. ‘Here, you take care of it. We’ll need a stake to start over, and this gold will help us do that. But we have to be careful.’

Martha grabbed them, turned to the shelf and hid them in a tea caddy. ‘I’ll see what they are worth and then we’ll talk about what to do.’ She could see how determined he was. Work was hard to find and she’d weathered his bad moods, heard his thunderous swearing and knew he wouldn’t last long in a paid job if his temper was ruffled.

Creditors called for an auction of the Good Woman’s stock and furniture. It was scheduled for 4 May. Martha scurried around separating their personal
possessions, clothes, books and memorabilia, from the fittings and furnishings that belonged to the business. The sale was organised, catalogued and advertised in the *Courier* on 18 April 1860:

Friday, 4 May  
Wm. Guest’s Estate,  
“Good Woman,” Argyle Street  
Stock-in-Trade, Furniture, Utensils and Effects

MR. WORLEY  
Is instructed by John Wilward, Esq.,  
Assignee to the above Estate, to sell by public auction, on the premises, on  
FRIDAY, 4 May, 1860, at 11 o’clock,  
WITHOUT RESERVE

UTENSILS IN-TRADE, Spirit Kegs, Glass Tub and Drainer, Pewter Measures, Tin Measures, and Funnels  

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE –  
BAR, eight-day Clock, Chairs, Oval Looking Glass  
BAR PARLOR – Cedar Table, Three Chairs, Sofa Mattress and Pillows, Fender, and Pictures  
BEST PARLOR – Three Tables, Six Horsehair Chairs, Three cane bottom ditto, brass fender & fire-irons, Chimney Ornaments, Framed Engravings, Blinds, Curtains  
BEDROOMS – Four-post Bedsteads, Bed and Bedding. Chest Drawers, Chests, Stretcher and Bedding, Washstand, Towel Horse, Chairs, Window Blinds, Table, etc.  
KITCHEN and YARD – Table, Meat Safe, Dresser and Shelves, Chairs, Cooking Utensils, Crockery, Knives, Water Casks, Lumber, &c  
Terms – Cash

On the morning of the auction, Martha rose and dressed. Feeling disheartened, she decided to stay in the kitchen, while the auctioneer disposed of the furniture from front of house. She listened anxiously as he took the bids and she tried to add up how much they might get. Finally, when he came back to the kitchen and yard, gavel in hand, it became too much to bear. The time she’d spent working here and all those hours of cooking and scrubbing for little gain! It was heartbreaking, so taking Mary Ann by the hand, she moved quietly to next door to stay with Dick Whelan and his wife. The sale went well and Will was confident that with his secret gold nuggets and a few personal items kept from the sale, he’d be able to salvage enough to set them up in Eden.

For the next few weeks they lodged at another inn while they finalised their affairs and organised the move to New South Wales. Will
purchased the framework and timbers for a two room cabin and arranged for that to be sent on ahead. He bought tickets for Eden on the *Tasmania* and 2 July was the date set for them to leave. They said their goodbyes to friends and supporters – Martha was anxious, Mary Ann was sad to leave her friends, Will was enthusiastic and optimistic. His mind was taken over by the problems and possibilities associated with the move – he worked hard all day and slept better at night, dreaming of gold rather than the war in Spain.
Chapter 6
New South Wales

The Red Lion in Imlay Street was notorious for the ghost that haunted the cellar, but that was where the family chose to stay while they were looking for somewhere to set up a new boarding house. Mary Ann shuddered when drinkers laughed and told her not to go down to the cellar alone. Will frowned and reassured her. ‘There ain’t no ghosts. Take no notice.’

Martha and Will walked around the town for several days searching for a good, yet affordable site. The market place and the wharf attracted townfolk and travellers and on the fourth day, she saw a man nailing a ‘for sale’ sign to a tree in front of a lot beside the post office. She hurried to the Red Lion, grabbed Will by the elbow and dragged him to the market square. ‘See, this is the busiest part of town – people meet and shop. We can’t miss if we set up here.’

He looked around and paced out the width of the street frontage. ‘I’ll check the price. Let’s hope we’ve got enough dosh.’

‘We’ll do fine, so we can afford to borrow a little.’

‘I reckon you’re right. I’ll find the vendor before someone else puts in an offer.’

Within the week, the sale was closed. Not wasting any time, Will paid a gang of Chinese labourers to assemble the cabin. He bribed some natives with grog to go bush and bring back wattle timber and bark. With this the gang built a small hut, separate and at the rear of the cabin, for a cookhouse. When it was finished, Martha and Will checked it over; the front rooms were small and neat; the hut out the back held an iron stove, but the walls were unlined and the floor was just earth. He remembered the Good Woman and apologised. ‘It ain’t much, I know. Do you reckon you can cook here?’

Martha scuffed her shoes on the floor. ‘Best get this tamped down a bit. That’d make it easier.’

‘Sure, I’ll get some men onto that tomorrow.’

They walked back to the two front rooms and Martha frowned as she looked around. ‘We need to get curtains to make it homey.’
Will nodded and made a note on a pad he took from his pocket. ‘And a coupla comfortable chairs,’ he said.

‘That should do it. How do you plan to attract customers?’

‘How about a ball? If you agree, we’ll advertise. Would Thursday week suit?’

Martha turned and walked out back to re-check the cookhouse. She thought for a while. ‘There’s a lot of work still to be done,’ she said. ‘But, yes. Let’s put a notice in the paper.’ Advertising had worked for them before, so they wrote to the *Twofold Bay Telegraph*.

A Subscription Ball Will be Held At
Mr Guest’s New Building in Market Square, Eden on Thursday Evening, 23 August, Commencing at 8 o’clock.
Gentlemen’s Tickets, including a lady’s admission 5s. Ladies’ Tickets 2s 6d. They can be obtained at the Red Lion Hotel, or at the Drapery Store opposite.

The ball was a roaring success. It was the first major social occasion since Easter. Will was a smiling host, generous but careful with the tickets and cash; Martha prepared a fine supper and guests were left in no doubt that a boarding house run by this couple would be a reasonable place to stay.

With just two rooms and a simple kitchen Martha knew it was a small start. But it was a start and, though she regretted the loss of the *Good Woman*, this was better than nothing.

That September, she often felt unwell, suffering from a slightly bloated feeling and nausea each morning. At first she blamed the local water, but finally she could deny it no longer. She was pregnant. She bided her time and one night as they lay in bed she whispered, ‘I think we are to have another child.’ She snuggled up beside him under the covers.

‘What?’ A big grin lit up his face. ‘Are you sure? I’ve hoped for this so many times!’

‘The signs are there. Though, at 36, I’m getting to middle age, but I’m pretty sure it’s not the change and that we’re expecting a child before the middle of next year.’

He kissed her cheek. ‘We’ll celebrate. Look after yourself. When shall we tell Mary Ann?’
‘Let’s wait a while until I’m sure and certain. Sometimes bad things happen. We’ll have to prepare for the birth. I’ll need baby clothes and a midwife. Out here that might be hard.’ Martha squeezed his hand. ‘You’ll have to stay in Eden for a bit after the birth.’

Talk of gold was all over town and steamers off-loaded men desperate to race inland and make fortunes. Will watched for three weeks and eventually could resist no longer. He left Martha in charge while he went searching for gold in the Gulph diggings. When he’d gone, she hired a native woman to clean and one of the Chinese gang turned out to be an excellent cook, so diners came often. At Christmas, Will returned with two canvas packets holding specks of dust and six nuggets. He bragged when he handed them to her. ‘See? I told you. Gold! And there’s more where that came from. We’re truly on our way. We’ll build a room to one side for Mary Ann and another for dining. That way we’ll have our own separate quarters.’ He was happy and enthusiastic; Martha counted their profits and relaxed. In January, he returned to the Gulph, leaving Martha to run the business.

Martha’s pregnancy moved on uneventfully until on 29 April 1861 she gave birth to a boy, and they named him William Eden Guest. Remembering their friends in Hobart Town and wishing to share the news of their good fortune, they sent a notice to be published in that city’s newspapers. Soon the Tasmania brought letters of congratulations, but William was a year old before letters and a small christening gift arrived from Saltash.

For the rest of that year and all of 1862 Martha and Mary Ann remained in Eden while Will pursued his mining passion – often staying away for weeks on end. Though the gold finds were exciting, he was lonely in the hinterland. He wanted his wife and children with him. So when he was back in Eden to celebrate Christmas, he put his ideas to Martha. ‘I miss you and I want you and the children to be with me at the diggings.’

Martha simply said, ‘Yes.’ But there was a questioning note in her voice. She stood and started to clear the table.

‘Stay awhile, leave the washing up for now and let’s talk about our future.’
She sat down, began to rock William in his cradle and brushed a fly away before shooing Mary Ann outside.

Will took her hand. ‘What do you think about moving up to Nerrigundah?’

‘What about this place? Business is good.’

‘But the gold finds are richer.’

She stopped rocking and faced him. ‘It’d be a big change. What’s it like up there?’

‘The town’s growing. We could find a place, be innkeepers and gold miners.’ He used his thumbnail to draw a map on the table cloth. ‘See here, there’s two main streets close by a decent creek.’ She peered across as he went on. ‘Ya’know, there’s more than 700 people on the diggings. Prospectors, travellers and visitors need somewhere to stay. An inn should do well.’

‘Tell me more. Are there shops?’

‘Yes. On the main street. Most are close by the creek.’ He pointed to the shapes he’d drawn on the cloth. ‘Just about here. There’s general and hardware stores: one’s owned by John Pollock; another run by Eddie Smith; the Cowdroys have a farm and store. Ah Sun has another, but he mainly serves the Chinese. There’s a butcher and a blacksmith. There’s three inns and they’re doing good trade. A chap runs a mail service to Moruya each week.’

‘Sounds busy. But is it a rough place?’

‘No, there’s a constable, churches and a small school.’

‘Would the school suit Mary Ann?’

‘Sure! But that’s not all – there’s lots of miners, lonely men. They’d be good customers. Some just fossick but others have big diggings with mechanical sluices. You know, they’ve come from all around the world – there’s Irish, a few Welsh and there’s a mob of Chinese mining up at a place called North Creek Crossing. Occasionally black fellers wander through town, but they don’t bother us. Many of the miners work upstream, live under canvas all week, and come to town on Saturday. Most are really thirsty and drink a lot.’

Two things bothered Martha: first the cost, and second, whether she would be lonely in a small town. ‘How much would getting a place cost?’
William stirred and she hushed him. She turned to Will, putting her finger to her lips. ‘Speak softly. It’s so hard to get him to sleep.’

Will lowered his voice. ‘I’m trying to work it out. I need to see what’s for sale or rent. We should be able to do it, especially with the gold I turned up last month. But don’t take my word – read ‘Correspondent’s’ column about the town in the Empire. It’s written by John Barker, one of the innkeepers up there. He has a letter published each week.’

‘Are there many women living there?’

‘There are a few. You’d like Mrs Pollock – her boys are at the school. There’s just one class with ten children but she says that the teacher’s good.’

She turned it over in her mind. ‘If we go – and it is “if” – we need to save. So I’ll look after our banking. Leave the gold with me. I’ll invest it and get good interest. If you promise that the place you choose’ll be suitable for a family, I’ll come with you.’

He clapped her on the back. ‘Great! I’m sure it’s the right thing. I’ll do my best and won’t decide anything without your approval.’ The baby stirred again and Martha shushed him back to sleep. She batted a fly away from his face. Running an inn was something she did well. She thought about the reading room and the bar at the Good Woman. Perhaps that might work in the Gulph.

Once more bursting with energy, Will headed into the back country – this time carrying Martha’s list of things she’d need for an inn. The most popular shop in town was the Free Selection, run by Eddie Smith. He was tired of serving behind the counter and of the time it took to source essentials from Sydney. He’d made his pile and dreamed of retiring to Moruya. So he was tempted when Will offered to buy – after all, he’d built on land he’d been given free by the government when they were trying to develop the town, which was why he called it the Free Selection.

The property was in Short Street with three buildings all made of shiplap boards and corrugated iron. The shop and residence had two floors; a kitchen and a large barn-like room were in a separate single level building at the rear, and there was a stable behind that again. The shop was just one
block back from the creek and very close to the main diggings. Will wrote to Martha describing the rooms, stable and location seeking her approval. Though she was wise enough to recognise he might gild the lily, with his enthusiasm blinding him to possible problems, she thought the move seemed attractive and she’d been reading the weekly reports about Nerrigundah in the Empire. It all sounded just fine, so she wrote back saying she’d join him there.

By June 1863 he’d negotiated the sale, furnished the inn, and obtained liquor and billiards licences. When all was done he returned to Eden, and gathered his family, their goods and chattels ready for the trip. The first stage was by sea to Moruya. After that, Martha and the children travelled by coach, while the luggage went by dray with Will taking the reins. Mary Ann was excitedly looking forward to a new beginning and what her Pa promised would be a settled life. William was too young to care and slept most of the way.

On board the coach from Moruya, Martha was worried by the wilderness on either side. She felt hemmed in by the large trees and wondered about bushfires when she saw how many had black charred trunks. There was dense scrub growing close to the road – so different from the wide streets of Hobart Town. She looked out the window and wondered whether she was crazy coming to this back country.

After hours of bumpy travel, they rode over the ridge of a mountain and before them was a steep road down to a creek. She saw smoke from camp fires, dusty streets and low level buildings. As they passed through the last clump of wilderness, from one of the tallest trees the warbling of a magpie drifted on the breeze and a pair of wild ducks took to the air. The coach rattled downhill at a smacking pace, and the horses splashed across a wide ford before dashing into the centre of town.

It was a strange sight that met them. There were the few town buildings and beyond them, beside the creek, groups of men were engaged in digging, wheeling and rocking cradles, to wash mud and ore. The sound of rushing water, picks and sluices filled the air. Martha looked around hopefully for some female companions, but none was immediately in sight. Looking further upstream to the hills, she saw what looked like a tent city made of canvas shelters in varying degrees of shabbiness.
The driver pulled up near the corner of Short and Gulph Streets. Will had renamed the *Free Selection* store and, as they came to a halt, Martha saw a huge banner hanging from the front window. ‘*Free Selection Inn* opening soon.’ The cab driver helped Martha and the baby down while Mary Ann jumped out and skipped around the coach. Martha looked about.

This was a small village, but there were shops, a court house and other inns. Not far away were slab huts of the police barracks and a paddock stabling their horses. All the buildings were timber with zinc or corrugated iron roofs – one stood out with a flag waving above: it was Pollock’s Post Office and General Store.

Martha shifted William from one hip to the other as she stood and read the shop signs. Next to the *Free Selection* was a butcher’s, outside it two mongrel dogs were growling and snarling over a bone. Martha saw a large half mutton carcase on hooks suspended just inside the window. On the other side of the street was Ah Sun’s shop, next Cowdroy’s stables and further along was a saddlemaker-cum-bootmaker and a wheelwright. From further up the street she heard the hammer and clank of a blacksmith’s forge. A plump pig wandered up the road urged along by a youth with a crook.

‘Come along!’ Martha called to Mary Ann. Carrying William, she led the way to the inn door. The coach driver lifted down their bags and followed them inside, dumping cases and trunks in the hallway before hurrying back to his coach. ‘Well,’ she muttered as she gazed about. She was standing in the main building. There was a central hallway that led to several rooms at the rear. Not far from the front door was a simple staircase. Exploring further, she found that there was a large bar downstairs and behind that there were two bedrooms ready to rent to travellers. Upstairs, she was relieved to find that Will had done his work well – their quarters were sizable and furnished with beds, bedding and curtains. In the end room was a child’s cot, so she laid William in it. He murmured and complained a little at first, but settled down to sleep. Together, she and Mary Ann explored the rest of their new home.

The separate back building included a billiards area, a kitchen and a dining room. The billiards room was large with a table, cue racks and stools. The kitchen seemed well equipped and roomy, with a wood burning stove,
dresser, and butcher’s block. Small items, pans, jugs and china, were stacked on shelves. The dining room was separated from the kitchen by a thin partition wall.

Mary Ann had raced on ahead. ‘Ma, come and see!’ she yelled. ‘There’s chairs and a table.’ Martha followed and saw a centre pedestal cedar table, laid with a carpet cloth. Six rail back chairs were set out around it and against the wall stood a chiffoniere food safe – its brass wheeled feet resting in bowls of water, designed to keep the ants at bay and out of the sugar and cheese. Turning, she walked to the back door and looked out. There was a small stable just big enough for a horse and carriage and near that the necessary house – large enough to serve the family and guests.

Down the road, Mrs Pollock had heard the sound of the coach and she pulled off her apron and smoothed down her hair. She shut up the family’s shop and hurried to welcome Martha. In a town peopled mainly by rough miners, she looked forward to the arrival of a female companion. She knocked on the inn door and called loudly. ‘Hullo, anyone at home?’

Hearing the greeting, Martha hurried from the back and through the hall, anxious to meet another woman. Mrs Pollock greeted her, ‘Good day and welcome. I’m pleased to meet you. Let me introduce myself, I’m Mary Pollock and we have the shop around the corner.’

‘Hullo, I’m Martha, this is Mary Ann and my youngest, William, is asleep upstairs. He’s just a babe.’

‘I hope you plan to stay. It’s a bit lonely for a woman out here. Once your good man said you were coming, I’ve looked forward to meeting you. You must come and have tea with me soon.’

‘Come on in. I’m afraid I can’t offer you anything, being so newly arrived. But do come and sit awhile.’ She led the way to the dining room, and offered Mrs Pollock one of the chairs beside the table. Mary Ann, wanting to listen, sat on the floor under the table as her mother took a seat.

‘Thanks for the welcome,’ Martha said. ‘I’m pleased to see another woman.’ She again apologised for not being able to offer refreshments. This didn’t bother Mrs Pollock; she was happy just to sit and talk, filling Martha in about the town and its activities. She told her which shopkeepers were honest; when to have mail ready for the coach to Moruya and the best mail order catalogues. Finally she offered her sons as guides for Mary Ann. They
would show her the school house and church – even, she said with a grin, the best orchards to raid.

After she left, Martha and Mary Ann took an hour to explore their new home. Both were pleased with the way Will had furnished it. Martha jotted down a few notes about extras that she would need, such as a large copper kettle, three sharp kitchen knives and a new linen cloth and napkins for the dining table. She sensed that the light construction of the building would make it hard to heat in winter and hot in summer. So she added timber for the fireplaces and canvas for summer blinds to her list. Will and the loaded dray arrived just before dusk.

The next day she placed lanterns at the front of the inn while Will rode to the diggings. There he found an Irishman who played the violin and he engaged him to entertain on Saturday nights. He put up posters around town, ‘Come to the Free Selection, quality booze – Irish Fiddler on Saturdays.’ That first weekend, lonely men came for the company and to sample Martha’s cooking. The Free Selection developed a reputation for good food at reasonable prices and Will’s licences for wine, billiards and bagatelle attracted miners, ready to drink and gamble.

He was happy to be in the Gulph, but with middle age creeping up on him, his bodily aches reminded him of his trials in Spain. He spent time at the diggings, but the work didn’t tire him the way his Hobart Town walks had. As an innkeeper, temptation was ever present and he began to drink early in the day. His nightmares still intruded. Martha was patient with him most of the time because she’d heard him moan in fitful half-awake dreams. At times, in his cups, he’d ramble on about the war, the terror, the bitter cold in the Spanish mountains, and even sob for the loss of his friends who were among the thousands who died of the plague or at the siege of San Sebastian. He never remembered telling her once he sobered up. Liquor loosened his tongue and at times his anger rose to the surface, leading to arguments with customers and an occasional scuffle.

On a cold evening in August 1863, when a light drizzle brushed against the inn’s windows, there was trouble. At first the atmosphere was jolly: the fiddler played requests and a couple got up to dance just as a stranger walked up to the bar. ‘A brandy, large,’ he demanded. Will poured the drink and the man handed over a coin. ‘Keep the change, barman.’
‘Hey that’s a fake – it looks like Spanish dross. It’s rubbish.’ Will was not quite steady on his feet but he could tell counterfeit when he saw it. ‘What do you take me for? Pay with real money.’

The traveller put down his bag and faced Will. He wasn’t going to back away. ‘It’s good. I was paid yesterday over in Braidwood.’ As Will moved towards him, he raised his fist. ‘Are you calling me a liar? Take it, or be damned.’

‘You’re a bloody no-good thief, coming in here and expecting to get grog for naught.’ Will snorted and grabbed the stranger’s lapels. ‘Bloody hell, what a measly bugger you are.’ He yelled and shook the stranger. ‘I’ll punch your brains out if ya don’t pay me now.’

‘Says who?’ The traveller shrugged his arms out of his jacket and held up his fists.

A passing constable hearing the ruckus came in and pulled the men apart. ‘Come on, Guest, leave it.’

‘Bugger off, he goddam deserves a lesson.’

The constable grabbed Will’s arm. ‘Insulting an officer and obscene language! Guest, you’re under arrest. You’re off to the lock up.’ He turned to the stranger. ‘Off with you. Go and drink elsewhere or I’ll arrest you too.’

Next morning the magistrate sent Will to Braidwood gaol for one month. Martha cared for the children and managed the business. When he returned he promised to watch his drinking and behaviour.

Despite Will’s erratic behaviour, the inn was doing well. Martha set up an office in a side room and became a registered gold buyer. She was a favourite among the Chinese as she was known to be fair and not cheat. Her business prospered. So, in November she decided the family should celebrate Christmas in style. She poured over mail order catalogues and sent an order to Sydney. For herself she ordered a fine navy taffeta gown and petticoat; a pretty print cotton dress for Mary Ann; new coats and boots for Will and William Eden. The parcels arrived on the mail coach in the middle of December and there was much excitement as they were unwrapped.
Martha decorated the inn and got in supplies for a Christmas feast. On 24 December a crowd gathered to sing carols and the atmosphere was jolly with folk wishing one another season’s greetings. It was a hot night so the drinks flowed fast. William Eden was in the back room with Norm Pollock, and Mary Ann was helping service by carrying drinks. It was nearly mid-night when a tipsy gentleman known locally as Paddy Turner, overcome with good will, grabbed Mary Ann by the waist as she passed down the hall. He pulled her to him and planted a loud kiss on her lips. Will was right behind her and heard her scream as she pulled away.

He charged at Paddy, fists flying. ‘What do ya think you’re up to? That’s my daughter. Leave her alone or I’ll thump you. You dirty old man.’ Surprised, Paddy raised his fists and began to fight back. The struggling pair tumbled out onto the street.

‘Fight, fight!’ someone yelled. Others seemed anxious to take sides and join in just as a constable passed by. He pulled out his truncheon and thumped Will’s back, before pulling the men apart. He arrested both men and charged them with ‘Fight at Large’. Next day the magistrate found them guilty and each was fined five shillings.

Will again promised Martha that he’d be careful and watch his behaviour and things quietened down at the Free Selection. But then, in February 1864, there was trouble between the Guest family and the Scriveners who ran an inn opposite theirs. Mary Ann and William Eden were friendly with the children, Ellen and Johnny Scrivener. Everyone in town knew that they were neglected and they were often at Martha’s kitchen door asking for food. Then one Saturday morning when Mary Ann raced up to the stable where Will was grooming the horse. ‘Pa, you’ve gotta come and see. Johnny’s dad’s taken his belt to him and he’s thrashing him out on the street. I think he’ll kill him.’

Will hurried out and saw Abe Scrivener standing over the cowering boy, belt in hand. The lad was curled like a foetus in the dust, his hands over his head trying to protect himself, while his father lashed down again and again. ‘Lazy good-for-nothing. Chop the firewood I said, and what do ya do? Nothing.’ With that he started to kick the lad where he lay.

Will grabbed Abe’s arm. ‘Stop it, stop it. You’ll kill him. I’ll call the police if you don’t lay off.’
Abe paused, sized up Will and recognised the threat. ‘Ah well, he’s learned his lesson.’ With that he gave the lad a last kick and barked, ‘Get outta my sight and do your chores!’ Johnny got up and slunk away behind his father’s inn. Mary Scrivener was standing in her doorway and Will yelled at her.

‘Look after your children or I’ll go to the magistrate and have them taken away.’

Mary muttered an oath and went back inside, planning revenge.

Back at the *Free Selection*, Will was furious. ‘They’re just as bad as Eliza Wilson. Remember that poor child, Elizabeth. What can we do? Children ought to be cared for. Poor devils living in a family like that.’

Martha tried to sooth him. ‘We’ll help where we can, but they have both a mother and father and we can’t interfere.’

Overnight, the Scriveners hatched a plan; in the morning, Mary went to the police station and complained that she’d heard Will yelling obscene language around midnight, and that she saw disorderly conduct in the *Free Selection*. Mary’s maid backed her story, repeating the accusations word for word. Aware of Will’s wild behaviour, the constable was easily convinced and Will was charged with ‘Breach of the Publicans Act’. The magistrate found him guilty and fined him 40 shillings.

A week later, still irritated by the fine, Will saw Mary in the street. He shook his fist at her. ‘You bitch!’ he yelled. ‘You rotten bitch! You’re a liar, nothing but a yellow faced old bugger of a fish-wife. You don’t look after your kids and you run a lousy inn – one that’s more like a whorehouse.’ He went back inside the *Free Selection*, only to ruminate on the lying exaggerations that the Scriveners had told the magistrate. Angrily he turned back onto the street and seeing Mary sweeping the steps in front of her place, he made rude gestures and swore at her again. ‘God’s blood, but you’re a rotten, rotten, no good, yellow faced bitch. Jeezus, bloody mind your own bleeding business and let me mind mine!’

Mary called the constable and insisted that she’d done nothing to provoke Will and demanded that he be charged. In due course the court heard the case and once more Will was fined 40 shillings with the option to pay or spend fourteen days in Braidwood gaol. Caution was never his strong point. He couldn’t hold his tongue during the hearing. So, feeling a strong
sense of injustice, he abused the magistrate. He was fined once more and committed to the lock up for six hours. He may have felt justified when he discovered, on his release, that Abe Scrivener had been sent by escort to Sydney, to face charges of child neglect. Martha quietly paid the fines and shepherded him back to the Free Selection before he got into further trouble.

She kept any advice to herself until they were inside in the cool of their bedroom. ‘Will, what a waste of money! Try to guard your tongue. We don’t want hefty fines right when we’re buying land up near the church, and there’s the mining licence to pay. You’re bringing scandal on the family.’

‘I know. I know, sorry. I’ll try, but those Scriveners are a bloody pain.’

‘I’m ashamed of you and wonder what the town thinks of us. And don’t forget the grog! You’ll kill yourself with booze, you know.’

In his heart, Will knew she was right. ‘Sorry, sorry. I’ll do better. Promise. But grog’s a fine healthy drink and we’ve done well out of it.’

‘Take care. Don’t take me for granted. Unless things improve, I’ll take the children and leave. I’ve gotta do what’s best for them. Slow down your drinking and you’ll find life a lot easier.’

‘I’m a publican, I can’t become teetotal. I’ve got to entertain customers. I can’t play billiards with them and not share a glass or two. That’d be mean spirited. Besides I like it.’

‘But you know that once you start, you can’t stop.’

‘I’ll cut down, promise. And anyway, we’re not doing badly and the gold’s good.’

‘Just don’t make me ashamed of you again.’ Martha had heard the excuses before, so she sighed and went to tidy the kitchen.

Life was not easy for the children: Mary Ann felt ashamed when gossips talked about Will’s escapades; William Eden had playmates who teased him about his father. Instead of blushing and retreating as Mary Ann did, William Eden, young as he was, took to fisticuffs. Will expressed pride in his son. He was pleased that his son wanted to stand and fight, so he showed him the boxer’s stance, how to put his fists up to protect his face and the best way to be swift of foot and parry an opponent’s punches.
‘You’re a fine young lad, m’boy. Not afraid to get into a barney and fight for your rights,’ he said. After that William Eden’s nickname was ‘Barney’.

‘No. Will.’ Martha complained. ‘It won’t do. He can’t grow up with such a name. It ain’t fitting.’

‘You know the town’s rough. A man needs courage and my son and heir’ll learn to defend himself, if I have anything to do with it.’

She saw that arguing was pointless, and went quietly to the kitchen to help the maid prepare the evening meal.

As the population increased, so did the police presence. Nerrigundah had three officers to keep order and provide escorts for gold despatched to the coast. Their presence helped the townfolk and miners feel more secure even though gangs of bushrangers roamed the countryside. By 1865 there were many stories about the exploits of Mad Dog Morgan, Ben Hall and Captain Thunderbolt. Some were exaggerations but they were frightening enough to make citizens concerned. In Nerrigundah miners worried that a gang might come into town, especially once stories circulated that the Clarke gang were in the locality. The gossip was all about being prepared and how to hide their findings.

Will was more bothered with his own concerns – on 18 August, he was again before the bench for wilfully using insulting and abusive language on the street after he was caught shouting curses at a passing coach that ploughed up mud outside the inn. Sergeant Hutchens was acting magistrate and he sentenced Will to one month imprisonment in Braidwood gaol. He scheduled him to be escorted to Braidwood on 24 August. When that morning dawned, Will was too intoxicated to travel, too drunk to sit on a horse. He sobered up the next day and went to Braidwood, escorted by Constable Miles O’Grady.

Once more Martha managed alone. Things were calmer. Though his behaviour was erratic, the children missed him and constantly asked Martha when he’d be back. Barney specially missed the boisterous games his father played with him.
On his return, Will continued to seek peace through drinking which led to further troubles. In January 1866 he was arrested for assaulting Bill Drew after a skirmish at the inn. Martha protested and paid the fine; Will promised to reform. But promises are hard to keep – other disturbances happened and his temper flared often so that Martha, Mary Ann and Barney walked around him gingerly. His anger never lasted long and he was remorseful when the rage subsided. In February, Martha threatened to leave when she tried to get him to cut back on his drinking, but he would start by midday most days, except Saturdays, when he began earlier. He said this was to keep the miners company.

Whenever he was challenged he’d fly into a temper. ‘You remember. I’m a “first-rate drinking man” and I beat the best pedestrian in Hobarton. So don’t ask me to drink water instead of wine!’

‘But Will, you’re drinking more now. You’re thinner and it isn’t happy grog. It’s angry stuff. Mary Ann and Barney are afraid of you. They stay out of your way. All your yelling and cursing’s bad for all of us – and for you. It doesn’t make for a happy home and I want my old Will back.’

‘Martha. You’re nagging. I’m the man of the house and I’ll drink when I want to!’ His voice was slurred and he stumbled towards the bar, gripping a bottle of rum. Martha followed, grabbed the bottle and dashed it into the fireplace.

‘Enough, Will. Stop, for God’s sake, stop.’ The flames dipped and then flared and shards of broken glass glinted among the coals. Will turned, uttered an oath and pulled his hat and coat from the stand near the door, before stomping out, feeling pleased that he had a good excuse to go up the road to Wallis’ pub and seek the company of Ned Wallis. There he’d have more to drink, while complaining about the way a wife tried to control a man.

By the first week of March 1866, the townfolk heard that bushrangers were robbing gold escorts and some worried that Nerrigundah might be next. When on Tuesday 6, the crack of a whip, the rattle of coach wheels and a loud ‘Halloa’ heralded the arrival of the mail coach many turned out to get the latest news. The wind was strong and from the south, snatching off hats and whipping eddies of dust along the street as an excited
crowd gathered outside the post office store where Mrs Pollock was selling the Sydney papers.

‘What’s the story on the Clarke gang,’ called Bill Drew.

Mrs Pollock glanced sideways, barely stopping as she passed over copies of the Herald. ‘Buy one and read all about it yerself,’ was her terse reply.

He fished coins from his waistcoat pocket, handed them over and grabbed the paper, quickly turning past the advertisements on page 1, going directly to the headlines: Bold Robbery in Bathurst. He swore. ‘Bloody Hell. They’re comin’ closer.’

The news was bad: the Clarkes had robbed coaches at Bathurst and murdered two travellers near Orange. After hearing this, a bunch of miners marched to the police camp demanding protection, but there was only one sergeant and two constables stationed in town. Sergeant Hutchens tried to calm the mob, insisting that his men were well trained and would do the best they could.

Just one month later, the Clarkes were six strong, and they ventured into the mountains behind the Gulph. Restless and running short of supplies, on Sunday 8 April, they took shelter in an abandoned hut at Deep Creek, near a public house run by Mrs Green. On Monday morning they ventured out and held up a mail boy and Mrs Green. They threatened them with pistols and marched them out of sight and into the bush. Two of the gang were left to guard them, while the rest returned to wait, hiding in underbrush and concealed near the road. Within an hour, John Emmott, Robert Jones and David Sutherland came by.

‘Stand and surrender!’ one of the gang yelled. Jones and Sutherland stopped, but Emmott had bank and promissory notes with him, so he urged his horse on, with a slap of the whip and a quick kick.

‘Hold, stand fast! Won’t you stand, by God!’

Emmott didn’t get far before one of the Clarkes took aim, hitting the horse in the shoulder. It fell and rolled on top of Emmott who struggled to stand. Another shot wounded him in the thigh. The robbers grabbed him, searched his pockets and his saddle bags. They found cash and promissory
notes. These they pocketed quickly before one ordered, ‘No tricks! March on. Get you into the bush.’

‘I’m bleeding, I can’t walk.’

‘Get moving, or you’ll get my pistol butt around your head.’

Jones stepped forward, ‘I’ll help him.’ Warily, moving slowly so that the Clarkes wouldn’t shoot again, he linked his arm through Emmott’s while Sutherland took the other one.

The gang members force-marched their prisoners to Mrs Green’s public house. There the mail boy’s letters were taken and Sutherland’s wallet with sovereigns and a five pound note. When Mrs Green protested that the ring they demanded was her wedding ring, they let her keep it. They moved on to Jones who had only two shillings in his pockets and Thomas Clarke sneered, ‘Put that back. It ain’t worth the bother.’

Fletcher jammed his gun into his belt and he turned to the rest of the gang. ‘We ain’t got much outta this lot. I reckon we oughta go into town. I was there last week and the gold safe’s in Pollock’s store. If we can get to that we’ll do fine.’

‘But what about the police?’ Tommy Clarke was doubtful. ‘We’ll hang if we’re caught.’

‘Gold, think of the gold! The pickings up stream’ve been good and I reckon the safe’d be full.’ Fletcher pointed to the few sovereigns and notes they’d collected and sneered. ‘Hardly enough buy hay for the horses. But, if we can get the gold from the post office store, we’ll be in the money.’

Tom Connell, the latest man to join the gang, was all for holding up the town. ‘We’ve been in the bush for days with little to show for it. I vote we head into town tonight.’ He nodded his head in the direction of the prisoners. ‘But, we need someone to look after this lot.’

Tommy Clarke considered the suggestion for barely a minute before deciding. ‘Fine. Fletcher, you know the town. You’d better lead us. Bill and Joe you stay here. Shoot ‘em if they give any trouble.’ He pointed his gun at the prisoners and growled. ‘To the back of the room, now and stay quiet the lot of you.’ He turned to his men. ‘Best get some disguises,’ he said as he grabbed a grey cloak and a red face mask. Another man pulled on a blue poncho and a blue hood with eye holes cut out. Fletcher dipped into his
kitbag, found a tin of black boot polish and smeared his face with it before offering it to the fourth gang member.

Clarke threatened the prisoners with his gun before turning to his men. ‘Check your weapons.’ Once weapons and bullets were checked the four headed outside and rode towards town.

Fletcher led them across the creek and onto Short Street where, near the corner of Gulph Street, he saw Wallis’s inn. Fletcher burst through the door and fired into the air, hitting the ceiling fan. ‘Stand! Nobody move!’ There was a commotion and Mrs Wallis tried to hide behind the bar. All four of the gang moved inside, pointing pistols at the drinkers.

‘Move to the back of the room and empty your pockets,’ snarled the one wearing the grey cloak.

The drinkers knew the bushrangers’ reputation and obeyed – except one, Bill Drew, who recognised Fletcher as a fellow miner.

‘You bastard! You said you were going to ride in the races at Mullenderree on St Patrick’s Day. What the hell are you doin’ back here holding up your mates? Fellers you’ve been drinkin’ with!’ Bill spat on the floor in disgust.

Fletcher came and stood over him, delivering a hefty punch to the chest, followed by a pistol whip to the head. ‘Fork out now!’ With that distraction, Ah Luk, one of the patrons, took the opportunity to jump out a back window and head to the Chinese camp.

Three of the robbers moved along the line of prisoners forcing them to empty pockets. Fletcher decided to leave and search for bigger rewards. ‘Pollock’s post office has the gold safe,’ he said as he walked out and up the street into town. Mrs Pollock had heard the shot and looked outside just as Fletcher came up. He waved his pistol and grabbed her arm. ‘Gimme the key to the gold safe.’

She screamed, ‘No!’

He forced her to walk, pistol at her back, to Wallis’s. Close by the inn door, she turned, pulled the key from her pocket and quickly threw it over his shoulder and onto the dusty road. Fletcher cursed. ‘God damn you woman! Someone get a light.’

Norm Pollock watched as his mother was marched away. He had Barney Guest with him and they bolted out the post office back door and
along to the police barracks where they found Constable Miles O’Grady ill in bed. He was suffering from the Sydney Fever that he’d caught on his last trip to Sydney with the gold escort. Now his ailing mind was filled with confused visions of his brother’s farm near Bathurst, Chinese miners chasing him with machetes, his father’s hovel in County Clare and the wailing of a beautiful woman he knew was a banshee. That troubled him. He’d always believed she’d be an ugly-faced hag, sufficiently frightening to make one welcome death.

His teeth chattered, chills ran through his body and his bunk was sweaty as his body tried to clear the poison. Even in this befuddled state he recognised Norm and Barney.

‘Come quick, the Clarkes are down the road, holding up Wallis’s pub!’ Norm’s voice shook. ‘They’re after the key to the gold safe, but Ma chucked it away.’

O’Grady sat up slowly, shook his head to clear his vision, reached for his pants and shot gun. Duty called and it was up to him to protect the town’s people. But what the hell was he doing here? He was only nineteen and should be quietly minding sheep or ploughing rows like his father before him. Gold town, gold miners and bushrangers were not what he’d hoped for in the new world.

Norm was agitated and urged him to the door. ‘Ma’s there, Pa’s away. You gotta help!’ O’Grady pulled on his shoes and saw his hands were shaking. Would he be able to shoot straight if the need came?

‘How many were there?’
‘Four, I think.’
‘Where did you last see them, lad?’
‘One took Ma up to Wallis’s pub.’
‘Okay son, you both stay here. Keep your heads down.’

Barney was afraid and scrambled to hide under a bed. Norm watched as the constable walked to the door. O’Grady paused, looked around and listened before walking onto the street. It was around half past 7 and the moon was just rising. Solid timber buildings cast shadows on either side of the road. He saw the familiar hardware shop, the butcher’s shop and four inns, all with stables. Some 100 yards down the street was Wallis’s pub.
There were a few lights in homes and smoke from cooking fires hung low over Gulph Creek. There was the scent of something exotic swinging on the breeze drifting down from the joss house further uphill near the Chinese camp. Drunken voices, singing and laughing, blared out from the public houses. Though he knew many of the regulars, this was a town that harboured restless men in search of quick money and many couldn’t be trusted. They’d come from all over the world, English, Irish, Chinese, Germans and even an American or two looking for something better than California.

The road was ridged and had been churned up by carriage wheels since the last rains. He made his way, sticking close to the shadows of the buildings, hurrying in a stooped fashion across the gaps between them. He saw a lantern way down at the end of the street, near Wallis’s door. It was held aloft by a large man. O’Grady’s heart was beating fast with the fever, but now it rushed at a gallop, his knees felt weak. He prayed. ‘Oh Sweet Jesus help me. I’ve left the troubles back home to meet more here.’ He fingered the trigger of his gun, now heavy in his hand as he moved shivering and slinking closer to the distant lantern.

He was near the Jones’s cottage when Eileen Jones peered out from behind her door. She saw O’Grady staggering from weakness and begged him not to go on.

‘Duty,’ he said. ‘The Clarkes are in town.’ She’d heard stories about the bushrangers’ brutality so, fearful of what might come, she turned back and locked the door.

Half crouching, half crawling O’Grady edged towards the man with the lantern. Though he was still at some distance, the constable lifted his arm, looked along the barrel, took careful aim and fired. The bushranger swung around to return fire. At the sound of gunshot, dogs up and down the valley began to bark.

Fletcher dropped his lantern and turned towards O’Grady, who retreated along the eastern side of the street. Fletcher paused, listened, trying to discover who was there and how many. He looked in the direction of the stumbling footsteps just as O’Grady stepped out from beside a slab hut and raised his gun. Seeing the officer, Fletcher knelt, took aim and fired.
At that same instant O’Grady fired – he was hit by Fletcher’s bullet as he lowered his gun.

‘I’m shot!’ he yelled. He grabbed at his belly as he reeled, feeling nothing at first and then a searing pain as the blood and ooze around his navel seeped through his fingers. Dogs barked, horses whinnied, shouting came from the Chinese camp.

In the doorway of Wallis’s, Fletcher too lay crying in pain. O’Grady’s bullet had glanced sideways off his arm and entered his body through the arm pit. He was mortally wounded. O’Grady started to limp back to barracks but was too weak. He fell to the ground outside the Jones’s cottage. Eileen heard a knocking on her door and O’Grady’s voice calling. ‘I am shot dead.’

When she opened the door, he fell into her arms. She dragged him inside and laid him on a couch close by the door. He had no weapon with him and she hoped the Clarke gang would not find him. She saw his wound and tried to comfort him as she sat by his side and stroked his brow.

At the Free Selection an exciting game of bagatelle was in progress with a dozen Irish miners cheering on their champion, hoping he’d beat a newcomer to town. The gunshots couldn’t be heard above their cheering as they urged on their man. Will thought he heard something, but decided it was some bugger shooting possums and went back to polishing glasses and drawing ale.

Up at the Chinese camp, Ah Luk urged his compatriots to defend their mines – they were angered by the shots and a screaming mob armed with lanterns, machetes and pistols raced to the town. Hearing the hubbub, the Clarkes grabbed their mounts, abandoned the wounded Fletcher, and galloped off. In town, everyone now knew something was afoot – inn doors opened, cottage doors were slammed shut and lights doused. A few local men, roused to their own defence, began to pursue the gang. They found that their courage was rising with the increasing distance between them and the bushrangers, who by now had fled across the creek and into thick bush, apparently heading towards Deep Creek.

As the din of the pursuing men died away, Norm and Barney cautiously emerged. Norm was anxious to check on his mother and Barney hoped to slink back home before his parents noticed his absence. But
Martha had missed him. She’d searched the inn and was heading into the street just as he tried to sneak in. She grabbed his shoulder and shook him. ‘You wicked, wicked boy! Where have you been? Are you hurt?’ Seeing he was safe, she stooped, kissed him and twisted his ear. ‘Don’t ever do that again.’

O’Grady’s was a slow lingering death over three long hours, while Eileen sat by his side. His thoughts were rambling and his mutterings were about Ireland and the folk back home. He murmured ‘Mammy’ as he slipped into delirium. Eileen stroked his brow and whispered comfort until she knew he no longer heard her. She began to pray. A few brave souls gathered at her door and they joined her in prayer. The rest of the town stayed behind locked doors in case the Clarke brothers returned. Later that night, those who’d given chase straggled back. The gang made a clean getaway.

Knowing that bushrangers were in the vicinity kept the locals on guard for the next few months. News came that they’d held up the Moruya mail on 16 July, stole from Morris’s Store at Mudmelong on 17 July. On 21 July a shoot-out with police in the bush behind Braidwood left one of their number, Pat Connell, dead. After that, people in town checked each crime report to see if the Clarkes looked like returning. Martha and Will collected their valuables and hid them in a bucket that they lowered down their well. Tensions were high and everyone remained nervous.

Will felt responsible for the safety of his family so he kept a pistol behind the bar, even though he doubted his hands were steady enough to aim accurately. He tried to stay sober, but there were times when a water cannon blast from a mine, or rifle shots in the hills had him reliving the Spanish war. He was transported back: he smelled gunfire, saw the enemy advancing and heard the roar of canons; shaking and sweating he’d calm his nerves with rum.

On 22 September he was arrested and charged with ‘exposing his person’. Constable Brennan came to the Free Selection with the news and early the next morning Martha hurried to the police station and spoke to Sergeant Hutchens. Her cheeks were flushed and her voice soft. ‘Sergeant,
you know Will and how hard he works. He had some grog in our bar and went on up to have a pint with Ned Wallis. I’m sure he was on his way home when he had to relieve himself. He’s a good man and, it was night, so he no doubt thought he’d be hidden if he stepped behind the tree.’

‘Yes. I know Will and his habits.’ Sergeant Hutchens nodded. ‘And I’ll withdraw the charge if you can try to make him take a little more care.’ He turned to the junior constable. ‘Bring Will Guest out from the lock up.’

Will was shabby and in handcuffs when he shuffled in. He looked at Martha and the sergeant and apologised softly to both. Martha felt a tear prick her eye when she remembered the bold smiling lad she’d first met at the Waterloo. This prisoner was just a shadow of that man. Sergeant Hutchens issued a caution and Will vowed to behave better in future.

The summer sun scorched down and the town sweated through a Christmas heat wave. By the end of December, most were praying for cooling winds and rain. Will decided that his patrons’ dry throats deserved good booze, so he ordered in extra supplies and the 1867 New Year celebrations at the Free Selection were wild. Those in luck drank to their success and sang bawdy songs, while the less fortunate tried to drown their misery. Will joined in until near dawn, when one fellow threw up all over the billiard table. Seeing this, Will’s temper flashed into rage and he threw a punch just missing the drunk. Both were caught off balance and ended up brawling on the floor.

Martha rushed in. ‘Enough, enough. I’m calling time.’ She set about closing the bar and told Will to get to bed.

He tried harder to control his drinking but some days he was drunk from morning till night. This went on until midday on 28 February 1867, when he saddled his horse to ride out and inspect land they owned at the most recent diggings. Hung over and not quite steady on his feet, he was less than secure in the saddle.

The day was hot and smoke beyond the mountains hinted at distant bushfires. The sun burned even his tanned arms, mosquitoes and little stinging March flies were hovering. Will scrunched his eyes against the glare and heat. His throat was dry as the blustery wind, laden with dust, passed over him. As he approached Gulph Creek, a pair of cockatoos...
flapped above, white against the blue sky, challenging with their aggressive screech. Will looked up just as a snake slithered across the track and the horse reared, unseating him. He was thrown into the creek. There was a sickening crack as his head hit rocks beside the bank. His body twisted into a crumpled heap and was bounced along by the rushing stream. A miner working nearby ran into the whirling eddies to pull him up onto the bank. And he lay there unconscious.

‘Hey, give me a hand! It’s Will Guest. He’s hurt.’

‘Someone grab the horse.’

‘Better get a doctor – he don’t look too good.’

The men tried to help. One caught the horse and calmed it. Then they hoisted Will up so that he lay across the saddle. Holding him firmly there, they led horse and rider back to the Free Selection.

Martha was chatting with Mrs Pollock near her front door when she saw the men leading Will’s horse. She sensed disaster as the small procession advanced. It was Will and he wasn’t riding. She sent Mary Ann and Barney indoors and she raced to meet him. As she got close she saw he was hurt. She touched his back, hoping to rouse him, but he didn’t respond. She grabbed his hand and walked beside the procession until they pulled up at the inn, where the men lifted him inside. They carried him upstairs, placing him gently onto their bed. She saw how badly injured he was. There was blood coming from a wound above his forehead and mud around his jacket and neckerchief. She called for a cloth and started to wipe his face and throat clean. There was heavy bruising on his neck and his right arm swung at a strange angle. Though badly hurt, he wasn’t moaning and she knew he was unconscious. She dreaded the worst.

‘Get the doctor – quickly!’

‘It’s all right, ma’am, we’ve already sent a rider for him,’ said one of the miners.

The surgeon arrived three hours later and carefully examined the still unconscious Will. In the bedroom, a small lamp threw a yellowish light around the room, but not to the furthest corners, and the faint smell of burning oil scented the air. Martha, Mary Ann and Barney kept vigil at his bedside. There was nothing to do but wait as the afternoon dragged on into a long night. Mrs Pollock and Mrs Wallis dropped by to comfort them. The
miners who rescued him and a few patrons waited in the bar, which was unusually quiet.

Will died just before dawn.

Grief is embedded in every love story. Martha and Will had lived theirs, now he was gone and her pain was as great as their love had been. She knew he was flawed, all men were; often he’d been difficult, but he was hers and she loved him. She felt lost. She couldn’t believe it; so much confusion and so many questions. Her thoughts were troubled as she searched for answers.

That night, after he died she sat by his bedside until just before dawn when she heard Annie, the maid, bustling around in the kitchen. She rose, completed her toilet and joined her. Annie made breakfast, and placed tea and toast in front of her, saying, ‘Do eat something, ma’am. You need to keep your strength up.’

I’m sorry, Annie, but I feel ill. I’m sure I’d be sick if I tried to force food down. You’re a good girl; best leave me be for now.’

As she looked around the kitchen, she felt a sudden irritation – how dare he leave without saying goodbye? Anger flooded in, but was quickly followed by guilt. Why was she angry? What had he done to deserve that? He hadn’t intended to leave her. What a mean unworthy woman she was to blame the dead. She felt sick and weary. She looked around. ‘Annie, how will I manage? What’ll I do? How can I go on living when Will is dead?’

The maid had no answer and quietly busied herself with the tea cups.

Martha tried to control her mind, but her body rebelled. She was nauseous, yet as empty as a crusty shell left behind by a cicada in summer. Her breasts felt as though they’d shrivelled and become as dry as the dust blowing along the road to the graveyard. Her throat had a stone lodged in it. Her arms seemed to have lost all strength as she linked her fingers and twisted her wedding band. Deep down she knew there was a wound as raw and fresh as though a knife had gone right through her. But she wasn’t ready to deal with that yet.

Soon after sun-up, Sergeant Hutchens was at the diggings by the creek interviewing the miners who’d pulled Will from the water.
'Just routine,' he assured them. ‘I have to write a report for the coroner, so I need to get the facts.’ He questioned each, in turn, on what they had seen and what they’d done. He was satisfied with their versions, all of which tied the sequence of events neatly together. As he was well aware of William Guest’s personal foibles, he decided it was probably Will’s drinking as much as anything that had been responsible.

Next he rode up to the Free Selection to talk to Martha. He found her in the kitchen with Mary Ann. She was trying to contain her grief. She knew she’d have to do her best for Will’s memory and she wasn’t surprised when he questioned her.

‘How was your husband yesterday?’
‘He was well and much as usual.’
‘He rode off around midday?’
‘Yes, he went to look over the diggings.’
‘When did the men bring him back here?’
‘Around half an hour later. I’m not sure. Everything happened in a rush after that. I saw that he was badly injured and they’d already sent for the doctor. He came quickly, but there was nothing he could do.’
‘Anything else you think might be relevant?’
‘No. Such a dreadful thing. Dreadful – a tragedy. So quickly gone. I’ll be lost without him. I don’t know what I’m going to do.’
‘Mrs Guest, I’m truly sorry for your loss. You do understand that I’ll have to make a report on this accident.’ He gently shook her hand before he bade farewell and returned to the station to file his paperwork.

News of Will’s death spread quickly. Friends and strangers dropped by and Martha was sensitive to the different ways folk expressed their condolences. Some wished her well as though she’d been ill – strange, since it was Will who’d been injured and died. A few were awkward when his name was mentioned, as if they wanted to forget him. Some suggested she should take the children and move to the coast. Others simply stayed away – was it because they didn’t know what to say, or were they uncaring? One assured her she’d get over it and that she had to keep busy. A cynical inner voice prompted her to bite back. ‘I’ve got no option, two children to care for and an inn to run.’
In her pain, she marvelled at the way the rest of the town continued to go about its usual business, when her world had been turned upside down. She watched people talking and laughing and felt an outsider, a prisoner in her own body, a watcher from another world. But tears would not come.

In the late afternoon, the undertaker rode over from nearby Cobargo. He arrived, dressed in formal black and his clothes carried some of the dust of the road. He tethered his horse to a post near the front door, knocked, then removed his hat as he entered and bowed to Martha.

‘Madam, this is a sad day. Let me express my condolences for your loss.’

‘Thank you.’

‘May I see the gentleman? I understand he was your husband.’

Walking as though in a dream, she led the way to the bedroom, where the body lay. She half expected or hoped that Will would sit up and say this was one of his silly jokes – but he didn’t. At the bedside she gently touched his hair. The brown curls, now streaked a little with grey at the temples, were soft and felt the same as they had through their near 20 years of marriage. Loved and familiar. She stroked his cheek, but she quickly pulled her fingers away. His warmth, his spirit was gone.

‘He’s so cold! He was always full of energy and life – but it’s all gone. Where, is he? What am I to do?’

The protective wall she’d built around her heart broke, the tears she’d kept frozen inside shattered like crystal and sorrow engulfed her. A solid mass of grief hit her with the impact of a thrown punch. She felt the pain first in the throat and it went from there to her eyes. She feared she would break apart with the power of her anguish. She started to sob.

The undertaker was sympathetic but he had a job to do. ‘I’m sorry ma’am, do you wish to continue?’

‘Yes, it has to be done.’

‘Are you going to have a lying in for folk to pay their respects? And we should discuss when the burial will be.’

The thought of Will alone in the burial ground was too much to bear. She hurried from the room and out to the back garden. At first the dog sniffed at her skirts and wagged its tail, but slunk away when she kicked and
punched the kitchen door. Eventually, she collapsed breathless onto a
garden chair and stared at nothing for minutes on end.

Annie came looking for her. ‘Ma’am, shall I tell the undertaker to
come back later?’

‘No, no. I’ll come. It must be done and better to do it now.’ Though
drained, she stood, took a deep breath and forced herself to get on with the
task at hand. For, after all, there was no one now to lean on – perhaps Mary
Ann, but Martha knew it was up to her to make arrangements and hold the
family together, so she drew on her inner steel and decided to live from
moment to moment. And right now she had to plan the funeral and select a
text for the service.

Next day she talked to Mary Ann and the Pollock family before
deciding on all the details. She organised the minister, the chapel and order
of service. Two days later, all was ready – the sun was hot and the sky clear
as the family walked to the church, where many of the townfolk were
already seated. Henry Cowdroy delivered the eulogy, while Martha sat
quietly in the front row with Mary Ann and Barney on either side. ‘It’s all
unreal,’ she whispered as she followed the casket to the burial ground after
the ceremony. Mary Ann held her elbow.

A small band of mourners crunched along the road to the cemetery with the
pall bearers, Henry Cowdroy, his brother John, Ned Wallis and John
Pollock leading the way. The graveyard was unfenced and, though it had
been cleared two years ago, saplings were springing up here and there
between the scattered graves. A few headstones showed older burial spots –
some were simple wooden crosses, others were made of tin, now rusted by
the weather. Will’s grave was close by the entrance and a narrow gravel
path led the way. At the site, the minister offered prayers before the coffin
was lowered into the ground. Martha leaned against Mary Ann’s shoulder as
the men shovelled earth. When she heard the clods hit the timber coffin with
a heavy, deadening thump she wept. It all seemed so final, yet unbelievable
and her mind refused to take in her loss. It was as if she was walking
through a waking nightmare.
For days she clung to her children and became overprotective in case she might lose them as well. She felt the need for the warmth of human touch. Mary Ann understood what was happening and mourned, but Barney at five was bewildered. All he knew was that his father had gone and his mother was sad, so he often sat by her side and held her hand.

Martha relied on old habits to introduce some sense into her changed circumstances. She tried to maintain routines and rose each morning at the normal time to work as usual. For many nights after his death she cried into the pillow that still smelled of him; she curled up in the hollow in their feather mattress where he used to lie. During the day she tried to keep busy so she shook out and tidied the clothes stacked in his drawers; she left his boots beside the back door; she washed his razor and wiped down his strop. Once or twice at meal time she started to set his place at table, only to remember that he wasn’t coming. When Barney stamped his feet and yelled in temper she almost said, ‘I’ll tell your Pa,’ but stopped herself just in time. She especially missed him in the evenings, when patrons came round to drink and play billiards – though crowded, the bar felt empty without him there as host.

She swung between hanging onto Will and letting go. Day to day necessities caused her to have the rouse-about take care of Will’s horse and maintain the heavy lifting work. She struggled on, and then one day, almost two months later, she remembered her friends, Annabel Swift and the other widows in Hobart Town, who ran inns. She knew she was as strong as they and could do the same. The Free Selection had a good income, her gold trading was a success and several mining leases were profitable, so financially they were secure, but she would have to manage alone and find extra staff to make up for the work Will had done. During the next few weeks she hired a cook, a lad for the bar and she gave the rouse-about more duties. She relaxed a little. Life was quieter now with no ugly surprises.

The news was not all bad, and around this time the townfolk relaxed a little too, when word came that the Clarkes had been cornered and captured at Jingera on 17 April after a shootout with police, during which they wounded Constable Walsh and his black tracker, Sir Watkin. The Clarkes were sent to Darlinghurst gaol, where they were charged with various crimes including the murder of two special constables. They were
convicted and finally executed on 25 June 1867. Only then did the miners, shopkeepers and families of Nerrigundah feel safe. Though there might be other thieves around, none had the reputation for brutality that the Clarkes had. Martha felt some relief when she heard the news – fear of them returning was one less challenge to be faced.

One day at the end of July, while busy with chores, Martha looked around and realised she was coping. ‘I’m managing just fine,’ she whispered. ‘I’m the head of this family. My children love me and I care for them. I can do what I like. I’m free.’ She went into the bedroom and carefully searched under Will’s socks in the top bureau drawer. There she found his watch – a bit old and with a few dents, but it had been precious to him. She pulled out one of his scarves, wrapped the watch in it and carefully placed it in a drawer among her own things. ‘That’ll be for Barney when he’s 21.’

Not long after that she decided to part with a few of Will’s possessions: Henry Cowdroy, a neighbour’s lad, was courting Mary Ann – she gave him Will’s saddle, his riding boots and thickest wool coat. Other items she donated to those down on their luck. She told Barney stories about Will to ensure that he wouldn’t be forgotten. Life settled into a routine, with Martha as hostess serving meals and welcoming staying guests.

Months passed and by the end of November she decided it was time to erect the grave stone. She wanted something worthy of the man she loved, so she sent to the best quarry and stonemasons in Moruya and had them carve a headstone engraved with the inscription:

Thou art gone to the Grave but we will not lament thee,
Though sorrow and darkness encompass the tomb.
Our Saviour has passed through its portals before thee,
The lamp of his love be thy guide through the gloom.

Early in the New Year it was ready to be put in position. Martha, Mary Ann, Barney, Ah Sun and the Cowdroy and Pollock families walked to the graveyard and watched, under a warm and lazy sun, as workers lifted the stone and settled it in place. Martha planted a small rose bush and the crowd standing by the graveside said a few quiet prayers. Away in the hills there
was the clink of miners’ cradles, currawongs calling and down by the creek
the steady thrum of a village working.

Back at the *Free Selection* that night, Martha felt strong. She had
Mary Ann and Barney and her inn was doing well. She knew she was
capable and ready to face tomorrow, the day after and the days after that.
On 10 January 1896, the Pambula Voice, Bega city’s favourite newspaper, carried news of the death of Martha Guest.

Word came from Sydney that Mrs Martha Guest had succumbed to ailments of long standing. On 11 December she went to Sydney for medical advice but did not benefit from the treatment. She was a native of Cornwall, her maiden name being Goodman. She was well known to residents of Nerrigundah where she conducted the Free Settlement inn and more recently as owner of the Club Hotel in Bega. The deceased was a good friend to many poor people who, in common with many inhabitants of the district will sincerely say they regret to hear of her death.

Two weeks later the Bega Daily carried details of her funeral.

Many folk gathered at the Bega Wharf yesterday to meet and mourn the death of Martha Guest who died recently after a long illness. Her body was returned from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney on the Southern Star. It was a solemn sight as the cortege left for Bega graveyard. There were eighteen carriages in the procession, which was headed by Henry and Mary Ann Cowdroy, her son in law and daughter, together with Barney Guest, her son, and his wife Catherine. They were followed by two carriages carrying several of Mrs Guest’s many grandchildren. At the graveside the Reverend Crawford said prayers over the coffin; the congregation sang ‘Abide with me’ before the body was interred. It was touching to see her grandchildren, led by her eldest granddaughter Martha Cowdroy, each drop a single rose into the grave. Residents of the district will regret the loss of this good friend to many. She was 71 years old.