

Moving Islands, Shifting Perspectives: a Microhistorical Essay
and Two Novellas (One Partial)

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Abstract

Travel reading inspired me to visit Vanuatu in 2003. Once there, I found a country that contained traces of what I had read, but also very different stories and life-ways. I have since noticed reductions similar to those I found in travel writing in other literatures concerning the archipelago. I have written the fiction and microhistorical essay contained in this thesis as a way of complicating and perhaps widening perspectives on Vanuatu and the imperialisms experienced there.

In his article 'Against Ethnography' historical anthropologist Nicholas Thomas cautions against what he describes as anthropology's gravitation towards exoticism. As practitioners translate fieldwork into provocative ethnography, disciplinary demands and authorial desires to produce successful ethnographic work often lead to the creation of what Thomas calls 'persuasive' or 'analytic fictions' that over-represent cultural difference. In Vanuatu these pressures are not limited to anthropology; they equally apply to travel writing and other literatures. This raises the question of how we might write in ways that evoke more than exotic cultural difference in the islands while not fabricating cultural difference's absence. How do we write compelling, non-reductive stories and histories that represent Vanuatu's intra and inter-cultural conflicts, resolutions, and enduring complexities?

This thesis draws upon various archives, scholarly publications, fiction, travel writing, oral histories, notes from visits and fieldwork in the islands in 2003 and 2014, as well as relationships, begun in England, with former expatriates to Vanuatu or the erstwhile New Hebrides. In my microhistorical essay and novellas I endeavor to recover, recreate and reify experiences of Vanuatu that are multivalent, multi-vocal and multi-lateral. My work asserts that fiction, historical and contemporary, and the research that underwrites it can help us to regard Vanuatu and its past and present experiences of imperialism through a fresh paradigm that is inclusive, complex, and open-ended.

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*New Brunswick, NJ
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Lastly...history, one might say on the scale not of man, but of individual men... 'l'histoire événementielle', that is, the history of events: surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs. A history of brief, rapid, nervous fluctuations, by definition ultra-sensitive; the least tremor sets all its antennae quivering. But as such it is the most exciting of all, the richest in human interest, and also the most dangerous. We must learn to distrust this history with its still burning passions, as it was felt, described, and lived by contemporaries whose lives were as short and short-sighted as ours. It has the dimensions of their anger, dreams, or illusions...of the poor, the humble, eager to write, to talk of themselves and of others. This precious mass of paper distorts, filling up the lost hours and assuming a false importance. The historian who takes a seat in Philip II's chair and reads his papers finds himself transported into a strange one-dimensional world, a world of strong passions certainly, blind like any other living world, our own included, and unconscious of the deeper realities of history, of the running waters on which our frail barks are tossed like cockleshells.

Fernand Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume 1

He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars

William Blake, 'Jerusalem' [The Holiness of Minute Particulars]

John the great
my brother here is joe: my name is karapanaman
every thing is near to us
see us two joe captain cockle shell

Excerpted from a John Frum letter dispatched from Joe Nalpin on Efate to his father on Tanna; intercepted by Condominium Police in September 1941

Delivering Judgements: A Microhistorical Essay of Murder and Justice in the New Hebrides, 1923



Figure 1: Map of Clapcott Property at Tasmalum, Espiritu Santo, 1913 (reproduced by kind permission of the National Archives of Vanuatu).¹¹

Introduction

On the morning of 24 July 1923, Asapele and Lolorave, two indigenous men from Espiritu Santo's interior, descended from the Bibaka Hills and into the cool of the Wai'loa River basin. Each was armed with a shotgun. They skirted Tasmalum Bay, moving quietly, listening for the chop of a launch motor, scanning the waters. Then they made their way off the beach, onto the copra plantation of the British settler, Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott.

They approached Clapcott's home from the rear. A dog began barking and Clapcott came to his backdoor whereupon Lolorave enquired as to whether or not they might purchase fowls from the planter. Clapcott replied that he had no fowls to spare. Nothing more was said. Asapele

¹¹ 'Tassimalum' as it appears in Fig. 1 is a variation of the area referred to as Tasmalum throughout this thesis.

swung his gun up and fired a shot into the planter's chest, knocking him back into the house. Lolorave's shot hit the settler just above the groin as he fell to the floor.

Shortly thereafter, three more men, Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni, joined Asapele and Lolorave at the house, whereupon they too each fired a single shot into the dead body of the Englishman. Things were subsequently taken from the house and store: tins of money, matches, a small basket, a mosquito net. Asapele pulled the body out of the house and onto the grass. Over the next days, more would be taken from the property: sacks of rice, a meatsafe, a damaged stove, a bottle of ink, a magnifying glass, galvanized fencing wire, barbed wire, the house's sole reading chair. Furniture, stores, tools, and cash were carried into the bush. Parts of Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott were removed as well. His body was stripped of clothing, ring, and watch. Two fingers were cut from one hand and one from the other. An ear was taken, as were all of his toes and his genitals. When his body was found on 31 July, all the flesh from his buttocks down to his feet was missing entirely, seemingly sliced away from the bones with care.² What motivated these mutilations and what became of the missing flesh remains unclear. The goods and cash, however, were brought to Ronovuro, a charismatic leader who had ordered Clapcott's murder.ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱ Variations on the name include Ronovura, Runovoro, Rongofuro, etc.

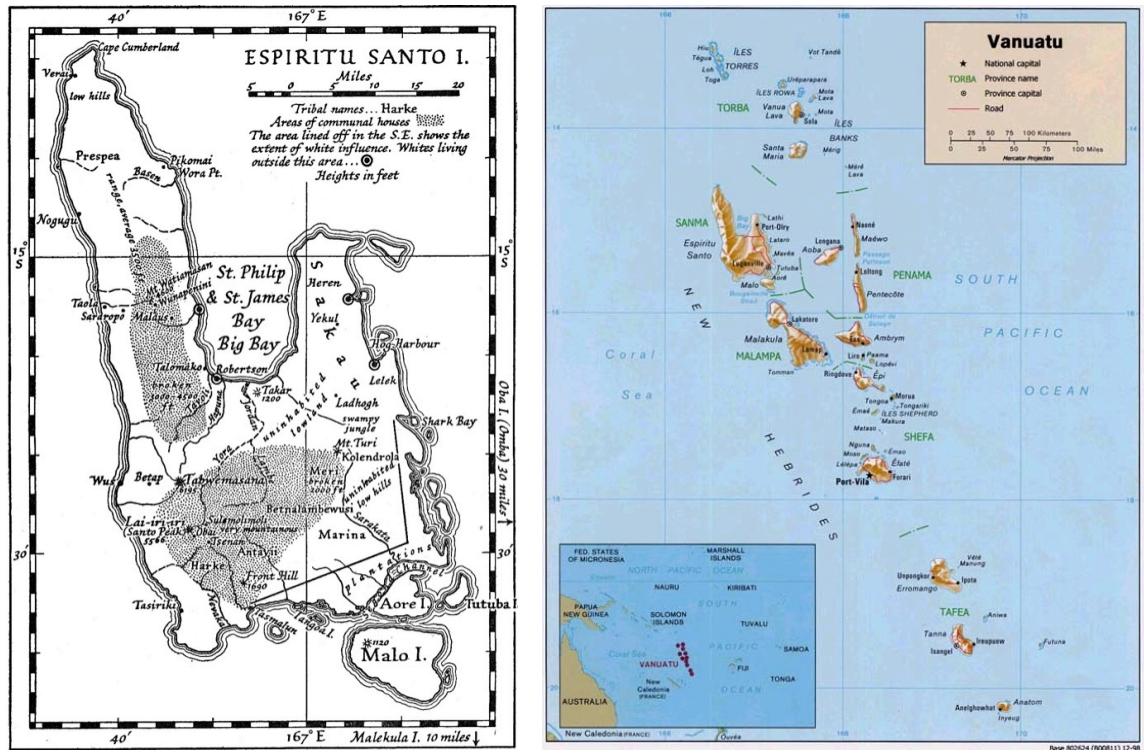


Fig. 2: Map of the island of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, 1936 (reproduced by kind permission of John Wiley & Sons Limited).³

Fig. 3: Administrative Map of Vanuatu (reproduced from The Nations Online Project).⁴

To many Pacific audiences in 1923 this event would have appeared more commonplace than shocking. The violence that characterized much of early Euro-Melanesian relations in the Pacific in general, and the New Hebrides in particular, is as old as first contact. Only days after making what had been the first European landfall in the islands in 1606, the Spanish explorer Pedro-Fernandez de Quiros and his conquistadores opened fire on the people of Espiritu Santo's Big Bay.⁵ This is not to discount violence that pre-existed European encounters in the islands, but merely to assert that, in the New Hebrides, Melanesians' and Europeans' experiences of one another and of violence between each other entered history almost conjointly. Over the next two hundred years, through the sporadic visitations of whalers, sandalwood hunters, black-birders, legitimate recruiters, missionaries and the occasional victims of shipwreck, killings, perpetrated by islanders and Europeans alike, persisted throughout the archipelago. In the fifty years preceding

Reginald Clapcott's death, a number of murders occurred on Espiritu Santo alone.⁶

There was, of course, a wide range of interactions between islanders and foreigners in the Pacific, and relations on Espiritu Santo and elsewhere in the New Hebrides were far from being simply murderous. It is only to suggest that by 1923 the murder of a European settler in the archipelago, even a brutal murder, was nothing particularly novel. How is it then that this murder persists in being notably different? What is it about the killing of Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott, a deaf and supposedly inoffensive planter alone at the remotest edge of empire, that makes this instance of Pacific violence what the microhistorian Edoardo Grendi termed an 'exceptional normal'?⁷

Part of what is exceptional about the Clapcott Murder is the expanse of its representation. In 1923 and the early months of 1924, Clapcott's killing, unlike other, contemporaneous deaths, connected Espiritu Santo's interior to the innermost chambers of metropolitan governance.⁸ Gossip, personal letters, international news media, legal correspondence, judicial documentation, official memoranda, confidential telegrams, stolen trade goods, even flesh itself embodied a substantial archive. Nearly a century of history has seen this corpus fragmented.⁹ Scholars have dispersed its pieces into discourses relating to ethnology, theology, social anthropology, cultural anthropology, political science, literature, and history. The event also endures within the founding ideology and rhetoric of Nagriamel, an active political force with seats in modern Vanuatu's Parliament.ⁱⁱⁱ The relative insignificance of the victim and fairly commonplace nature of his killing might seem incommensurate with the event's geographical, social, and historical reach, indeed, one might wonder what more needs saying. But there is something—something vague and disquieting at the edges of the event's representations in secondary scholarship—that begs further inspection.

ⁱⁱⁱ After Independence in 1980, the New Hebrides official became the Republic of Vanuatu.

We look closely, and the body becomes bodies. We listen closely, and new voices join the welter.

On 13 November 1923, at 5 o'clock in the morning with the tropical sun already up, three South Santo men—the murderers Asapele and Lolorave, convicted of killing Reginald Clapcott, and their prophet, Ronovuro, principal conspirator in the crime—dropped through gallows' trapdoors and were executed in Port Vila, on the island of Efate. Theirs were the first capital sentences executed by the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. The gallows had been constructed specifically for the inaugural event.¹⁰ Present as witnesses were British Resident Commissioner Merton King, Commandant of the British Constabulary Ernest Seagoe, Condominium Medical Officer Dr. Madeline, and the Presbyterian missionary Rev. Eric M. K. Raff.¹¹ If the prophet, Ronovuro, known for his outspokenness, said anything that morning, before he dropped through the trapdoor, it is unknown to us. No contemporary or scholarly accounts have voiced the claims or experiences of the accused; they are likewise muted within the broadcasts between territory and metropole. Precisely because of the Clapcott Murder's expansive representation, a lacuna such as this makes for something exceptional.

Suspecting that some record of the accused men's testimony survived, I travelled to Vanuatu in 2014. There was no digital catalogue to browse before going. No finding aids to secure my hunch. The staff at Vanuatu's National Archive welcomed my visit, but warned me not to get my hopes up. Nevertheless, I maintained belief that, if I could just get to Vanuatu, something would speak to me. If I could put my ear to the right ground, I'd hear something buried there.

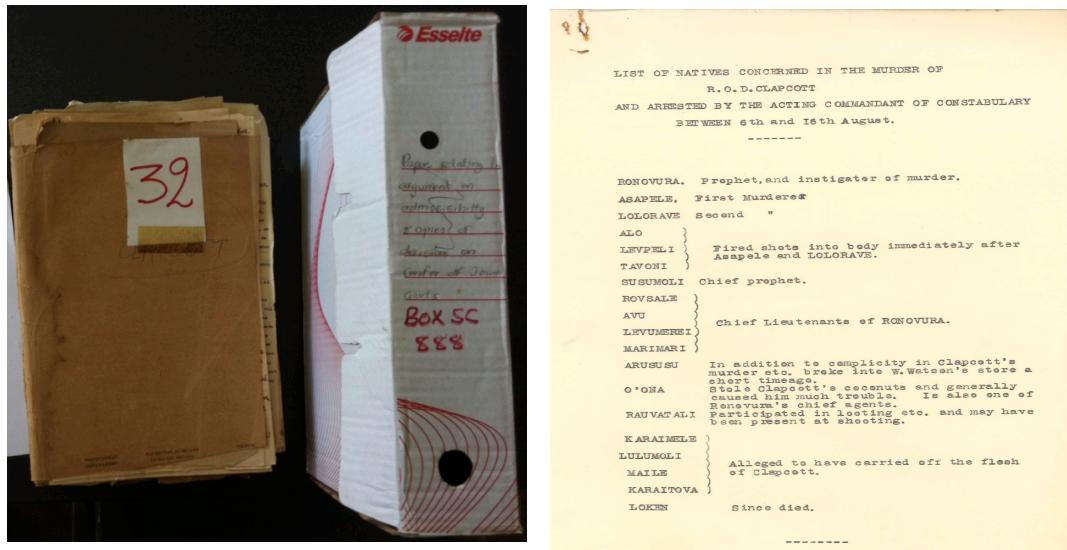


Fig. 4: Vanuatu Supreme Court Box 888 & File '32 Clapcott' (reproduced by kind permission of the National Archives of Vanuatu).¹²

Fig. 5: Arrest record from the 20 August 1923 report of Acting Commandant of the British Constabulary (reproduced by kind permission of Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services).¹³

Within Supreme Court Box 888, amid files entitled 'District Court Case Lists 1979' and 'Papers relating to arguments and admissibility' is a file labelled '32 Clapcott'. The thick brown folio contains loose papers and three sub-files entitled 'Santo Murder', '2nd Count of Larceny', and 'Mixed Tribunal French'. In the interviews, formal pre-trial examinations, judicial hearings and court minutes documented within these files, we can locate the voices of Ronovuro, Asapele, Lolorave, and fourteen other local men brought to stand before the Joint Court in connection with the murder, robbery and cannibalization of ROD Clapcott. The men spoke little or no English and were illiterate. Their words are translated, transcribed, and circumscribed by the contexts they were uttered in, but these records are the closest the accused islanders come to self-representation within the archive. For the majority of the men, they are their last and only recorded words.

Taken together, Vanuatu's file '32 Clapcott' and other archival documents in the United Kingdom and New Zealand allow us, then, to listen to a history of the Clapcott Murder with both politics and people

put back in. We are able to pick out the voice of Ronovuro, the prophet who ordered Clapcott's killing. He was rumoured to have inhaled powers of sorcery from his notorious uncle's dying breath, to have received further arcane knowledge from the glowing fruits of a mythic tree deep in the bush, to have preached resurrection in the flesh, raised his own brother and a cow back from the dead, to be invulnerable to bullets, and have the power of flight. Gathering followers from all over Santo and its surrounding islets, he charged them cash and pigs for their inclusion, proclaiming a flood would come to sweep the island's coast clear of Europeans and Christianized New Hebrideans. In their wake, a vast, magical steamship would arrive into Tasmalum Bay, laden with trade goods and bearing the resurrected dead. Ronovuro's presence reverberates through the documents, revealing his complex worldview, resisting circumscription, and crackling with agency. In these same documents we can also hear the voices of his followers and peers and the degree to which they believe, disbelieve, or prevail upon their prophet's mystique.

Other actors have their say as well. For example, preoccupations are clearly audible behind the questions the British Commandant and lawyers pose to the prisoners, as are the values and prejudices of the high officers of the Condominium and Joint Court as they battle over the fates of the guilty. Clapcott's European neighbours on Espiritu Santo petition to keep even the acquitted permanently exiled from their island.¹⁴ The Presbyterian missionary nearest the scene of the crime reports on tensions among the tribesmen in the area.¹⁵ And while conversation in distant Britain and France turns on whether to shell the South Santo bush, who should do it, and what such actions in the Pacific might do to upset the delicate applecart of Entente Cordiale, a single South Santo Melanesian is quoted in a local planter's letter as saying 'By an' by, me feller finish': before long my people will be gone.¹⁶

It goes without saying that Clapcott's murder on Espiritu Santo and the executions of Ronovuro, Asapele and Lolorave in Port Vila reveal clashes of cultures. What is truly exceptional about these clashes though

is that the dissonant and politically unequal voices are ranged in opposition both between and within cultural blocks.¹⁷ Reading the archival material generated in the case both with and against its grain yields rare views into the public and hidden transcripts of cultures in the early Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides.¹⁸

Applying an approach rooted in microhistorical analysis, in this essay I will pursue specific questions. What went into the making of the idiosyncratic imperialism of the New Hebrides—the background against which the Clapcott Murder is foregrounded? What contributions and misrepresentations exist within the discourse that surrounds the event? And what do new voices, recovered within the archives, add to what will be the most comprehensive account of the incident to date? How do they clarify our understanding of this murder? How do they complicate it?

Each chapter will present gains—new contributions to the Clapcott Murder’s discourse as well as nuanced representations of imperial culture in the New Hebrides—but, in the end, the essay will not present us with full certainty as to why this murder and these executions took place in 1923. The sources that I have brought together to compose this new perspective resist totalizing explanations. What this new paradigm will offer instead is an appreciation of historical complexity and a deliverance from its simplification.

Notes

¹ Herbert D. Hawkins, 22 February 1912, ‘Plan of Portion No. 8 South Santo,’ Vanuatu Supreme Court 197/39, National Archives of Vanuatu, Port Vila (this archive hereafter listed as VSC).

² Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, ‘Native Outrages 1914-1924’, New Hebrides British Service 1/I, Vol.1, 17/14/ folder 3, p.2. Special Collections, University of Auckland Library (this archive hereafter listed as NHBS).

³ T. H. Harrisson, Map of Espiritu Santo, *The Geographical Journal* 88:3 (1936), 245.

⁴ *Administrative Map of Vanuatu*, One World – Nations Online Project, accessed 17 August 2017, <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/vanuatu-map.htm>

⁵ In this exchange, Quiros's men killed one Santoese man. The victim's body was hung from a tree by one foot: a 'lugubrious and symbolic flag' raised as a warning; see Celsus Kelly and Martin de Munilla. *La Australia Del Espíritu Santo* (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society at CUP, 1966), 212.

⁶ For John W. Coath in 1874, see <http://www.coath.info/notables2.htm>; for Henry A. Mair in 1881, see <http://thecommunityarchive.org.nz/node/85762/collections>; for settlers with the French Compagnie Caledonienne des Nouvelles-Hebrides in 1886, see Katherine S. K. Cawsey, *The Making of a Rebel: Captain Macleod of the New Hebrides* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1998), 311; for Peter Sawyer and his Melanesian laborer in 1891 and the Greig family in 1908, see Howard Van Trease, *The Politics of Land in Vanuatu* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1987), 129-130.

⁷ Edoardo Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale' *Quaderni storici* 35 (1977): 506-20. Citation taken from Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory,' In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 109.

⁸ 'Confidential memorandum conveyed between Secretary of State for the Colonies Duke of Devonshire Victor Cavendish and Secretary for Foreign Affairs Marquess of Kedleston George Curzon,' Foreign Office Records 371/8456/A6055/26/51/20-26, The Nation Archives of the UK, Kew (this archive hereafter listed as FO).

⁹ Distinct and substantial archival collections are currently held in the Vanuatu National Archives in Port Vila, the Special Collections at the University of Auckland Libraries, and the National Archives of the UK at Kew.

¹⁰ Rodwell to King, 12 October 1923, Western Pacific High Commission (this archive hereafter listed as WPHC) archive 4/IV/2293, MSS & Archives 2003/1, Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services.

¹¹ King to Rodwell, 13 November 1923, FO 371/9543/A2154/23/51/73.

¹² 'File 32,' VSC 888/1, National Archives of Vanuatu.

¹³ Seagoe to King, *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴ Thomas to King, 2 October 1923, 'Proposed Remission Sentences on Clapcott Murderers 1926' NHBS 1/I, 161/1926/10.

¹⁵ F. Bowie to King, 15 August 1923, 'Correspondence 1923' NHBS 1/I, Vol.1, 17/14/ folder 3.

¹⁶ Stephens to Rewse-Smith, 18 August 1924, 'In re R.O.D. Clapcott', NHBS 1/I, 81/1924/8.

¹⁷ For more on the importance of examining both intra and intercultural oppositions, see Nicholas Thomas, 'Against Ethnography,' *Cultural Anthropology* 6, no.3 (1991): 306-322; and Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 51-61.

¹⁸ While I will not pursue interpretation of hidden transcripts to the degree that the author does, I am indebted to James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

Chapter 1: A History's Stamp—Britain and France in the New Hebrides (1867-1907)

The first of the images below, the only known photograph depicting those accused in the 1923 Clapcott Case, is a photo-postcard from the private collection of Frédéric Petit in Vanuatu; the other is a close-up of one of Jules Giraud's design templates for the stamp that can be observed at the corner of Monsieur Petit's postcard.

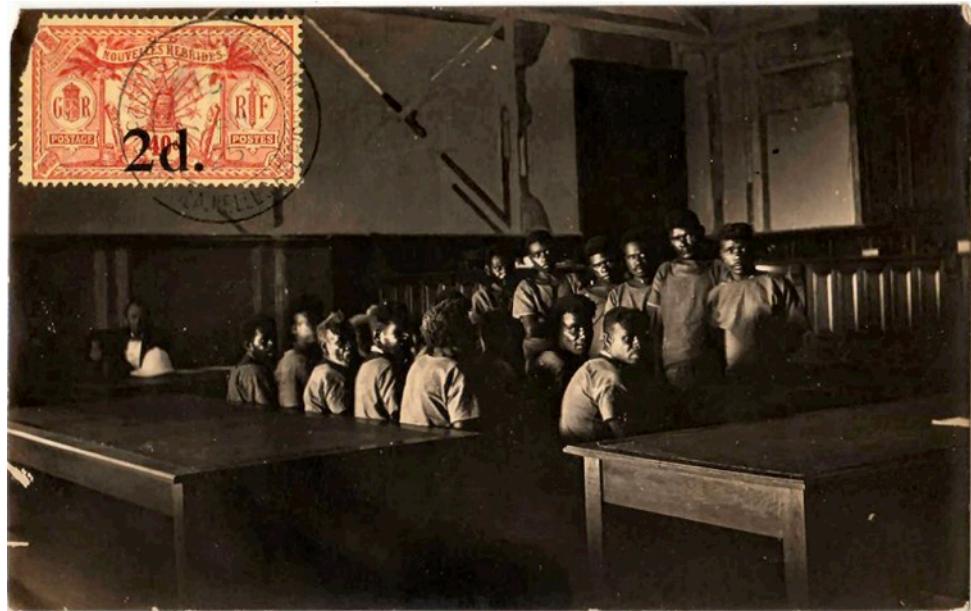


Fig. 6: 'Assassins de Clapcott' photo-postcard (reproduced by kind permission of Frédéric Petit).



Fig. 7: Giraud Template for New Hebrides Postage Stamp (reproduced by kind permission of Roland Klinger).

Let us begin at the margins. Adhered to our picture-postcard, in its upper left-hand corner, is a French issue postage stamp. Inscribed over the stamp we can see the faint trace of a postmark, and close inspection of this reveals two concentric circles. The outer band locates the postmark to 'Postes Condominium, Port Vila, N'elles Hebrides'. The inner circle dates the postmark to '15 Avril 1925.' The stamp, however, predates both the postmark and the event depicted in the postcard; it dates back to 1911 when Britain and France produced their first series of Anglo-French Condominium stamps.

Created by order of Article 4:3 of the Condominium's 1906 Convention, which called for postage distinct to the New Hebrides, our stamp was designed in 1909 by a Frenchman, Jules Giraud, a resident and professional surveyor in the islands. In Port Vila that same year, British Resident Commissioner Merton King and French Resident Commissioner Charles Noufflard approved Giraud's design and forwarded it to Europe. It was engraved and printed on Crown Agents paper by the British firm of Thomas De La Rue & Co. in London after minor design changes in Paris. The first of their kind, the stamps would represent both Britain and France together in the New Hebrides.¹ They were, like the Condominium itself, produced conjointly.

The 1911 stamp was a philatelic embodiment of Entente Cordiale, and there was global anticipation and enthusiasm for its release among would-be collectors and practical users. Sales of the original series were intended to coincide with the New Hebrides' achievement of membership into the Universal Postal Union on 1 March 1911, some four years after the Anglo-French Condominium had been proclaimed in the New Hebrides in 1907. In Europe the release was delayed until 11 March 1911. The stamps arrived in Port Vila that same month, but had to wait until July while the Condominium Post Office worked to exhaust its stock of pre-1911 provisional stamps.²

While an object of Entente Cordiale's material history, the stamp also represents trade asymmetries between territories and metropoles. The majority of elements figured in the design and the design itself were produced locally in the islands. The design was then shipped to Europe where it was manufactured into the stamp series. These were subsequently resold, principally back to residents in the archipelago. It is unclear if the islanders whose crafts served as models for the items at the centre of the stamp were recompensed for their reproductions or if Jules Giraud was paid for his design. However, we do have some sense of what the 1911 stamp series' pecuniary value was to the Condominium and its signatory powers: a Monsieur Deschamps who served as both Condominium Postmaster and Treasurer at the time, having received large orders for the new and iconic stamps from overseas dealers, estimated that sales of this particular series both in the New Hebrides and abroad would provide revenues surplus to the Condominium's administrative costs for that year.³

Though Monsieur Deschamp's estimate provides an intriguing window into how objects like the 1911 stamp might both artistically represent and financially enable imperial apparatuses such as the Anglo-French Condominium, a discussion of the latter invites comparative study that would be outside the scope of this thesis. This chapter does, however explore the stamp at the corner of our picture-postcard as a representation: one that was artistically designed, politically approved, and that both depicts and underwrites imperial self-regard vis-à-vis the New Hebrides.

In this chapter I will briefly describe the stamp as I see it: a collaborative work of statecraft tight to the edges of what is a multi-authored, mixed media collage. I will also discuss British and French involvement in the New Hebrides' histories that led to the creation of both the Condominium and its stamp, reading both as declarations of stately ambitions and anxieties. Lastly I will offer a brief survey of early 20th century criticisms of the Anglo-French Condominium. My purpose in this is to examine Britain and France in the New Hebrides: how they saw

the islands and their condominium governance there, how they wanted themselves and it to be seen, and how others saw them. By illuminating gaps between projected dominance and its troubled reception, I hope to mark out space for later discussion of multi-vocal agencies present in the Clapcott-Ronovuro Affair's past, if not its history.

Before commencing with all of this, it could be helpful to consider what might be a fairly obvious question: does a postage stamp deserve all of this proposed scrutiny? I have asked myself this same question. Facing thesis deadlines, trans-city, trans-state and trans-Atlantic moves, trying to juggle these along with teaching, editing, research, and family life, I have asked myself why a postage stamp—this postage stamp—is important? The stamp was not important to me at first. In fact I hardly considered it at all.

When I first encountered Frédéric Petit's photo-postcard on a website devoted to the stamps and postal history of the New Hebrides, I had been searching out fragments of the Clapcott-Ronovuro Affair for three years. Never once in all my searching, all my collecting, had I ever come across photographs of the men (almost exclusively men) principally involved in the events of 1923. As much as I had read descriptions of them, read *into* descriptions of them and thought about them, I had never actually *seen* Reginald Clapcott, British Police Commandant Seagoe, Ronovuro, Asapele, Lolorave or any of the other Santoese men removed to Vila for trial. And so when I saw the image on Petit's postcard—the seventeen men from Santo, clustered in the half-lit courtroom in their prison smocks—it took a long time before I could see anything else.

When I eventually noticed the stamp, that's all that I did: I noticed it. I saw it as little more than an officious device appended to the postcard. I didn't read it; I couldn't then. The digital image was too small. I had no knowledge of philately or its language. Also, mistakenly dividing the Clapcott-Ronovuro story into sides, and scant few sides at that, I had decided my thesis would endeavour to represent the islanders' side for reasons that were personal and political. What little I could decipher in the stamp was obviously European and thus subordinate to what I'd

determined would be the focus of my enquiries. Thankfully, the processes of collecting, researching, and writing are inductive, or at least they have been in my case. Otherwise, I might have ignored all that is significant in Jules Giraud's stamp.

A year after finding Petit's postcard, I had gathered more experience, more texts, more knowledge to the corpus of my research. If we can imagine these pieces, these objects of research, as physical, we can, perhaps, imagine them crowding in on one another. In the crush, things I'd held as monolithic fragmented. Scholarly monologues harmonized; legal testimonies diverged. Things separated, parts never finding their way back together; others clasped more tightly, becoming indivisible. Under pressure, black and white bruised, revealing startling new colours. Spectrums emerged. I read Pacific historian Greg Dening describing how cross-cultural histories 'in their exposure to one another lay bare their structures of law, of morality, their rationalizations in myth, their expressions in symbolism' and these words, too, entered the confluence.⁴ I began to see the stamp not as something Eurocentric, separate and secondary to the postcard, but rather as something fused into it. It was no longer merely affixed to the photograph; I began to see it more and more as something *within* it. The stamp is cornered within the photo-postcard's frame. It is ragged. And yet, the stamp still offers fresh perspectives; its currency has been written, overwritten, and can still be reappraised. Reviewing the stamp allows us to see more inside it—it might allow us to see it differently. No longer just a stamp, we might see it as a window in a wall. Through it we might achieve a significant, albeit partial, view of cultures at work both inside and outside the courtroom in 1923.

In researching and writing this thesis, my perspectives on the Clapcott-Ronovuro Affair have changed. New vistas have opened up. While, like the image in the postcard, I am still focused on the indigenous subjects in the foreground, I no longer disregard what the Condominium's imperial stamp seems to be projecting at the back. The stamp, much like

the Clapcott-Ronovuro case, is positioned at the margins, but a more 'integrated discussion' of the events of 1923 should not abandon it there.⁵

The 1911 Condominium stamp is a rare object: a collector's object. At the same time, it is a work of state-sponsored, mass-produced art that was considered in its design, local in its inspiration, and global in its creation. It is artistic in and of itself, but, taken together with other elements inscribed upon and framed around it, the stamp becomes part of a mixed-media, multi-authored collage, and so, before we consider what is depicted within it, we might consider its relation to the elements that surround it.

From its high corner, surrounded by diagonals, the stamp seems to look down upon the central subjects. This is, of course, an illusion. The stamp has been applied to the postcard's surface with adhesive, but it appears almost as if it were hung within the courtroom, its bold vermillion leaping out from the wall. Its bright, crenelated edges are torn and irregular; they subtlety echo imperfections that fleck and grain the larger photograph. From its top-right corner, the stamp seems almost to bleed into a line of structural ornamentation that has faded on the courthouse wall. In this, stamp and courthouse seem to share a vein: the stamp vivifying the architecture that houses it.

Closer inspection of the stamp itself might begin with its rectangular, 'commemorative' frame.⁶ On each side, the border is composed of crested waves or currents flowing in binary opposition to one another. Inside and echoing the oppositional structure of this oceanic border, the stamp presents a fascinating tableau. The background within the border is furrowed in straight and orderly rows, like soil that has been cleared and ploughed, and, at the same time, both background and tableau are depicted not from a bird's-eye view, but along a horizontal axis with a vanishing point that is shallow and unseen, presumably somewhere just behind the central figure. Thus the interior space of the stamp appears composed much like that of a room, stage, or shadowbox.

The central figure, an anthropomorphic indigenous idol emerging from a mute field, bristles with spears. Ornamental feathers on many of the spears give them the appearance of vigorous shaking. Each one of these weapons is distinct; each one likely symbolizes a different of the archipelago's ten largest islands. Two slit-gong drums, also anthropomorphic, attend the idol on either side, leaning backward in awestruck and subordinate poses. The idol, crowned with feathers, appears to be bearing a large vessel, marked with European currency—in this case, 40 French centimes (the exchange rate of two pence is overwritten in black)—to the foreground of the tableau, presenting it alongside four smaller vessels. These smaller vessels, a pair to each side, represent two distinct variations of pottery indigenous to the islands.⁷

Symbolic portraits of the Condominium's signatory powers flank the New Hebridean idol. To the left we see the 'GR' of King George V astride the escutcheon and imperial Crown Proper of the British Royal Arms; on the right the 'RF' of the Republic of France spans the French *faisceau de licteur*. Simplified national heralds pin down land and sea at each corner of the frame; these heralds bridge the oceanic space between cleared and ordered territory within the New Hebridean archipelago and other lands, homelands or otherwise, under the British or French jurisdiction. Read this way, these tiny heralds might, in effect, represent the two signatory powers' international reach.

In contrast to such range, the indigenous figures at the centre of the stamp are depicted as almost strictly insular. The slit-gong drums, as devices of intra-island communication, talk to themselves; as anthropomorphic figures, they are inward looking. The majority of commodities within the tableau's inner frame are local. Indeed only the large vessel marked with European currency actually touches the pale internal border, or beach, that lies just inside the framing waves. The smaller, more clearly endemic pottery does not cross this beach's spatial threshold.

To the left, Britain's shield supports the crown of empire. To the right, France's *faisceau* bespeaks the paternity of Ancient Rome. Both

European representations employ symbols demonstrating geographic reach, historical provenance, and a shared but by no means universal orthography. The New Hebridean idol, on the other hand, is rendered a water carrier. Under the stately supervision of Kingdom and Republic, he bears commodities out from terra incognita, across a visibly ordered field, to the edge of a beach where these goods might be made available to global commerce. The idol moves under violent, symbolic compulsion: the barbed and heavy weight of a shared European navy threatens to crush him from above. The anchor is suspended on loosely knotted cords; its lowest point touches him, balancing delicately upon the idol's head. Obversely, the idol's weapons touch nothing. They pierce only the empty space from whence the idol came. Where they once appeared fearsome, the shaking spears now assume a different meaning.

Or do they? I have described this stamp as a rare object, a collector's object, an object of commerce, statecraft, and material history. In its symbolic subjugation of the island 'savage'—its depiction of the native and the native's products as extracted from out unknowable, unintelligible space—the stamp is also a textualized vision of a civilizing process general to 19th and 20th century European imperialism in the Pacific. It is a document of civilizing culture that is, as Walter Benjamin describes such objects, also a document of barbarism.⁸

In light of such dualities and re-readings, it is important to remember that, as a state-sponsored work of art, the stamp is also a work of propaganda. Furthermore, it is important to remember that, whatever the stamp envisions, it is attached to a postcard that commemorates the killing of a British subject by indigenous men of Espiritu Santo. Such violence was not particular to 1923. It was even more prevalent between 1909 and 1911 when Giraud's stamp was designed and printed. So, rather than displaying Truth, perhaps even contrary to it, the stamp is meant to display the Crown and Republic's aspirations for their shared governance in the islands. Contrary to the balanced and confident positions of their emblems of state, even a cursory examination of British and French history within the islands will reveal that neither power governed or

shared the New Hebrides comfortably, not before the Clapcott-Ronovuro Affair in 1923 or anytime soon thereafter.

Since Pedro Fernandez de Quiros in 1606, European explorers, whalers, sandalwood loggers, traders and missionaries had all visited the New Hebrides. Some attempted and, mostly in the case of Protestant missionaries, succeeded in creating semi-permanent settlements in the group. But permanent, non-ecclesiastical European settlement in the islands only began in the late 1860s when British subjects from New Zealand and Australia began agri-business ventures in the group, and it was only a few short years before these settlers began to petition for the extension of home government into the archipelago.ⁱ

The first European settlements of any scale, principally on the islands of Tanna and Efate, were short lived. In 1874 one of the indigenous communities on Tanna murdered Henry Ross Lewin, the first recorded European land purchaser in the group. At Havannah Harbour, on Efate, it was malaria and hurricanes—not the indigenous Efatese—that scourged the settler community. In addition to these stark challenges, the global cotton market began to collapse. Cotton had been booming since the beginning of the United States' Civil War; the first settlers in the New Hebrides planted it aggressively and were initially rewarded, but when production in the United States recovered, Pacific cotton exports withered. In the islands, the New Hebrides' first wave of European economic migrants floundered.⁹

As a result of the aforementioned hardships, in 1873 the Sydney firm of Scott, Henderson and Company, with representatives on Efate, petitioned the government of New South Wales for annexation of the islands to Britain.¹⁰ This request, like so many that would follow it over the next fifty years, would be denied. The settlers, however, still largely British citizens of the Australian and New Zealand colonies, responded

ⁱ Scots Presbyterian missionaries on Aneityum submitted petitions to the British Colonial Office as early as 1857; see J. H. Proctor, 'Scottish Missionaries and the Governance of the New Hebrides,' *Journal of Church and State* 41, no. 2 (1999): 358.

with something else that would become a commonplace in the New Hebrides: they swapped flags.¹¹ Having failed in their attempt to attract the protection of the British Empire, the settlers, mercurial in the face of disaster, turned to New Caledonia and France, offering them the same petitions for annexation. The first of these petitions was raised on Tanna in 1875. The cry was taken up on Efate in 1876.

These calls for French annexation, from subjects of the crown no less, triggered an immediate response from Protestant missionaries with stations scattered throughout the New Hebrides. The missions believed that, through decades of toil and no small number of martyrdoms, they had won a difficult foothold in the archipelago. They would not be parted from it. And so, in 1877, fearing that French annexation would result in religious persecution or forced removal from the islands—as it had in the Loyalty Islands and Tahiti—Protestant churches, particularly those in Australia, mobilized against the threat of a French-Catholic incursion. The incendiary Rev. John G. Paton, a Scotsman who headed the Presbyterian mission on Futuna in the New Hebrides, stoked up latent Francophobia amid the public, press and parliament in Victoria. In 1877 supporters packed a public Melbourne meeting hall in order to wish the Reverend Godspeed back to his endangered mission. Paton worked himself into an electric state before the crowd, brandishing an extract from a French newspaper, reprinted in the Melbourne *Argus*, that all but confirmed France's will to annex the New Hebrides.¹²

To Paton and the churches' credit, French annexation was no phantom menace. Expressions of interest had been circulating between New Caledonia and France since at least 1875.¹³ Those in the New Caledonian capital of Noumea saw the New Hebrides as an attractive field for labour recruitment and a potential market for export. Interest in an exclusively French New Hebrides, through partition or otherwise, would persist all the way up and through the year of the Clapcott Murder in 1923. But in 1877 France was still recovering from losses sustained in its war with Prussia, and Paris was not sold on the islands' promise. That year French interests found themselves in what would become a

frustratingly familiar situation vis-à-vis the New Hebrides: a desirable alliance with Britain could not afford ugly antagonisms in the Pacific.¹⁴

For thirty years, from 1877 to 1907, and beyond, France resolved itself to a waiting game. By establishing a creeping inertia in the group, beginning in the 1880s, it hoped it would some day achieve sole jurisdiction in all or part of the New Hebrides through an eventual British default.¹⁵ However, in 1878, Australia's calls for British annexation of the islands—which were stronger than similar calls from New Caledonia—sufficiently worried the Republic. Paris sent enquiries to London regarding British intentions for the archipelago. When London replied that it, in fact, had no intentions for the group, the two powers pledged themselves to preserving a state of neutrality and independence in the New Hebrides.¹⁶ This commitment to what was then status quo in the islands became known as the Anglo-French Agreement of 1878. It was, in principal and even more so in effect, an agreement to *not* govern the New Hebrides or the two nations' subjects who were settling there. It would remain joint policy, largely unchanged, in the islands for the next thirty years.

If the French approach to the New Hebrides was one of patient pursuit of control, the British approach was one of steady avoidance of it. The United Kingdom, for its part, never desired annexation of the islands. If not for fairly constant agitation from Australia and threats of German expansion into the group, it would likely have obliged France's ambitions for sole possession.¹⁷ Years of unsanctioned settlement of British subjects in Fiji, and the depredations this caused against and between indigenous communities there, had necessitated a emergency annexation of those islands in 1874. The Crown was not inclined to repeat the process, certainly not in the 1870s, and certainly not in the New Hebrides.¹⁸ They were, literally, the last islands Britain wanted to be in.

For better or worse, the Empire's direct involvement in the New Hebrides came only after it had established itself everywhere else. In 1884, compelled by Germany's surprise annexation of non-Dutch territories in north-eastern New Guinea, Britain claimed that island's

unincorporated south-eastern territories (this after rejecting Queensland's unauthorized annexation of *both* regions the previous year). The Crown took possession of the Cook Islands and Niue between 1888 and 1889, annexing these to New Zealand two years later. It established a protectorate over the central and southern Solomon islands in 1892 and then another over the Gilberts and Ellices that same year. Tonga, while remaining a kingdom of its own, was brought closer to Britain under the Treaty of Friendship in 1900, and in that same year Ocean Island was annexed for its phosphorous.¹⁹ It was only after proclamation of the Anglo-French Condominium in Port Vila Harbour in 1907 that Britain began to fly its flag officially over New Hebridean soil. The Convention had been signed into effect the previous October.²⁰ The New Hebrides marked the end of Britain's expansion in the Pacific, and when the Union Jack finally went up in Port Vila, the Tricolour went up beside it.ⁱⁱ

All of this, too, finds representation within the stamp. If multiple readings of the stamp reveal it as both a document of civilization and of barbarism, these further readings might reveal it as an admission of imperial ambition as well as anxiety. The four heralds still connect ploughed New Hebridean soil to similarly cultivated lands across the oceans, but, upon second glance, their shields and crowns no longer appear to command the corners of the tableau. Instead, they appear to be leaning backward, homeward, and away from the project at the centre of the stamp. They reach, but are at the same time reluctant. Similarly, the portraits of state now bespeak a careful placement. They do not touch the slender tree trunks or the negative, inner space these frame; the banner Britain and France unfurl between themselves is prudently beyond reach of the idol's spears.

ⁱⁱ The politics of flags and flag raising were a steady flashpoint during Britain and France's tenure in the New Hebrides. The British Residency was on the small island of Iririki in Port Vila Harbour; the French Residency overlooked it from a bluff on mainland Efaté. Yet, despite differences in elevation and their distance from one another, legend has it that the national flag that flew outside each Residency had to be flown at the same height as the other; see Margaret Critchlow Rodman, *Houses Far from Home* (2001), 21, 28, 53, 70, 80, 165, 198.

Lastly, while anticipated and largely received as an emblem of Entente Cordiale, the Condominium stamp of 1911 reproduces rivalries and asymmetries between Britain and France that were rarely, if ever, out of mind. The stamp depicts scant congress between the powers: no markings of state cross over from their chosen sides. Each power raises its own 'Condominium' scroll in the upper corner as if to say that the governance they shared in the New Hebrides they shared in name only, that it was redundant and could be managed full well by one without the other. Beyond these uncooperative symbols, another minute but disruptive detail can be found amid the palms. Giraud's design was printed and issued in two simultaneous, nearly identical series: in the French series, the language of the central banner is French, the currency on the idol's vessel is French, and the French national insignias feature exclusively on the right; in the British series, the currency and language are both English, and the insignias and smaller heralds also appear exclusively on the right.²¹ However, in both series, the palm tree left of centre bears six coconuts, the islands' principal resource. The tree to the right only bears four. It is a tiny difference, perhaps easily overlooked, but, amid the tableau's careful show of balanced power, it is startling.

Was this matter of coconuts intended as an inside joke? A source of mutual amusement to be enjoyed on either side of the Channel? A wink shared between two traditional enemies who were, in the face of new threats rising in Germany and Japan, each shyly reaching for the other's hand? It might be useful to recall that in the early 20th century coconuts were the essential commodity of value in the New Hebrides.ⁱⁱⁱ Though it's possible that they were being put to a whimsical purpose in the stamp, I think it not entirely likely. Coconuts were serious business in 1911. As

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Islands copra industry expanded, to supply...the growing populations of Europe and America...Copra, the dried meat of the coconut, a source of oil for soap, margarine, and nitroglycerine, has affected the lives of more Islanders than all other Island products put together.' Douglas L. Oliver and Sheila Mitchell Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 63.

documents I will introduce shortly will go some way to demonstrate, in the early Condominium people lived, and died, by coconuts.

Could this asymmetry be chalked up to artistic oversight, then? This is even less likely. Giraud's design was recommended to Europe by both British and French Resident Commissioners in Port Vila, and these two powers, if anything, tended to over-scrutinize each others moves. The design was also provisionally approved by both home governments, where it underwent minor redesign and re-approval once more before print orders were submitted. Prior to printing—and very likely after it as well—all elements within the finalized design would have been carefully reviewed, all aspects within the stamps acknowledged.²²

If we rule out humour and oversight, how else might we read the disparity between these two trees: this unbalanced and dynamic element? Could Giraud or someone in Europe have inserted or effaced an extra coconut or two here or there to energize the stamp's artistry? Something to challenge this symbolic system that might have otherwise represented Britain and France as completely static, equal, and unproblematically transposable within the New Hebrides?

Is there anything to be read in the coconuts themselves? There are six on the left, four on the right, ten in all. Could there be significance in this total that can provide greater insight into the disparate addends? If, as I suggest above, the ten distinct spears encompassing the central idol might be read as an allusion to the ten major islands in the archipelago, might not the ten coconuts refer to the same?

Assuming this connection between coconuts and islands raises a number of new questions. Given that each nation positions itself on the right side of its own series of the stamp—the side with less coconuts or islands and their attendant natural and human resources—what might this say about British and French self-regard in early 20th century New Hebrides? In that each power chooses to locate itself in the classically privileged right-side position—and thus across the frame from the tree of greater wealth—are we to perhaps understand then that, in the New

Hebrides, each power viewed honour and pride of place as separate and opposite from greater possession and prosperity?

When considered alongside the different approaches Britain and France took to the islands both before and after proclamation of the Condominium in 1907, one imagines they might have approved the disadvantageous imbalance proposed in Giraud's design for different reasons. On the French side, in 1911, the slim majority of coconuts in Britain's tree might have perhaps signified the Crown's longer history in the islands.^{iv} On the British side, it might have represented the larger French population, commercial presence and land holdings in the group.²³

It could also have been that the powers desired a more cynical message coded into this picture of partnership. By choosing to represent themselves in the position of disadvantage or lesser involvement in the New Hebrides, Britain and France might both have intended the stamp to be read as an indictment of the other, as if to say: 'Whatever the state of these islands, the greater responsibility is yours.' If a narrative of imperial domination is plotted within the stamp, a sub-plot of disavowal is also present.

Let us be clear: we do not know for certain how its authors intended the 1911 stamp to be read. Even if they had stated their intentions explicitly, and even if these claims could be tested rigorously, assayed true to their claimants' declarations, and the forms executed found true as well, none of this would settle interpretations. Even where—and if—authorial intention and execution converge, audience reception can—and often will—diverge. Interpretation's currency abides in its ability to slip a leash.

^{iv} France, under Bougainville in 1768, cruised the northern islands in the archipelago, but Britain, under Cook in 1774, toured the New Hebrides more extensively; see Margaret Jolly, 'The Sediment of Voyages,' in *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence*, eds. Margaret Jolly, Serge Tcherkezoff, and Darrell Tyron (Australian National University Press: 2009), 57, 73-97 *passim*.

In the Condominium, Britain and France created a brand; in collaboration, Jules Giraud, Resident Commissioners King and Noufflard, and teams at home in London and in Paris produced its mark. But, keeping the gaps that can exist between projection and interpretation in mind, we will now consider how some residents and visitors outside the workings of its brand management viewed the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides.

Fortunately, at least for our purposes of comparison, Britain and France's Condominium was penetrable and productive of opinions. Among these were those of the Swiss ethnologist, Dr. Felix Speiser, who, after spending two years in the New Hebrides (1910-1912), described the Condominium in 1913 as 'a unique form of government and at the same time a most interesting experiment in international administration.'²⁴ Other appraisals were not so kind. An American hookworm specialist, Dr. Sylvester M. Lambert, who led a medical expedition in the islands in 1925, recollects the Condominium thus: 'thirty wild islands...the lawless stepchildren of a bad government aptly nicknamed "Pandemonium", a sort of Siamese-twin arrangement made between England and France...The only occasions I ever saw the Condominium get together were on the King's Birthday and July Fourteenth [Bastille Day].'²⁵ The English, Sorbonne-educated attorney, Edward Jacomb Esq., who served as Assistant to the British Resident Commissioner Merton King from 1907 to 1911 wrote of the Condominium in 1914 that, 'It is a sad thing...*all* of its inhabitants are in agreement as to the inefficiency of its Administration.'²⁶ Around this same time, Rev. Frank L Paton followed in the footsteps of his father, the notorious Rev. John G. Paton, and lambasted the Condominium as, 'A proved failure...A menace to peace and a gross injustice to the islanders,' and, in response to earlier Presbyterian complaints and orders from the Colonial Secretary in London, Western Pacific High Commissioner Sir Francis May inspected the archipelago in 1911 and declared it an 'obvious failure' deserving of partition.²⁷ The most lurid account of the Condominium though comes to us from Australian travel-

writer, Colin Simpson, who first visited the group in 1934. In *Islands of Men*, Simpson writes the following:

The Condominium was conceived in 1906 and born in 1907. It was conceived out of wedlock, or deadlock, in a diplomatic bed Britain would gladly have climbed out of and left to France. But, from under the bed, Australia kept screaming, “Push France out!” Something had to be done to placate the troublesome colonial brat of a Commonwealth. Also, Germany was casting an eye on these islands. So Britain turned over wearily and said to France, “Let us have a Condominium....” The Gallic shoulders shrugged, not without hope that the two-headed little monster could be reared as a Frenchman. Australia was not fully aware of just what was happening. When Australia found out, there was a wail of woe from down under, but couched in terms of “respectful and earnest protest”, which is the way the colonial children had been taught to speak to Mother. But Australians said among themselves at the time, in their own vulgar Australian way, “This is going to be a proper bastard!”

Under the Condominium agreement the New Hebrides Group was constituted “A region of joint influence in which the subjects and citizens of the two Signatory Powers [France and Britain] shall enjoy equal rights of residence, personal protection and trade.”

So that neither nation’s interests should get ahead of the other’s, they were joined in the fashion of a pair of runners in a three-legged race. This is a notably slow and cumbrous way of getting anywhere, but it was inevitable that the two-headed Administration should have three legs.²⁸

Having recounted a monstrous past, Simpson goes on to forecast an ugly future:

Nothing effective developmentally, nothing adequate to the needs of the natives, nothing that makes economic sense or social justice will ever be done while these islands remain subjected to the ludicrous, impotent, freak-form Condominium Government. Nobody has a good word for it: the French have criticized it as much as the British, though not as much as the Australians—who have really done nothing except criticize, and who have let their own colonists down, let the British down, too.²⁹

All of this is to say that the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides, much like our stamp, is an imperial project that contains multiple readings. To whatever degree History and the unflattering opinions above were at odds with sentiments *felt* within the New Hebrides in 1909 when Jules Giraud designed the Condominium's stamp or ambitions and caveats approved a year later in Paris and London where the design was finalized and the two nations' series printed to order, the stamp's depictions are by no means incongruous with what invested Britons and Frenchmen wanted their Condominium to be and be seen as in 1911.

Remembering that the Condominium was something fragmentary and contentious, an imperial outpost more in pieces than at peace in 1923, will be important as we shift our focus away from the stamp to the photograph and discourses that encompass the figures at the centre of our inquiry. But, before we leave the margins, there is another subject to discuss.

A single European sits below the stamp. He is alone, isolated in the background. Like the majority of the islanders, he is only half-lit. He has one arm draped over the seatback and this appears casual. He has a high hairline. His shirtfront and his hat, resting on the table in front him, are

very white. His one hand, his hat, his shirt, and half of his face are all of him that is illuminated. Were it not for these he might be invisible against the courtroom wall.

When I shared Petit's photograph with a poet-philosopher friend of mine in an email, he was quick to respond. He wrote, 'Look at that hegemon looming in the corner. So very white, his hat.' And I laughed. The hegemon: easy before the camera, at rest beneath a blazing totem of state, outnumbered and only half there, he commands a courtroom with his solar topee. I am sure I have thought this. Just as my friend saw him, I have seen him.

I have not yet determined who he is. He could be the Joint Court's registrar, its clerk, the Commandant of the French Police, the recently appointed Native Advocate Dr. Vernon Davies, or any number of other Condominium officials or Europeans in Port Vila between late August and early November 1923. I keep searching for him in other photos, looking for something to cross-reference. But in the meantime, in light of surfeit possibilities and minimal certainties, we can leave him be as hegemon. Until we have to do otherwise, we do not have to name him, and we can assume the dominance he affects within the photo is candid. High above him, the anchor in the stamp is poised to crush the native idol, but, if one or both of the powers were to lose their grip, if the anchor were to fall through the borders of the stamp, it would likely only clip the European below. It might dent his hat, but surely his position is largely safe. He is the hegemon.

In the next chapter we will continue making our way towards the Santoese men at the centre of Petit's photograph, but before we do, I include the following letters exchanged between British Resident Commissioner Merton King and Reginald Clapcott between June 1920 and July 1923. All letters besides the first I hereafter reproduce from typed-up copies sent to Clapcott's brother, Frederick, at his—the brother's—request; only the first correspondence comes from its original: a handwritten letter I found it misplaced within another file. No part of these exchanges has, as yet, been published or cited elsewhere.³⁰ To the

best of my limited abilities, I have tried to approximate their formatting and reproduce completely their character and inconsistencies:

Tassmalum
South Santo
June 4th 1920

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir, I have to again report to you re depredations caused by bushmen. Two mission boys from Tasiriki on going through my place on their way to Tangoa saw two bushmen taking young nuts off the trees, they came & reported this to me; two days later I went to the place were [sic] they were seen when I happened to see two natives taking young nuts off the trees, I tried to get closer so as to distinguish their features, but on my doing so they saw me and one turned & fired on me. I have tried to find out who they were, but natives either do not know or else refuse to name the culprits.

Two months ago I had over 2000 nuts stolen by natives, two of them by name Lulu (son of the late Moli Tailllaka) & O'omo, there were others but I could not get their names but these two were in it.

The village of these two natives is within easy distance from here & I think if they were deported would [sic] have an effect on others.

Yours faithfully,

R.O.D. Clapcott

Tasmalum,
South Santo,
February 1st, 1922

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

I have to write to [sic] again about the depredations of the local natives. They have cleared one part of my plantation of all the matured nuts and

pulled off the partly matured nuts, this means that I shall have hardly any copra off that part this year. They have also been coming on to the plantation shooting cattle. Yesterday I caught several natives stealing coconuts [sic], this was in the morning and in the afternoon I went again and saw four natives up the trees pulling down nuts. Warning natives has no effect at all, an example should be made by removing the culprits.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

BRITISH RESIDENCY.
VILA.
10th February, 1922.

To:
R.O.D. Clapcott, Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 1st January, on the subject of the renewed depredations of natives on your plantation, and to state that the Condominium Government Agent of Santo has been directed to see into the matter.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant.

(Signed) M. King
Resident Commissioner.

Tasmalum,
South Santo,
April 10th, 1922.

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

On February 1st I wrote you in reference to natives stealing nuts, I have not received any notification from [sic], however I enclose copy of letter sent. Two days after sending my last letter 10 natives from the Navada beach came threatening me, because some of them stealing, after a good deal of talk they left but came again bringing a lot of other natives, in all about 30 all told. They started on to me from all sides should I report about these four natives that I caught stealing the nuts the worst offenders in the threatening business are the two prophets on the beach the other side of my place. Now last week I had to go into the bush, on my ground I came across a pig house built by these prophets there I found a lot of nuts which had been taken off my place. Surely you are not going to allow all these depredations to go on without affording me some assistance.

These depredations will not be stopped until something is done and when copra export tax is now applied means so much loss to me, and this stealing is going on almost daily. I should be much obliged if you will have this matter attended to as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

BRITISH RESIDENCY.
VILA.
2nd May, 1922.

To:
R.O.D. Clapcott, Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 10th ultimo, on the subject of your complaints against your native neighbours, and in reply to state that your communication of 1st February was acknowledged on the 10th idem, and you were informed that the Condominium Government Agent at Hog Harbour had been instructed to visit your place again, and try to settle the matter. The instructions to him have been renewed.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) M. King

Resident Commissioner.

Tasmalum,
South Santo,
June 29th, 1922.

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to again report to you in reference to local natives.

On June 4th some of my labour were walking on the beach when two of them were shot by Meleronlio of Tasiriki together with some natives from Sauriki West Central Santo. It appears that the Sauriki natives heard that I had labour on and they and Meleronlio came down the previous day to the shooting, camped on my ground without my knowledge and laid in wait on my ground until some of my labour were walking about. Meleronlio I reported to you some years ago but nothing was done.

Now that this latest affair having taken place no native will come down to work. In your letter of Feb. 10th you say that my previous complaint will be seen to by the Condominium Agent, so far he has not turned up. I should be much obliged if you will assist me by having the culprits brought to book. Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

BRITISH RESIDENCY,
VILA,
7th July, 1922.

TO:
R.O.D. Clapcott, Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 29th ultimo, on the subject to alleged recurrence of aggressive acts by your native neighbours, and to state that instructions have been sent to the

Condominium Government Agent at Hog Harbour to enquire into the matter immediately.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) M. King
Resident Commissioner.

Tasimalum
South Santo
New Hebrides
January 16th, 1923.

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

I have to complain to you about so much witch-craft going on here by the prophets that natives continually complain to me, they say that various kind [sic] of craft is applied to the roads leading to my place, and those that wish to come down to work are afraid to go along those roads. This witch-craft not only hinders me with my work but prevents natives from coming down to work and getting their supplies.

Some time ago (June 2nd 1920) I wrote to you about a native named O’Oma who at that time stole practically / stole all the cocoanuts [sic] on one part of my place, well this native is now threatening some natives who wish to come to me and work and they wished me to complain about it, they seemed emphatic about their complaint otherwise they would not have told me about it.

Yours faithfully

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

BRITISH RESIDENCY
VILA,
29th January, 1923.

To:

R.O.D. Clapcott Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 16th instant, on the subject of "witchcraft", and to state that I have instructed the Condominium Government Agent at Hog Harbour to enquire into the matter as soon as possible.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) M. King

Resident Commissioner.

Tasimalum
South Santo
New Hebrides
February 20th, 1923.

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

On June 29th 1922 I wrote to about Meleronlio of Tasiriki and some natives from Sauriki (5) shooting my labour. Your Agent from Hog Harbour came and removed Meleronlio and took him to Hog Harbour and there kept him for 3 months, the others from West Central Santo nothing was done and they are continually passing through my place on their way up to the French in Segond. The five passed through here two weeks ago and are now working for M. Chapui, Segond, and whilst they are coming and going from my place, the natives they fired on are afraid to come down knowing that nothing was done by the Govt.

If nothing is done to the culprits for all the various offences trouble will always occur, as only last week a lot of nuts were stolen as I came across a lot of cocoanut [sic] skins left after the nuts had been husked. I shall be much obliged if these matters were seen to and some of the offenders removed to Vila.

Yours faithfully

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

BRITISH RESIDENCY.

VILA.

5th March, 1923.

To:
R.O.D. Clapcott, Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 20th ultimo, in which you allege further depredations by natives on your property, and in reply to state that the Government Agent informs me that your native neighbours give as the reason for their hostile action "continual interference by you with their women". If there is any ground for this charge, I would suggest that if such interference were discontinued the annoyance of which you complain might also cease.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) M. King
Resident Commissioner.

Tasimalum
South Santo
June 14th, 1923.

To:
H.B.M. Commissioner
Vila.

Dear Sir,

On January 16th I wrote to you complaining about witch-craft being carried on here; your reply of January 29th was that you had instructed the Govt. Agent at Hog Harbour to enquire into the matter. Your Agent came but made no enquiries whatever and the subject of "witch-craft" was not brought up.

On February 20th I complained about nothing been done to the natives from West Central Santo who shot my labour, Meleronlio is dead

but the 5 natives from West Central Santo pass through my place continually on their way to the French in the Segond and are now working for M. Chapui, your reply was that the Govt. Agent at Hog Harbour had complained to you that I was "continually" [sic] interfering with their women" this charge is ridiculous and absurd and I forward you a copy of a document signed by the chiefs saying that what they told your Agent was a lie, if there is nothing done to clear this charge the natives can lay all sorts of ridiculous charges.

Yours faithfully

(Signed) R.O.D. Clapcott

Tasimalum
South Santo
New Hebrides
June 4th, 1923.

We the undersigned do hereby declare that the charge laid by us to Mr. T. R. Salisbury Govt. Agent at the Hog Harbour against Mr. Clapcott in reference to he interfering with our women is false and not true and also that on no occasion has Mr. Clapcott approached our women both directly or indirectly.

Names of two Chiefs -- NARISA his mark

X

WAIATU his mark

X

Witness

KARAWATU his mark

X

JUDA his mark

X

BRITISH RESIDENCY
VILA.

24th July, 1923.

To:
R.O.D. Clapcott, Esq.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th instant, on the subject of the action of your native neighbours, and with the reference to the second paragraph to suggest that you should reperuse [sic] my letter of 15th March. If you do so you will see that I did not state the Government Agent had "complained to me" of anything. What I wrote was that "The Government Agent informs me that your native "[sic] neighbours give as the reason for their hostile action continual interference by you with their women".

2. The Government Agent did not, as you allege, make any complaint or charge against you—He did what was his obvious duty, that is, report to me the nature of the natives' defense for their action.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient Servant,

(Signed) M. King
Resident Commissioner.

This last is a dead letter. Reginald Clapcott was murdered the same day that it was dated.³¹

Notes

¹ Nathan Hals and Phil Collas. *The New Hebrides; Their Postal History and Postage Stamps* (New York: 1967), 81.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Greg Dening, Review of *Marists and Melanesians*, by Hugh Laracy. *New Zealand Journal of History* 12 (April 1978): 83.

⁵ Nicholas Thomas, 'Partial Texts: Representation, Colonialism and Agency in Pacific History,' *Journal of Pacific History* 25, no. 2 (1990): 140.

⁶ Hals and Collas, 84.

⁷ Felix Speiser, *Ethnology of Vanuatu*, trans. D. Q. Stephenson (Bathurst, Australia: Crawford House Press, 1991), 185-8, 230-2, 387-90. It is worth restating here that my assertion that the ten spears in Giraud's design correspond to the ten largest islands in the New Hebridean archipelago (Tanna, Erromango, Efate, Epi, Ambrym, Pentecost, Maewo, Ambae,

Malekula, Espiritu Santo) is my own conjecture. In the event that this supposition were to prove correct, while reference to Speiser's *Ethnology* can confirm that the spear types closely resemble those depicted in Giraud's design, I do not assume that any one type of spear depicted represents exclusive usage of said type to any one island in particular; furthermore, while it is impressive in its depth, the scope of Speiser's volume does not include all major islands in the group. Representations of pottery in the stamp are slightly more straightforward. While Giraud's depictions do not very closely resemble earthenware as practiced in the New Hebrides in 1909, the only extant methods of pottery known in the group were employed on Espiritu Santo and there were two of them.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian,' *New German Critique*, no. 5, trans. Knut Tarnowski (1975): 35.

⁹ Howard Van Trease, *The Politics of Land in Vanuatu* (University of the South Pacific, 1987), 19-23.

¹⁰ Roger Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific* (Melbourne University Press, 1980), 44.

¹¹ Deryk Scarr, *Fragments of Empire* (University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 177, 179, 182.

¹² Thompson, *Australian Imperialism*, 44-5.

¹³ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 49; Scarr, *Fragments*, 182-4; Douglas L. Oliver and Sheila Mitchell Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 73-4.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Australian Imperialism*, 47.

¹⁷ Ibid., 47, 128-9, 182-3, 186; see also Scarr, *Fragments*, 221-7, and Van Trease, *Politics*, 37.

¹⁸ Van Trease, *Politics*, 23; Scarr, *Fragments*, 16-21.

¹⁹ Oliver and Oliver, *Pacific Islands*, 73.

²⁰ Linden A. Mander, 'The New Hebrides Condominium,' *Pacific Historical Review* 13, no. 2 (June 1944): 151.

²¹ Hals and Collas, *The New Hebrides*, 81.

²² Ibid.

²³ Edward Jacomb, *France and England in the New Hebrides: the Anglo-French Condominium* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co, 1914), 19-22.

²⁴ Felix Speiser, *Two Years with the Natives in the Pacific* (London: Mills & Boon, 1913), 6.

²⁵ S. M. Lambert, *A Yankee Doctor in Paradise* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1941), 223.

²⁶ Jacomb, *France and England*, 88.

²⁷ *The New Hebrides Islands, S.W. Pacific: Under Two Flags: A Hopeless Experiment and a Grave Scandal* (Southend-on-Sea: Francis & Sons, 1913), 3; Thompson, *Australian Imperialism*, 196 [quoted remarks the author's, not May's].

²⁸ Colin Simpson, *Islands of Men: a Six-Part Book about Life in Melanesia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1955), 136.

²⁹ Ibid., 143.

³⁰ Jean Guiart alludes to some select content from these letters in his works, but he never cites nor reproduces any portion of them directly, furthermore, as I will discuss in the next chapter, his allusions are erroneous in key places, see Jean Guiart, *Espritu Santo: (Nouvelles-Hébrides)* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 199-202; *ibid.*, 'Forerunners of Melanesian Nationalism,' *Oceania* 22:2 (1951): 86.

³¹ ROD Clapcott to King, 2 June 1920, NHBS 5/V/4; for letters 1 February 1922 – 24 July 1923, see Inwards Correspondence, FC Clapcott and King, WPHC 4/IV/2853 (excerpt reproduced by kind permission of Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services).

Chapter 2: Buried Chambers, Deafening Notes—Raff, Guiart, and Worsley's Reverberating Trumpet



Fig. 8: Capitol Records 'Tower' studios and offices in Los Angeles, California.¹

In 1956, on Vine Street, between Yucca Street and Hollywood Boulevard in Los Angeles, Capitol Records completed construction on a new, landmark studio and office space. The Capitol 'Tower,' as it would come to be known, was a 'striking, earthquake-resistant reinforced-concrete structure.' It was a wonder of modern architecture. Designed by the firm Welton & Associates, it was the world's first circular office tower. It climbed 13 stories into the air, and, at 50 meters tall, it was the maximum height the city allowed.² Looking for all the world like a series of glittering records stacked beneath a needle, the Capitol Tower changed the Los Angeles cityscape forever.

Much of what was—and what remains—truly remarkable about the recording company's new edifice, however, is chthonic. Below the surface of an adjoining lot, buried beneath some 10 meters of earthen fill and connected to the complex by a narrow tunnel, is a hollow divided into four trapezoidal chambers.³ These four spaces, approximately 600 cubic meters apiece, with their hard surfaces, 'floating' construction and sloped ceilings, were what would come to be known as Capitol's famous 'echo' or reverberation chambers.⁴ These subterranean spaces, designed by the renowned Les Paul and completed with the rest of the Tower complex in 1956, would be at the heart of the company's historic success.

The chambers offered solutions to what was becoming an enormously popular problem by the 1950s: the 'close control of reverberation' in recorded sound.⁵ Echoic techniques in music and other sonic recording had long been a staple of Tin Pan Alley gimmickry, but they achieved dramatic renewed interest after Les Paul and his vocalist and rhythm-guitarist wife, Mary Ford, cut their reverb-saturated duet 'How High the Moon' in their Hollywood garage, late in 1950. The single was released in the early months of 1951. It went on to sell over a million copies.

'How High the Moon' broke new ground in soundscapes and their popular appreciation. The track made novel use of echo, delay, and multitracking techniques that Paul had been experimenting with for years. Furthermore, the single represented a major step forward for Paul in the process of recording onto magnetic tape: a material that offered the sort of greater clarity that would later come to be associated with high-fidelity. It was on this new recording surface that he recorded the brisk, plucky 'How High the Moon,' and on magnetic tape the track sparkled. When transferred onto record, every tap and click against the strings and surfaces of Paul's guitar leapt from the vinyl. Every 'breathy' sibilant on Ford's double and treble-tracked vocals stroked the listener's ear.⁶ 'How High the Moon' spent 25 weeks on the Billboard chart; it spent 9 of those weeks at #1.⁷ It was Paul and Ford's first magnetic tape hit, and it paved the way for new amplifications and degradations in sound, many of which

would be achieved within the recording rooms at the Capitol Records Tower.⁸

According to Capitol's James Bayless, by the mid-50's, manipulating reverberation had become 'the most important single factor in satisfactory recording acoustics.'⁹ To get and stay ahead of competitive sounds being developed at rival Chess Records in Chicago and Sun Studio in Memphis, Les Paul and Capitol Records knew that they needed to create something superlative: something of hitherto unparalleled accessibility, scale, acoustic fidelity and control, electromechanical accountability, and attractive design.¹⁰ Realization of the Tower's studios and Les Paul's adjoining echo chambers cemented Capitol and its parent company, EMI'sⁱ, place at the forefront of things.

Artists and producers from all over the world would travel to Hollywood to record at Capitol.ⁱⁱ In the Tower's studios, reverberation and noise could be reduced to an unprecedented minimum, producing 'a high degree of clarity, intelligibility, and separation...characterized by an extremely clean musical response, with a great deal of "presence."'¹¹ At the same time, these newly polished sounds could be piped down and released into the subterranean echo chambers where, in the hard-surfaced space—lined with metal lath and cement plaster, insulated by earth, cork and stone, and engineered against sonic flutters and decay—the desired sounds would careen about before being recaptured by a microphone positioned at the opposite end of the otherwise empty room. These reverberant positives were then fed back into the studio or mixing room, where they reinforced and amplified the track's desired sound.¹²

Meanwhile, in 1957—a year after the completion of Capitol Records' new offices, studios and echo chambers in Los Angeles—a construction job was being completed in a different sort of tower, several thousand kilometres eastward. That year Peter Worsley, a lecturer in Sociology at Hull University (with strong ties to Max Gluckman's

ⁱ British music company: Electric and Musical Industries.

ⁱⁱ The Beatles, the Beach Boys, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra were some of the many famous rock and pop performers produced at the Capitol Tower in the mid-20th century.

'Manchester School' of anthropology at University of Manchester), would publish what would become a classic work of British Social Anthropology, his *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia*.¹³ Much like the 'Tower sound' produced at Capitol in Los Angeles, the scholarship that Peter Worsley would produce (and reproduce) in *Trumpet* would go on to achieve global significance. It remains iconic even amidst present-day studies of Melanesia.¹⁴ And, much like the sonic engineering conducted in the studios and echo chambers at Capitol Tower, Worsley's *Trumpet* would, through various means of amplification and degradation, produce a desirous sound.

It is my desire, in this literature review, to examine the most well known accounts of the 1923 Clapcott Murder on Espiritu Santo. I will attempt to reverse-engineer key aspects of these accounts—particularly as they appear in Worsley's *Trumpet* and a letter appended to F. E. Williams's 1928 *Orokaiva Magic*—tracing them back and comparing them to the sources they cite from the literature of the field. Eventually I will compare these most popular accounts to undiscovered primary sources I uncovered during fieldwork in Vanuatu in 2014. In this chapter, however, my focus will be on those sources known to scholars who precede me. What elements within the source material do the leading scholarly accounts raise the volume on? What have they recorded over?

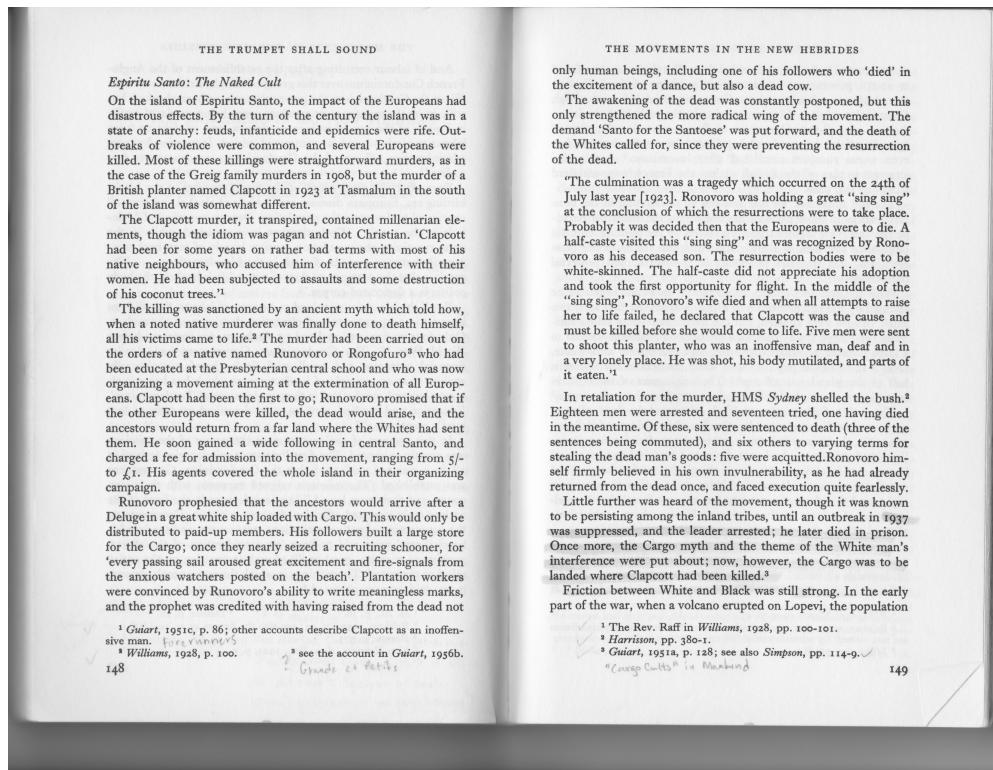


Fig. 9: Peter Worsley's 1957 writings on Clapcott, Ronovoro, and the events of 1923.¹⁵

Much like the artists and producers who recorded at the Capitol Tower after 1956, in *The Trumpet Shall Sound* Peter Worsley created a master work: a seminal text and future touchstone that would reference 'all the relevant available evidence...everything published on...Melanesian cults, mainly in English, French, German and Dutch.'¹⁶

Worsley's *Trumpet* had an immediate and resounding impact. The study was a powerful pushback against what had long been a dominant Structural-Functionalist mode in British Anthropology.¹⁷ Furthermore, Worsley wrote *Trumpet* 'in firm belief that anthropology can be interesting to the non-specialist.'¹⁸ Issued as it was, in the mid-1950s, during a time of heightened academic and non-academic attention to post-war social rebellions in Europe and unease over the future of colonial territories worldwide, the book met a broad reading public that was primed to receive it.¹⁹

Before long, *Trumpet* was both a popular and academic hit. Since its original release in 1957, *The Trumpet Shall Sound* has been translated into Italian, Russian, German, French, Spanish and Japanese. Worsley

revised and expanded upon it in a second edition in 1968, and it has gone on to be reprinted dozens of times. It stands to this day as a landmark work within the fields of Pacific Anthropology, Social Anthropology, and Cargo Studies.²⁰

In *Trumpet*, Worsley distinguished himself from fellow anthropologists working in the Pacific in a number of ways. Rather than focusing on a particular cultural group or region, Worsley trawled the entirety of Melanesia in an effort to net all cults recorded therein since the arrival of Europeans. The resultant study was a macroscopic survey, underpinned by Worsley's roots in Marxist historiography. The volume's scale was unprecedented within Pacific Anthropology. *Trumpet* also stood out from the anthropological monographs of Worsley's contemporaries by nature of the fact that it is informed exclusively by literature of the field, rather than by any actual fieldwork undertaken by Worsley himself.

In general, Worsley's contemporaries reviewed *The Trumpet Shall Sound* favourably.²¹ Likewise, the work is, by and large, still highly respected in today's retrospective analyses.²² Then, as now, the author's Marxist determinism draws some criticism, as does his reductive—and not entirely original—argument that cargo cults are a sort of adolescent phase: responses to colonial oppression and expressions of indigenous anomie somewhere along the arc of a transnational Melanesian modernization. Despite these critiques, Worsley's *Trumpet* is often credited for helping to advance perspectives on cultism in the Pacific beyond the mental and psychological pathologies they had been mired in since the publication of F. E. Williams' *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf Division* in 1923.²³ Furthermore, *Trumpet* is praised for the 'vast data' it processes, for the 'thoroughness' of Worsley's archival work and bibliography, and for the author's illumination of many 'informative statements...buried in out of the way reports written by government officials and missionaries in a variety of languages.'²⁴

My experience with Worsley and *Trumpet* is at significant odds with those of the critics above. I find it difficult to square my impressions

with theirs. The knowledge I have acquired in researching the Clapcott Murder compels me to claim that, insofar as this event is concerned, Worsley's account does not illuminate the buried reports of officials and missionaries. It is not a thorough sounding of vast data. The account is, instead, a prelude: an introduction within the narrative Worsley arranges around his book's theme, which is that cultic movements in the Pacific, unless properly countered by colonial authorities, contain the potential to evolve into proto-nationalistic and then organized—and potentially aberrant—political movements.

As a prelude, the iteration of the Clapcott Murder that Worsley composes is a telling production: a partial and particular version of events on Espritu Santo and Efate in 1923, arranged by the author towards the achievement of minimal dissonance within and wide diffusion of his thesis. And yet, if close inspection and the inclusion of contemporary voices in the previous chapter problematized notions of casual imperial hegemony projected within the Condominium's stamp and Petit's postcard, what could a more exacting review of treatments of the Clapcott Murder—Worsley's and others'—reveal about their production? What are these accounts made of? Will they achieve consonance or dissonance when mixed with new primary source materials?

Though we ostensibly begin this review with Worsley, we are necessarily also beginning it with the Presbyterian Reverend Eric Maitland Kirk Raff. Though he does not credit all of what he takes with proper citation, nearly half of Worsley's writing on the Clapcott Murder is taken directly from a letter written by Raff on 10 January 1924. In the immediate aftermath of the Clapcott Murder and the trial of those accused, Raff addressed this letter, offering his limited perspective on events, to the Assistant Government Anthropologist of Australian Papua, F. E. Williams, author of the aforementioned 1923 cause célèbre, *The Vailala Madness*. When Williams published his next book, *Orokaiva Magic*, in 1928, an extract from Raff's letter appeared in the volume as an appendix.²⁵

Fittingly, given his addressee's view of local cultism as phenomena of mental and psychological pathologies, the portrait that Raff's letter paints of Espiritu Santo in the early 1920s is one of pagan credulity and mass hysteria. He writes of prophets on the island ginning up insanity, preying upon their fellow islanders' material desires for European trade goods and local grief over the inexplicable losses of friends and family, presumably to introduced diseases at home or disappearance while labouring abroad in nickel mines on New Caledonia or sugarcane operations in Queensland and Fiji.

The Reverend tells of watch-fires being lit upon the beaches in anticipation of the arrival of a steamship from Sydney that would be laden with cargo for the cultists, of resurrections achieved and others promised, and of the islanders' wonder at the sight of at least one of their prophets writing in the manner of Europeans. What becomes clear when close reading is applied to the extract from Raff's letter—reproduced in Williams and leaned so heavily upon in Worsley—is that the Reverend Raff was himself somewhat well read on the subject of cultic behaviour within Pacific Anthropology. Aside from its being a patchwork of anecdote, misattributed history, and hearsay, at its worst Raff's letter merely mirrors F. E. Williams' own words back at the letter's addressee. For an example of these faults, consider the following passage, taken from Raff's letter:

A large house was built to receive these goods and on one occasion the people nearly took possession of a recruiting schooner in the belief that their ship had arrived. Every passing sail aroused great excitement and fire-signals from the anxious watchers posted on the beach.²⁶

The Rev. Raff never worked on Espiritu Santo. His six-year tenure in the New Hebrides was spent supervising operations at the Margaret Whitecross Paton Memorial Church in Port Vila on Efate Island, several hundred kilometres away. There might be some grain of truth in his

reference to the prophets' 'large house.' In the larceny case against those who took Clapcott's goods, William Bowie testified to Ronovuro's house being larger than other homes in his village, and two of the Presbyterian missionaries on Espiritu Santo, familiar with the South Santo area, attest to this as well.²⁷ The rest of the above passage, however, has no basis in discernable facts relating to the Clapcott Murder. My research has uncovered no reference to an assault of any kind in connection with the Clapcott Murder on trading or recruiting vessels visiting Espiritu Santo, and reports of 'fire-signals' on the beach, lit in anticipation of the mythic steamer, are likewise baseless.

The attempt on the schooner that Raff cites most likely refers to an assault on the vessel *Les Trois Amis*: an event that took place off the island of Malekula in 1910.²⁸ The 'great excitement and fire-signals' he recounts are likely taken from the appendices of Williams' own *Vailala Madness*, where the Australian Papua Gulf Division's Acting Resident Magistrate, G H Murray, reports:

The natives became obsessed with the idea that their ancestors were returning to them in a large ship as white men, and they would not go to their gardens or make sago for fear that the vessel would come in their absence. Some kept vigil throughout the night, and when one imagined that he saw the glimpse of a vessel there would be a cry of "Sail, ho!" and instantly every one was running about with torches in the wildest excitement.²⁹

Raff does not confine his mirroring to signal-fires. In a subsequent paragraph, the Reverend claims knowledge of cries of 'Santo for the Santoeses' having been raised on Espiritu Santo. Like the claims of fire-signals, these cries for island-wide solidarity find no corroborating evidence in any archival materials relating to the Clapcott Murder or Espiritu Santo in the early 1920s; they do, however, have much the same

ring as the call of ‘Papua for Papuans’ observed in an appendix to Williams’ *Vailala Madness*.³⁰

Lastly, Raff claims that the Clapcott Murder was partly in consequence of a rise in popular belief in an indigenous myth that taught ‘when at last a noted native murderer was done to death, all his victims came to life.’ Raff goes on to posit that, ‘The natural deduction was “Kill the whites who have caused the deaths and the dead shall arise.”’³¹ Worsley references this passage from Raff in *Trumpet*, saying that it sanctioned Clapcott’s killing.³² Whether or not such myths existed in the New Hebrides in general, or Santo specifically, is not at issue here: what is at issue is whether they had any bearing on the decision to murder Clapcott. On this the archive is mute; I found no mention whatsoever of this myth in any of statements or testimonies of those accused in the Clapcott case.³³ The myth of resurrections begat by the killing of murderers enters the Clapcott story with Raff’s letter. This myth, the signal-fires, the burgeoning nationalism, and a number of other elements in the letter are embellishments. Yet, as they go on to be reproduced, Worsley’s account and others’ grow to be apocryphal tales, proffered loudly as local facts and historical truths.

In contrast, it is worth noting particulars in Raff’s letter that are muted in Worsley’s account. For instance Raff correctly makes reference to there having been multiple prophets in connection with the Clapcott Murder. In the midst of material clearly taken—but not properly cited—from Raff’s letter to Williams, Worsley reduces this multiplicity to a single prophet: Ronovuro.³⁴ The prophesized ‘flood’ coming to drown all those but paid members of the cult in Raff’s account becomes a ‘Deluge’ in Worsley. Here Worsley is likely foregoing Raff’s word choice in favour of diction Alfred Court Haddon uses in the Cambridge anthropologist and ethnologist’s 1917 account of the Prophet of Milne Bay movement on New Guinea in 1893, another cult examined in *Trumpet*. Worsley references Haddon’s report on the Milne Bay movement in his bibliography, yet, unsurprisingly, he does not cite Haddon’s work in the pages where he discusses the movement.³⁵ Lastly, where Raff relays that memberships

into Ronovuro's movement on Espiritu Santo could be purchased by means of pigs *or* European currency, Worsley only includes mention of the monetary method of acquiring membership, again reducing the range—and in this case, accuracy—of information available from his sources.³⁶

This selective heightening and diminishing of source material, regardless of veracity, in Worsley's account does not end with Raff. Worsley's inclusions—and exclusions—from the works of the Cambridge polymath, Tom Harrisson, and the French anthropologist and ethnologist Jean Guiart make for even greater sources of interpretive tension³⁷. One notable example of this can be found in Worsley's description of Ronovuro as having been educated at the 'Presbyterian central school', herein citing Guiart.³⁸ This school was the Presbyterian Mission's Tangoa Training Institute (TTI), established on an islet off the south coast of Espiritu Santo, near to Tasmalum where Clapcott was murdered, and it is highly likely that Guiart took this information from Tom Harrisson's 1937 *Savage Civilization*. Harrisson, in writing of the Clapcott Murder in this book, claims that Ronovuro 'had been trained at the Presbyterian central school on Tangoa islet, where he got wise to many things; they [the islanders] do.'³⁹ Guiart takes this claim from Harrisson, and Worsley takes it from Guiart. All of this is unfortunate because Harrisson is wrong.

There is no evidence of Ronovuro's ever having been a student at the mission school on Tangoa. There is no mention of the prophet's name in TTI's student or teacher rotas.⁴⁰ More tellingly, the Rev. Frederick Bowie, resident on Tangoa and South Santo since 1897, details what are clearly the first of his problematic encounters with Ronovuro, who was hitherto unknown to him, in letters he wrote in 1919.⁴¹

Harrisson, who arrived and worked in the islands a decade after Clapcott and Ronovuro's deaths, is either misinformed or misreporting in *Savage Civilization*.⁴² He is in error again when he claims that, after Clapcott's murder and in retaliation for it, '[The] H.M.S. *Sydney* rushed up. Shelled the bush [sic] and rounded up some of the participants, largely through the courage of Salisbury [the British District Agent at Hog

Harbour, on the east coast of Espiritu Santo].⁴³ This very serious claim in Harrisson, a claim of violent and largely indiscriminate British reprisal against the indigenous people of South Santo, is reproduced in Worsley's *Trumpet*. It is worth going into some detail here to correct it.

No vessel named H.M.S. *Sydney* rushed up to Santo in the wake of the Clapcott Murder. No shells are recorded in any official correspondence as being fired into the bush. The Anglo-French Condominium steam-vessel *Euphrosyne* arrived into Espiritu Santo waters on 6 August 1923, two weeks after the killing, under the command of Ernest Arthur Goldfinch Seagoe, the Acting Commandant of the British Constabulary. Only two bullets were fired in the process of arresting the nineteen indigenous men the *Euphrosyne* would transport south to Port Vila for trial.⁴⁴ One shot was fired into the vicinity of one of the accused men to 'induce his surrender' as he resisted arrest and attempted to escape custody. The other bullet was used to execute a dog rumoured to have been fed Clapcott's genitals.⁴⁵

The British Resident Commissioner Merton King and the Acting French Resident Commissioner Aguste de la Vaissiere did send a second vessel to Espiritu Santo in response to the Clapcott Murder after the verdicts in the trial were handed down in mid-September, but this mission is mentioned nowhere in secondary scholarship. Its details are somewhat difficult to find within the archive, but on 28 September 1923, the French Government Auxiliary Yacht *Victoire* set out from Port Vila on what would be described as a 'tournée' of South and Southeast Espiritu Santo.⁴⁶

A contingent of indigenous police from the Condominium Constabulary in Port Vila travelled aboard the *Victoire* under the command of the French Commandant Berthault. They anchored in Port Sandwich, Malekula, on the 29th where they were reinforced with additional French police. After a luncheon on 2 October, and with the agreement of the British District Agent to Santo Thomas Salisbury, the Constabulary force commenced 'operations' on the plantation of a Mr. Tom Reed on Santo's east coast. This was followed by visits to the French

plantations of Caspar, Chapui and the Société du Canal. The *Victoire* would continue along Santo's southeast and south coasts the next day, visiting the French settlements of Bechade, Chantreux, the Catholic Mission, the hospital, Russet, Bourchard, Cassin, Peyrolle and Ratard. British District Agent Salisbury did not accompany the Constabulary this second day, complaining of a pain in his foot.

From Berhault's report it would seem that much of this tour was conducted with the Constabulary travelling on land, presumably along the beach, and *Victoire* in support, keeping apace not far off the coast. Throughout the first days of the tour, *Victoire* flew the Tricolour from its mast. However, when the vessel reached Tangoa islet midway along the south coast on the afternoon of 3 October, the crew changed flags, running up the Union Jack.

Berthault describes the next day, 4 October, as 'the most painful' day of the tour. In the early morning *Victoire* travelled along the shore of Tasmalum Bay, supporting the Constabulary column, which was followed by the recovered Salisbury and the Rev. Frederick Bowie. The land the men moved through along the shore was friendly to South Santo's British plantation community, but at 9am the Constabulary force embarked inland, likely up the Wailapa River Basin. There they visited six tribes before returning in the rain and making their way back to Tangoa for the night. Other than his mention of the rain, Berthault gives no explicit indication as to why 4 October was any more painful than any other day of the tour.

The force visited three British-owned plantations on the mainland across from Tangoa the next day. By mid-afternoon on 5 October the tour was over. The company spent the rest of the day cleaning the linens, weapons and equipment. They billeted at plantations on neighbouring Malo and Aore for a few days more before setting off for Port Vila. *Victoire* returned on 10 October, whereupon Berthault is reported as saying 'all is quiet on the island [Santo], and confidence is apparently being restored.'⁴⁷

Though it does not do so explicitly, the following summary, addressed from Berthault to Vaissiere, conveys some sense of the *Victoire* tour's objectives and the actions it took to achieve them. It also provides the French officer's impressions of Espiritu Santo some two months after the Clapcott Murder:

If the alarming rumours of which you have been aware have been exaggerated as far as the French settlers are concerned, there should be legitimate apprehensions for the British nationals, for these isolated pioneers use for their plantations only the natives of Santo and are thus exposed to the hatred and vengeance of these natives. It was therefore urgent to show these disruptors that the Administrations possessed well-armed police forces, able to act in due time. Mr. Bowie spoke in the dialect of Santo and explained this to them.

The English and French settlers, on the other hand, are very grateful to you and the British Resident Commissioner for having made a police tour so that the natives of Santo and those hired on the plantations know that if they were to revolt they would soon be repressed. The good behaviour and discipline of the French and British Corps deeply impressed the indigenous people who remained interested in the passage of the Militia.⁴⁸

Imperial anxiety; indigenous antagonism; an imperial show of strength translated, in part, by a missionary; and a police operation, limited almost entirely to the coast, conducted in two parts, on one boat, under two separate flags: Berthault conveys all of this to us his account. However, he says nothing with regards to bombardments, casualties or encounters with resistance.

Whatever really happened on the south and southeast coasts of Espiritu Santo between the 2nd and 5th of October 1923, the cruise of the

Victoire spared the island a visit from a warship that had been pre-approved. In response to an appeal for naval aid against continued unrest on Santo from British Resident Commissioner King in late September, British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific Cecil Hunter-Rodwell received authorization from both the Secretary of State for the Colonies Victor Cavendish and the Governor-General of Australia Henry William Forster on 7 October to dispatch a Royal Australian Navy warship to Espiritu Santo.⁴⁹ Two days after Rodwell received this authority, King notified the High Commissioner that he and Vaissiere had taken matters into their own hands and sent the *Victoire* north. At this point, the vessel had not yet returned—both British and French Administrations in Vila were unaware of the mission’s results or consequences.⁵⁰

Within the next few days the pre-authorized warship proved unnecessary. The *Victoire* arrived back in port on the 10th, and on 12 October King communicated its success to Rodwell.⁵¹ A month later, in light of the mission launched aboard the *Victoire* and no subsequent appeals from King, Rodwell communicated to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that, ‘on the subject of unrest among Natives of Santo following on the murder of Mr. Clapcott, a British Settler, I have the honour to inform Your Grace that...I have taken no steps under the authority conveyed in Your Grace’s telegram of October 7th.’⁵²

In connection with the Clapcott Murder, then, we have four ships: the *Euphrosyne*, the *Victoire*, a warship that never left Australia, and the H.M.S. *Sydney*. Of these four ships and their respective missions to Espiritu Santo there are two that were, one that could have been, and one that never was. Only the last of these exists within the scholarly discourse that surrounds the Clapcott Murder. Harrisson is the first to claim it. Worsley echoes it. As is the case with so much else in accounts of this event, the cruise of the *Sydney* is a fiction that has, unchallenged, been left to masquerade as fact.

The most well supported source material cited in Worsley’s account of the Clapcott Murder comes from Guiart, who made several observational trips into Espiritu Santo’s rugged interior in the mid-1940s,

after the war's end, at the behest of the New Hebrides' Condominium Government.⁵³ Notwithstanding his inaccurate assertions, cribbed from Harrisson's narrative, that Ronovuro had been mission-trained, much of Guiart's various writings that touch upon the Clapcott Murder are grounded in oral testimonies taken years after the events *in situ* or from the sorts of 'out of the way reports written by government officials' that Worsley is credited with unearthing by his generous reviewers.

Perhaps the most important example of a positive reproduction of Guiart's findings that appear in *Trumpet* is a piece of crucial and corroborated information taken from Guiart's 1951 article 'Forerunners of Melanesian Nationalism' where the French anthropologist first makes the claim in secondary scholarship that 'Clapcott had been for some years on rather bad terms with most of his native neighbours, who accused him of interference with their women.'⁵⁴ Here Guiart is alluding to the letters I have reproduced in full at the end of the previous chapter. Though he never provides a clear reference for the exchanges that passed between Clapcott and Merton King, it is evident from the language and details he includes that Guiart had seen at least some of the links in this chain of correspondence.

Guiart's revelation of discord between Clapcott and his indigenous neighbours represents an important development upon the version of events that had stood uncontested since Raff described the planter as 'inoffensive' in 1924.⁵⁵ Worsley includes both interpretations of Clapcott's character in *Trumpet*. He quotes Guiart's remark about interference with local women and attaches Raff's description of Clapcott as inoffensive to this as a contrastive footnote. The juxtaposition here—Clapcott as benign in Raff and potentially malign in Guiart—produces a rare instance of dissonance within Worsley's text. A fissure opens up in the historical record; it is as if, somewhere off-mic in the middle of Worsley's otherwise slick production, we briefly overhear one musician quietly upbraiding the performance of another. The track marches on, but something about this disharmonic moment fascinates. It calls out. In this quiet clash of notes we

begin to hear something personal beneath Worsley's very structural presentation: a faint but disquieting agency.

Further examination of Guiart's work in *Grands et Petits Hommes de la Montagne, Espiritu Santo* (1956) and *Espiritu Santo: (Nouvelles Hébrides)* (1958), reveals the most substantial versions of the Clapcott Murder hitherto available.⁵⁶ For example, Guiart describes the aforementioned letters concerning Clapcott and his neighbours in some detail, though his dates are wrong.⁵⁷ He refers to some of the lesser known participants in the events on Espiritu Santo and Efate by name, demonstrates awareness of petitions drafted by Europeans in the islands urging Condominium officials toward dramatic and lasting action against the Santoese accused, and he quotes certain documented remarks made in 1923 (though he misattributes these to Ronovuro).⁵⁸

Guiart is obscure about his sources, but in my research among official documents within the New Hebrides British Service Archives at the University of Auckland Library I have located primary sources that support (even where they challenge the strict accuracy of) the above remarks in *Grands et Petits* and *Espiritu Santo*. What is most interesting in these accounts in Guiart, however, is what comes not through the Condominium archives, but through indigenous informants interviewed by Guiart during his fieldwork on Espiritu Santo.

According to Guiart's informants, Ronovuro was a skilful exhibitionist who, in years preceding the Clapcott Murder, had acquired some wealth through the sale of magic that rendered its purchasers invulnerable to bullets. As part of his 'sales' pitch, Ronovuro would offer a demonstration. He would fire blanks at banana leaf targets after removing the lead from the cartridges in secret, a ruse he had inherited upon the death of his maternal uncle, Payalolos.

Within a few years, Ronovuro's ambitions outgrew his uncle's trick. He set himself up on a hilltop not far from Clapcott's plantation at Tasmalum and endeavoured to build his own, rival copra operation. Like anyone attempting to profit in copra harvesting and production, Ronovuro needed labourers. To attract them, he needed to offer them

wages in European cash. It was to this end—the accumulation of payroll capital—that, according to Guiart’s local informants, Ronovuro began selling memberships into a new cult: one that promised the dead would return to life and that individuals would be pardoned for acts of murder.⁵⁹

According to a certain Paya, Ronovuro’s nephew and one of the few informants Guiart names, when Clapcott’s murder eventually came, it was on account of the death of Ronovuro’s wife. As the Rev. Raff describes the story to Williams in his 1924 letter, and as Worsley quotes it in *Trumpet* in 1957 (and maintains it, verbatim, in his augmented 2nd edition in 1968), Ronovuro ordered Clapcott’s death to catalyse the magic that would resurrect his wife. As Paya recounts it to Guiart, the murder was a revenge killing: Ronovuro’s wife had taken ill some few days after laying with Clapcott, who was suspected of having poisoned her.⁶⁰

Worsley and Guiart were contemporaries and well familiar with each other’s work. The two scholars co-authored an article that appeared in *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* in 1958, which maps, inventories, and offers an overview of millenarian movements in Melanesia.⁶¹ In his conclusion to *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, Worsley credits Guiart’s earlier notion of cults and cargo movements as ‘forerunners to Melanesian nationalism,’ this being consonant with Worsley’s later identification of such movements as being ‘proto-national.’⁶² And yet, for all of their intellectual harmony, Worsley relegates much of what Guiart has to say on the matter of the Clapcott Murder, particularly those suggestions of agency, into relative silence.

Whatever interests these two anthropologists might have shared in the Clapcott Murder, their texts that address it have not enjoyed similar success. *The Trumpet Shall Sound* was reeditioned, reprinted dozens of times before the end of the 20th century, and made available in seven different languages, Guiart’s *Grands et Petits* and *Espirito Santo* were never reprinted after each book’s first year of publication. *Espirito Santo* is available in French and Spanish, *Grands et Petits* solely in French. Why this disparity, I will not venture. An assessment of the means of production of anthropological monographs, tastes of global readership

from the late 1950s to the present, and other factors that have led to the long-standing popularity of Worsley's study and the relative obscurity of Guiart's two volumes is outside the scope of this essay. For the purposes of my argument, it might suffice to merely say that former's account, over time, has effected to speak over the latter's. Where the Clapcott Murder is concerned, this is unfortunate. Guiart's account offers more facts and original contributions, fewer inaccuracies, and a more nuanced portrait. But despite his improvements upon the versions that preceded him, Jean Guiart's account of the Clapcott Murder is by no means completely accurate. Nor does it tell us all we might wish to know.

Guiart names seven of the islanders brought to Vila for trial, but who were the other twelve men? What were their fates? What motivated the assassins? Was it belief in Ronovuro? Loyalty to him? Fear of him? What motivated Ronovuro to order the killing? Was it vengeance, or something else? What motivated those islanders who took no part in the murder, but did partake of Clapcott's goods, flesh or both? Surely all of this was more than the product of one man's rage over being made a cuckold, if he were indeed ever cuckolded at all. And what of the European population on Santo? Beyond their petitions, what roles did they play in the murder's build-up and aftermath? How did the trial proceed on Efate, and how did European fears and desires on Santo, in Port Vila, and in the British and French colonial headquarters in London and Paris affect its results? These questions find no answers in Worsley or Guiart; they indicate only hollows within the historical record as it stands.

Records can, however, be updated. They can be recorded over. They can be scratched, played backwards and broken. They can be rediscovered.

On Tuesday, 24 June 2008, the Los Angeles City Council's Planning and Land-Use Management Committee was scheduled to overhear an appeal, issued by EMI, to overturn an approval for construction to begin on a 16-floor condominium and 242-car underground garage adjacent to Capitol

Tower. This prompted concerns that 'noise and vibrations' from the neighbouring project would render 'quality sound recording impossible' in the Tower studios during its construction.⁶³

The Tower's famous echo chambers faced the greatest risk. A mere six meters would separate the condominium project's excavation and building works from the Tower's concrete vaults, which were still very much in use. In 2008, ahead of EMI's appeal, record producer Larry Clothier was interviewed at the Los Angeles Capitol complex. He had flown in from New York to record there. He is quoted saying, 'We can record in New York; that's where everybody lives. We could, but it wouldn't be the same. The chambers under here are legendary.... Nothing can replace them.' Following Clothier, 19-time Grammy Award winner, Al Schmitt, deplored the new project: 'There is nothing like these echo chambers anywhere. Nobody can replicate them.... [The] intrusion could shut this building down. It would be a shame to have the history of this studio gone like that. People want to come here to work.'⁶⁴ As it would turn out, EMI won its appeal. The new project was halted, for a time.

One year earlier, in Port Vila, on the night of 7 June 2007, fire burnt the Supreme Court House of the Republic of Vanuatu to the ground. This building, too, was historic. Constructed in 1910, it had originally served as the palatial residence of the newly-appointed President of the Joint Court of the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. It served as headquarters for American forces in the islands during the Second World War, and was converted from residency into official courthouse after the conflict. It was the last of several original administrative buildings that had been built upon the bluff overlooking Port Vila, where it had stood as a demonstration 'of the rule of colonial law to all who entered the harbour.'⁶⁵

All records of the Supreme Court and all pre-independence records of the Joint Court covering cases from 1910-1979—'the patrimony of France and Britain as well as Vanuatu'—were known to have been inside the Court House. Registrations of companies operating in Vanuatu, land and title records, criminal records: all appeared to have been lost in the

fire. But, after the embers cooled, a subterranean strong room was uncovered.⁶⁶ Within this hard, dark space beneath the rubble, many of these critical archives survived. Included among them was Supreme Court Box 888: File '32 Clapcott,' containing interviews, formal depositions, judicial hearings, court minutes and a cacophony of other primary source materials as yet unheard of within scholarly discourse surrounding the Clapcott Murder.

Before we move into the last chapter of this essay, where I will introduce what we have of the voices of the accused, it is worth noting that, as of June 2016, construction has broken ground on the building project in Los Angeles, adjacent to the Capitol Tower, that had been brought to a stop in 2008.⁶⁷ Despite edicts designed to protect the Tower's on-going recording operations and the integrity of its echo chambers, there is no certainty as to what consequences this development might have on Capitol Records' iconic sound in the short or long term. I will reproduce no images from the job site, though photos of the on-going work can be found with a simple Internet search (the physical address is 2230 Yucca Street, Los Angeles, CA 90028). I will, instead, offer images from Port Vila, Vanuatu: the site of a different sort of destruction and, hopefully, construction.

The first photo depicts the surface remains of the erstwhile Joint Court of the New Hebrides as I found them during my fieldwork in Vanuatu in 2014. The photo immediately below is the entrance to the underground strong room where File 32 outlived the fire of 2007.

Below these is a photograph taken of the third and final page of the original pre-trial deposition Ronovuro delivered before Jules de Leener, Public Prosecutor to the Court. Present with de Leener were several official witnesses and William Bowie, a British planter from a property neighbouring Clapcott's on Espiritu Santo. William was the younger brother to the Rev. Frederick Bowie of Tangoa who accompanied and translated for the Constabulary force that toured Espiritu Santo with the *Victoire*. William Bowie served both as the interpreter of South Santo dialects in the Clapcott Case and as a witness for the prosecution.

If we look closely at the page's bottom left, just above the angular European signature belonging to Darroux, the Joint Court Notary, we can detect what looks like a faint smudge. This is Ronovuro's fingerprint—his signature. It is the material remnant of the moment the Clapcott Murder's orchestrator touched his inked finger to the historical record. It is, perhaps, as close to history 'as it really was' that source material can take us. Like any mark upon a physical surface, it has dimension. It has been put down, and yet it rises from the page.



Figs. 10 & 11: Front steps and exposed strong room of Joint Court of the New Hebrides and Supreme Court of Vanuatu after fire of 2007 (photos taken by author in August 2014).

Q. Did not Trowbridge bring him the money
R. And I never did hear of the money, but old
Lug's brought it.

Q. Did he see the dead body of Clapcott?
R. Yes, I saw the Clapcott after his death. I used to go
to see him there, I just used him & drive my
village by the way.

Q. Could he see in his mind what he did to the
body of Clapcott?

R. No he could not remember it now.

Q. by whom arrested? Did he never hear him to come
from the ground? He alighted at last.

R. I did not, I just saw I saw I heard that

Tombleton was never the dead & when
after being said & translated into English
by Mr. Borden, he said he was not
and he was not. ~~He was not~~ Mr. Borden said he
was not dead, he said he was not dead.


In contradiction with Trowbridge
and old man Trowbridge

Fig. 12: Signatures upon Ronovuro pre-trial examination (reproduced by kind permission of the National Archives of Vanuatu).⁶⁸

Notes

¹ Kevin D. Hartnell, 'Capitol Records building photographed in black and white on an overcast day,' Wikimedia Commons, 28 March 2006, accessed 17 August 2017,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACapitolrecords_032806_kdh.jpg.

² James W. Bayless, 'Innovations in Studio Design and Construction in the Capitol Tower Recording Studios,' *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society* 5:2 (1957): 71.

³ Bob Pool, 'Capitol Fears for its Sonic Signature,' *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 2008, accessed 20 August 2016,

<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jun/18/local/me-capitol18>; John Peabody, 'The Secret of that Capitol Studios Sound,' *A Continuous Lean*, last modified 2 December 2013, accessed 21 August 2016,
<http://www.acontinuouslean.com/2013/12/02/secret-capitol-studios-sound/>; Bayless, 'Innovations,' 72, 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶ Writer, musician, and visual artist Peter Doyle describes the 1951 single: 'Paul's first "mag-tape hit" made a feature of multitracking and of echo and reverb devices, applied to Paul's guitars and now to the voice of his vocalist wife Mary Ford....The slapback echo applied to the guitars exaggerated every minor incidental string noise. Every little tap of the plectrum on the strings rebounds *in tempo*—an important effect...adding a sense of drive and urgency to the music. Mary Ford's singing is heard as a breathy, lightly uttered, on-time crooning, doubled (or trebled) to resemble the sort of close-harmony swing singing made famous by groups such as the Boswell Sisters and the Andrews Sisters....The echo and delay on the multitracked voices also greatly heightens incidental sounds, in particular the breezy sibilants.'; see Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording, 1900-1960* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 147-8.

⁷ Whitburn, Joel (1973). *Top Pop Records 1940-1955*. Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin: Record Research, *Wikipedia*, accessed 21 August 2016,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/How_High_the_Moon#cite_ref-Whitburn_5-0.

⁸ In *Echo and Reverb*, Doyle discusses a December 1977 *Guitar Player Magazine* interview with J. Sievert, where Les Paul discusses his approach to early multitracking: a process where tracks are recorded, played back, and new, additional music is layered upon them, creating what was, at the time, an innovative, composite sound, as well as consequent degradation of the original tracks and ambient sounds. In subsequent interview with P. Laurence and B. Rypinski of *Audio Magazine* in December 1978, quoted by at length in Doyle, Paul says of multitracking's degradations and production's priorities: "Course you degrade. But the degrading depends on what you're degrading. You're at the Hilton Hotel and you don't know what you're sittin' on down underneath the hotel, do ya? Okay, on my recording we don't know what's down underneath....Like a drum is in the

background, he's just stirring around, he's unimportant...but you get that bass, you gotta have him right up front, and you better have him just right. That lead guitar better shine, and he better be brand new. That vocal better be so clear that the four part harmony may be off in echo and it may be half a block away. So your perspective has to be in mind.' Doyle, *Echo and Reverb*, 148.

⁹ Bayless, 'Innovations,' 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74; see also Ed Schilling, 'Capitol Records Studio A,' *Frets* 5:10 (October 1983): 17-18.

¹² Bayless, 'Innovations,' 74-5.

¹³ Lamont Lindstrom, 'Trumpet and Road: Two Classic Cargo Texts,' in *Texts and Contexts*, eds. Doug Munro and Brij V. Lal. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 179-80. For a general overview of Peter Worsley's career, see JDY Peel, 'Peter Worsley Obituary,' *The Guardian*, 28 March 2013, accessed 9 August 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/mar/28/peter-worsley>; see also Jeffrey Henderson et al., 'Letters: "Peter Worsley Was One of Britain's Sociology Superstars",' *The Guardian*, 2 April 2013, accessed 9 August 2016:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/apr/02/peter-worsley-obituary-letters>.

¹⁴ Lindstrom, 'Trumpet and Road,' 179.

¹⁵ Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 148-149.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁷ Lindstrom, 'Trumpet and Road,' 182-184.

¹⁸ Worsley, *Trumpet*, 9.

¹⁹ Lindstrom, 'Trumpet and Road,' 182-183; Peel, 'Peter Worsley Obituary,' <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/apr/02/peter-worsley-obituary-letters>.

²⁰ Lindstrom, 'Trumpet and Road,' 178-188; and Jebens, Kaplan, Kohl, and Dalton in *Cargo, Cult, and Culture Critique*, ed. Holger Jebens (Honolulu: UHP, 2004), *passim*.

²¹ See reviews by M. Mead (1958), K. E. Read (1958), A. Wallace (1958), H. Riecken (1958), C. Belshaw (1958), D. Aberle (1969); a notable exception to the generally positive tenor of these reviews can be found in Lucy Mair's scathing attack on the study's scope, originality, credibility and rigor (1958).

²² Munro and Lal, *Texts and Contexts*, *passim*; and Jebens, *Cargo*, *passim*.

²³ F. E. Williams, *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf Division* (Port Moresby: E.G. Baker, Govt. Printer, 1923).

²⁴ See Henry W. Riecken, Review of *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, by Peter Worsley, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (1958): 324-325; Cyril S. Belshaw, Review of *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, by Peter Worsley, *Man* 58 (1958): 200.

²⁵ F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic* (London: OUP, 1928), 100-101.

²⁶ Raff in F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100.

²⁷ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Larceny), 18 September 1923. VSC 888/32/3; William Anderson, "A Dangerous Fanatic," *Quarterly Jottings from the New Hebrides* 124 (1924): 5; and Rev. F. G. Bowie, "A Strange Tragedy in the New Hebrides," *Record of the Home and Foreign Mission Work of the United Free Church of Scotland* (1924): 77.

²⁸ Brian J. Bresnihan and Keith Woodward, *Tufala Gavman: Reminiscences from the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2002), 27.

²⁹ G. H. Murray in Williams, *The Vailala Madness*, 70-71.

³⁰ Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100; Williams, *The Vailala Madness*, 15.

³¹ Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100.

³² Worsley, *Trumpet*, 148; see also Jean Guiart, *Espirito Santo: (Nouvelles-Hébrides)* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 199.

³³ File 32 'Clapcott'. Vanuatu Supreme Court Records 888/32/1-3.

³⁴ Worsley, *Trumpet*, 148-9; cf Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100; and Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 199, 202.

³⁵ Cf. E. W. P. Chinnery and A. C. Haddon, 'Five New Religious Cults in British New Guinea,' *Hibbert Journal* 15:3 (1917): 458; Charles W. Abel, *Savage Life in New Guinea* (London: London Missionary Society, 1902), 107; Worsley, *Trumpet*, 52; and C. G. Seligman, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 656. It is worth noting that 'deluge' is the term used in Haddon and Abel's accounts of the Prophet of Milne Bay events; the term is absent in Seligman. All three accounts are referenced in *Trumpet*'s bibliography. It is also worth noting that Rev. Frederick Gatherer Bowie, the likely source for much of Raff's information, consistently refers to the promised cataclysm as a 'flood' in his letters concerning Ronovuro. See F. G. Bowie to King, 3 September 1919, New Hebrides British Service archive 5/V/4, University of Auckland Library, MSS & Archives 2003/1, Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services (this archive hereafter listed as NHBS); F. G. Bowie to Don, 6 June 1919, Foreign Missions Committee archives, Subject File 'Rev. F. G. Bowie (Tangoa Training Institute)', Folder 1, Presbyterian Research Centre at Knox College, NZ (hereafter listed as FMC).

³⁶ Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100; Worsley, *Trumpet*, 148. Guiart's informants make mention of each of Ronovuro's followers bringing 'his quota of pigs and narave [hermaphrodite pigs],' to the sing-sing where the animals were shut up in a large enclosure; see also Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 201.

³⁷ While often branded a 'Barefoot Anthropologist' and despite the anthropological bent of much of his work, Harrisson's brief Cambridge education was primarily in natural sciences. He devoted the years he spent with the Oxford University Expedition to the New Hebrides (1933-1934) largely to ornithology and census collection. His *Savage Civilization* (1937), which I reference in this thesis, is not a work of scholarly

anthropology, but rather a polemical account of his time in the archipelago.

³⁸ Worsley, *Trumpet*, 148.

³⁹ Tom Harrisson, *Savage Civilization* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1937), 380-1.

⁴⁰ J. Graham Miller, *Live: A History of Church Planting in Vanuatu, Book III* (Port Vila: Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, 1985), 351-353.

⁴¹ F. G. Bowie would seem to indicate in letters, to separate addressees, that his first time meeting Ronovuro in person took place in 1919. See Rev. F. G. Bowie to BRC Merton King, 3 September 1919, NHBS 5/V/4, 1-5; Rev. F. G. Bowie to Rev. Alexander Don, 6 June 1919, FMC, Subject File 'Rev. F. G. Bowie (Tangoa Training Institute)', Folder 1, Presbyterian Research Centre at Knox College; see also Miller, *Live: Book III*, 242.

⁴² It might be that Harrisson is confusing Ronovuro with the case of Bonoro, an ex-mission islander on Malekula who incited anti-European and missionary sentiments and openly defied the Anglo-French Joint Naval Commission in the islands; see Deryk Scarr, *Fragments of Empire: A History of the Western Pacific High Commission, 1877-1914* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1968), 241; cf Roger C. Thompson, 'Natives and Settlers on the New Hebrides Frontier, 1870-1900,' *Pacific Studies* 5:1 (Fall 1981): 10.

⁴³ Harrisson, *Savage Civilization*, 381.

⁴⁴ One of these men, Loken, would die before the *Euphrosyne* reached Port Vila; see Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923. NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 14.

⁴⁵ In his report to British Resident Commissioner Merton King, Seagoe claims both shots. See Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 1-2, 9.

⁴⁶ Berthault to Vaissiere, 11 Oct 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3. Translation author's.

⁴⁷ King to Rodwell, 12 Oct 1923, Foreign Office Records 371/9543/A105/40, The National Archives of the UK at Kew (this archive hereafter listed as FO).

⁴⁸ Berthault to Vaissiere, 11 Oct 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

⁴⁹ Forster to Devonshire, 4 Oct 1923; Devonshire to Rodwell, 6 Oct 1923, FO 371/8456/A6055/23-24

⁵⁰ King to Rodwell, 9 Oct 1923, FO 371/9543/A105/39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12 Oct 1923, FO 371/9543/A105/40.

⁵² Rodwell to Devonshire, 9 Nov 1923, FO 371/9543/A105/76.

⁵³ E. M. J. Campbell, Review of *Espirito Santo: (Nouvelles Hebrides)*, by Jean Guiart, *The Geographical Journal* 125: 3/4 (1959): 436.

⁵⁴ Worsley, *Trumpet*, 148; Jean Guiart, 'Forerunners of Melanesian Nationalism,' *Oceania* 22:2 (1951): 86.

⁵⁵ Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 101.

⁵⁶ Guiart, *Grands et Petits Hommes de la Montagne, Espiritu Santo* (Noumea: Institut français d'Océanie, 1956), *passim*; Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 198-202.

⁵⁷ In 'Forerunners' Guiart refers to incidents without dates; in *Espirito Santo* he dates the chain of correspondence from 1914-1917 when, in

actuality, it runs from 1920-1923; see 'Forerunners', 86; *Espirito Santo*, 198; cf FC Clapcott and King, WPHC 4/IV/2853; see also ROD Clapcott to King, 2 June 1920, NHBS 5/V/4.

⁵⁸ Guiart reports that Ronovuro declared he would return (whether this was to his home island of Espiritu Santo or from the dead is not clear), saying: 'Banana stalk has been cut, but shoots will grow.' My research did recover an instance of this utterance, but it neither quotes Ronovuro nor any Presbyterian missionary quoting the aforesaid. I found it, instead, in a letter from the South Santo planter, Robert Watson. In his letter to British Resident Commissioner King, Watson states: 'There has been a statement by the natives re [sic] the leader Ronovura, "that that banana stalk has been cut but shoots will grow." Which shows that they expect someone else to carry on his schemes.' See Watson to King, 20 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3; Cf. Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 199.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

⁶⁰ Cf. Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 201; Raff in Williams, *Orokaiva Magic*, 100-101; Worsley, *Trumpet*, 149; Harrisson makes no mention of Ronovuro's wife cf *Savage Civilization*, 380-1.

⁶¹ Jean Guiart and Peter Worsley, 'La Répartition des Mouvements Millénaristes en Mélanésie,' *Archives de Sociologie des Religions* 5:1 (1958): 38-46.

⁶² Worsley, *Trumpet*, 255.

⁶³ Appeals on a Site Plan Review, Certification of an EIR, Adjustment, and Zone and Height District Change for Property at 6230 Yucca Street: Hearings on 11 July, 2008, Before the Los Angeles Planning and Land Use Committee, accessed 20 August 2016:

http://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2008/08-0550_ca_07-11-08.pdf; see also Bob Pool, 'Capitol Fears for its Sonic Signature,' *Los Angeles Times*, last modified 18 June 2008, accessed 19 August 2016:

<http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jun/18/local/me-capitol18>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Keith Woodward, *A Political Memoir of the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides* (ANU Press, 2014), 5 n2; Vanuatu Cultural Centre, 'Court House Fire,' *Pambu* series 5: 23 (July 2007): 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

⁶⁷ Steven Sharp, 'Stalled Tower Finally Progresses in Hollywood,' *urbanize.LA*, accessed 29 August 2016: <http://urbanize.la/post/stalled-tower-finally-progresses-hollywood>.

⁶⁸ Ronovuro pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888/1/2, 3.

Chapter 3: Opening Remarks

The previous chapter examined the discourse surrounding the Clapcott Murder, particularly the dominant contributions of Eric Raff, Peter Worsley, and Jean Guiart. To summarize the arguments it might suffice to say that Raff's account is anecdotal, and that Worsley compiled his pages on the Clapcott Murder from strictly secondary sources within the literature of the field. Both of these accounts produced and reproduced erroneous information, whether cribbed from unrelated accounts, misattributed, unverified in their original contexts, or simply fabricated.

Guiart's last and most significant account in *Espritu Santo: (Nouvelles-Hébrides)*, on the other hand, benefited from access to primary sources within the Condominium archives as well as fieldwork on Santo. These additions helped him to provide a more empirically grounded version of events. The French ethnologist avoided many of the uncorroborated claims that appeared in Raff and Worsley, and he dampened his earlier conclusion that budding nationalism had underwritten the disturbances at South Santo in 1923. Having put aside this earlier claim, however, Guiart shifted to new, agency-oriented explanations, supported by oral histories on Santo nearly thirty years after the event. In this new explanatory framework the author characterized Ronovuro as an entrepreneurial charlatan who, cuckolded by his wife and Clapcott, used his wife's untimely death to justify a murder that would distract his paying faithful away from his failure to perform resurrections and other promised miracles.

There is much that is compelling about Guiart's assessment of the event in *Espritu Santo*. It marked a significant, yet underappreciated development in the understanding of the Clapcott Murder. Crucially, it was the first to make a concerted effort to repopulate the narrative with some of its principals, it liberated the events of 1923 from an erroneous explanatory framework dominated by political concerns over emergent Melanesian nationalism—a framework Guiart originally helped to

fashion—and it demonstrated particulars in which Ronovuro's story and others' had survived locally.

Despite these developments, Guiart's 1958 account is still insufficient. Critically, it lacks inclusion of anything resembling the accused or other indigenous informants admitting to have participated or paid into Ronovuro's movement. Likewise it does not seek out principals or witnesses to the trial on Efate who might have commented on what was a sensational case.

My search for these voices within the Clapcott story has been fruitful. The material for a more comprehensive account exists in Vanuatu, New Zealand and the UK, but scholarly renditions of the event have talked over, rather than talked about the Clapcott Murder's particulars. Leading voices within the field have recorded over those most authoritative sources. Having located these previously unexamined primary sources—these new voices—we might try listening. What can these voices tell us about the motivations behind Reginald Clapcott's murder? What actions and attitudes accompanied the trial on Efate? Who participated in these events as they unfolded on South Santo and in Port Vila? What, in effect, do these new voices have to say for themselves and their particular experience of the New Hebrides between July and November of 1923?

As is not atypical of Pacific stories and histories, we begin this new account with an arrival by boat. An indigenous police force under the command of Acting Commandant of the British Constabulary Ernest Goldfinch Seagoe arrived at Tangoa Islet, of Espiritu Santo's south coast, on 6 August 1923. After collecting a list of the principals involved in Reginald Clapcott's murder and the larceny of his goods, the police force, in partnership with European and indigenous residents of Tangoa and South Santo, began a campaign of investigation and arrests. Early in this campaign, perhaps before it even got thoroughly underway, the Rev. Frederick Gatherer Bowie communicated with Ronovuro through an islander, a Tangoa teacher named Movele or perhaps Olovele, and

induced the prophet to descend to the coast and give himself over to the constabulary.¹

Over the next ten days, with virtually no documented resistance, eighteen other men came into police custody. Ronovuro, Lolorave, Asapele, Lepvele, Alo, and Tavoni were arrested on suspicion of murder. These six men and the thirteen others—Susumoli, Rovsale, Rauvatali, O'ona, Arususu, Avu, Lulumoli, Karaitova, Karaimele, Maile, Levumerai, Marimari and Loken—were also arrested on suspicion of larceny and having been accessories both before and after the fact.² The constabulary force departed Espiritu Santo waters on 16 August 1923.³ It arrived back in Port Vila the following day.⁴ Sometime in the interim, either before they embarked from Santo or while en route to Port Vila, Loken, who had been Clapcott's caretaker, died of pneumonia aboard the *Euphrosyne*. He was thought to have aided in the post-mortem looting of his employer's estate.⁵

The Rev. Frederick Bowie interviewed many of the suspects while they were detained on Espiritu Santo.⁶ Once back on Efate and with the assistance of these notes, Seagoe drafted a report of the investigation for the British Resident Commissioner Merton King on 20 August 1923. Seagoe's report reveals that while the above men were all eventually charged with larceny, this was in several cases merely the pretence under which they were removed from Santo.

Lulumoli, Karaitova, Karaimele and Maile (along with Lepvele) were initially of interest in the case because they were suspected of dismembering and cannibalizing Clapcott's body. Settlers on Santo alleged that Arususu had robbed William Watson's store on the south coast of the island sometime before Clapcott's murder, an offense for which he never received punishment. O'ona, as the previous chapters have shown, was known to the British Government for having had conflicts with Clapcott in the past. Rovsale and Avu were thought to be Ronovuro's chief treasurers and money collectors; the later already having been confronted once on the subject, years before, by British Resident Commissioner Merton King. Susumoli, while brought up on

charges of larceny like the rest, was really deported to Vila on account of anti-European ‘dreams’ he was accused of circulating on Santo. Rauvatali was apprehended for spreading word of similar dreams. Unlike Susumoli however, he was known to have had previous trouble with Clapcott and was alleged to have received stolen money from the murdered man’s house. Levumerai and Marimari were alleged to be keen supporters of Ronovuro and it was said that they too received large shares of the loot taken from Tasmalum. Marimari never stood trial. While he was arraigned, he died on Efate sometime before he could undergo the pre-trial examinations that took place between the thirteenth and fifteenth of September.⁷

The eighteen prisoners who arrived in Port Vila Harbour appeared three days later before the Joint Court on 20 August 1923, where they were formally accused by the Public Prosecutor Jules de Leener, upon Segoe’s testimony, of ‘unlawful homicide, with malice aforethought’, conspiracy to commit murder and theft from Reginald Clapcott’s estate.⁸ Dr. Vernon Davies was also present at the proceedings, representing the Santoese defendants as Condominium Native Advocate. He was only formally and temporarily approved to the position two days later.⁹

Between the 23rd and 28th of August, several notable things occurred. On Efate, the court drew lots for assessors, selecting two British nationals, two French nationals, and one from each community to serve as alternates in the forthcoming criminal case, scheduled for 17 September.¹⁰ On 25 August on Espiritu Santo, a Mr. T.O. Thomas, Honorary Secretary to the New Hebrides British Association, addressed a letter to King expressing the South Santo European community’s relief at the prompt removal of Ronovuro. In his missive Thomas assures the British Resident Commissioner that enquiries conducted *in situ* revealed that no personal enmity toward Clapcott prompted his murder, but rather it stemmed from general obedience to Ronovuro’s vision and the prophet’s belief that Clapcott, as the nearest white man, posed some interference to the resurrection of the islanders’ dead relatives motivated the crime. Thomas goes on to claim that ‘attacks and depredations on the

person and property of Mr. Clapcott' had been increasing in violence for years, that this was common knowledge and that the murder was merely an indicator of no less than an island-wide plot to exterminate the white residents of Espiritu Santo. He advises King that he speaks for the Association when he expresses his hopes that none connected with the murder should be permitted to ever return to Santo.¹¹

Meanwhile, back in Port Vila, Commandant Seagoe interrogates the prisoners accused of murder.¹² The statements recorded by and before Seagoe between 23 and 28 August are significant. For one, they are the first instances within the annals of the case wherein remarks are clearly individuated to specific members of the accused. Some individual remarks were attributed to Ronovuro in Seagoe's earlier report of 20 August; however, the majority of claims recorded throughout this document are fraught with hearsay and speculation. There is little to indicate specifics as to which indigenous or European sources provided the report's information, where and when it was gathered, and whether it comes from notes Frederick Bowie contributed, the result of Seagoe's direct inquiries or a combination of the two.

The witness statements taken by Ronovuro, Asapele, Lolorave, Alo, Lepvele and Tavoni are problematic as well. They are composed in a strictly declarative, confessional style, with the islanders each posed as first-person narrators dictating to Seagoe. In reading the statements we are not privileged to the questions their interrogator asked the islanders, we cannot be exactly sure who is even asking the questions. Each confession is said to have been given voluntarily, but there are no witnesses to these interviews indicated other than the Commandant himself. To this point it is also unclear whether or not William Bowie or any other interpreter was present. Unlike the pre-trial examinations that would follow in September, William Bowie's signature is absent from the documentation, as is anyone else's save Ernest Seagoe's.

Here we might question whether Seagoe's statements are spurious. Was William Bowie present as interpreter? If not, was there anyone else there to hold Seagoe to veracity concerning these six men's

confessions? Was the Commandant capable of holding himself to truthful renderings of his prisoners' statements?

Whatever the truth-value of these statements, they were no mere repetition of what Seagoe had conveyed to Merton King in his report of 20 August. If the Commandant had over-relied on information he took from Frederick Bowie's interviews when composing that report, he might have found the revelations of these six statements startling: for the picture that emerges from the prisoners contradicts both the earlier report and the claims of T.O. Thomas's letter to King in many ways.

One widely corroborated claim to be found across the statements is that Ronovuro ordered Asapele to murder Clapcott one morning sometime after a large sing-sing had begun to wind down. The prophet provided Asapele with two shotgun cartridges and Asapele later presented one of these to Lolorave. In this round of questioning Ronovuro and Asapele seem to indicate that Lolorave received the orders directly from the prophet. In his statement, however, Lolorave claims that Asapele conveyed the order to him after the two of them set off into the bush under the pretence of shooting pigeons. Both killers admit to full compliance with order.

In what would become material to the eventual commutation of their death sentences, Alo, Tavoni, and Lepvele each claimed that they had received no order to murder Clapcott or assist Lolorave and Asapele in carrying out the deed. Ronovuro and the two self-declared murderers corroborate these statements of innocence. The three men—Alo, Tavoni and Lepvele—do all attest to being together, nearby, and being drawn to Clapcott's property by the sounds of gunfire. Though they say the victim was already dead, Alo and Tavoni each admit to shooting the planter, and they include Lepvele as a fellow shooter. None of the three offered any explanation as to why they involved themselves in this way.

Other unambiguous information arises out of these statements. The six men unequivocally deny any knowledge of the butchering of Clapcott's body, though Lepvele speculates that men of a village named Opai could have eaten Clapcott's flesh on account they were seen carrying

bags from the property in the wake of the murder. Little reference is made to Ronovuro's wife in these statements, but when Asapele addresses the topic directly he confirms that the prophet's wife died sometime shortly after the sing-sing. Both the assassin and Ronovuro deny that any attempt was made to resurrect her, and they offer no suggestion of a connection between her death and the decision to murder Clapcott.

The denial of an attempt to resurrect Ronovuro's wife does not mean that belief in resurrections was non-existent among Ronovuro's followers. In these statements both of the actual killers admit to some credulity in Ronovuro's claims to supernatural power, particularly Asapele. Ronovuro's primary shooter claimed that while his prophet never attempted to raise his wife back from the dead, he could have done so if he wished. Moreover, he confesses to having paid Ronovuro ten pounds for the resurrection of his relatives. Lolorave, in his statement, recounts a story of a visit from Ronovuro to his village whereupon the prophet dug a hole into the ground that he claimed would one day issue forth both goods from an imminent steamer and resurrected dead, among them Lolorave's father. For his part Ronovuro denies ever making such claims. He denies ever promising a steamer or goods or resurrections or that he ever brought a cow back to life or told others that he had done so. But while he denies any pretensions to magic, he does not deny that he sent men to collect money for his benefit. Whether others remitted this money to him as down payment on these or other promises, the prophet does not say.

The statements also challenge the legitimacy of claims that the islanders on Santo were organizing toward a goal of European extermination. Seagoe's report, T.O. Thomas's letter to King, and the secondary scholarship of those such as Raff and Worsley all speak of this genocidal plot. The consensus available across these six statements, however, stands in sharp contrast to these fears and assumptions. Those who stood accused of Clapcott's murder seem to indicate that even this was unpremeditated. Ronovuro says that 'spirits, two of them, spoke to

me from a long way, and told me to kill Clapcott.' The prophet does not specify when the encounter with these spirits happened—whether long in advance, or if it directly preceded his fatal order. In any case it would seem he kept the supernatural conversation to himself. Asapele, Alo and Lepvele all explicitly deny receiving any foreknowledge of the murder, and Ronovuro denies giving such in advance. Furthermore, the prophet, Asapele and Alo, who were asked directly, all say they had no grudge against Clapcott in particular nor had they any knowledge of others nurturing grievances against him. None of the six reduce Clapcott to any symbol of white interference with resurrections or the bounty from a magical steamship, or allude to anti-European sentiments in general.

But while a general consensus exists, denial of the genocidal project posited by Seagoe and Thomas is not contradicted wholesale within these statements. There is a notable exception within the cohort. In his original statement before Seagoe of 24 August, Tavoni is reported as saying, 'I was at the big Dance [sic] given by Ronovura. The next morning I saw the towel hoisted on the bamboo. I did not know what for. I did not know that it was the signal for Clapcott's death.' Whether his interrogator is leading Tavoni to form—if only to disclaim—this connection between the towel and Clapcott's murder, we cannot say with certainty. Ironically, Tavoni's claim of ignorance of any linkage is the closest any of the prisoners come to implying a connection between the towel and the subsequent murder. Asapele and Lolorave describe seeing Ronovuro dancing amidst the people with the towel and waving it around at the sing-sing; Ronovura himself admits to doing so. There is agreement across the board that the towel was raised upon a bamboo spar the morning after Ronovuro's dance. Ronovuro claims he ordered Tavoni to raise the towel on the bamboo, but Tavoni admits no knowledge of who erected the ambiguous sign. All agree that the towel-raising preceded the order to kill Clapcott, yet all six deny knowledge of the gesture's meaning, at least at in the first instance. However, Tavoni's original statement, unlike those of the other five men, is amended, not once, but twice thereafter.

In his original statement of 24 August, Tavoni maintains general solidarity with the others in denying any knowledge of the crime to come, but he breaks ranks the following day. Seagoe appends the following, dated 25 August, to Tavoni's statement of the day before (emphasis Seagoe's):

Today TAVONI admits lying when he was questioned yesterday, and states that Rovsale told him to do so. LATER When asked if he hoisted the towel upon the bamboo he flatly denied doing so, and said he was asleep when it was done. Then on being confronted with Ronovura he then admitted the truth of it. He said he did not know that the sign was for Clapcott, but he thought that was what it was meant for. He admitted having heard previously that Ronovura contemplated killing of whites, and that someone's death had been decided on. But does not know whom; heard men talking about it.

Seagoe then registers this third entry:

Later 25th August, 1923. He [Tavoni] now admits that Ronovura had stated that he intended to kill Clapcott. That this statement was made and he heard him make it with his own ears before the Sing Sing took place.

What happened between August 24th and 25th? Why did Tavoni follow Rovsale's instructions to lie in his original statement? What compelled him to recant? How was he 'confronted' by Ronovuro? Were these accusations of premeditation *sui generis*, or were they recriminations against the prophet for his alleging that Tavoni raised the towel? And, if the latter, were these new accusations—first the plot to kill whites in general, and then Ronovuro's specific, advance targeting of Clapcott—made within the presence of Ronovuro, or in private

consultation with Seagoe after confrontation with the prophet? Do these complicating additions to Tavoni's original statement indicate a new or pre-existing rift between Tavoni and Ronovuro, some competing loyalty to Rovsale, or is this merely evidence of the Commandant using a slight difference in story to turn Tavoni and the prophet against one another? What were the consequences of Tavoni's self-corrections, and did he maintain these allegations throughout the rest of the judicial process?

The answer to the first of these last two questions is no: on 14 September, three days before the murder trial, when asked about the meaning of the towel and whether it was a sign that a murder was to take place, Tavoni responded only that he did not know. And rather than admitting foreknowledge of intent to kill Europeans, or orders to murder Clapcott specifically, he says that Ronovuro only sent Asapele to shoot a fowl, that Asapele asked Lolorave to join him, and that he, Alo, and Lepvele had only thought to go shoot flying foxes, and in doing so they just happened to be nearby Tasmalum when the killing transpired. Tavoni gave these remarks at the Joint Court as part of pre-trial examinations conducted by the Public Prosecutor. The Native Advocate, Registrar, Court Notary and the interpreter, William Bowie, were all present; Seagoe was not. Some three weeks after his contradictory declarations on the 24th and 25th of August, in the Commandant's absence Tavoni reverted to his original reserve.

It is difficult to appreciate just what consequences Tavoni's statements had upon the case. On the one hand, his contradictions did not convict Ronovuro, Asapele, or Lolorave of murdering or conspiring to murder Clapcott. These three men confessed or refused to deny their involvement at every level of the judicial process. And whether the statements offer grounds to consider Tavoni, Alo and Lepvele as having entertained malice aforethought which prompted them to shoot Clapcott's dead body is unclear from all of the extant records in File 32. These three men were convicted of murder alongside Ronovuro, Asapele, and Lolorave, and while, unlike the aforementioned, their death sentences

would be commuted, this would come down to questions of time and proximity, not to pre-existing malice or intent.

The real significance of Tavoni's statements is that they suggest either the fabrication of a document of confession on the part of Seagoe or the glint of a violent, conspiratorial transcript kept tightly guarded by the accused. It is also significant because it raises the issue of lies within archive and my own frustrated hopes that recovering indigenous perspectives in the Clapcott Murder would yield a clearer, more reliable, more discernable portrait. I will elaborate upon the last of these concerns within my conclusion to this essay. With the remainder of this chapter, however, I will turn to the pre-trial examinations and testimonies made during the Clapcott murder trial to question whether further evidence of a hidden genocidal plot existed among the accused, and if such a plot did not motivate Clapcott's killing, what might we argue did?

Before proceeding to their content, I think it important to note that the pre-trial examinations are themselves born of battle: an internal conflict between the Judicial and Executive powers within the New Hebrides. Between the 7 and 12 September, Belgian Public Prosecutor Jules de Leener, British Judge Robert Vere de Vere and the Dutch President to the Joint Court Goeman Borgesius, fought with Seagoe, British Resident Commissioner Merton King, and Frank Wallace, the Australian Government's legal advisor to the New Hebrides, over the drawing up of indictments and the release of the Santoese prisoners for prosecutorial questioning in advance of trial.ⁱ It was a contest waged in tiny, handwritten notes, more grandiose declarations made on letterhead, and off-the-record conversations only alluded to within the archives.

On 7 September, the trial date of the 17th fast approaching, de Leener left a note for Seagoe, urging the Commandant to submit to the court all material evidence gathered against the men from Santo.¹³ Seagoe, under King's instructions, sought out Frank Wallace's guidance on

ⁱ In the interest of neutrality in cases between British and French nationals, the Joint Court positions of Registrar, Native Advocate, Public Prosecutor, and President were, whenever possible, appointed to nationals from outside Britain and France.

the matter.¹⁴ Presumably acting on advice from Wallace, Seagoe sent the six statements previously discussed—those of Ronovuro, Asapele, Lolorave, Lepvele, Alo and Tavoni—to de Leener's office the next day, alluding also to a revised formal charge against these six principals, and the need to drop all murder-related charges against others concerned in the case while warning that 'other charges may be preferred at a later date.'¹⁵

Seagoe's first note of the 8th, with its surprise changes and withdrawal of charges, led to three more exchanges that day, each rising in temperature. In a terse reply, de Leener reminded Seagoe that, 'Time is getting short' and stated that he expected all of the Santoese prisoners to be brought to the courthouse on Monday, 10 September in order that he might examine them himself.¹⁶ Seagoe responded by challenging the Public Prosecutor's authority to examine the prisoners and draw up their indictments. He informed de Leener at that point that he had, per King's guidance, engaged outside legal counsel to determine whether he, in fact, needed to provide the islanders for de Leener's examination at all, saying 'after all, it's up to us to give these beggars a fair go,' implying, it would seem, that a 'fair go' for the prisoners was more likely to be had within British custody than at the Joint Court.¹⁷ To this de Leener responded with a memo on the formal letterhead of his office. In this bristling note, he grounded his authority to examine the prisoners on points of legal procedure taken from the Convention of 1906. He turned questions of legal authority back upon Seagoe and Wallace, informed the Commandant that the prisoners were under the Court's jurisdiction, not the Constabulary's, and that in order to assist the Public Prosecutor as was his remit, Seagoe was to send all of the prisoners to the courthouse the following Monday without further delay.¹⁸

On the Monday in question, no prisoners appeared before the court. Neither did Seagoe. Instead the Commandant sent de Leener a memo on his own office's letterhead, challenging the Convention articles cited by the Prosecutor with sub-clauses of his own. Seagoe concluded the

memo by saying 'I am instructed to not produce the accused in question for any examination whatever [sic] prior to their trial.'¹⁹

The instructions Seagoe alluded to came from British Resident Commissioner King. And at this point, on 10 September, King weighed in on the matter with correspondence of his own. Though he did so more with more grace than his subordinate in the constabulary, King likewise challenged de Leener to produce convincing arguments justifying his demands to examine the prisoners, and he also stipulated these arguments adhere to British legal procedure as Clapcott had been a British national and the case pursued thus far with British executive power.²⁰

It is unclear just why the British Administration refused to release the Santoese prisoners over to the Public Prosecutor for questioning. Any number of motives might suggest themselves, but the simple fact is that the only evidence we have within the archival material under our consideration is the question Seagoe raises over the prisoners' chances of receiving due process at the hands of officers of the Court. Before we finish with the Clapcott Murder trial and its ultimate consequences, we will see that the Commandant was within his rights to express his scepticism.

In the end, and on this particular matter, British executive power in the New Hebrides submitted itself to the authority of the Joint Court. Responding to King's letter of the same day, on 10 September de Leener, albeit with some deference, insisted upon the validity of his cited statutes and threatened King upon two powerful fronts. If the Santoese prisoners were not remanded to him for questioning, de Leener declared he would report the matter to the neutral President of the Joint Court and insist it be brought before both the British and French Home Governments. Furthermore, he described the prisoners statements before Seagoe as 'practically useless' and intimated that he would request the court 'discharge those against whom no evidence is brought' making any and all he chose from among the accused free men and thus immune to double jeopardy.²¹ British Judge de Vere followed this with similar legal points

and threats the next day, which were forwarded to King by Borgesius, the Acting Joint Court President, on 12 September.²² The Judiciary thus insisted on its right to examine the prisoners before trial. King acquiesced that same day, observing that his object in doing so was 'to deprive the public of the enjoyment it would doubtless feel at the spectacle of a conflict between the Executive and Judiciary, with which, I believe gossip is already busy.'²³ The Clapcott prisoners began appearing before the court the next day, on the 13th, for examinations de Leener assured King were well understood to be 'taking place in virtue of the Law.' Despite requests for his presence at these examinations, British Commandant Seagoe made no appearance.²⁴

As mentioned previously with regards to Tavoni, the pre-trial examinations took place with William Bowie as interpreter and multiple court officials present. In nearly all the interviews de Leener as Public Prosecutor would pose the first and much larger share of questions. The prisoners are recorded as answering these one at a time. Dr. Vernon Davies in his temporary role as Native Advocate would then follow with some few questions. In some cases these would be followed by additional or clarifying questions by de Leener. Ronovuro, Asapele, and Lolorave were deposed first, on 13 September, and in that order. Lepvele, Tavoni, Alo, Rovsale, Levumerai, O'ona, and Avu were examined the following day. Maile, Karaimele, Lulumoli, Susumoli, Karaitova, Rauvatali, and Arususu went last, on the 15th. All participants affixed signatures to the transcript. In the case of the prisoners this was usually done with an inked fingerprint, though Rovsale and Levumerai wrote their names in script.²⁵

For the majority of the prisoners in the Clapcott case, their statements recorded at this pre-trial stage offer the only window we have into their perspective on the case. The six men accused of killing Clapcott all had opportunities to speak when tried for murder on 17 September: an opportunity only Lolorave and Ronovuro really availed themselves of. But the rest of the Santoese men, charged only with larceny, were relegated to silence at their trial on the following day. After hearing first

William Bowie's testimony and then Seagoe's in the larceny trial, the Native Advocate ceded his opportunity to allow his clients to make statements before the court.²⁶

Only Avu spoke in his own defence. Once sworn in, he insisted that he had not received any goods from Clapcott's house. Moreover he cited knowing Merton King. He relayed to the Court how the Resident Commissioner, when visiting Santo some years earlier, had warned him against assisting Ronovuro with his money-collecting operations and had urged him to have nothing further to do with the prophet. Avu claimed he had made good on King's instructions: he said that he never collected any further monies for Ronovuro after King's admonishment and that, until their arrest and deportation to Vila, he had kept his distance from the prophet. Avu's remarks are the last of any substance from the Clapcott Trials. The Public Prosecutor went on to charge the accused, and the Native Advocate plead for the defendants, but these closing arguments, if they were transcribed at all, are not to be found amidst the rest of the case materials.²⁷

Thus, while the testimonies made at trial will offer some final revelations, the bulk of indigenous contribution to what we can know about the Clapcott Murder comes from the examinations that were collected pre-trial: examinations the Judiciary had to fight to conduct. It is from these documents that we can construct the most multi-vocal, multivalent indigenous description of the events that lead to and succeeded Reginald Clapcott's murder at Tasmalum. This description is not strictly autochthonous. The prisoners' remarks are delivered under compulsion. Each prisoner in his individual interview was outnumbered, far from home, largely at the mercy of an interpreter, and aware that what he said could and would be used against him and his fellows, and so the prisoners' statements are answers to questions posed to them from a place of power. But we should be careful not assume that the relationships between the accused and those across the table were strictly or uniformly oppositional or that—as in the case of Tavoni's

statement before Seagoe—lies and contradictions don't problematize these documents.

Given the complexity of the data set, a word on methodology might be useful at this point. All seventeen of the Santoese prisoners are represented in the pre-trial examinations. Between them, they articulated one hundred and sixty-seven discrete responses to questions posed. I have isolated the individual remarks, tagged them by speaker and regrouped them along such thematic strands as larceny, murder & motivations, magic, foreknowledge of murder, cannibalism, insanity, Ronovuro's wife, and European extermination. Within these strands, I have preserved the order in which the speakers were deposed. With the data organized thusly, I have split the thematic strands into the following three groupings: pre-existing factors, triggering factors and consequences. These groupings generally adhere to a chronological arrangement of the data which situates the end of Ronovuro's sing-sing at the border between pre-existing and triggering factors, and larceny at the border of triggering factors and consequences. Though each strand does not necessarily receive its own paragraph, I will touch on all of these threads in my reconstruction in a way that is commensurate to their volume within the corpus. I will conclude with a discussion of the consequences.

Of all of the factors that data indicates pre-existed Clapcott's murder, existence of magic and belief in Ronovuro's ability to manipulate the supernatural are the most widely discussed. Arususu stated that he believed that Ronovuro could raise the dead and told of paying Ronovuro both his own money and that of his son to see the miracle performed.²⁸ Arususu is the only one to proclaim full faith in Ronovuro's powers in these pre-trial examinations, though. In response to questions of whether the prophet could fly, raise dead humans or dead animals back to life, all others expressed ignorance or uncertainty: 'I don't know' was the most common answer. Tavoni admitted knowledge of a cow that Ronovuro had bought, but denied ever hearing that the prophet had resurrected it.²⁹

Even if faith in Ronovuro's powers appeared thin within the confines of the Joint Court, it was widely acknowledged that belief on Santo was at least somewhat remunerative for the prophet. Though Arususu was the only man to admit paying for resurrections during his pre-trial examination, many others remarked on the money collection operation Ronovuro had led. Levumerai said that people did not ask what the money would be used for, but that it was paid to Ronovuro 'on account of his dreams.'³⁰ Rovsale, one of Ronovuro's principal collectors, disclosed that payment was originally sought in pigs, and cash only initially accepted as a substitute; the money was collected against the prophet's promise that he would one day raise his clients' dead relatives; that people paid out of faith, not fear; but that they were, however, now beginning to have their doubts.³¹ Ronovuro denied all of this. With regards to the collections, he claimed they were for 'no special purpose.' When asked by the Native Advocate whether he raised a cow from the ground, he replied: 'I did not, I just said I did. I lied.'³²

This response speaks to Ronovuro's arresting singularity within the archive. His declaration before Seagoe, while freighted with inherent interest, presents much the same as the other five murder suspects' statements, most likely because the British Commandant composed it from notes taken throughout the interrogation. In contrast, during the pre-trial examinations as well as the trial, when the Court Notary Darroux transcribes his responses more or less in progress, something of Ronovuro's exceptional character is revealed. It can be tempting to read too much personality into any and all of these documents—we need to always be conscious of the layers that separate us from the prisoners, the context of their communications, and what may be our desire to confirm biases as readers and researchers. But both in content and form, even if we limit ourselves to the descriptive, Ronovuro's articulations stand out. Unlike the other Santoese prisoners, the prophet dismisses questions asked of him. He refuses to elaborate on his answers or repeat himself, employs metaphors and other non-literal language, and throws questions back at his interviewers. He lies and admits to lying.

His distinct affect and the pretensions to magic that he denied might have been what prompted the Public Prosecutor and Native Advocate to ask a number of the other prisoners whether or not the prophet was insane. The interviewers might have suspected that madness, either local to Ronovuro or general on South Santo, might have played some part in Clapcott's murder. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, anthropological accounts on the topic of cultic madness in the Pacific, such as those found in Chinnery, Haddon, and Williams, were not unknown in the New Hebrides in 1923.³³

There was the matter of direct observation as well. William Bowie minced no words on the subject. In testifying before the Court, during the murder trial on 17 September, he called Ronovuro a dangerous man, and then went on to add: 'I have known Ronovuro for about five years. I consider him mad. I have thought so ever since I have known him.'³⁴ The Public Prosecutor challenged Bowie's remark, reminding the Court that Ronovuro's fellows considered the prophet sane.³⁵ This claim was supported by the pre-trial examinations. Six of the islanders were asked directly if they thought Ronovuro mad. Levumerai claimed he was sane; Rovsale that people did not think him mad; and O'ona, Avu, Susumoli, and Rauvatali all answered that they did not know.³⁶ Neither the opinions of the Santoese, nor the Public Prosecutor's advocacy for them impressed British Judge Robert Vere de Vere though, who followed de Leener's response to Bowie by saying: 'I believe [Ronovuro] mad because he does not know what he says or do [sic] & from his general conduct.'

Ronovuro's madness, then, was a matter of perspective: a fault-line dividing European and indigenous opinions. As it so happened, Rauvatali also exhibited a similar exoticism of mind. In his examination he spoke of seeing a steamship in his dreams, one that would come with goods for him.³⁷ If symptoms such as this could be diagnosed as insanity, then insanity existed on Espiritu Santo prior to Clapcott's assassination, but among the islanders themselves pathologies of this sort were considered neither wildly abnormal nor expressly limited to Ronovuro.

Another of the factors that I argue pre-existed Clapcott's murder is the phenomenon of depopulation. This too was the subject of an exchange between the Public Prosecutor and William Bowie, who in addition to acting as Interpreter to the Court in the Clapcott Case, was a planter on Santo and had been such on Ambrym over the course of some twenty years in the islands. Bowie testified at the murder trial that Rovsale had been spreading word that the Europeans had been exterminating the indigenous tribes.³⁸ It might be that in his transcription the Court Notary here mistook Ronovuro for Rovsale, but what is perhaps more important is that Bowie would elaborate upon this point. Further on in his testimony, Bowie claimed that the islanders on South Santo were 'dying out.... Some generations have six children and others one. This dying out is consequent of the return of labour from Queensland.' He goes onto say that epidemics of the previous year had reduced the population in some districts by as much as a quarter. Downplaying any implication that introduced disease might have contributed to Clapcott's murder, the Public Prosecutor responded to Bowie and the Court, saying that 'These epidemics are usually brought in by boat. The depopulation is not altogether due to epidemics.'³⁹

It is unclear on what grounds de Leener bases his observations here, but, in Bowie's case, the interpreter references conversations he had had on the subject with scientists who visited Santo. As it happened, Bowie had been involved with several visiting scientists, three of whom published works on depopulation in the New Hebrides. William's brother the Rev. Frederick Bowie conducted census data between 1910-1916 that appeared in John R. Baker's 1928 essay 'Depopulation in Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides' and, as much of this data was taken from Santo's west coast, away from Frederick's duties at Tangoa, it is very likely that William, who lived at Kerenavaru and Tasiriki, had at least some hand in the data's collection.⁴⁰ William is also mentioned in Felix Speiser's *Two Years with the Natives in the Western Pacific* as an expert sailor who braved cyclone swells to get the Swiss-German ethnologist from the coast out to a passing steamer.⁴¹ Along with several volumes of New Hebrides

ethnography, Speiser published an essay entitled 'Decadence and Preservation in the New Hebrides' wherein he described diseases—with emphasis on those introduced by Europeans—as the chief cause of decline in indigenous populations in the New Hebrides. This essay was one of several included in Cambridge polymath William Halse Rivers Rivers' 1922 *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*.⁴² Rivers, too was familiar to William Bowie, friendly even. Rivers' collected papers at the University of Cambridge Library contain several letters between the two men, as well as revisions and additions that Bowie contributed to the anthropologist's kinship and ethnological work on the New Hebrides.⁴³

My intention here is not to re-litigate the existence, or extent of depopulation in the early twentieth century New Hebrides. My purpose is strictly to demonstrate that it was a phenomenon that people discussed—and contested—in the archipelago in 1923, and that Europeans and Santoese islanders discussed and contested the subject alike. When asked during the pre-trial examinations if people in his district were dying out, Lulumoli responded that, yes, people were dying fast, but that he did not know why.⁴⁴ When asked the same question, Levumerai responded that there were, indeed, fewer people than in the past, but that he thought it sorcerers and witchcraft that were killing the people, not the whites.⁴⁵ Only Rovsale remarks on any connection between Europeans and indigenous deaths and depopulation, and he attributes this connection to Ronovuro. When asked if the prophet had ever said that Clapcott killed his wife, Rovsale answers: 'I did not hear Ronovuro say so, but I heard Ronovuro some years ago say that he thought the whites were causing the sickness among them in Santo.'⁴⁶ These are the only references the accused made to disease and depopulation throughout the Clapcott case.

Did these factors: magic or chicanery, madness or affectation, and greater mortality motivate Clapcott's killing in 1923? Did they contribute to malice-aforethought against Europeans in general or Clapcott specifically and result in the latter's murder? A large crowd attended the July sing-sing Ronovuro described as having 'no special purpose.' Seagoe testified at trial that as many as 800 islanders had been present.⁴⁷ The

Commandant would have had this figure from informants, but Lepvele, at his pre-trial examination, also stated that many people came.⁴⁸ Was there, at this sing-sing, any widespread will to exterminate the European community on Santo's coasts? If there was, there is no sign of this in the pre-trial examinations. The question was rarely framed unambiguously, but de Leener did put it to Rovsale in a fairly direct manner, asking: 'Did Ronovuro ever tell you that the Whites had to be killed before he could bring the dead back to life?' to which Rovsale simply answered, 'No he did not.'⁴⁹

Ronovuro himself made no claims to ambitions of genocide despite openly and consistently admitting to issuing the order to kill Clapcott. He was cryptic though when asked about another planned assassination. At the sing-sing, two bamboos had been stood within public view—one with a towel and one without. In his statement before Seagoe on 28 August, Lolorave claimed, with Seagoe's own agreement included in parentheses, that a hole lay open in Ronovuro's village, and that Ronovuro meant to put the Rev. Frederick Bowie into it when he next visited. When the Public Prosecutor asked the prophet, with Frederick Bowie's brother as interpreter, if he had dug this hole for the missionary, Ronovuro only answered, that he 'could not say.'⁵⁰

According to the prisoners in the Clapcott Case, this then was the tangled milieu that pre-existed Ronovuro's final sing-sing. Belief in sorcerous power, irrational claims and behaviours, depopulation and European association with it were all in evidence, albeit as minority yet significant views. Against this backdrop the deaths of specific Europeans could be openly prepared for, called for, and, in at least one case, executed.

If Reginald Clapcott was not murdered indiscriminately, if he was not merely the first to die amid a thwarted plot for European genocide on Espiritu Santo, if there was at least some general knowledge that Ronovuro intended harm to the Presbyterian Principal at Tangoa, why then was Clapcott killed first? Why was he killed at all? Was the planter

inoffensive, as Rev. Raff wrote to F.E. Williams in 1924, or had he offended, as Guiart and Worsley claimed.⁵¹

Aside from the contradictory 25 August statements contained within Seagoe's interview with Tavoni, statements he would again change in the subsequent pre-trial examination, there are no admissions of knowledge of any intent to assassinate Clapcott prior to Ronovuro giving the order. Not one of the seventeen men deposed pre-trial confessed to knowing what the towel on the bamboo signified. Some of the accused such as Rauvatali, Arususu, Susumoli, and Avu claimed not to have attended the sing-sing at all; in all but Rauvatali's case, these men expressed aversion to Ronovuro.⁵² Karaitova, however, did attend the sing-sing, and it is possible that Maile, O'ona, Rovsale, and Levumerai did as well, but none claimed to have seen the towel on the bamboo, and they claimed no knowledge of the murder before the fact.⁵³ Lulumoli, Tavoni, and Lepvele all confessed to seeing the towel upon its pole the morning of Clapcott's death, but they admitted no knowledge of its significance.⁵⁴ Alo only mentions seeing people taking guns, but merely claims he 'thought they were going to look for something to shoot.'⁵⁵

Absence and ignorance: these statements could be nothing short of collective dissemblance. They could just as easily be the truth. In the first chapter of this essay we permitted ourselves to assume the European at the edge of Petit's photo-postcard invulnerable to harm. In considering the accused clustered at the centre of the same image, let us now presume innocence where and when we can.

At his pre-trial examination on 13 September, Ronovuro stated that he said nothing of the murder to come to Tavoni or Lepvele or his nephew, Alo. He did not tell Lolorave; he did not even know where the man was. He told only Asapele of his desire to have Clapcott killed. It was the morning after the close of the sing-sing. He gave his subordinate two shotgun cartridges.

Asapele asked no questions. Perhaps if he had, the prophet would have told him what he told William Bowie and the officers of the Court: that anger over a woman induced him to have Clapcott killed, that what

the woman did to make him cross was immaterial, but that the English planter repeatedly talked to him—days, nights, ‘and other things besides.’ That Clapcott, when he came to talk to the prophet, came to him not as a man, or a bird, or any other animal. When he came, Ronovuro saw him like water. Asapele did not ask his prophet these questions though, or any others. Ronovuro told him to murder Clapcott, and so he did. Ronovuro told him to give one of the cartridges to Lolorave, and so he did this too.⁵⁶

The Clapcott Murder Trial took place on Monday, 17 September, two days after the last of the pre-trial examinations concluded. William Bowie was sworn in as interpreter. Four local Europeans—two British and two French—were sworn in as assessors, with two more supplementary assessors standing by. British Judge de Vere, French Judge Sachon, and the Dutch Acting President of the Joint Court Goeman Borgesius presided. The Public Prosecutor opened the case.

William Bowie was the first to testify.⁵⁷ He spoke of receiving word of the tragedy at Tasmalum from two islanders on 31 July. He said that the news did not astonish him: that he’d expected something like what befell Clapcott to happen for quite some time. He went on to discuss discovering the body, the looted house, and some initial details of the crimes upon arrival at Clapcott’s property the following day. He then answered questions as to the state of play on South Santo, cultural details of its people, and the character of some of the accused, particularly Ronovuro, who, as noted above, he described as dangerous and insane. The Native Advocate also asked him whether he himself had ever been attacked by islanders. Bowie admitted that he had, though it had been seven or eight years before, and that the attacks had been the work of a different tribe, before the rise of Ronovuro’s influence.⁵⁸ The Native Advocate also asked him if he was known to some of the islanders as ‘the bad ghost’: a sobriquet for the interpreter brought to the court’s attention during Rovsale’s pre-trial examination.⁵⁹ Bowie admitted that, yes, he was known as such by some, and, when asked to explain it, he said that he

supposed the name was meant to imply that the islanders thought that he knew more than he should.

Seagoe testified next. His testimony amounted to much the same as he had written previously to Merton King in his report of 20 August. He described arriving at Tanga on 6 August and the prompt arrest of Ronovuro who had come down from the bush of his own free will. The Commandant explained how, following assurances exchanged through messengers, Ronovuro surrendered himself in response to Frederick Bowie's promises that the prophet would be delivered into Condominium custody upon arrival of the government yacht. Seagoe went on to detail the subsequent arrests and the discovery of much of the looted property in Ronovuro's house. He discussed how Loken, Clapcott's employee and caretaker to the property, had helped identify the stolen goods, and how he died in custody aboard the *Euphrosyne* after he too was arrested for his alleged involvement in the thefts. Seagoe went on to relay details of the sing-sing that he had collected from the defendants and informants on Santo: the bamboo pole and towel raised on the dancing ground, the second, unadorned pole beside it, and the general pleas of ignorance over just what these signs were meant to convey. The Commandant then went down the list of the six murder suspects, elaborating upon role each played: Ronovuro as the chief conspirator, Asapele and Lolorave as the primary assassins, and Lepvele, Alo, and Tavoni as having arrived shortly thereafter and fired shots into the dead body.⁶⁰

At this point there is a notable change in the trial minutes. The transcription changes: we go from Darroux's recognizable hand into someone else's. Most likely this was C.G. Adam the Court Registrar temporarily relieving the Notary. The rest of the day's transcription, though, was taken in French, by this ambiguous hand. It includes among it Ronovuro's last recorded words.⁶¹

For a short while after the change in transcribers, Seagoe continued to discuss Alo, Tavoni, and Lepvele's involvement, largely repeating the content of the interviews he took down in late August, and restating the contradictions and lies noted in Tavoni's statement. After

this some questions and remarks were exchanged between the British Judge, the Native Advocate and Seagoe.⁶²

Two important pieces of information are asserted in these brief exchanges. First, in response to a question by de Vere, someone—it seems to be Seagoe—states that Ronovuro, Lolorave, and Alo can speak English. This is neither stated nor implied elsewhere in the archive, and if it were true, it would have had a significant impact on the roles these three men and William Bowie, played within the proceedings. At the very least, even some facility with English would remove that much more of the layers that separate us from these individuals' articulated perspectives.

The second item of significance to come from this moment in the transcript is that it would seem that here the Native Advocate attempted to discredit some certain aspects of the prosecution's case. After the names of the prisoners who could speak English were given, Judge de Vere asked who interpreted the information relayed in Seagoe's interviews. Again, it is unclear who answered, but it seems most likely it was still Seagoe answering the Judge's enquiries. The Judge was told it was Frederick Bowie who interpreted the statements. Lolorave was the only one of the six men accused of murder who did not speak to the missionary, as he had only been apprehended just before the *Euphrosyne* began its return voyage back to Port Vila, and there hadn't been time. Thus it is likely his statements were interpreted by William Bowie during the journey south or once the prisoners reached Efaté. At this point in the trial, Davies, the Native Advocate seemed to claim that the plot articulated within Seagoe's report and statements was actually created in the original interrogations conducted in Frederick Bowie's house on Tangoa; that Ronovuro was 'a bit strange, but not mad' and that the prisoners were not strictly murderous—that they generally had no grievance against Clapcott, had had friendly relations with other Europeans on Santo, and had even, in the case of the Loken, worked for the victim. What effect the Native Advocate's appeal here had on the judges and assessors can only be guessed. No responses were noted in the transcript. After Davies'

remarks, it appears that Seagoe was dismissed, and the Court began to call the accused murderers to the stand.

Asapele was the first to be called. Here the minutes simply state that, having taken the oath, Ronovuro's primary assassin declared that he had nothing to say.⁶³

Lolorave, when sworn in next, was more expansive. There is little in his testimony that differs from what he said in his statement before Seagoe or during his pre-trial examination: Asapele invited him to shoot pigeons the morning of the murder and only later told him of the errand that they were on. The two men arrived at Clapcott's house in the late morning. Clapcott was alerted to them by the barking of his dog and so he met them at the backdoor. Lolorave asked him if he had fowls to sell them. The planter replied no, whereupon Asapele shot him in the chest—the heart—and then Lolorave shot him as well. He confessed to going along with the plot and not questioning it because he was afraid of Ronovuro, and he described himself and Asapele as men 'of little importance.'

A fresh point of interest did emerge in Lolorave's testimony, however, when he claimed that Clapcott was already dead when he shot him. This contradicted earlier statements he had made before both Seagoe and the Public Prosecutor to the effect that Clapcott had still been alive at the time, and it did not escape the notice of the Court. The Public Prosecutor addressed the change, saying: 'The witness told the trial that when he fired, Clapcott was not dead, and now he tells the hearing that Clapcott was indeed dead?' The new transcriber documented the proceedings using a question ('Q') and response ('R') format. Following this question from the Public Prosecutor, there is a line marked 'R', but it is left blank. It is the only instance like it in the document. If the argument had been pursued further there or elsewhere, regardless of whether this new claim was truthful or not, Lolorave too might have had his sentence ultimately commuted. The last question he was asked was whether he regretted murdering Clapcott, to which he responded that he knew what he had done was wrong, but he did not regret it.⁶⁴

Ronovuro was the last to be sworn in on 17 September. I include this section of the transcript, to the best of my ability, in its entirety. There are places where time, the original penmanship, or the particularities within the transcriber's language have rendered the text inscrutable. I have marked these instances throughout, in hopes that further efforts will see them interpreted with greater success. The following is a translation from the original French, but, as in the case of the letters between Clapcott and King, I try here to reproduce the text with its original idiosyncrasies. Questions clearly indicated as coming from the Public Prosecutor I have marked 'P.P.'. Those from the Native Advocate I have marked 'N.A.', and my assumption is that each speaker continued with his line of inquiry until interrupted or otherwise induced to make way for the other:

Ronovuro Native of Santo. Takes oath.

N.A Q: Did he see Clapcott walking in the form of a white fowl?⁶⁵

R: He did not.

Q: Does he believe that a white fowl killed his wife?

R: He did not see it, but he believes this to be the case.

Q: Did he order the murder of Clapcott after the death of his wife?

R: First his wife died, then he ordered the murder of Clapcott?

Q: Is he afraid of the white men here in this room?

R: He is not very afraid, but somewhat afraid of talking.

P.P. Q: What was the meaning of the rag tied to the bamboo?

R: It means nothing, he [?] like that.

Q: In that case, why did Tavoni say it was a sign indicating that someone was to be killed?

R: I do not know why Tavoni said that.

Q: Does he [?] before the accused that he did not tell Tavoni that Clapcott was to be killed?

R: He would not have been able to tell him.

Q: Why does he believe Tavoni lied?

R: I do not know.

Q: Why did he choose Asapele and Lolorave to kill Clapcott?

R: He had no reason to choose these two men.

Q: Did he ask these two natives to kill Clapcott?

R: He gave orders

Q: Why did he not kill him himself?

R: He does not wish to answer.

Q: Did he forbid the removal of the body?

R: Yes.

Q: Why?

R: He did not have a reason.

Q: Did he inform Marimari of his intention to kill Clapcott?

R: Yes, Marimari told me this.

I did not tell Marimari but the two natives.

Q: Did he communicate his intention to Lepvele?

R: No.

Q: Why did Lepvele say he entered the house on Ronovuro's orders?

R: He does not know why Lepvele lied.

Q: What reason did he give to the other natives?

R: I sent them to collect money and not for any other reason.

Q: Why were they to collect this money?

R: He sent them to get money, but he did not know what to do with it.

Q: Is it not the case that he had asked for money to raise the dead?

R: He has never taken money for this purpose.

Q: What was this money for if not for this purpose?

R: It is quite possible that someone had this intention, but he did not.

Q: How does he explain the fact that he never said this yet he does not contradict it?

R: He has no idea.

Q: Was this money collected in coins or in gold?

R: Both.

Q: Did he have French dollars?

R: Not many.

Q: Did he promise the people that he would steal a boatload of goods and distribute them among them?

R: He never said it himself but others said it.

Q: Is it not the case that he promised the people many things, and when these things did not transpire the people were angry?

R: He did not ever make me any promises but I heard that he [?].

Q: Did he not say that he wanted to kill Clapcott [?] that Clapcott's spirit was preventing him from looting the boat?

R: He said this but it was a lie.

Q: Why did he choose Clapcott as his victim?

R: He cannot give a reason.

Q: Was Clapcott deaf?

R: He knew he was deaf.

Q: Was this not the reason why he chose Clapcott as ~~the victim~~ ~~but it was~~ the dogs betrayed them?

R: No, this was not the reason.

Q: He killed Clapcott after the death of his wife?

R: What is the connection between the death of his wife and the murder of Clapcott?

R: He believed Clapcott was the reason behind his wife's death.

Q: Did the spirits tell him to kill Clapcott?

R: Two spirits appeared.

Q: What form did they take?

R: I know that they were spirits, but I could not distinguish their form.

Q: What instructions did he give to these three men Lepvele, Alo and Tavoni?

R: He did not give them any instructions; they went by themselves.

N.A. Q: How does he know where these three men went?

R: Did they not go to kill bats?

R: This question is not permissible because he has answered it himself.⁶⁶

This testimony represents Ronovuro's final words within the historical record. The next day all seventeen men were tried for larceny. William Bowie testified again and was briefly questioned by the Native Advocate. Seagoe testified as well, but this drew no cross-examination. The Public Prosecutor, went on to read the statements the defendants had made before Seagoe as well as the remarks recorded in their pre-trial examinations. With the exception of the plea from Avu, mentioned above, the men from Santo were neither given nor encouraged to speak in their own defense.⁶⁷

When the verdicts were delivered, Arususu, Avu, Levumerai, Maile, and Susumoli were acquitted of all crimes. The rest were convicted of stealing or receiving stolen goods from Reginald Clapcott's property. Karaitova received the lightest sentence: penal servitude on Efate for two years for receiving a broken knife and a rice bag. O'ona received three years of the same for taking two cartridges of shotgun shells from Clapcott's house. Rovsale was found guilty of taking a hoe, a crowbar, a roll of barbed wire, a tin of money and other items from the property. The court sentenced him to five years, the longest of the sentences that were handed down.

Ronovuro, Asapele, Lolorave, Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni were convicted of Clapcott's murder. The prophet and the two assassins he appointed went to the gallows on 13 November, but the other three men's sentences were eventually reduced to penal servitude for life. These reductions came as the result of another battle between Commissioner

Merton King, representing the Western Pacific High Commission's interests in official process, and British Judge de Vere and Joint Court President Borgesius, representing what they viewed as a due process that had been prejudiced by the French Judge and the trials' assessors.

Ultimately, Ronovuro, the British Judge, the Joint Court President and the British Resident Commissioner all combined to persuade British and French High Commissioners Rodwell and D'Arboussier to forego Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni' executions. The same day that the Ronovuro, Asapele, and Lolorave were hanged to death, de Vere and Borgesius sent King their arguments for clemency so that he might relay these to the British High Commissioner. Borgesius, speaking for himself and the British Judge, appealed the remaining death sentences on the grounds that an appreciable interval had passed between Clapcott's murder and the shots Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni fired into his corpse (thus absolving them of the murder itself); that these shots into the murdered body were more to justify claims to the forthcoming loot than to indulge in 'savage exultation' or personal grievances against Clapcott; and lastly by all accounts, including Ronovuro's, the prophet had never ordered these particular men to harm the planter:

Ronovuro who was undoubtedly primarily responsible for Murder admitted giving orders for its commission to Asapele and Lolorave but said with regard to each of the three others I did not give him orders to shoot Clapcott.

British Judge and I regard this last statement as more reliable than most of the evidence.⁶⁸

King transmitted Judge de Vere and President Borgesius's appeal to High Commissioner Rodwell accordingly, and to it he added his own. For all his devotion to official process, King had no desire to see Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni hanged. Weeks before the executions he witnessed on the morning of 13 November, he had begged the High Commissioner to grant clemency for the three men upon arrival of the Judge and

President's written recommendations.⁶⁹ Upon his receipt of the appeal in Fiji, Rodwell shared it with his counterpart in New Caledonia. Per joint decision of the two High Commissioners, Alo, Lepvele, and Tavoni's death sentences were formally commuted on 1 December.⁷⁰

Notes

¹ Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, Vanuatu Supreme Court 888 1/2, 2-4, National Archives of Vanuatu, Port Vila (this archive hereafter listed as VSC); J. Graham Miller, *Live: A History of Church Planting in the Republic of Vanuatu. Book VII* (Port Vila: Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, 1990), 123, 191.

² Summary of Joint Court Proceedings, 20 August 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3, 4-6.

⁴ King to Rodwell, 20 August 1923, Western Pacific High Commission archive 4/IV/2094/1, University of Auckland Library, Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services (this archive hereafter listed as WPHC).

⁵ Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, New Hebrides British Service archive 1/I, 17/1914/3, 11, University of Auckland Library, MSS & Archives 2003/1, Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services (this archive hereafter listed as NHBS).

⁶ F. Bowie to King, 15 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 1-2.

⁷ Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 11.

⁸ Summary of Joint Court Proceedings, 20 August 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

⁹ King to Arboussier 22 August 1923, VSC 1091/70.

¹⁰ For assignment of assessors see 23 & 25 August 1923, VSC 888 1/2; for scheduling of date for murder trial see Summons to Assessors, 30 August 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

¹¹ Thomas to King, 25 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

¹² Seagoe et al, criminal examinations, 23-28 September 1923, VSC 888/1/1/6-9, 15, 16.

¹³ De Leener to Seagoe, 7 September 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

¹⁴ Seagoe to Wallace, 7 September 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

¹⁵ Seagoe to de Leener 'Herewith I enclose...', 8 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

¹⁶ De Leener to Seagoe, 8 September 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

¹⁷ Seagoe to de Leener 'Your notes to hand...', 8 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

¹⁸ De Leener to Seagoe (on Public Prosecutor letterhead), 8 September 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

¹⁹ Seagoe to de Leener, 10 September 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3.

²⁰ King to de Leener, 10 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

²¹ De Leener to King, 10 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

²² Borgesius to King, 12 September 1923, VSC 1091/76 with encl. De Vere to Borgesius, 11 September 1923.

²³ King to Borgesius, 12 September 1923, VSC 1091/22.

²⁴ De Leener to King, 13 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3.

²⁵ For Lepvele, Tavoni, Alo, Lolorave, Asapele and Ronovuro, see individual pre-trial examinations VSC 888 1/1 *passim*; for Rovsale, Levumerai, O'ona, Avu, Arususu, Rauvatali, Susumoli, Karaitova, Lulumoli, Karaimele, Maile, see individual pre-trial examinations VSC 888 1/2 *passim*.

²⁶ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Larceny), 18 September 1923, VSC 888/1/3, 1-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ Arususu pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2; Asapele also stated that he paid Ronovuro for resurrection of his family members, see also Asapele statement before Seagoe, 23 August 1923, VSC 888 1/1.

²⁹ Arususu pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³⁰ Levumerai pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³¹ Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³² Ronovuro pre-trial examination, 13 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1.

³³ E. W. P. Chinnery and A. C. Haddon, 'Five New Religious Cults in British New Guinea,' *Hibbert Journal* 15:3 (1917): 448-463; F. E. Williams, *The Vailala Madness and the Destruction of Native Ceremonies in the Gulf Division* (Port Moresby: E.G. Baker, Govt. Printer, 1923).

³⁴ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923. VSC 888 1/3, 2-3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶ For Rovsale, Levumerai, Avu, and O'ona see pre-trial examinations, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2; for Susumoli and Rauvatali, see pre-trial examinations, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³⁷ Rauvatali pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

³⁸ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3, 2.

³⁹ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3, 3.

⁴⁰ Baker, John R. Baker, 'Depopulation in Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides,' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 58 (1928): 282.

⁴¹ Felix Speiser, *Two Years with the Natives in the Western Pacific* (London: Mills & Boon, 1913), 189.

⁴² Felix Speiser, 'Decadance and Preservation in the New Hebrides,' In *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia*, ed. W. H. R. Rivers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 25-32.

⁴³ Rivers Papers, envelopes 12000-12002, Haddon Papers Collection, University of Cambridge Library.

⁴⁴ Lulumoli pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2

⁴⁵ Levumerai pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

⁴⁶ Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2, 3.

⁴⁷ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888 1/3, 5.

⁴⁸ Lepvele pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1.

⁴⁹ Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2, 3.

⁵⁰ Ronovuro pre-trial examination, 13 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1/2.

⁵¹ Raff in F. E. Williams, *Orokaiva Magic* (London: OUP, 1928), 100-101; Jean Guiart, *Espirito Santo: (Nouvelles-Hébrides)* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 198-202; Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of 'Cargo' Cults in Melanesia* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 148-149.

⁵² For Avu, see pre-trial examinations, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2; for Arususu, Rauvatali, and Susumoli, see pre-trial examinations, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

⁵³ For Levumerai, Rovsale and O'ona, see pre-trial examinations, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2; for Karaitova and Maile see pre-trial examinations, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

⁵⁴ For Lepvele and Tavoni, see pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1; for Lulumoli, see pre-trial examination, 15 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2.

⁵⁵ Alo pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1.

⁵⁶ See Ronovuro and Asapele pre-trial examinations, 13 September 1923, VSC 888 1/1.

⁵⁷ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923. VSC 888 1/3, 1-3 *passim*.

⁵⁸ In his report to King, Seagoe said that he had information indicating that two attempts had been made on William Bowie's life, and that it was Susumoli who had led these attacks; see Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 8.

⁵⁹ Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888 1/2, 3.

⁶⁰ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888/1/3, 4-6 *passim*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6-12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.* It is also worth mentioning that, while he did not share this information his statement before Seagoe, his pre-trial examination or at trial, in Seagoe's 20 August report, Asapele is noted as confessing (to either Seagoe or Frederick Bowie) that he murdered a man of his own village some years before the Clapcott Murder. If what Jean Guiart had from his Santoese informers was true—that those who paid Ronovuro did so not just for the resurrection of kin, but also for forgiveness for murders they had committed—this might offer some greater perspective upon Asapele's willingness to shoot Clapcott. This selling of pardons for murder, however, is referenced in Guiart and nowhere else; see Seagoe to King, 20 August 1923, NHBS 1/I, 17/1914/3, 11; see also Guiart, *Espirito Santo*, 201.

⁶⁴ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888/1/3, 8.

⁶⁵ The subject of white fowls first appeared in Rovsale's pre-trial examination. The Native Advocate asked if he had ever hear Ronovuro speak of Clapcott as a white fowl, to which Rovsale replied that he had never heard Ronovuro refer to Clapcott specifically as such, but that he had said that white people came to him like white fowls; see Rovsale pre-trial examination, 14 September 1923, VSC 888/1/2, 3.

⁶⁶ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888/1/3/8-10 (excerpt reproduced by kind permission of the National Archives of Vanuatu).

⁶⁷ Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Larceny), 18 September 1923. VSC 888/1/3/8-10.

⁶⁸ Borgesius and de Vere to King, 13 November 1923, VSC 1091/8.

⁶⁹ King to Rodwell, 28 October 1923, WPHC 4/IV 2293/24.

⁷⁰ Rodwell to King, 1 December 1923, WPHC 4/IV 2802/6.

In Conclusion: Motes in the Imperial Eye

In his 25 August statement before British Commandant Ernest Seagoe, the prophet Ronovuro claimed that two spirits instructed him that Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott was to die. Ronovuro cited no grudge against the planter, and the only reference he made to his late wife was to deny that he had ever tried to resurrect her. In his deposition before the prosecuting attorney de Leener some three weeks later on 13 September, the Santoese prophet ceded that he had had recurring visitations from Clapcott where the deaf Englishman came to him like water and talked to him incessantly; according to Ronovuro, these encounters with the planter—paranormal or metaphorical—along with troubles with an unnamed ‘woman’ who made him ‘cross’ and ‘other things besides’ resulted in his decision to order Clapcott’s assassination.

When he stood on trial for the murder four days later, Ronovuro acknowledged having stated, at some earlier point, that Clapcott’s spirit was in some way blocking him from ‘looting’ or possibly receiving cargo from a ship. He did not specify whether this ship or its cargo were real or supernatural; in either case they were new elements he introduced into the record. The two spirits he had previously claimed to have urged him to murder Clapcott reappeared within his testimony before the Court, and, when pressed, the prophet ultimately admitted that he believed the planter was the cause of his wife’s recent death—a death he had said at the beginning of this very same testimony had been caused by the appearance of a white fowl. Nowhere in any of the prophet’s statements at or before trial does he make any reasonably clear indication of an affair between Clapcott and his wife, nor do any of the other Santoese defendants reference, in their statements, sexual relationships between Clapcott and the prophet’s wife or other indigenous women on South Santo. This stands in sharp contrast both to the accusations relayed in Merton King’s letter to Clapcott before the latter’s murder and Jean

Guiart's conclusion that miscegeny and poison lay at the root of the planter's and Ronovuro's wife's demise.¹

What are we to do with these stubborn and multiplying ambiguities? Tracing reasons for Reginald Clapcott's murder back to Ronovuro, its principal author, our search for motive yields no clear answer. Instead, with every opportunity he is given to express himself (though always through mediation), the prophet manages to further complicate our attempts at deduction. His testimonies are intransigent. Our pursuit of any clear understanding of why he ordered Clapcott killed on 24 July 1923 reaches not a dead end, but a garden of forking paths, none of which promise to lead to a place of greater certainty. The legal history contained in Vanuatu Supreme Court Box 888 brings us closer to Ronovuro than ever before, yet it does not unmask him of his mystery. The Joint Court records relating to the murder are, of course, not the only story, but do extrajudicial archives—other sources and stories—provide any greater, more convincing insight?

Early in my research for this thesis I encountered an anecdote in Margaret Critchlow Rodman's *Houses Far From Home: British Colonial Space in the New Hebrides*. In this anecdote Rodman writes of the Hooker family—Ned Hooker and his mixed-race daughters, Jane and Nellie—who moved to Tangis, an islet off the South Santo coast, sometime after 1910 and slept with guns beneath their pillows. In interviews with Rodman, descendants of the 'Hooker girls', as Ned's daughters were known, remembered "Granny Jane" telling of the fear she had felt as she lay awake nights listening to "the natives calling and calling."² The Santoese mainlanders were remembered as claiming they wanted to come across the channel to Tangis to shop at the Hookers' store, but Jane and Nellie had suspected otherwise. These suspicions were not entirely baseless. Ned Hooker had moved his family to the islet so that he could take over five hundred acres across the channel after South Santo men had murdered Mr. Greig, the previous owner, and his two daughters at the property in 1908.

Familiar with the earlier Greig Murders, I did not dismiss Jane and Nellie's anxieties. And yet, when I first encountered them in Rodman's book I was safe and distant, reading in the British Library, more than a century after the Hookers had relocated to Tangis. I would be lying if I said that something about the recollections didn't strike me as profiling and purse-clutching. Two years later, further reading found me re-evaluating my judgments.

During my 2014 fieldwork in the University of Auckland's Special Collections, I accessed, somewhat by chance, a 1919 letter from Frederick Gatherer Bowie to British Resident Commissioner Merton King. The letter contained the first written mention of a South Santo man—insane or downright bad, the Reverend could not yet say—who was sharing his dreams (Bowie says the man called these 'parables') of a great flood coming to drown islanders and Europeans living on the coast. He talked of opening a store loaded with goods that would arrive on a steamer. He took money and orders for rifles, sewing machines, and cases of tinned salmon, and he promised to raise the dead friends of those who paid him for it.³

In his letter the Rev. Bowie goes on to tell King how this same man had been entrusted to he and his wife, Jeanie, at Tangoa on multiple occasions for harassing the Hookers at their store on Tangis. When Ned Hooker began refusing to bring the strange islander across the channel by launch, he would respond by singing out all night from the mainland shore. He was, of course, Ronovuro.

When the Rev. Bowie first questioned the nascent prophet as to his purpose at the Hookers' he claimed he merely wanted to buy goods. When pressed again upon the subject after several more weeks of singing and escalation among his followers, it came out that he had been returning to Tangis because he was intent on getting Jane or Nellie Hooker for a bride. In his letter to King, Bowie claims to have defused the situation for the moment, but he suggests 'it might be a good thing if some one had authority to take charge of [Ronovuro] if he becomes further aggressive.' The potential danger was not exclusive to the Hookers; it

extended to other European families who lived nearby on the South Coast, as well as to Ronovuro and his followers. The Reverend concludes the penultimate paragraph of his letter saying: 'I do not think [Ronovuro] or any of them will go near the Watsons' house, because they know that Mr. Watson, if pushed, will shoot.'⁴

Ned Hooker also worried the situation would culminate in violence. In the figure below, I reproduce a brief note he sent to Frederick Bowie following the above episodes. The Rev. Bowie enclosed it within his letter to BRC King:

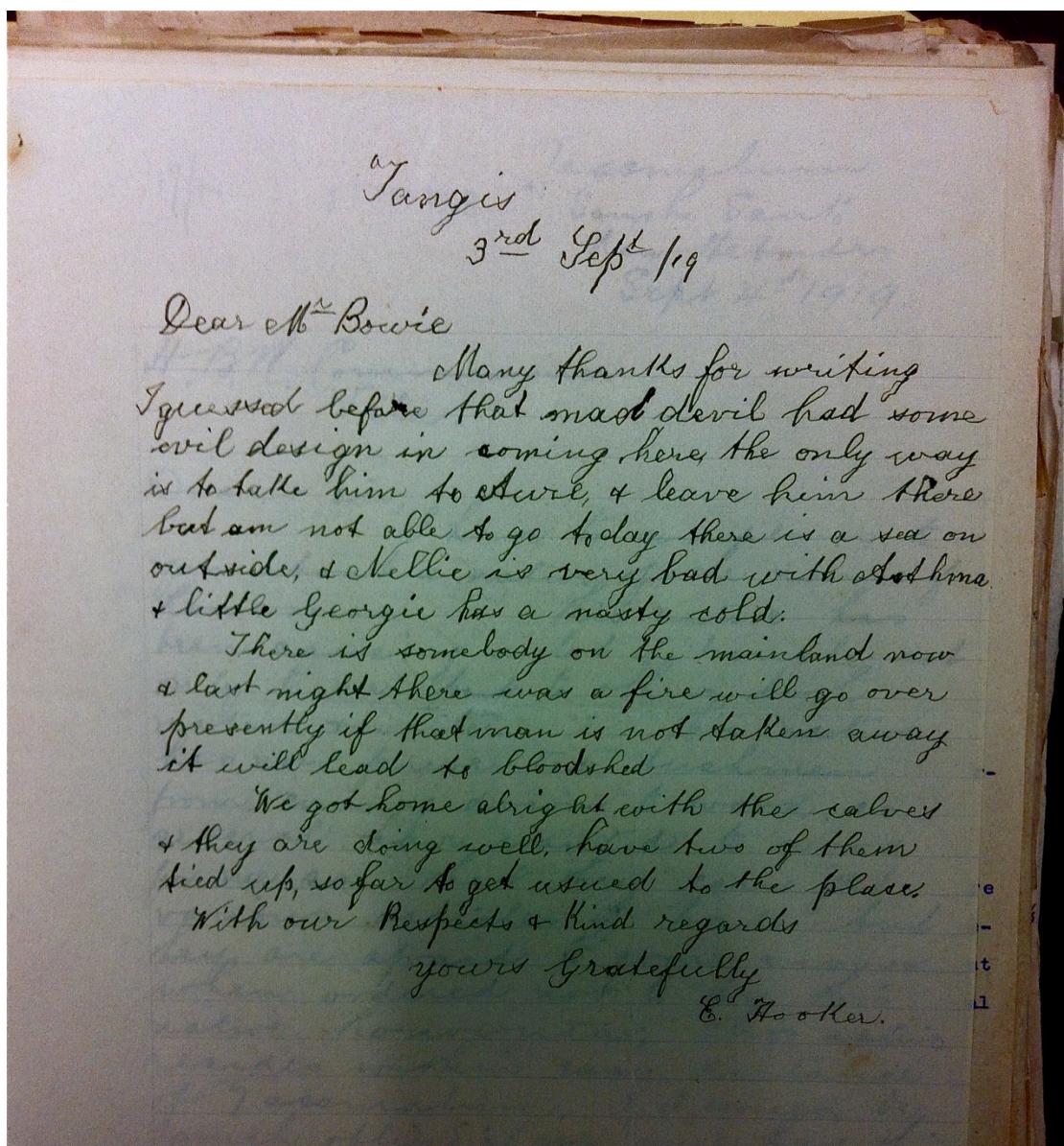


Fig. 13: Edward 'Ned' Hooker to FG Bowie, 3 September 1919 (reproduced by kind permission of Special Collections, University of Auckland Libraries and Learning Services).⁵

In another, more personal letter, this one to the Rev. Alexander Don in New Zealand, Bowie relates the first night Ronovuro spent in his custody on Tangoa, having been brought there by Hooker (the underlining herein belongs to Bowie, the Rev. Don or subsequent stewards of the original):

The first night [Ronovuro] was here...he sang all the time except when he was praying. It would never do to say it, but the settler [Hooker] was quite afraid of the man, and when he brought him he knew that I was not at home. Mrs. B told me she had never seen a European show fear so.⁶

Do these new fragments—these objects fashioned out of lived experience—contribute to a simpler or more complex representation of Ronovuro and the early New Hebrides? We find ourselves back at the margins of Frédéric Petit's photo-postcard, peering at the figure at the centre of Giraud's stamp. Read one way, all of these files, letters and recollections add up to a tale of terror: the indigenous idol's spears are rattling, and their threat is no mere threat. They will, before long, puncture someone beyond the blank and framing field.

Read another way, however, this central figure is emerging towards the beach's place of commerce. He is coming as an entrepreneur, a fraud, a would-be-lover. He prays. He does not bear the commodities out of blank wilderness; rather they are on the beach and he flies to them. These objects of exchange or desire or prayer both summon him and obstruct him. His tale becomes a captivity narrative.

When asked at trial if he feared the white men in the room, Ronovuro answered—through William Bowie—that he was ‘not very afraid, but somewhat afraid of talking.’⁷ If he was ‘not very’ afraid of the white men in the courtroom, why was he afraid to testify? Who or what else was there to cause him trepidation? We look to the stamp: to the idol and the spears that surround him, and recall that Rovsale claimed Ronovuro’s followers were beginning to doubt him. Are the spears, in fact,

the central figure's to command or is he running from them? Has he been signalling to us from behind the vessels that pen him in? Have we been deaf to his appeals? Has he, in the end, been caught within his own attempt at framing? Why won't he put aside his masks and explain himself clearly? Why won't he tell us just one thing? The right thing. Why doesn't he trust we'll hear him out?

Since the beginning of the new millennium (and beyond) scholars and practitioners within the humanities have been pursuing a fruitful line of enquiry into what the Arts, their objects and their institutions know. Though these questions have been posed in various iterations since Plato's *Republic*, we will begin with Paul de Bolla who describes himself standing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, looking at a Barnett Newman painting (*Vir Heroicus Sublimus*) in 2001.⁸ De Bolla recalls the painting raising normal questions of meaning and intention, but he quickly discards these in favour of effects of its affect and, more importantly, suspicion: what does Newman's saturated canvas know and what won't it admit to? Michael Wood, picking up on De Bolla's questions in 2005 asks whether literature offers us a discrete form of knowledge.⁹ Mark Currie has gone on to direct Wood's question at the novel's knowledge of time.¹⁰ Most recently this sequence of criticism—along with a Rothko painting interrogated in an episode of *Mad Men*—has inspired Andrew Cowan to defend Creative Writing as a practice and discipline from the threat of encroachment by Literary Studies, asking, 'What might Literary Studies know that Creative Writing doesn't *need* to know?'¹¹

As one might expect, these many enquiries have yielded various conclusions, usefully inflected towards the authors' concerns. I share some of these preoccupations. I too want to discern what objects of history and literature and travel and their living subjects know. I want to appreciate what drove Reginald Clapcott to persist in living as he did amidst rising danger; what exactly compelled Ronovuro to order his murder; how did William Bowie reconcile the ethics of serving as interpreter for the Santoese defendants and witness for their prosecution—did he even serve (as in was he serviceable to the task), was

he ethical, did he register or reconcile his conflict at all; and why was it, when I visited Tanna in 2003, brimming with curiosity about John Frum, the sad-faced ni-Vanuatu driver who took me across the island cared only to talk about the newest war—Operation Freedom—in Iraq. Like Wood and Currie and Cowan, I want to know. As De Bolla stands before the *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*—leaving arguments over personification to others—I stand before these objects of my enquiries, haunted by what seems ‘untouchable, unknowable’ and my suspicion that any rush to *know* conclusively might, in fact, preclude other important questions, like, How are we asking? Why? What do we intend to do with the intelligence we seek? What do we expect to hear and what do we do with the unexpected?

Michael Wood responds particularly admirably to some of these questions, and I will return to him before I conclude this chapter and cross over into my fictions. First, however, I think it might be helpful to briefly describe some aspects of my methodology in pursuing the works within this thesis: some of the hows and whys I’ve alluded to, some of the difficulties I’ve encountered throughout the process and opportunities these have presented me. I will discuss the importance of Microhistory to my work, then offer a short survey of imperial literatures of the Pacific that have influenced me. To these I will add some insights from travel and travel writing before I guide you into something that resembles the *Espritu Santo* of 1923 as I have read and pictured it.

But Microhistory first. And method.

Critics and practitioners of literature hunger after knowledge. Elizabeth Bishop drinks the North Sea and in doing so she *knows* it: its tastes—at first, bitter, then briny, then burning—uncloaking themselves upon her tongue. Likewise Roland Barthes truffle-hunts for what is savoury in literature: ‘that ingredient, the salt of words...this taste...which makes knowledge profound, fecund.’¹² Microhistorians sample and forage too, but while their searches are motivated by a similar desire to know, a different sensation attracts their palates. The promise of strange details,

clues, close-ups, incongruities, lacunae, singularities, peculiarities, puzzles and particulars are the microhistorian's enticements. Where Braudel saw the history of events as mere foam and flotsam upon the Mediterranean's *longue durée*, the microhistorian sees atolls of salt.¹³ These floating exceptions that others pass over or assume passé whet the microhistorian's appetite for mystery and offer the hint of novel perspectives.

Matti Peltonen claims this attention to mystery as microhistory's first feature.¹⁴ Earlier in this chapter I asked what we are to do with ambiguities—this question was not simply rhetorical: it is a primary concern throughout this thesis. Microhistory's answer to this question is its imperative; it says 'Seek them out.' Notice and explore them. Aim, as Giovanni Levi instructs, not necessarily (the adverb being key) at historicizing the distant, marginalized or precious, but rather at 'reconstructing moments, situations, and persons which examined with an analytic eye, in the context of their particularity, put on weight and colour; not as examples, for lack of better general explanations, but as physical correlatives to the complexity of the contexts within which men and women live and move.'¹⁵

Tooth, texture, weight, colour—I have found these in the history of the New Hebrides' becoming, the entangled secondary accounts of the Clapcott Murder on Santo, the complex proceedings of its trials on Efate, the drama of these events' interpretation, and in the struggle—nearly a century later and on yet another island—to narrate a vision of Tanna beyond the gravitational force of John Frum. And, in finding them, I have endeavoured to partially (again, the adverb) construct and reconstruct them into forms that do justice to the phenomena observed.

My acknowledgment and insistence on the partiality within this thesis leans heavily upon the work of historical anthropologist Nicholas Thomas and as such it is meant to signal several things, some in line with Thomas's thinking, some in conjunction with prevailing attitudes in microhistory and some particular to my work. Let me address the first two first.

Thomas's arguments as to the partiality of texts come in the wake of two dominant and controverting waves within 20th century Pacific historiography: 'Imperial' histories that loomed large before the Second World War (and extend as far back as European arrivals in the region), and the post-war 'island-centered' school marked by J.W. Davidson's inaugural appointment as professor of Pacific History at Australian National University in 1949.¹⁶ Following upon the ebb of these two tides and the second's overlap with the largely pre-1980s de-colonisation movements in the Pacific, Thomas's work has weighed in and addressed the shared partiality of imperial, islands-oriented and islander-authored histories both in terms of these modes' failure to achieve any sort of Quixotic, totalizing representational paradigm (an achievement of the proverbial past 'as it really was') as well as on account of the broader interested and thus selective nature inherent to historians, their methods of research and writing up and the interests embodied within the objects of research themselves.¹⁷

According to Thomas, 'good' histories are conventionally seen to be inclusive of the different, interested and incomplete viewpoints of various historical actors as they appear across a range of diverse sources. Furthermore, good historical projects should not be delivered or accepted merely on the merits of the grounds that they 'differ and enrich knowledge through complementary diversity.' History's projects and their texted products 'reflect interest in practical projects, in legitimising or destabilising; they entertain, and perhaps they perform some symbolic violence with respect to those who are spoken about but whose own voices are absent.'¹⁸

In using the words 'entertain' and 'perform' Thomas is taking issue with the work of historical ethnographer Greg Dening, and raising an important concern that I share: that history, partial and constructed though it might be, must not forfeit facts to relativism or flee from political implications. We must not ignore the practical consequences of arguing, as Greg Dening does, that history and the apprehension of facts is mere dramaturgy playing to a crowd of romantic positivists.¹⁹ The

passenger airliners that were flown into the World Trade Center towers on September 11 were not theatre in the sense of harmless or idle entertainment, nor was Alan Kurdi a child-actor. If we accept that fiction's entertainments are blithely interchangeable with history's facts, then what's to stop Tom Harrisson's *HMS Sydney*, as I de-mystify it in the second chapter of this essay, from being as real as the screen before your face or the pages beneath your fingers? If a phantom punitive mission's reduction of South Santo to a sweep of broken trees and bodies entertains our desire for a thrill or for justice or for umbrage we might chose to level at a particular system of government, a colonial one in this case, can it then perform as history despite its missing empiricals? Nicholas Thomas knows this is not enough. So do microhistorians. So does Michael Wood, but perhaps here I have strayed too far. Let us stay with Thomas just a bit longer and return to microhistory before we turn to fiction.

What Thomas argues compellingly is the need for an approach within historical anthropology and other disciplines that challenges generalizing, agency-denying trends within imperial and anti-imperial (or, perhaps more conventionally understood as Orientalist and Occidentalist) writing that privilege blanket, ahistorical and inter-cultural differences over such conflicts as can be found locally, historically and in the company of intra-cultural differences, as well as cross-cultural and transtemporal similarities.

Like a microhistorian, Thomas rigorously pursues his histories through letters, photographs, literary works and historical persons, often limiting his study of these phenomena to individual chapters or articles that he then foregrounds against larger themes. Though the notion is not uncontested amongst theoreticians and practitioners, this sort of micro-to-macro move towards generalization is traditional among microhistorians.²⁰ In much the same way that Thomas has held up examples of textualized experiences to reveal fraught, failed and idiosyncratic endeavours within a colonial history too often mistaken as uniformly and implacably hegemonic, so Natalie Zemon Davis has discovered fresh insights regarding past and present constructions of

truth and doubt against the backdrop of the legendary case of the 16th century French imposter Arnaud du Tilh, better known as his impersonation's target: Martin Guerre.²¹ Similarly Carlo Ginzburg has drawn upon the 16th century Inquisition records of a miller's heretical disseminations of a cosmology where angels were spawned from a froth of cheese and worms to illuminate reading, religious and social lives within peasant culture in medieval Italy thought beyond reach.²² The remit of microhistory is what Giovanni Levi calls 'the recovery of complexity', the isolation of what might be considered 'normative systems' or dominant practices or ideologies, and 'the study of events or persons in context...where individuals and groups perform in the interstices of the contradictory pluralities of the normative systems that govern them.'²³ The aforementioned authors all engage in this sort of work and I am attempting the same in mine.

At this point I will venture that readers have long since noticed that I term *Delivering Judgments* a 'microhistorical essay.' This is because the event-history I have constructed in *Delivering Judgments* is, simply put, not yet sufficient enough to merit being called a microhistory. While I will contend that the essay is moving toward a more general argument—that, like Nicholas Thomas (and Michael Wood and William Blake), I believe a more careful recourse to patience and empirical particulars might forestay judgments proclaimed by and upon imperial subjects in error—what is microhistorical in this critical essay is not yet developed enough to move beyond the adjectival.²⁴ Or, to phrase it more positively, the essay still has room to grow.

To name a few areas for further inquiry, the figures of Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott and William Bowie remain too mysterious within my essay. It would appear that nothing defines the former so much as his death. This is, unfortunately, much in keeping with the world outside my thesis. Beyond materials relating to his murder, Clapcott's presence within the archives is thin. This same holds true for his family's written history. In *As Gentle Strangers: the Clapcotts from Elizabethan Times*, amidst discussions of the family's roots in Dorset, England, analysis of its

coat of arms, reconstructions of Henry and Frederick Clapcott's migration to New Zealand in 1853 (Reginald's uncle and father, respectively) and Frederick-Charles's (his eldest brother and next of kin) successes as a sugar baron on the Ba River in Fiji, the entry devoted to our Clapcott's life seems a footnote. The sole reference to him reads: '4s ["fourth son"—the last of four boys; he was the second youngest among his siblings] Reginald Onslow Dean b. 1876 Killed by natives as a trader in the New Hebrides.'²⁵ Even the date and island of his death are left to silence. My attempts at establishing contact with his surviving relatives in Australia have hit what I hope is not a dead end, but rather a long detour.

Communicating with the family of William Bowie has been easier, but they only offered suggestions as to his life and character by way of absences. Unlike Clapcott however, William Bowie has a wider and more varied existence within the archives. Beyond governmental holdings I have recovered telling traces of him within the history of the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu, his brother Frederick Bowie's letters and correspondence he maintained with renowned British anthropologist and psychologist WHR Rivers. William Bowie's wife is another ghostly presence within the Condominium archives and the history of Presbyterianism in the New Hebrides. In the Clapcott Murder's legal history she only exists between the lines, but she inhabits a larger role within my fiction—one I have constructed out of the minimal traces and implications I have encountered in my search for her. Like Reginald Clapcott, there is much that is silent about Mary Bowie, but this itself offers promise. As Natalie Zemon Davis has said regarding her own microhistorical research: sometimes silences can be seen as indicators.²⁶

Besides these persons, there are the politics to be considered. The Clapcott Murder and the fates of the accused—guilty and acquitted—contributed to future political movements on Espiritu Santo known as 'The Ronovuro School', eventuating in an attempt at Santoese secession in the build-up to Vanuatu's independence in 1980, an effort advanced by the political party Nagriamel and the leadership of Jimmy Moses Tubo Pantuntun Moli Stevens (the son of Tubou Stephens who appears in my

partial novella *Hang Law and Prophets*). Nagriamel's ideological heritage, explicated by Jimmy Stevens and traceable back to Ronovuro, deserves careful comparison against the new primary sources I have recovered in researching this thesis.²⁷

Careful comparison should also be applied to oral histories of the events on South Santo in 1923. During my fieldwork in 2014 I had the privilege to speak with a number of individuals on Santo and Tangoa about the Clapcott Murder. The accounts were varied and fascinating, but three ethical and fairly unambiguous considerations prevent me from including this data within my thesis: 1) I am not sufficiently trained in this sensitive and invaluable work, 2) not anticipating the potential for engagement with oral history in the archipelago, I did not seek appropriate ethics clearances from my home institution prior to embarking on my fieldwork, and 3) the research permissions the Vanuatu Nasonal Kaljoral Kaonsel granted me in 2014 extended only as far as archival materials. I was, in fact, explicitly directed away from conducting the sort of live-subject surveys one might associate with oral history work. I did encounter retellings of oral histories and these were remarkable, but they occurred, by and large, incidentally and spontaneously. Out of respect for the boundaries laid out by the Republic of Vanuatu, boundaries which I agreed to, my hopes for earning future research permissions in the islands and consideration for the ethical reputation of the University of East Anglia, I have not included any of the oral data I chanced upon within this thesis. As I work toward scaling these projects up—as I expand this essay into a more full and proper microhistory and complete my novella *Hang Law and Prophets*—I will seek out further permissions from the Republic of Vanuatu concerning the oral data I collected as well as any future corpora.

Much as the Hooker Girls' story and Frederick Bowie's letters further convolute our portrait of Ronovuro, I expect inclusion of the above strands of enquiry—in-depth biographies, political legacies, oral histories—will present me with new challenges as I go forward. I don't anticipate that the growing process from microhistorical essay into

microhistory will be easy, but this is quite all right. Jacques Revel suggests microhistory's mantra might appropriately be, 'Why make things simple when one can make them complicated?'²⁸ This suits me. Unsettled murder cases, fractured imperialisms, the troublingly familiar amidst the exotic—in history as well as in historical and contemporary fictions, my tastes run to the complex: to uncertain territories that challenge our abilities and willingness to know.

Here I shift focus to fiction, more specifically a strain within imperialisms' fictions that has opened up these projects of cultural dominance to critique: a literary genealogy that includes Robert Louis Stevenson, Louis Becke, Joseph Conrad and others. I see myself as working within this lineage and the questions it has constructively posed to any uniform notion of imperialism's experience, and so it might be instructive to briefly survey references these authors make to one another, to disclose certain allusions I make to them within my fictions, and to suggest the impact of these connections.

Eric Massie has recently teased out compelling similarities and differences in comparing Stevenson's (and Lloyd Osbourne's) *The Ebb-Tide* and Conrad's *Victory*. Nimblly summarizing his analysis, he asserts that Stevenson and Conrad are 'concerned with the collapse of certainties as they become conscious of the human cost of the imperial project.' He goes on to say that the characters in these two Pacific tales struggle to respond to said collapse and costs, and that this is emblematic of the crises of confidence that confronts empires.²⁹

Massie's chapter, contained within a volume of essays devoted, quite rightly, to reassessing proximities between Stevenson and Conrad against the backdrop of their traditional separation into Late Victorian and High Modern siloes, stands as another promising instalment in a series of connections that have been drawn between these two giants. Greater attention to *The Ebb-Tide* is welcome and, I will venture, overdue given the way this very modernist novella is riddled with pricked romanticisms, broken letters and desperate mimicries such as when the

American, Davis, who is captain (but not the principal protagonist) amidst the novella's three dissolute beachcombers, earns his breakfast by dancing and singing English ditties for a group of Polynesian sailors.

Moments like this and others in the novella see *The Ebb-Tide* prefiguring Conrad's frayed yet intricate narratives in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*.³⁰ Perhaps Conrad even embedded a grudging acknowledgement of his debt to Stevenson's troubled yarn when, in the last line of dialogue in *Heart of Darkness*, the Director aboard the *Nellie* ruefully observes, 'We have lost the first of the ebb.'³¹

Whatever reticence Conrad might have had to confessing Stevenson's influence on his work explicitly, I will herein own certain references to both authors as they appear within my fictions. For instance, equivocal objects abound within their works and I have salted my novellas—and my essay—with these as well. Jules Giraud's stamp in my essay is, of course, one example, but Ernest Seagoe's witness statements, Tavoni's in particular, with all its back-tracking and amending, can be taken as others. The calico or flag Ronovuro danced with at the sing-sing before he ordered Clapcott's death and the testimony the prophet gave before the Joint Court can be appreciated as similarly opaque.

In *Hang Law and Prophets*, Clapcott's bed, left as it is (and was, historically) within his gutted home remains an object of mystery. The moment in the novella where Frederick Bowie is seen leaning out over the prow of his brother's boat and gleaming in his mission whites as William's pilots them across the bay to Tasmalum, while not an object per se, recalls one; it is meant to allude to the haunting salvaged figurehead on Attwater's island in *The Ebb-Tide*: an intertextual reference that is both historically grounded in the Stevensons' travels aboard the *Janet Nichol* in 1890 and indicative of the will to dominance my Frederick Bowie shares with Stevenson's rifle-wielding man of God.



Figure 14: Salvaged figurehead photographed on Penrhyn Island.³²

Come John Frum also echoes *The Ebb-Tide*'s use of ambiguous objects. Like the vessel *Farallone*'s cargo of champagne bottles filled with water in Stevenson and Osbourne's novella, the buried treasure of dynamite on Tanna is revealed as a box of fireworks. And in connection with Conrad, the mast and buoy in the Port Resolution Yacht Club—testaments to heroics and a much desired local-visitor connection Irving's friends have achieved in his absence—allude to the early pages of *Lord Jim*, where the titular protagonist dreams of 'saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through surf with a line,' but then fails to act when given his first chance at bravery.³³ *Come John Frum*'s mast and buoy are also anachronistic, personal references. They are objects recovered from the wreck of the *Coker Lady* off Port Resolution in 2003. Willie and Werry in the novella are friends I made on my visit to Tanna that year. They assisted in saving the vessel's yachties before the boat was wrecked upon the reef.

Mention of the *Coker Lady* brings me to what I take to be another of my affinities with these authors' representations of the Pacific: namely that this sea of islands has been a well of violence but that it has also been

a space of rescue. Of requital and brotherhood. Perhaps it is because of longstanding interest in early contact and conflict between Europeans and Islanders, perhaps it is because death engenders stories and chatter within the archives, but from Cook's murder on Hawai'i to widespread depopulation in the region to the Clapcott and Greig killings on Espiritu Santo, perspectives on and within the Pacific seem inured to brutality between its cultures. However, Pacific fictions, many of them informed by histories and lived-experiences, can also illuminate, to return to Giovanni Levi, persons, events, interstices and contradictory pluralities to challenge and add nuance to this dominant narrative of violence.

This is not a plea to qualify inter-cultural violence out of existence or ignore its abundance: for all of the interracial friendship and sacrifice in his 'Tarria the Swimmer', Louis Becke has other stories, like 'The Trader's Wife' where an islander, having killed a white trader in order to steal his wife, is strapped to a man-of-war cannon and blown to bits.³⁴ Nor do I mean to promote fallacious symmetries: for every 'Mauki' in a Jack London tale that successfully skins his German overseer on Ontong-Java, there is an 'Inevitable [American] White Man' shooting Solomon Islanders by the dozen.³⁵ Furthermore, of the original nineteen Santoese men who went down to Vila in connection with Reginald Clapcott's death, only four—and not all of them those who were acquitted—are recorded as ever making it back to their island alive.³⁶

I make no attempt within this thesis to crowd stories of inter-cultural violence and its asymmetries out of memory, the historical record or what circulates within literary tastes. But it is important to acknowledge that theirs are not the Pacific's only stories. Tales of intra-cultural violence exist within and alongside them. The white protagonist, Wiltshire, in Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá*, stabs his fellow white trader and rival, Case, to death—the other man jerking 'like a spring sofa' and pouring out blood 'hot as tea'—in a scene whose desperate savagery and strange intimacy informs the battle between Irving and Baby-Face Antoine, two men of Tanna, in my novella *Come John Frum*.³⁷ And though they remain nameless, there are the labourers Clapcott writes of in his

letters to the British Resident Commissioner during the build-up to his own murder on Santo to be considered: indigenous men, slain by their fellow islander, Meleronlio, while engaged on Clapcott's land.³⁸

Furthermore, in contrast to their violence, there is also fair commerce within the islands, love and even peace. Wiltshire's marriage to Uma in *The Beach of Falesá*, for all the troubling bigotry of the novella's last line, is genuine and mutually enjoyed. It is also very likely historical, inspired by the lives of a Niuean woman and her husband, the European trader R. H. Head, who entertained Robert Louis and Fanny Stevenson in 1890 and sold the literary couple several bark-cloth tapa 'at an exorbitant price' when the travellers came ashore to what was then known as 'Savage Island' on their way to Samoa.³⁹ The young woman whom William Bowie sees 'glittering' on the beach in the first chapter of my novella *Hang Law and Prophets* is both an allusion to Kurtz's Congolese partner in *Heart of Darkness* but also an expansion upon her. The New Hebridean woman speaks. She directs her older man, quarrels with him and casts her eyes where she pleases, seeking out new arrangements for herself. She is inspired by Vetchum, a South Santo figure of unforgettable agency, who, historically, carried out a passionate affair with another minor character in my novella, Johnny Stephens, in the 1930s—a romance anthropologist Margaret Critchlow Rodman chanced upon in a love letter she found amidst the Condominium archives.⁴⁰ Lastly, the annals of the Presbyterian Mission at Tangoa record that during the Christmas holiday in 1909, tea and football were enjoyed among Europeans and islanders alike, and the mixed community stretched a vine rope with some seventy canoes fastened to it from end to end across the channel between Tangoa islet and the Santo mainland in a ritual of unity called 'bridging the strait.'⁴¹ However, the Presbyterians and Tangoans would also, from time to time, dump beef carcasses in this same channel in order to attract sharks that discouraged mainlanders from trying to make the crossing in secret. This is the same waterway that Ronovuro sang across to the Hooker Family on nearby Tangis in 1919. Stories, histories and discourses that would privilege one of these various modes of engagement by means

of effacing all others run the risk of pushing beyond partiality and into propaganda.



Fig. 15: Canoes crossing from Tangoa Islet to Espiritu Santo mainland (reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library).⁴²

Thankfully, Vanuatu and the New Hebrides resist narratives of uniformity, and attempts to silence dissonance in the islands cannot help but draw attention to their commotion. Those seeking to impress the archipelago into fixed roles within structural histories or rigid theories are likely to find themselves disappointed. The islands will not stand still.

At this very moment two converging tectonic plates are pushing Espiritu Santo up and eastward, and Yasur Volcano is launching new earth into the air above Tanna. In 1913 Ambrym ‘danced’, its contortions shearing parts off the island and destroying the Presbyterian hospital at Dip Point that William Bowie helped to build. Low islets have lost their heads to tsunamis, and the whole of Kuwae exploded in 1453.⁴³ At some point in the past Araki island, which I have seen from Clapcott’s beach at Tasmalum, is said to have been stolen, along with all of its women, from the Sakau Peninsula in the mainland’s northeast: a feat of magic the men of South Santo accomplished by towing Araki through the night and into their home waters with a coconut-fibre rope. And in 1946, with the advent of a new imperialism in the Pacific, James Michener, having served on Santo during the war, took a page from the local book and pulled Vanicoro down from the Solomons to the New Hebrides where he set it looming behind Ambae (or Bali-Ha’i): itself a place of stirring passions.⁴⁴

In his commentary on Stevenson and Conrad’s Pacific narratives of fallen certainty and the human casualties of hegemony’s troubled expansion, Eric Massie concludes by saying that in *Victory* and *The Ebb-Tide* the two authors were attempting ‘to make sense of a world’ where what had been taken as stable grounds for judgment— informed consensus, democratic authority and the presumption of some empirical value within texts—had been found unsound, urging a removal of epistemology toward more localized experience.⁴⁵ Traveling to Vanuatu in the fall of 2003, I was struggling with similar thoughts. They accompanied me on my return to the islands in 2014 when I went searching for the Clapcott files, and I struggle with them still.

Pico Iyer says that travel, at its best, does not search for answers but for better questions: that it does not put us in full possession of knowledge, but instructs us on how to ask after it, to wait for it and to accept it when it comes, even—perhaps especially—if what arrives runs contrary to our expectations or eludes us altogether.⁴⁶ One good question—the one Iyer says is the most central and wrenching that travel poses—asks, ‘how do you respond to the dream that people tender

you?"⁴⁷ Iyer's question guides me to different questions, some of which I've asked before.

What do we do with ambiguities that confront us? How is it that we didn't expect them? Did we hope to find something different in their place? Why? What are we to do with this partial knowledge? Engaging histories, fictions and travel that include a range of voices, preserve complexity, and refrain from expedient conclusions can encourage us to pause, to allow ourselves to stand more modestly before ambiguous projects. They can remind us to afford ourselves patience, as Michael Wood suggests: to listen, really listen, before we render judgment—before we move or let ourselves be moved.

Notes

¹ Jean Guiart, *Esprit Santo: (Nouvelles-Hebrides)* (Paris: Plon, 1958), 200-1; see also letter from British Resident Commissioner Merton King to Reginald Onslow Dean Clapcott, 5 March 1923, WPHC 4/IV/2853.

² Margaret Critchlow Rodman, *Houses Far From Home: British Colonial Space in the New Hebrides* (Honolulu: UHP, 2001), 175-6.

³ FG Bowie to King, 19 September 1923, NHBS 5/V/4.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Edward Hooker to FG Bowie, 3 September 1919, enclosed within FG Bowie to King, 19 September 1923, NHBS 5/V/4.

⁶ Rev. F. G. Bowie to Rev. Alexander Don, 6 June 1919, FMC, Subject File 'Rev. F. G. Bowie (Tangoa Training Institute)', Folder 1, Presbyterian Research Centre at Knox College.

⁷ See previous chapter (p100) for Ronovuro's testimony in Trial Minutes: Public Prosecutor versus 17 Natives of Santo (Murder), 17 September 1923, VSC 888/1/3/9-11.

⁸ Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 31; see also Michael Wood on Plato's *Republic* in *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 2-3.

⁹ Wood, *ibid.* 2-5 and *passim*.

¹⁰ Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2007).

¹¹ Andrew Cowan, 'Blind spots: what creative writing doesn't know,' *Text* 15:1 (April 2011), 4.

¹² See Bishop's poem 'At the Fishhouses' (1979) discussed in Wood, *Literature and the Taste*, 1; and Richard Howard's translation of Barthes's *Lecon* (1978) in the same, *ibid.* 9-10.

¹³ See epigraph to this thesis or Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume 1*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley: UCP, 1995), 21.

¹⁴ Matti Peltonen, 'Clues Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research,' *History and Theory*, 40:3 (2001): 349.

¹⁵ Giovanni Levi, 'Microhistory and the Recovery of Complexity' in *Historical Knowledge: In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence*, eds. Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 125.

¹⁶ For a concise overview of these historiographical developments, see Bronwen Douglas, 'Imperial Flotsam? The British in the Pacific Islands,' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume 5*, ed. Robin Winks (Oxford: OUP, 1999): 366-378; see also Nicholas Thomas, 'Partial Texts: Representation, Colonialism and Agency in Pacific History,' *The Journal of Pacific History*, 25:2 (1990): 139-158.

¹⁷ Thomas is not the only anthropologist working in the Pacific who offers these acknowledgments. Lamont Lindstrom, for example, offers compelling evidence of indigenous and Euro-American partial co-constructions in his definitive study of discourses surrounding the John Frum Movement on Tanna in *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from Melanesia and Beyond* (Honolulu: UHP, 1993), as does Joel Bonnemaison in *The Tree and the Canoe: history and ethnography of Tanna*, trans. Josée Pénôt-Demetry (UHP, 1994); see also Margaret Critchlow Rodman's 'The Heart in the Archives: Colonial Contestation of Desire and Fear in the New Hebrides, 1933,' *The Journal of Pacific History* 38:2 (2003): 291-312, which, as I explicitly discuss later in this chapter, is one of several of her works that recovers female agency in the New Hebrides and stresses the co-constructive nature of colonial experience; for location of indigenous women within the records of missionary culture in the archipelago see also Margaret Jolly "To Save the Girls for Brighter and Better Lives": Presbyterian Missions and Women in the South of Vanuatu: 1848-1870,' *The Journal of Pacific History*, 26:1 (June, 1991): 27-48. Outside of Vanuatu, see Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880* (UHP, 1980); Martha Kaplan, *Neither Cargo Nor Cult: Ritual Politics and the Colonial Imagination in Fiji* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Bronwen Douglas, 'Conflict and Alliance in a Colonial Context: Case Studies in New Caledonia 1853-1870,' *The Journal of Pacific History* 15:1 (January, 1980), 21-51; and Klaus Neumann, *Not the Way It Really Was: Constructing the Tolai Past* (UHP, 1992). For literary historians' perspectives, see Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (CUP, 1997); Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-Century Textual Encounters* (CUP 1998); and Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas, *Exploration & Exchange: A South Seas Anthology 1680-1900* (UCP, 2000).

¹⁸ Thomas, *Partial Texts*, 143-6; Rod Edmond, in describing the 'muteness' often attributed to the Pacific, warns of challenges the region poses to historians: scarce source materials displaying unmediated indigenous

points of view, repetitions of tropes and hearsay rather than empirically-grounded representations, and the need to recognize and navigate literatures that can be equally uncritical in their valorization of imperial or indigenous histories, see *Representing the South Pacific*, 20-21.

¹⁹ Greg Dening, *Performances* (Chicago: UCP, 1996), 55-6; for a better portrait of the debate over relativism and consequence see Dening, *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (Honolulu: UHP, 1995), 99, and Thomas, 'Partial Texts,' 144-6.

²⁰ Cf Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, "'The Singularization of History": Social History and Macrohistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge' *Journal of Social History* 36:3 (Spring 2003), 701-735.

²¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²² Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).

²³ Levi, 'Microhistory and the Recovery of Complexity', 125-6.

²⁴ For expressions of Michael Wood's views on notions of patience, hesitancy, and uncertainty, see *Literature and the Taste*, 12, 35-6, 127, 188-90; for Blake, see the epigraph to this thesis or 'Jerusalem' in *The Poetical Works of William Blake* ed. John Sampson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 307.

²⁵ Bernard Clapcott, *As gentle strangers: The Clapcotts from Elizabethan Times* (Auckland: B. H. Clapcott, 1976), 134.

²⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Silences of the Archives, the Renown of the Story' in Fellman and Rahikainen, *Historical Knowledge*, 82.

²⁷ For discussion of the Nagriamel political movement and Ronovuro's legacy on Espiritu Santo, see Bernard Hours, 'Un Mouvement Politico-Religieux Neo-Hebridaïs Le Nagriamel,' *Ethnologue* XI:3-4 (1974): 227-242; ibid, 'Leadership and Cargo cult: L'irrésistible ascension de J.T.P.S. Moïse,' *Journal de la Société des océanistes* 51-52:32 (1976): 207-231; Erich Kolig, 'Kastom, cargo and the construction of Utopia on Santo, Vanuatu: the Nagriamel movement,' *Journal de la Société des océanistes*, 85:2 (1987): 181-199; Howard Van Trease, *The Politics of Land in Vanuatu: From Colony to Independence* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1987); and Marc Tabani, 'A Political History of Nagriamel on Santo, Vanuatu,' *Oceania* 78 (2008): 332-357.

²⁸ Jacques Revel, 'L'histoire au ras du sol' in Levi, in *Le pouvoir au village : histoire d'un exorciste dans le Piémont du XVIIe siècle*, eds. Giovanni Levi and Jacques Revel [trans. Levi] (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), xxiv.

²⁹ Eric Massie, 'Stevenson and Conrad: *The Ebb-Tide* and *Victory* Revisited,' in *Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad: Writers of Transition*, eds. Linda Dryden, Stephen Arata and Eric Massie (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), 38.

³⁰ Lloyd Osbourne and Robert Louise Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide: A Trio and Quartette*, eds. Peter Hinchcliff and Catherine Kerrigan (Edinburgh: EUP, 1995), 15.

³¹ Conrad famously bristled at comparisons to Stevenson, perhaps most notably in a letter to J. B. Pinker in 1902, where he wrote, 'I am no sort of

airy R. L. Stevenson,' but here again the final moments of *Heart of Darkness* might offer a subtle reflection on how Conrad viewed his predecessor: immediately after the Director makes his remark about having lost the first of the ebb, Marlow looks up and sees their offing 'barred by a bank of clouds.' See *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad: Volume 2*, eds. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), 371; cf Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness & The Secret Sharer* (New York: New American Library, 1950), 157.

³² Reproduced from Fanny Stevenson, *Cruise of the 'Janet Nichol' Among the South Sea Islands* (New York: Scribner's, 1914), 56.

³³ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (New York: Harper & Rox, Inc., 1965), 5-6.

³⁴ Louis Becke, 'Tarria the Swimmer' in *Bully Hayes, Buccaneer, and Other Stories* (Sydney: NSW Bookstall Co., Ltd., 1913) and 'The Trader's Wife' in *Rodman the Boatsteerer, and Other Stories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898), 159.

³⁵ Jack London, *South Sea Tales* (New York: Macmillan, 1911). The particular 'Inevitable White Man' in London's eponymous story is likely based on the historical figure and able seamen Thomas Crittenden who survived an attack aboard the *Young Dick* off Malaita in 1886, see Nicholas Thomas, *Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010), 231-234.

³⁶ The four men who made it back to Santo were Rauvatali, Lulumoli, Karaitova who had been convicted of larceny and Susumoli who had been acquitted of all crimes. Guilty or innocent, all four men were forced to live in exile on Efate until 1933. When they returned to Santo aboard the *Laperouse* at the end of March of that year they were mistakenly and tragically imprisoned and forced into labor yet again, this time at the French District Agency on the other side of their home island, until Rev. Frederick Bowie and several islanders intervened; see NHBS 1/I/, 17/1914/3/161.

³⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Beach of Falesá* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2005), 110; this scene in my novella—and its aftermath—is also meant as a revision of the climactic killing of the antihero, Robert de Guenchy, by his Tannese former employee-turned John Frumist, Philip, in Maurice Guy's *So Wild the Wind* trans. Peter Wiles (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1960), 311-14.

³⁸ Correspondence between Reginald Clapcott and Merton King, 29 June 1922 – 24 July 1923, see Inwards Correspondence, FC Clapcott and King, WPHC 4/IV/2853.

³⁹ Fanny Stevenson, *Cruise of the 'Janet Nichol'*, 25; for striking similarities between R. H. Head's marriage and family to those of Wiltshire described by Robert Louis Stevenson's in the final pages of *The Beach of Falesá*, see Basil C. Thomson, *Savage Island: An Account of a Sojourn in Niué and Tonga* (London: John Murray, 1902), 67-68.

⁴⁰ Rodman, 'The Heart in the Archives,' *passim*.

⁴¹ J. Graham Miller quoting Rev. Joseph Annand in *Live: A History of Church Planting in Vanuatu, Book III*, (Port Vila: Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu, 1985), 262.

⁴² 'Canoes at Tangoa,' FG or William Bowie to WHR Rivers, 12039A
Haddon Papers, Special Collections, Cambridge University Library.

⁴³ Patrick D. Nunn, *Vanished Islands and Hidden Continents of the Pacific*
(Honolulu: UHP, 2009), 22, 36, 157-163, 192.

⁴⁴ James Michener, *Tales of the South Pacific* (New York: Macmillan, 1946),
179-226 *passim*.

⁴⁵ Massie, 'Stevenson and Conrad,' 38.

⁴⁶ Pico Iyer, 'Why We Travel,' First published in *Salon Travel* (2000),
collected and reprinted in *The Best American Travel Writing*, ed. Paul
Theroux (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 144.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 147.

Hang Law and Prophets (an unfinished novella)

Chapter 1: West Coast, Espiritu Santo, 30th July 1923.

They don't see a soul from Nogogu to Taola. The beaches are empty and smokeless, but from his place at the launch's steering wheel, the Pacific rolling easy, rhythmic furrows across their path, William Bowie is free to notice other things. Great coral polyps, like monstrous nuggets of gold or sulphur, choke a lagoon off the launch's portside bow. A school of young barracuda wheels like a swarm of needles and, over the course of many minutes, he watches a bulbous cloud crown distant Mount Tabwemasana like a barrister's wig. A few miles below Sararopa, the rich scent of roasting pig comes wafting from the land. Saliva pools in his mouth and he swallows it. He scans the bush, looking for the greasy smoke of cook fires, but he sees nothing above the waving palms.

William guides the launch along the coast. For a week they'd been north, camping out on the late Connell MacIvor's derelict plantation, harvesting the dead man's sandalwood at the request of a Sydney estate lawyer. It had been dry and draining labour, but it seems to William now that the six of them—himself, his two journeymen carpenters, Winzi and Kalo, both natives of nearby Malo Island, Bob Watson, and Johnny and Tubou Stephens, two half-Tongan boys Bob Watson brought along—had enjoyed each other's company and the work while they'd been at it: burning acrid leaves to beat back the mosquitos, felling the trees and shearing them of limbs, stripping the bark for the Chinese tanner in Port Vila, squaring the sandalwood butts over the primitive sawpit, and stacking the baulks for the eventual steamer that would fetch them to timber-yards in Sydney or Brisbane or the joss-stick factories in Singapore.

The Pacific had been a hard, dark washboard throughout the journey up. They'd arrived sore and surly to a man, but the weather brightened over the course of the week, and, before long, smoke, sawdust,

and sweat from honest toil eased the kinks in their disposition. Each morning the men awoke to scalding tea that William brewed, and each day they retired at dusk. At breakfast and again at dinner they consumed mountains of food they'd brought and fruits they'd found. And each night, in the darkness, all six men armoured themselves against the mosquitoes, anointing their bodies in ash mixed with fragrant sap from the sandalwood timbers. They said good night to one another, then climbed into their blankets, plunging into sleep like stepping off a bridge.

They finished half a day ahead of schedule and, to celebrate, William sent Kalo and the Stephens boys, under Watson's supervision, out to shoot pigeons for their last dinner in camp. They set out with two shotguns and a rifle, while William and Winzi stayed behind to break down the platform above the sawpit and prepare the tools for the journey home. In the blazing afternoon, while Winzi napped beneath a gum-tree beside the dilapidated house, William took down a sign MacIvor had kept nailed to a banyan tree at the corner of the property. A souvenir from the man's Boer War years, it read: 'Dutchmen And Uninvited Niggers Will Be Shot' in white, hand-painted letters on a navy field. MacIvor's widow, a tight-lipped Javanese, had taken every scrap, seed, and coat-nail with her to Sydney after the Blackwater fever carried off her man, but she'd left the sign behind. William split the signboard into kindling and fed it to the mosquito fires. Then he returned to the tree and drew out the rusted nail.

Later, when the hunting party returned, Kalo was carrying seven pigeons dangling from a string. Watson was cradling a bottle of raw and stinking rotgut the Stephens boys discovered in a still MacIvor had hidden in a ravine. That night they poached the pigeon breasts in coconut milk with wild onions and ate them over rice laced with lime. Then they cut the bootleg gin with boiling water they sweetened with sugar and softened with margarine, and Watson raised a toast to the late Connell MacIvor 'the bilious, old smuggler'. William sipped his modest share, then bid the other five men a good and happy evening and retired to his blankets. He would captain the boat on the morrow and, more importantly, he knew his weaknesses. Though it had taken half a lifetime, he could resist his

own capacity for drunkenness. He imagined it as a loud and charming guest who had joined the others around the fire, and he stared it down until sleep released him.

In the boat now, Bob Watson sleeps behind William in the stern, his face hidden below his felt hat, his ears tucked away from the launch's noisome motor. Up in the bow, Winzi and Kalo sit with Tubou and Johnny Stephens, playing mumblety-peg, throwing penny-knives into a patch of the unwaxed flooring between their feet. The aim of each round is to get one's blade stuck closest to the 'peg'. The thrower whose blade lands farthest away loses. He must retrieve the others' knives using only his teeth. The winner's blade stays lodged into the wood, becoming the new 'peg'. This round, Winzi's is the winning knife. When it is Tubou Stephens' turn to throw, the boy balances his heavy belt-knife, point-down, upon his smooth, brown forehead. William immediately scans the water ahead for any chop or deep troughs, but then the boy nods forward, sending the knife spinning to the deck where it sticks into the planking, inches away from Winzi's 'peg.' Johnny, seated next to his older brother, crows loud enough for William to hear him over the motor.

'Look at that! Look at it! Try that with your oyster-shuckers!' he says to William's apprentices.

Winzi looks away, but Kalo, the younger of the two Malo men, is determined to be a good sport. He strops his penny-knife against the edge of the wooden gunwale, then throws. His aim is accurate, but the angle is wrong. His knife's tip fails to sink into the planking and clatters several yards across the deck.

All day, both Stephens boys have sat themselves, cleverly, towards the stern-end of the launch so their missed throws would slide uphill, as it were, and not so far away from the target. Tubou swigs water from one of two aluminium canteens the two boys share. He spills some of it into a cupped hand and splashes this across his face. Both Stephens boys reek of the previous evening's gin. Downwind of them, at the steering wheel, William would prefer to breathe the fumes of the kerosene-powered engine.

Then it is Johnny, the younger boy's turn. He stands astride the thwart and turns so he is facing in William's direction, squarely opposite the target, holding his delicate Cham briard blade by its tip. Where his brother Tubou is thickset and powerful, Johnny Stephens is lithe and quick. At the MacIvor property, William had been impressed with the boy's knack for the carpentry, but he was prone to fooling. And boasting. At their last dinner, the boy had insisted on receiving two of the pigeon breasts, having shot the bulk of them himself. When Bob Watson asked what kind of boy half his brother's size demanded twice his share of meat, Johnny had wasted no time in replying, 'The kind that's not content to stay half his brother's size.' They'd all laughed, but it made William wonder just when the boy had gotten his last good hiding.

Up in the bow, Johnny closes his eyes. He flips the knife backwards, over his shoulder, and William turns the wheel, easing the launch almost imperceptibly to starboard while the knife is falling through the air. It lands tip down. It is well wide of Winzi's 'peg', but it sticks.

Having lost again, poor, affable Kalo gets down onto his all fours. He retrieves Winzi's knife first, clenching the cheap wooden handle between his teeth and pulling it from the deck boards as one might pull a cork from a bottle. He shuffles over and drops it into Winzi's waiting hand. All the while, Johnny Stephens dances an exaggerated hornpipe around him, hauling a phantom rope, kicking out his heels, and singing:

'Do your balls hang low? Do they swing to and fro.

I can tie mine in a knot. I can tie mine in a bow.

I can bounce 'em off the wall like an Indian rubber ball.

I can do the double shuffle while my balls hang low!"

Bob Watson stirs against the transom. He peeks out from beneath the brim of his hat.

'Now just look at this jackass.' He crushes the hat back to his face in exasperation, then sits up. 'I was dreaming of a roast dinner. I was just about to eat my Yorkshire pud, damn him. Oi now! Shut it, Johnny.'

Winzi looks back at William from the front of the boat, then points down the coast. William squints and wonders, as he has many times of

late, whether he might need spectacles. He sees it now. Beyond Winzi's pointed finger, he can make out a thread of smoke. It rises far off down the beach's ribbon of sand. He raises his hand to let Winzi know he has seen it.

To Watson he says, 'My nan used to put spoonfulls of snow into her batter to make our puddings lighter.' He thinks of icy Christmases with his grandparents in the Shetlands. Tunnelling mazes beneath the hard-packed snowfall with his siblings and watching his grandmother through the kitchen window, how she would reach her spoon out under the raised sash and gather only the lightest snow off the sill for her mixing bowl. Then she would shut the window tight, sealing the heat and the smells of roasting beef and sweet camphene lamps inside. 'Signal fire up ahead.'

'Recruits?'

'Could be. Or someone for doctoring or news. I can't say.'

'Recruits'd be a bloody Godsend. I've got copra rotting on the ground that's waiting for some extra hands. And...' Bob Watson gestures dismissively at the backs of the Stephens boys, who eye the rising smoke from the prow, 'the south coast isn't exactly teeming with decent labour.'

William angles the launch inland. He smiles. 'The lad can sing though.'

'Balls.'

As they approach they see that two figures attend the fire. A man and a woman. The bush is too close to the beach. William doesn't like the look of it. The overgrowth could conceal any number of would-be ambushers, however unlikely. He tells Winzi to call out to them in the Nogogu dialect and indicate they should walk back up the beach a ways, where William noticed a spit of land that provided safe distance from the jungle. He tells all to look out for shoals and coral polyps, then swings the launch closer, into shallower water, so Winzi can be heard over the chop over the motor.

The girl, barely a woman, squats beside the modest fire, feeding it driftwood and shielding it from the wind. A thick choker of cowrie shells

circles her longish neck. Her shoulders are smooth and dark, like oiled teak, and, below them, folded as she is, her full, firm breasts press against her thighs. Her hair is close cropped, like a boy's. Even at this distance, William can see she watches their approach with a glittering expression and her naked, unblinking scrutiny puts him on edge. The man squats a pace or two upwind, where he sucks torpidly at the long stem of a clay pipe. Winzi calls out to them and the bushman feigns indifference. He is old enough to be the girl's grandfather.

Neither native returns Winzi's call, but the girl ducks her head a bit as she stirs the fire with a stick. William suspects she is saying something to the old man from behind her knees. The old man merely puffs his pipe and digs a finger into one ear. The launch passes them.

'One old fellow and a girl. Do you fancy they're worth the trouble, Bob?' William asks.

Old men brought less manpower to plantation work, but they brought less trouble, too. They were less quarrelsome and more content to stay their contract. If they came ill or caught sick during their indenture, they could be induced to stay for medicine—genuine or counterfeit. Older men, like Winzi, knew their way around copra kilns, but they could also pilot boats, tend livestock, mend barrels and fences, and act as serviceable valets. Many, having contracted themselves out to cut sugarcane in Queensland or Fiji in their youth, spoke a good deal of English and even more Bislama-pidgin. Those who'd laboured at the nickel mines in New Caledonia favoured the French tongue, but these men were rare and best avoided, their dispositions inevitably crippled by that cruel and thankless work. In this case, William knows neither language nor experience will matter. The old bushman could be the laziest, most offending soul alive. What matters is what William sees at the front of the launch: Kalo and the Stephens boys, stiff as English pointers, pressing themselves against the prow in manly postures for the benefit of the girl crouched upon the shore. A glance sideways confirms Bob Watson has observed her too.

To recruit men, recruit women. It is a strategy every planter knows. William shakes his head. He is already swinging the launch around for another pass when Bob Watson says, 'I'll be damned it's not worth a little trouble.'

In the fore of the launch, Johnny Stephens elbows his older brother softly in the side and they grin at each other. When the brothers are facing forward again, Winzi looks back at William. He points, first at the Stephens boys, then at one of the two canteens the brothers have been sharing. He mimes like he is drinking from an imaginary bottle, then he positions himself along the opposite gunwale to call out again to the natives on the beach.

Rags of seaweed litter the spit, the great gnarls of it crawling with tiny crabs and sand fleas. On a clear spot in the ashen sand, William, Watson, Tubou, and Winzi smoke their pipes and wait. Kalo and Johnny hang back aboard the launch, Kalo to weigh anchor and Johnny to offer covering fire in the event of any trouble.

When the old man approaches, his girl follows at a respectful distance. The bushman carries an aged Snyder rifle, she a long bush knife. She carries it lazily, dragging the tip of the blade through the sand.

His wife, William thinks. The girl is his wife.

The old man makes his way along the strand on bowed legs and knobby knees like great wooden knots, and William pegs him as some thirty years the girl's senior. His septum is pierced with a polished dowel and he wears a pair of small, yellowed boar tusks strung around his neck on a sennit braid. He stands straight, but not tall, naked but for a pair of dirty, sailcloth drawers. White hairs salt his chest and shoulders. The skin at his neck, chest and joints hangs slackly, but elsewhere muscle and sinew cord his frame. His beard and woolly hair are grey through and through. As he nears the men, William notices that the soles of his bare feet are thick with cracked callouses. William knows the man; there is something about the face that he recognizes. He cannot say where from just yet, but he is confident the memory will come. The old man

recognizes him too. William catches the other man's eyes lingering on his face.

'Olsem Wanem?' Bob Watson greets the man, extending his tobacco wallet.

The old man nods, taking the smooth leather. The surf drowns his muttered reply. After checking that the girl is the appropriate distance behind him, he fills his pipe from Watson's wallet. He passes it back, then leans in to a match Watson strikes and shields for him. In this moment, while her bushman immerses himself in the task of getting his pipe lit, the girl twists coyly on her hips, offering a small smile and a view of her body in profile to Tubou Stephens, who makes the most of the opportunity to eye her openly.

'This man is Mr. Watson.' Winzi says to the old man, in the Nogogu dialect. 'He wants to recruit you and your girl to work at his place.' Bob Watson watches the old man's face eagerly. The bushman sucks at his pipe stem and says nothing, his face composed and inscrutable. Watson looks at Winzi, then the two of them look at William. William shrugs and Winzi starts again, this time trying his native South Santo dialect, but the bushman cuts him off.

'Where are you?' he addresses Watson directly, in Bislama.

'South Coast. Across from Malo, near the Presbyterian school.'

The old man puffs at his pipe. The girl squats behind him, poking at the minute crabs that scuttle near her feet. The old man half turns his head in her direction and she stops.

'I am not looking for work now,' he says, turning back to Watson.

'Light work only. Sundays are yours—for church, your own gardening...' Watson presses, but, even as he speaks, the bushman sinks into a squat, like a stubborn child that will not go but for dragging.

Winzi says, in Bislama, 'We saw your fire...'

The old man shrugs. 'There was no meaning in it. Maybe we were going to catch some fish and cook them.'

Winzi translates this for Watson, who swears.

'Look,' Watson says, adjusting his broad-brimmed hat, 'Tell him he's got us in a right proper bind. That we've been timbering up the coast and we've not much trade with us. What's he want up front? A rifle? Cartridges? How about an axe, hell, Tubou, he can have both yours and Johnny's.'

William listens, but watches the girl. She keeps her eyes downcast. There is the most delicate curl to her lashes. Two small moles freckle the space between her breasts. She sweeps the machete slowly back and forth, roughing up the sand before her in a semicircle. Something about her downcast eyes, her modesty, affected or no, evokes for William a memory of his own wife, Marie, and those early days, in the cool hallways of the hospital on Ambrym, where she would stand against the wall in her starched whites and let him pass on his way to install the windows, her lowered eyelids, deep brown, like twinned and perfect clamshells, seeming to greet, rather than avoid William as he carried the delicate window sashes to their casings. Such a pretty thing.

Tubou Stephens spits. He grinds the butt of his rifle into the wet sand, and William watches him lean against the barrel, trying to attract the girl's attention. She doesn't look his way. There is a tightness to her neck, William thinks. She is listening, not just hearing them. What is she listening for?

It strikes William that he has not yet seen her teeth. Even when she smiled at Tubou, she hadn't shown them. If she were married, to this man or some other, she'd have had the front two teeth of her upper jaw knocked out to declare it, like a white woman would display her status with a wedding band. It could be the old man is not her husband, that he has stolen her away. It could be he is rescuing her from an unwanted marriage or violent punishment for breaking some taboo. Was she at something, some game or intrigue, or could this just be her nature? To not show her teeth when smiling?

If she weren't married, or if this man were not her proper husband, Bob Watson would need to expect, at the very least, the common sort of trouble. Recruiting an unmarried woman or a wife

without her husband accompanying her was discouraged; recruiting a married woman without her husband's signed consent was outright illegal. William knew men—libertines and Frenchmen—who snorted at the regulations and threats of native violence, but Bob Watson, believing in the currency of goodwill as he did, was not one of these. Should this girl's wronged husband or her uncle, who gained from her bride-price and lost in the event of her flight, show up to claim their property, Bob would have to forfeit her. He would give her up, suffer his losses, and foreswear recruiting 'bloody duplicitous heathen jades' until he saw the next one stoking a signal fire on the beach. William knew that for more than strictly commercial reasons—their capacity to attract male labour—Bob Watson couldn't resist the women. He was a Methodist, and while he didn't proselytize, William knew the man quietly subscribed to the belief that every girl brought out of the bush was a girl saved from it.

Winzi continues, 'If you didn't want to recruit, why did you come out here to talk to us?'

'Maybe just to talk. Maybe you've got some good stories,' The old man replies in Bislama. He tilts his head up to Bob Watson, squinting against the sun and the smoke of his pipe. In English, he says, 'Maybe you got good tobacco.'

Watson curses and William stifles a laugh. When Watson flashes a glare in his direction, he rubs his nose to hide his smile.

'What about her?'

All eyes snap to Tubou Stephens. He is lowering the pannikin from his lips. His chin glistens and he wipes this with the back of his hand. William glances at the girl, but if she looked at the boy, she has already recovered her propriety.

Bob Watson starts, 'Now listen boy, no one—'

'She yours? Your wife?'

The old man sucks at his pipe. Behind him, the girl scrapes the machete in slow, smooth arcs across the sand. He does not look back at her.

'She is nothing. Nothing important. She goes where I go.'

William steps in.

‘Tubou, pass me your canteen.’ He speaks casually, without looking at the boy. There is a pause and William allows for it. Then he meets the boy’s eyes with a look he has prepared—faint incredulity that the canteen is not already in his hand and a hint of anger at having to further explain himself. ‘I left mine in the launch.’

Some colour leeches from Stephens boy’s face. He holds the canteen close to chest. ‘It’s empty,’ he finally manages.

William turns to Winzi, who passes his own pannikin over. William squats down next to the old man. He unscrews the cap and lets it fall on its chain and extends the pannikin to the bushman, offering it by way of his raised eyebrows. The old man, who has been watching the Stephens boy, shifts his attention to William. He nods and sets his pipe down in the sand, leaning the stem against his calf. Then he cups his hands to receive the water, and, in that moment, William is flooded with memory. He recalls the man, this man and others, their hands cupped to receive farewell gifts of gauze and plasters from Speiser, the German hookworm specialist William guided through the high mountains nearly a decade ago, many days southwest of here. No wonder he hadn’t responded to Winzi in Nogogu. William fills the old man’s hands and watches him bring his lips to the cool water. He wonders if the old man has stolen the girl for a wife. If they have fled something, some quarrel, they’ve run far. How much farther need they go? To another island? The old man finishes drinking. He wipes his hands on his thighs. William offers the pannikin again, but the old man shakes his head.

William passes the pannikin back to Winzi. Gesturing up at Bob Watson, William says in Bislama, ‘This man’s plantation is south of here. Down Tangoa-way. But there are others. We could arrange an exchange. Your contracts for someone else’s, some man and woman trying to get back home, closer to Santo.’ William speaks loud enough for the girl to hear him, but he takes care not to be obvious about it. He angles his face away from the old man’s, so he is looking back across the spit. He plucks at a rag of seaweed near their feet, as if he is deep in thought. This way,

even if she cannot fully hear him, the girl can see his face around the old man's shoulder and read his lips. 'Where do you want to go? Aore? Ombo? Epi, Efate?' He reels names off, each island farther than the one before it. He doesn't look at her. Instead he listens. The sweeps of her machete grow louder and faster with each subsequent island he names.

The old man shakes his head angrily. He meets William's eyes. His eyebrows are knitted together. They too are salted heavily with grey. Frustration? William can't read what he sees there. Now the old man tugs at the seaweed, lifting the edge of it like the corner of a rug.

'I remember you,' the bushman says, appearing to address the crabs he's exposed beneath the wet and ragged green. 'You came to my village with the...' he struggles to find the word in Bislama, '...the medicine man.'

'Dr. Speiser. His medicine was strong. Was it good for you?'

The old man shrugs. 'People die all the same.'

'I'm sorry.'

He shrugs at this too. 'You die. Maybe someone brings you back.'

William studies the man. A convert? William has seen less likely specimens. Still, he hesitates before speaking, knowing Bob Watson will have a fit. He'll accuse him of poaching for the Mission. But they can sort that later between the two of them.

'My brother, Reverend Bowie, is the missionary at Tangoa. We could take you there—to Tangoa.' The words spark nothing, no change at all in the old man's face, so William tries something different. 'There's safety there at the Mission—in Jesus Christ. We can die and live again in Him.'

The old man grins. 'Mmm...yes. Jesus.' He rubs his eyes and face as if he is sleepy, or childlike and embarrassed. 'Him. And others too, I hear. I don't believe. I'm nobody's school-man.' He picks his pipe back up and tries it, but it's gone cold. William looks up at Bob Watson, whose face is the colour of a sugar beet. He gestures to the old man's pipe. Watson rolls his eyes. He fishes a match out of his wallet.

'Damn you William Bowie. You and your damn brother'll have them all in gowns, singing "How Firm a Foundation" while the rest of us go bust.' He squeezes the words past his clenched teeth. He snaps the matchstick against his belt. 'Goddamn it!' He inhales deeply, calming himself. Then he retrieves another match and lights it against the rough leather. He touches the flame to the half-burnt tobacco waiting in the old man's pipe bowl. 'I shouldn't have said that.' He shakes the match to extinguish it and looks up at the sky, 'Lord, forgive me.' Then, to the bushman, he says, 'I'll give you a new rifle. A Winchester—that's right. Don't look at me, Bowie. You and your brother can write Merty King and the bloody lot of them. That's right—a Winchester *and cartridges*. And a six-month contract you can renew every six.'

William doesn't bother looking at Watson's purple face. He watches the old man and listens to the placid, almost inaudible scraping of the girl's machete. Not Tangoa or anywhere near Santo, then. She won't have it. Why? To Watson, he says, 'Do you trust me to translate that, or do you want Winzi to do it?'

'He's your bloody man! What difference would it make?'

William translates, but the old bushman has already taken his leave of the conversation. He sucks at the pipe and stares out over the water. When William finishes, he nods approvingly and smiles up at Watson. He speaks in English.

'I like a Winchester.'

Then he stands. William stands too. He can almost feel the jubilation beaming out of Watson.

'A good gun. But I'm not looking for work. Thank you for the tobacco.' To Winzi he says, 'And the water.'

He shoulders his own outdated rifle and takes a step closer to William. He dips his head toward the mountains to the southeast and smiles.

He says, in Bislama, 'Over there some call you The Ghost Who Knows Too Much.'

'I've heard it,' William replies.

The bushman runs a wrinkled hand through his grey curls and sniffs, his smile fading. He rubs his nose. In his own dialect, behind his hand, he murmurs, 'There's a hole in the bush for your brother. Be careful he doesn't step into it.'

The old man looks him in the eyes and William feels a chill descend his spine, as if he were a child again, in Aberdeen, at play in the schoolyard in late winter, and someone had dropped snow down the back of his shirt. He blinks. He sees his brother, Frederick, accompanying Banet, or some other native teacher training at the Mission, out into the district to supervise the Sunday preaching, the two of them greeted at the edge of some rude and heathen village, the expectant crowd parting before them, revealing a wide cleft hollowed out of the earth. Sweat from the journey pearls on Fred's trim and platinum moustache, then he, and Banet after him, are hatcheted down from behind. William also pictures his Marie, on their veranda at Tasiriki. She grates yams into an enormous bowl, the vigorous up and down of her arms slowing, then stopping, as she watches strange men wading through the goats that moil out in the yard.

'Who?' is all he can think to say. He means to ask who dug it, what the old bushman means by it, what it means for Frederick, but the single word is all he can manage.

'Suppose you ask someone. Someone at Tasmalum. Suppose you know.' The old man says it quietly, almost to his feet. Only later will William recall he said the words in English. Tasmalum is Reginald Clapcott's place, just south of his own. William finds himself nodding dumbly. The old man returns his nod. They shake each other's hands. Briefly. Awkwardly. Then the old man turns to walk back down the spit toward the beach.

The girl does not stand up when her bushman passes. Scowling down at the sand, she digs at it with her bush knife. For the first time, her gaze meets Bowie's. It is baleful, her dilated pupils gape like sinks of tar. I tried, girl, he thinks, though Lord only knows what I'd be helping.

'Well, piss on this then.' Bob Watson says. He stomps into the surf, crossing the shallows to the anchored launch.

'Go on back, Winzi.' William directs his man without looking at him, knowing he has to get to Tubou Stephens before the boy revisits his earlier stupidity. He holds the girl's eyes with his own. Yes, that's it. Keep looking at me. He crosses the sand just before the girl redirects her attention to Tubou, replacing her open resentment with a look of desperation. Tubou's arm is thick with muscle, but William grips as much of it as he can. The girl's eyes glisten. They beg. In a low voice, almost in Tubou's ear, William says, 'Steady, lad.'

The old bushman, taking note that the girl has not risen to follow him, rounds on her. He tries to grab her by the scruff of her neck but she hunches her shoulders and his hand can find no purchase. He tries to her neck out from where she's turtled it.

'I'm coming,' she shouts in their dialect. 'I'm coming.'

'Steady now.' William says, tightening his grip on Tubou, though not so much as to cause him pain. Even in speech, the girl masks her upper teeth behind her lip.

The girl rises and the old man steps back from her. He can see plainly that she is openly looking at William and the Stephens boy, but he doesn't care. Instead of warning William and Tubou off with a proprietary glare, the old man keeps his eyes on the girl. He holds his rifle out before him with both hands, and William thinks he resembles some sort of lion-tamer, regarding his charge from behind the chair and whip.

She begins walking. The old man waits, then follows her.

'I'll take some of what's in your pannikin, now.' William says to Tubou.

The boy is focused on the girl's backside, swaying even in retreat. He replies absentmindedly, 'I told you, it's near empty.'

William doesn't release the boy. He puts out his other hand.

Tubou looks at him now, his face crinkled in disgust and almost hopeful disbelief. 'She can't be married to him. Not to that old bastard. He

could be her grandfather.' The boy is so focused on the girl and her bushman, he doesn't even try to hide the alcohol on his breath.

William pities him. He feels he's only halfway present, too, his thoughts running to Marie, to his brother Fred, and Reginald Clapcott at Tasmalum. Tasmalum? Why Tasmalum? He feels as if something important, some understanding that he'd been holding onto has now slipped him. He feels it sailing south over the water, parallel to the coast, and too fast for any launch to catch. So William pities Tubou and the lag in the boy's understanding, but he doesn't have the time to explain to the boy that he's seen older husbands and younger brides and matches that were less suitable for even worse reasons. He wants to shake the boy, to grab him by each of his ears and rattle his head like a gaming cup filled with dice and holler, 'Something has fled us and we have got to close the distance,' but instead he locates himself in the moment. This moment. He thinks, Patience. And then, again, Patience. The sand is firm below his feet. A tiny bruise purples Tubou's cheek where a chip from the timberwork struck him. William says to the boy, 'Your pannikin, Tubou.'

It's just the two of them out on the spit now. No one to hear them. No one to be impressed by any resistance the boy might otherwise be tempted to practice. William is a respected man in the islands. Tubou and his brother, delinquents. Both owed money to pay down fines they'd drawn for selling alcohol to natives in Luganville, fines only the town's chinamen had ever been forced to pay. While they'd both turned out to be unexpectedly able hands, it was only through the stubborn grace of Bob Watson that they'd been taken on as sub-contractors. William would have never chosen them himself. But there was neither time nor need for William to remind Tubou of these subtleties. If the boy refused, he'd take the canteen from him. If he fought it, William would fell him like a tree. For Tubou, it was a no-win situation. He could either give up the spirits or drop William to the sand and forfeit the goodwill of the community for his whole clan.

'It's got the rotgut in it, Mr. Bowie.'

'I know it does.'

Tubou places the pannikin in William's outstretched hand. William unscrews the top and the smell of rank gin assaults his nose. It forces Tubou's eyes to squint. William presses the cool aluminium to his lips and takes a short, almost perfunctory drink. The liquor drops into his belly like a lit match down a well. He releases Tubou's arm.

'Have you had enough of this?' He tries to sound as neutral as he can. He wants an honest answer from the boy.

'I've had enough.'

'Alright then.' Making sure his body shields the sight from the men watching them from the boat, William empties the rest of the rotgut out over the sand. He can see the distant figures of the bushman and his girl, off the spit now, making their way back towards the embers they'd left to smoulder under ash and palm fronds. '...because those two are from over the mountains. Their people are South Santo people. What they're risking their lives to be out here alone for, I cannot figure other than to say something's gone or going wrong down that way, and I need you and your brother to get right and sober.'

William screws the cap back on the pannikin. 'Can you do that for me?'

Tubou nods, his lips gone a sickly shade of purple.

'Is there any more on board?' William asks.

'No. Our other one's filled with water.'

William passes the pannikin back, offering fast thanks to God the boy hadn't been fool enough to fight the truth when he was up against it. William steps out into the shallows.

'Mr. Bowie? Johnny...He's had even more than me.'

'You were a smart lad to keep it with you, then. Away from him.'

William motors to his place at Tasiriki first, flogging the panting engine all the way. The other men clean their rifles, sharpen their knives, and clean their guns again. The boat runs rough at top speed. Swell after swell pummels its bottom, and William feels at times as if the hull will go to pieces beneath them. Less than two miles south of the natives they left on

the beach, Johnny Stephens folds himself over the portside bow and vomits into the launch's wake. Tubou takes charge of him. He forces water down his brother's throat until the boy erupts a second time.

At Tasiriki, Marie Bowie greets them on the beach herself, bearing grim news that Kalo's wife has caught the Spanish Flu while they've been gone. William examines Marie. Her chestnut skin has an ashen cast to it. Exhaustion has pinked the whites of her eyes like pickled eggs, and her mane of curly hair is dented where she must have slept sitting up, leaning on her hand. She is not sickly herself, but William can see in her that the situation with Kalo's missus is grave. At least Marie will have a rest, now that Kalo is back to tend his own.

Marie shades her eyes with a hand and asks William if he and the others will stay for tea, but she knows from the set of his stubbled jaw that the answer will be 'no.' Of Tasmalum she has heard nothing. She does not ask him why he asks. Instead she looks at young Johnny Stevens, rung out like a rag and being kept upright by Tubuo, and she asks whether they have enough drinking water in the boat. William tells the brothers to run and fill their canteens from the well up by the workshop.

He decides to leave both Kalo and Winzi with her. He instructs the three of them to warn any approaching strangers of the Flu. And then to unlimber the shotguns should the threat of pestilence not suffice. The Stephens boys return, their hair flattened and faces streaming, having doused themselves with cold water from the well. William takes Marie into his arms, unusual for them despite their bond, and the other men labour to look elsewhere. With her body tight against him, the smell of her hair in his nose, her ear below his mouth, William whispers against her skull. He tells her to sleep with the shotgun, to shutter and bolt the house at night, and to answer the door for no one. Not even the apprentices.

William climbs back aboard the launch. Bob Watson, still embarrassed by the embrace, busies himself by getting the motor started. The Stevens boys ask William what they can do to help. He tells them to keep drinking water. As they are about to put back out to sea, Kalo

suddenly breaks away from Winzi and Marie. He sprints across the beach, into the shallows, and then topples forward through the breakers. He swims after the launch, and William yells for Bob Watson to kill the motor. The young Maloese catches up to the boat and clings to the stern. When he recovers his breath, he asks William if his good brother, the Reverend Bowie, might please lead the Mission in a prayer for his sick wife. Bob Watson unspools a string of quiet obscenities. William promises to convey the message. Kalo reaches above the stern, briefly takes William's hand in his, then he lets go and paddles backward, releasing William and the launch out into the open water.

By the time they reach Tasmalum, night has already fallen. A fingernail moon has risen in the West, where it hangs so low one could mistake it for a glowing canoe floating on the water. No lamps burn in Reginald Clapcott's house, back upon its hill, and the moon's low angle illuminates little of the land. But for the pale hides of cattle, asleep within their paddock, the property seems stifled in shadow. Braving rocks he knows lurk beneath the surface of the inky bay, William guides the launch as close to the shore as he dares.

From the fore of the launch, the Stephens brothers scan the property for any movement, peeking their eyes and gun barrels over the prow. Bob Watson crouches in the stern, blowing William's bosun-whistle. While there is no hope of hailing Clapcott, who is so deaf that he jokes he could have slept through Gallipoli, they try their best to rouse his dog, Belle. The Englishman trills William's bosun-whistle again and again, until the friction from ball rattling inside the tube heats the metal to burning. Watson curses. He mittens his fingers with a neckerchief and keeps blowing. In the paddock, the cattle flick their tails and answer in low moans, but neither dog nor man emerges from the darkened house.

Across the bay, five miles to the east, William fancies he sees light flickering on the banks of distant Tangoa. He prays it's only his brother Frederick's diligence—to light a beacon fire on this the night they're scheduled to return.

William reasons that Reginald could be drunk or sick or dreaming within his shuttered house. He could be out on a hoot, slurring out verses of ‘La Marseilles’ with the French crowd at Segond Chanel, or off reporting some grievance to Salisbury, the British District Agent at Hog Harbour, and he might have taken his dog with him. Just as easily, he might be stretched out dead beside his copra kiln and Belle run off. He could be anywhere out on the property, struck down by stroke or aneurism or falling coconut, his body a labyrinth for the ants.

From his position aboard the launch, William has no way of knowing what, if anything, has befallen his friend. The shadowed landscape gives nothing away; the plantation is nothing save a dark space wherein to craft his speculations. He hates to leave Reginald to them, but the knowing, he feels, must wait.

There are his brother and his sister-in-law at the Mission to think about, and Bob Watson’s wife and children, and the Stephens boys’ family at Urelapa—if there was anything of native violence in the old bushman’s words, all of them are equally at risk. If William went ashore now, it would be only himself and Bob Watson wading in. Johnny and Tubou would have to cover them as well as man the boat. The uphill climb to the house is more than one hundred yards, the whole of it exposed to any guns that might await them amidst the trees that fringe the yard. William can invoke these and a dozen other sensible arguments against what he fears—his fear of knowing now, confirming now, that Reginald is shot and murdered somewhere up there, in the dark, beneath the meagre stars.

‘Let’s onwards then, Will.’ Bob Watson says. ‘If he’s up there, he can’t hear us. Let’s each of his get back and check in on his own.’ Watson is sweating despite the cool. The scant moonlight seems to stick to his wet face. Poor Bob, thinks William, whistling himself windless for Reginald and all this while terrified for *his* wife and *his* family just a handful of miles on down the beach. William looks at the Stephens boys—their naked, unblemished faces—and wonders, for the first time that week, if they haven’t been exaggerating about their age. Tomorrow,

Reginald. God help you in the meantime. William swings the boat east
towards the light he thinks he sees there.

Chapter 2: Tangoa Islet & South Coast, Espiritu Santo, 31st July

When William pilots his launch up the channel between the Mission on Tangoa and the mainland, he sees two figures rise up beside a low bonfire that he assumes was set to guide him in. Thin and spry, the figures clamber out, barefoot, to the end of the piled-stone jetty where it juts out into the current. Two young men, they are dressed in the white shirts and trousers of native teachers-in-training. Standing in the darkness, on the jetty's wet stones, they appear to float above the silent, streaming water. They beckon William forward. Over the low chop of the motor, William hears them calling for the rope.

Shoes, he thinks. If they're really with the Mission, they should have shoes. He looks to the ground around the bonfire behind them, but it is too far. He can make nothing out. All is lumped together in formless silhouette.

William cuts the engine almost completely, so that the boat only inches forward. To the right of the figures and the jetty, on a low hill rising from the beach, the Presbyterian chapel is lightless. The Mission Principal's house stands beside it, and the soft glow of a single paraffin lamp marks out the window of William's brother's study.

'Sakem rope i go!' Throw the rope over.

The young men on the jetty lean out over the dark water, their arms outstretched, clapping and hailing him, trying to guide him as much with sound as sight. But less than a dozen meters separate boat and jetty now, and William can see the young men clearly. The bonfire behind and to their right suffuses their white shirts with orange. He can make out their dark faces where the firelight paints their skin. He does not recognize them.

'Sakem rope i go! Sakem rope, Mr. William!'

He sees no movement in the study window. No movement elsewhere along the Mission's shore. That they knew his name is something he will only later recall. That they might have left their shoes

ashore, to better navigate the jetty's stones, will only make sense in hindsight.

William sets his heavy revolver behind him on the seat. The hand he's been holding it with is slick with sweat, and the night air feels cool against his palm. Keeping his other hand on the wheel, he retrieves the launch's mooring-rope from where it is coiled between his feet. He sends this snaking out into the darkness.

'What would you have Jeanie and I do, William? Wait out the night for you? Camped out by the shore in our bedclothes?'

'They were strangers. You could have used men I knew. That's all.'

'That's all? Should we start a personal registry for you, William, listing those you know and don't know here among the flock? And I thought young Makileu a smart choice, his being from Ambrym. It beggars belief to think there might be someone on that island you haven't known in one way or another.'

William looks up from his plate. His woman, Marie—his wife, in any sense that matters—is Ambrymese. And there were others before her. He lays his knife and fork down beside the cold ham and tinned beans, the silverware quietly snicking against the porcelain. He places the unfinished plate on the side table between he and his brother's chairs.

'That's enough wordplay out of you now, Brother.'

William says it quietly, but if the Reverend Frederick Bowie hears him, he doesn't show it. William's elder brother stands at the room's sideboard pouring the normally reserved Speyburn whisky into a tumbler. Turning, he holds the moss-green bottle, almost black in the room's dimness, out to William, offering it, his face arranged in careful neutrality. William shakes his head.

The Reverend corks the scotch and fills William's tumbler from a squat demijohn of water with a lime-round floating in it like a lily pad. He brings William the water and settles into the other armchair with his scotch. He sips from his tumbler and places it on the side table, then leans

forward to inspect William's plate. The half-finished ham raises the Reverend's eyebrows.

'No appetite tonight, William? Something's in the wind indeed.'

William doesn't answer. Clever, Brother. Always so very clever.

He waits for Frederick to dash off an apology for his earlier cracks about Ambrym and *knowing*, but the Reverend merely settles deeper into his seat. His face takes on a calm, flat look which William recognizes as his brother's affectation of deep patience: his signalling that he is bunkered in and comfortable, that he will wait for William to speak next and send his argument over the top.

The smell of his brother's scotch reaches William's nose—brass, smoke, hay—and he is suddenly self-conscious of the odours of sweat and salt and gasoline that he has carried with him into the room. He shunts these thoughts aside and takes a drink from his lime-scented water. He can play at patience too.

Without turning or craning his neck to look behind him, he takes in what he can of the low-ceilinged study. The two huge, wing-backed Georgian chairs, clad in matching lambskin, donated by the First Presbyterian Church in Melbourne. The shelved volumes of theology, anthropology, history, practical sciences, and the small clutch of Classics: Shakespeare, Marcus Aurelius, Caesar's *Bellum Civile*, all smelling of the turpentine they were brushed with to keep woodworms away. On the wall above the closed writing desk there hangs a grave portrait of the Reverend Joseph Annand, First Principal at the Mission School and Frederick's predecessor. Over the sideboard, an Autochrome portrait, taken in Aberdeen—Mother sitting, her face already thin and pained, Father standing tall behind her—in a cherry-wood frame William assembled for Jeannie and his brother on their fifth wedding anniversary.

William thinks of his brother and the ownership of objects: the claims and expectations they can project into a room. The study's single, unshuttered window admits a view of the Santo mainland, its forests and high mountains picked out in moonlight. He can picture his launch riding at anchor in the channel. There is a shift in the air, and through the walls

William hears coconut fronds softly clacking out in the yard. Then he is reminded of Clapcott's dark and silent plantation.

'I'm tired, Frederick. I wanted to check on you and Jeannie, and I have. I'll go down and sleep on the boat. Bob and I and some of the villagers will call on Reginald tomorrow and see if anything's amiss. A small party. Thank Jeannie for the plate. Make sure to tell her I was grateful.'

'A small party. You and the Watsons.'

'Bob Watson. His brother's down with fever. And some villa—'

'What would you say is likely going on over there at Tasmalum, William?'

And now with the interruptions, William thinks. So full of yourself. So sure there's only one answer and that you've already got it cornered. William feels Frederick baiting him into this and older battles, but he cannot resist.

'I couldn't say, Brother. That's why we—'

'No, William. No. You can say something. Are you going to sit there, modest as milk, and tell me that you can't venture a guess? That you haven't already speculated on it?' The Reverend's eyes narrow, crows' feet clawing out from their corners. The lamplight gleams along his silver moustache. 'He's your friend. So whatever could he be up to? Where could he be? Debauching himself in Segond Channel? Holed up in his hovel with a fever, sweating himself down to a wisp? Or could it be that it's something less innocent—something he wouldn't tell you. Maybe he's humbling some simple, heathen bride over the price of a tin pot or maybe he's up in the bush, conning her husband into signing on: stick tobacco and a handful of bullets for twelve months' labour on Tasmalum's wretched dirt.' William starts forward in his chair, ready to retort, but the Reverend lowers his head slightly and holds up a hand, acknowledging he might have gone too far. When he lifts his head again, there is a glitter in the Reverend's eyes that William does not mistake for any reflection from the lamp. 'You could certainly say it if you thought he were drunk. That he's blottered, and that the bushmen are making off with his stock. Those

are well-practiced words by now, aren't they William? They'll roll right off your tongue. You could—'

'I think he's murdered up there. I think that's what the bushman was getting at.'

'Yes.'

'Yes what?' William snaps, immediately regrets saying it, the way it betrays the ease with which Frederick can manoeuvre him into asking after answers rather than providing them.

'Yes, he could be murdered and, yes, you *can* say it. You tell me you and the Watsons and your "small party" will go over there tomorrow as if for tea. And all the while you know just last year O'ona and his lot shot at Mr. Clapcott—your friend—that they haven't lifted their taboo on his lands, that they murdered his labour—a Christian—and all the rest. You know all this. And you know I know it too. So why do you refuse to say it? Why must I always badger simple truths out of—'

'I'm *afraid* he's dead. I'm afraid he's murdered and that his dog and manservant are just as likely dead. And I was afraid you and Jeannie might be murdered up here as well. If my fears are simple enough truths for you, well done in ferreting them out. What good does my putting name to them do us? Right now? Here in your cosy parlour? What good is it doing him?'

William feels swollen, as if his chair were pinching him. He shifts, and the lamp on the table between the two men wobbles. The Reverend leans forward and touches two fingertips to the brushed nickel of the lamp's neck, stilling it. 'It's a start, William,' he says. Then he takes a sip of his scotch. Setting the tumbler down, his gaze flicks to the open window. William watches as his brother's lips purse ever so slightly. When the Reverend turns his attention back to William, his voice is distant. Pensive. There is a conciliatory tilt to it that keeps William on his guard.

'No. Not simple then. My apologies, Brother. You said you tried to hail him from near the shore?'

'To wake Belle, really. Reginald wouldn't have heard from that distance. Not even on his best day.'

‘Yes, of course. The dog.’ The Reverend crosses his legs, bringing an ankle to rest on the opposite knee. ‘You must have been afraid. I suppose I can’t imagine what it must have felt like. Hollering into the dark, trimmed out in moonlight—an easy mark for any gun. The exposure must have recalled...unfortunate memories.’

This too is familiar ground. William rolls his eyes, not bothering to hide his distaste for it or Frederick’s show of empathy. ‘You can leave off patronizing me, Brother. I’ve made my peace with that memory and the fellows involved. I daresay it haunts you more than it haunts me.’

‘Oh, you daresay, William? You’re so daring now with all your “saying.” It does haunt me. *I daresay* it haunts all of us more than you. That’s exactly the problem. You pretend that, if you don’t speak evil’s name, you might just skip over to Tasmalum tomorrow and not find it waiting there. I get you to admit there’s a chance that islanders have killed your friend and you thrash around in your chair and threaten to knock over the lamp like a child. Let me ask you, William, what if Clapcott’s dead and it’s Susumoli that’s behind the murder? Will it haunt you then—that you let him go? No. Don’t bother answering. I don’t suppose it will. I don’t suspect it troubles you nearly enough to think what example you set with your gentle clemency. But what do you care? What does it matter what terror befalls the rest of us, so long as the natives hold you tight to their breast?’

This last barb, so obviously aimed at Marie, seems to William a clumsy and cynical provocation. Again he speaks quietly, but this time he has his brother’s gaze and holds it. ‘It’s not my wife’s fault they shot at me, Frederick. And the accord I’ve come to with them has always been against her advice. You know that. So don’t punish Marie. It’s not her fault that no one can be bothered to try killing you.’

The last words spill out and William knows as soon as they do that there will be no getting them back, nor his brother’s unhearing them. For his part the Reverend does not flinch. Instead, a small, strange smile flashes across his face. He takes his tumbler of scotch and holds it in his lap with both hands. He rests his head against the upholstered seatback.

“That’s why I’m going with you tomorrow, William—to see if I can convince a bushmen or two that I’m every inch the trophy you are.”

‘You’re not going.’

‘No?’

‘No.’

‘How will you stop me?’

‘It’s my boat.’

“The Mission has its own boat William. I could assemble a crew and be on my way before Mrs. Watson has finished preparing Mr. Watson’s breakfast. Or I’ll simply cross the channel and have one of our horses saddled.”

So this is the real fight then, William thinks. He won’t be excluded again.

“The bushman said—”

‘A “hole in the bush” for me. No, I haven’t forgotten. Your natives on the west coast are full of tales, William. Well so are mine. Magical steamboats filled with trade goods and angry ancestors on their way. A great flood coming to wash us off this island. Trees fallen across trails that I step over upon peril of death. If my memory were short enough, all this prattle would be terrifying.’ He takes a sip of his scotch. The tumbler is nearly empty when he lowers it. He wipes a finger along his silver moustache. ‘You’re the one who’s been fired upon, little brother. If you’re brave enough to hazard bullets, don’t ask me to go pale at the thought of a rabbit hole.’

William struggles to think of what to say in response. In the end he stays silent.

‘So what will you do, William? Knock me senseless? Fetch a rope from your boat and hobble me here in my study?’

William still says nothing.

‘—Because if you do, we’re finished, William. Jeannie and I are your only family on this side of the world, but so help me we’ll cut you out of our lives like a bad spot in an apple. And we’ll spare no one the tale—everyone from the Resident Commissioner in Vila to our Mother in

heaven will know that you struck me down. And for what, exactly? What devilry's afoot at Tasmalum that you would attack me to keep me from seeing it? Or can't you say?"

William lets the threat sink in. He weighs it in his mind while staring at his brother. Years of malaria have reduced the Reverend, so he seems little more than half of William's size. William wagers he could fit the whole of Frederick into a single leg of the loose pyjama trousers he wears when captaining the launch. The huge chair the Reverend sits in seems a prop. William can see that his brother's coat slouches across his shoulders in a manner the gentlemen's clubs in Glasgow would never countenance, and that the collar of his shirt is wrinkled where his necktie is forced to cinch it tight against his throat. Sun and sickness have turned his brother's skin the colour of tarnished brass, robbing it of the family rosiness. But thin and discoloured as he is, and as disagreeable as he could be, the Reverend still has their mother's face, and nothing can provoke William into battering it.

William is suddenly exhausted. He feels as if his eyes have been rolled in sand. He closes them, bathing them in the cool darkness behind his lids. He thinks of the old bushman on the beach at Sararopo, cloaking his message in dialect, hiding his mouth behind his hand though no one was around to overhear them. *There's a hole in the bush for your brother. Be careful he doesn't step into it.* William pictures Frederick astride a Mission horse with a gaggle of neophytes crowded round, jabbering and joking all the way to Tasmalum, not two wits or a decent marksman among them. He hears a shot ringing out from somewhere amidst the trees, and watches as the Christian natives scatter, leaving Frederick alone atop his panicking horse. He opens his eyes and reaches for his tumbler. He wets his tongue in preparation to admit defeat.

When they set out at seven the next morning, the sun is already roaring toward its meridian. Bob Watson has left the Stephens boys to stand guard over his family's compound at the mouth of the Adzone River. The planter and farrier, Sydney Axam, and the Reverend stand in the

launch's prow. Bob Watson resumes his place behind William, near the engine. All, save the Reverend, are armed. When they leave the channel for the open water to the west, William asks Bob Watson to muffle the motor with a blanket he keeps stowed beneath a panel in the flooring.

Axam's presence is felicitous. He'd been on his way to Tasmalum himself to settle accounts over an undelivered bull and to berate Clapcott upon the subject of the man's vagrant horse. The horse, Sisyphus, had again wandered down the coast and was harassing Axam's mares: kicking down fencing and charging the family dogs for three days running. Axam complained that for the better part of two days he'd stalked the beast about the yard, trying to coax him into harness. All he has to show for his troubles, however, are a livid bite mark on his forearm and an angry sunburn he keeps sheltered beneath a monstrous Mexican-type sombrero he'd come by from God knows where. Clapping the sombrero to his head against the wind with one hand and cradling his rifle, like an infant, with the other, Axam cuts a miserable figure in the prow. He alternates between peering at the slowly approaching shore and staring back at William from under his hat, his face a mixture of confusion and dread. He looks like a man who's come back to consciousness in a prison or a hospital. If he hadn't called upon the Watsons that morning, Axam would've made his way to Tasmalum alone, innocent of any danger. William wonders if the man counts himself lucky to be in their company now.

Beyond Axam, the Reverend appears to be in his element. He stands at the launch's utmost fore, leaning out slightly over the gunwales to monitor the waters of the Bay for rocks, reefs and other hazards. He faces resolutely forward, his back and shoulders straight, square to William and the other two men behind him. His conical pith helmet elongates his head to a point and the harsh sunlight glares off his spotless Mission whites. He is a bright blur at the centre of William's field of vision, but as much as William would like to command him to sit, he can't. The Bay is dangerous at low tide; someone needs to survey their approach, and though William wishes Bob Watson—or Axam, even—had assumed

the responsibility, neither man volunteered. William suspects his brother relishes the idea of himself as vanguard to their tiny expedition, and that no small part of that satisfaction comes from knowing that William is stuck behind him at the wheel.

In front of Clapcott's property at the far end of Tasmalum Bay, William reverses the launch into the shallows. If they are attacked, as William knows from recruiters' stories, there will be no time to turn the boat around, and so they drop fore and aft anchors to keep the cutter pointed out to sea. William waits on the deck while the other men help each other climb down over the stern. He passes two rifles and a shotgun down to Watson and Axam. To his brother he hands the Reverend's dog-eared copy of the King James Bible. Then he lowers himself into the waist-high surf, and the four men wade forward together with weapons held high above their heads and purses of ammunition slung around their necks. No one attempts to speak. They would have to shout to hear each other over the crashing breakers.

The plantation's landing is a small cove with yellow, cornmeal sand, and they make their way toward this. At the top of the cove's incline is Clapcott's boatshed, and when they reach this they stop. Clapcott's cutter is there, covered in a faded red tarpaulin. The shed was originally built for a smaller craft, so the prow of Clapcott's boat hangs out of the structure's seaside face like a pointed tongue that's been mottled with birdlime. The men gather around it: William and his brother on one side, Bob Watson and Axam on the other. Bob Watson leans against the boatshed's salt-crusted boards for a moment, and, in the pause, William realizes that he too is out of breath.

From their vantage behind the boatshed, the men can scan the whole length of the Bay's shore to the east. The rhythmic collapse of waves and a few scudding birds are all the movement that they see. To the west the property extends out into a small peninsula scattered with sago palms and all is quiet there. Beside him, William hears the Reverend breathing hard through his nose.

William decides to step out from behind the boatshed for a better look at the rest of the property. His eyes flit from Loken, the caretaker's, shack to Clapcott's house up on the hill, then back down to the cattle paddock, the sagging slaughterhouse that leans on its foundations, and the wood-and-wire chicken coop he helped Clapcott rebuild after last year's cyclones flattened it. Likewise he inspects the distant rows of coconut trees, taking care to search their crowns for any natives that might be perching there. He sees no one. Hears no one.

Aside from the doleful moaning of the cattle in their paddock, all is tranquil, but none of this puts William any more at ease. His eyes are drawn back to the chicken coop. It is intact. There are no tears where wild pigs or Sisyphus might have damaged it, yet the coop is silent. And there are no fowls about, strutting or pecking out in the yard as they should be.

'Look at those poor buggers.' It is Axam. He has come around to William's side of the boatshed and he stands just behind him. William follows his gaze to the cattle. He looks closer. He sees now that the animals are clearly starving. The sharp lines and ridges of their bones are more visible than they should be, so that their hides look like bedsheets draped over cabinetry. Several of them bear gashes and abrasions on their legs, sides and faces where they've prodded or been pushed against the fencing. 'Of all the cruel...' Axam steps forward. He shouts, 'Reginald!'

William makes a grab for him, but the younger man shirks his grip. Again he bellows, 'Reginald!' William hisses at him, but Axam is off, striding straight toward the paddock. William looks again at the tops of the coconut trees. The breeze ruffles their fronds, revealing nothing.

Bob Watson has come around now. 'I don't see a blessed thing,' he says lamely.

William nods. 'Loken?' he calls. 'Belle?' Normally Clapcott's bitch would be on them already, sprinting down the hillside, yapping eagerly all the way.

Axam makes the paddock gate. William sees him tearing at something—a length of wiring that has been wound around the latch. The cows are moaning and climbing up each other's backsides. The paddock

fencing bulges under the pressure of their weight and William fears that it will buckle and Axam will be trampled to death beneath the moiling cattle. He catches the words 'deaf, dumb bastard—' and then Axam has the wire unwound and the latch up and the gate bursts open with the force of thirty-thousand pounds of beefsteak. The starving animals scrabble and jostle with each other to squeeze through the gate, and, once clear, they lope out onto the grass where they slow to a trot and then stop altogether to break their fast upon the land. One cow remains in the far corner of the paddock with its legs folded under it, fluttering its ears weakly. Another lies flat on its side in the centre of the muck and this one doesn't move at all. The cattle stream between William and Axam. Through the dust that floats above the backs of the passing animals, William can see Axam looking at the two casualties left behind, his face streaming with tears.

The earth outside the paddock's perimeter has been eaten bald. Bent wires within the fencing show where the imprisoned cattle had stretched their necks in search of every nearby blade of grass. Inside the fence, Axam crosses the paddock's square of filth with his gigantic sombrero in his hands. When he reaches the cow in the corner, he lays the hat down before the pitiful creature's face and fills its crown with water from his own canteen. William sniffs and wishes he hadn't. The stench of the paddock nearly makes him gag. He blinks and wipes a hand across his nose and eyes.

‘—the mercies of the wicked are cruel.’ He hears the Reverend’s voice behind him.

‘What’s that?’

‘It’s Proverbs.’

“What did you say” is what I mean.’

‘I said, “A righteous man has regard for the life of his beasts, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” Shall we go up?’

William sees Bob Watson emerge from Loken’s shack, over near the slaughterhouse. The other man’s face is grim. He shakes his head to indicate that Clapcott’s native manservant is not within.

William wipes his nose again. 'Alright. Let's go up then.'

The Reverend sets off marching toward the hill.

'Wait.' William says. *The damned fool wants to race up Calvary.*

'Just...Wait.' He waves for Watson to join them.

William thinks the house's windows are shuttered, but he doesn't trust his eyesight at such a distance. When the three men are confident that all the shutters are completely closed, they cross into what they consider a native's rifle range. All the way up the hill, the three of them call out Clapcott and Belle's names, hoping that the dog might respond to either, but when they reach the house they find it completely silent. Bob Watson emits a low whistle and points to the front door, but William has already seen it: a foot-long length of split bamboo that someone has pounded through the door handle. This baffles William. Why would anyone do such a thing? Reginald certainly wouldn't have done it—he had locks to secure the door. And if someone wanted to lock him *in*, they'd gone about it in idiotic fashion, as none of the shuttered windows had been barred from the outside. William and Bob Watson step onto the veranda. They approach the door with their guns levelled at it.

'Reginald?'

'Belle?'

With the stock of his shotgun, William hammers the length of bamboo out of the door handle's grip. Then, after motioning for his brother to move far off to the side, William pushes the door open with the shotgun's double barrel. Opening the door releases a fug of stale air along with a whiff of something metallic, but nothing else happens. There is no gunfire. No moaning or whimpering, so William lifts his gun barrel to let Bob Watson pass, then he and his brother follow the other man inside.

Stunned, William can only cast his eyes around the dim interior of the single-story house. His friend had always kept a Spartan home, believing an excess of things would only trap the heat inside and drive Belle out of doors. To appease the dog, Reginald stored all but his most immediate effects under lock and key in the rear of the slaughterhouse. But no previous experiments in monasticism could prepare William for

the emptiness that greets him now. The house is stripped of everything: the table, the chairs, the kettle and all the cookware; the writing desk and its inkwell, notebooks, and magnifying glass. The stopped naval clock is gone from its corner. All the food, the flatware and silverware has been removed from the cupboards. The cupboards themselves are gone, and not a grain of rice can be seen upon the floor. The wardrobe, too, and every stitch of clothing within it, has been taken. Even the stove, meat cask, and twenty-gallon water tank have been gutted from the kitchen.

'I'll be damned if it doesn't look like McIvor's place, rest him.' Bob Watson ventures with a laugh. The Reverend levels a flat look at him. 'Begging your pardon, Reverend, but you never saw the place after he passed—how little his Shanghai lady left of it. Anyways, you don't suppose Clapcott had some secret wife—someone that's been by to clean him out?'

William shakes his head. He beckons the other two men over to Clapcott's bedroom, directing their attention to the massive wrought-iron bed frame, the only item left behind.

Bob Watson rubs his chin. 'A wife from the colder parts, then?'

Frederick exhales noisily through his nose, 'Mr. Watson.' Then to William, 'What was Mr. Clapcott? A Burns Philp-man? Perhaps they foreclosed on him. I assume he had his debts—he never seemed a particularly...able businessman. Would the company have repossessed his wares? Like this? To such an extreme?'

Again, William shakes his head. 'They'd need a boat. There hasn't been a steamer up this week has there?'

'Of course not. But if he owed the Gubbay brothers, or Monsieur Becharde—'

'He owed money, Frederick. You know he did. He's a planter under the Crown, isn't he? Which of one of us doesn't? But he wasn't desperately in the red. And no matter how you feel about our French friends at Segond Channel, Brother, they wouldn't leave animals to starve.'

William needs to step outside. The fixed air is getting to him; he feels he's inhaling mold. He moves toward the open doorway and the

veranda, but Sydney Axam has come up from the paddock and he stands there, hatless, his sunburnt face trembling behind a cigarette. Changing directions, William turns down the shotgun hallway that runs past the empty concrete washroom to the bungalow's backdoor. The metallic smell is slightly stronger here, and when William turns the interior locks and swings the door open a rectangle of light reaches back into the hallway. On the worn wood flooring between his feet William can see a faint, whiskery pattern, done in pink, where it looks as if someone has tried to mop up blood with straw.

'Frederick...'

A russet trail slants away from the back step of the house, terminating some fifteen feet away where a hip-high wall of yellow bush-grass marks the boundary of the yard. The grass is smeared with dull maroon where the trail hits it, and there are two small gaps within the wall.

William is out the backdoor, yelling for his brother: 'Fred!'

The grass in the gaps is pinned down beneath two lumps—like two pale hunks of limestone marbled in inky green and violet—and when William comes to a stop at the border of the yard he sees that the lumps are attached to leg bones that extend further back into the grass. Feet. He sees now that the lumps are feet, or what remains of a pair of feet; all ten toes have been cut away. Reginald's feet. Reginald's toes. William's friend is on his back, his body outlined in matted grass. His face is purple and bloated, his eyes pinched back between the swollen cheeks and brow. One ear is missing, and his blackened tongue sticks straight into the air, but William recognizes him. Clapcott's singlet is in tatters, and the pocked and shredded skin it reveals looks as if it were studded with pomegranate seeds. He is naked from the waist down. The flesh from his hips to his ankles has been butchered to the bone and his genitals are likewise shorn away.

Chapter 3: Tasiriki & West Coast, Espiritu Santo, 13th & 14th August

Two weeks later, William and his wife lie in opposite directions on their bed: she at the head, he at the foot. Slightly apart, they let the little air that comes in through the louvered windows slip between them to cool their naked bodies.

William is covered with sweat. He cranes to look out through the window as if doing so will let more air in. He catches the sounds of soft voices in conversation outside: the women and the children on their way to the cove to bathe. He hears goats protesting as the children chase them from the road, a regular encounter usually accompanied by laughter, only here is no laughter today. He tries to listen through the crunching and tumbling of stones underfoot, the quick steps and bleating of the animals, hoping to catch a fragment of light-hearted banter or the amused scolding of a lagging child. Instead, he thinks he picks out the word 'Tasmalum' amid the guarded voices. He looks at the ceiling of the room.

'Seagoe shot a dog.'

Marie says nothing in response. William lifts his head from the mattress to look at her. She is gazing out the window, her hazel eyes loosely focused on something in the middle distance.

He drops his head back to the mattress. 'It was in the middle of the village. Right in front of children.'

'Which village?'

William lifts his head again. She has not moved. Her face is still angled toward the window, but she is looking at him now.

'Lopaki.'

'Marimari's?'

William nods.

'What did the dog do?'

Though it strains his neck, William keeps his head raised. 'It was a dog. It was the wrong dog. I don't know.' He lets his head fall. 'Probably it did nothing.'

He looks at the bottoms of his wife's feet: the soles thick from her refusal to wear shoes anywhere but into the sea. He thinks of the time two boys came screaming up the path with a live sea-snake wrapped around a canoe paddle, and how he'd had to pin her down to keep her from shooting both boys and snake alike. It was the only time he had ever seen her cry.

'We found Belle in the village with the children and the other dogs. She recognized me of course and was sweet as ever and barking like a lunatic like she does. But then when the police took Marimari into custody and put the cuffs....' He struggles to think of how to express the word, the idea, in Ambrymese, '—the hand-rings that lock your wrists like this—when they put the hand-rings on Marimari he told me someone had given Clapcott's privates to Belle and she'd eaten them.'

At the top of the bed Marie hisses low and quiet through her teeth.

'Seagoe heard Clapcott's name and asked me what was said and before I could think of something Marimari grabbed his privates and said Clapcott's name again and "eat" and he kept saying it again and again and nodding at Belle. Seagoe took out his revolver and walked up to her and shot a dog that was standing there sniffing her from behind. Right in the head. And then the children started screaming.'

William scans the bedroom ceiling for cracks in the whitewash and finds none. He sees, instead, the village, the little girl nearest the dog dropping like her legs were chopped out from under her and Belle bolting and Seagoe holstering his gun and moving on towards the beach where the launch was waiting and the Commandant never looking back, not once, at William and the constabulary men, just assuming they were following until, sure enough, they did. William hits upon what looks like an ant or termite hole in the ceiling above Marie and checks the bedspread below and between her feet to see if any wood-dust has been fallen to the sheet. There is none, but there could have been. If there had been any, their lovemaking would have brushed it away.

'And Susumoli?'

He closes his eyes. Always Susumoli. If his brother and his wife never saw eye to eye on anything else, they could always find common ground on the little chief. Standing by the open grave they'd laid Clapcott in, it had been all that Frederick could do to not slip accusations against the chief into the Prayer of Commendation.

'It wasn't him.'

'How do you know?'

'Because Ronovuro took credit for it. He and some bushman named Asapele and the other one, Lolorave, that's up hiding on the mountain.'

'Did you speak to Susumoli? Or did you send someone?'

'I sent one Frederick's trainees.'

'And what did he say?'

'He said that he had nothing to do with it. That Ronovuro's people weren't welcome in his district.'

'You don't believe that.'

'I don't. Not all of it. If he didn't know about the murder before, he damn sure knew about it after. In any case, there's no great love between Susumoli and Ronovuro.' He thinks about the cycas leaf they found amidst the madness in Ronovuro's hut. Its leaves were brittle and curled and the paint faded, but it did bear Susumoli's insignia: the sign of an old debt or credit, not an indicator of some fresh allegiance, and so he does not tell Marie.

Even in the quiet William hears no singing or splashing from the cove. He has not heard the goats again, and so he knows the women and children are still down at the water's edge. He imagines the bravest of them treading the deeper water, out near the limestone cliff-face, talking where no one else can hear them. He thinks of the toy treasure chest he keeps chained to the massive starlet coral for the children. It's been too long since he put something in there for them.

His palms and fingers are rough from work in the coconut groves and carpentry shop, and so he reaches out and brushes Marie's knee with

the softer skin on the back of his hand. She neither presses nor shrinks away. After a moment, he feels her wrap her fingers around his ankle.

In the west, beyond their tiny inlet, the evening sun is plunging toward the Pacific. William loves this time of day, when he has stowed his tools and the temperature has gone merciful. When he and Marie have fed what labourers they have, and the families begin coming down to the water to wash, and the light slanting out of the west bathes the house in orange and yellow and throws all into high relief. He reaches a finger down between her leg and the mattress and tries to tickle the delicate skin behind her knee, but she moves it away from him.

'You play too much, William.'

'With you, yes.'

'I don't want you to,' she says. 'I want you to tell me what you're going to do.'

He rests both hands flat upon his chest and looks out the window. He doesn't want to say just yet. He wants to sink Tasmalum and Seagoe and what comes next beneath the most immediate details of the present. The warm light, the mild surf, the pilled sheet beneath his fingers. He wants to hear the women and the children coming back up the road. But there is no getting round it now. She knows something is coming and she is waiting to hear it. Everything he says until he tells her will be met with silence or a curt response. Everything she says will be thinly coded with her expectation. And so he decides against delaying any further.

'The men who cut up Reginald's legs are from Pakatema. Suriere and four others. I already sent a runner. I'm going up to see if I can't get them to come down.'

She has already let go of his ankle. Now she rolls to face the wall.

'Talk to me, Marie.'

'You said it wouldn't be like this.' she says.

He did. He remembers. 'I know.'

'You said, "It won't happen again, Marie." You said you would be more careful. All of you.'

'I know.'

'You promised.'

He shifts a little so that he can better see her: the backs of her legs, her buttocks. The high curve of her hip fills his vision. He wants to touch her again, but he doesn't.

'I didn't promise, love.'

'You did. You were on the floor in the front room. You took my hand between your hands and you made a promise to me.'

'I made no promise, Marie.'

'What were you making then?'

He does not answer. He would never have promised anything for the others: not for Reginald or for the Watsons or even Frederick, who was less a liability then. He remembers the day, not every fragment of it, but he remembers. He does not think he would have trusted himself then to promise anything.

'If I don't try, it will be Seagoe. He'll make a mess of it, Marie. You know he will. He doesn't know the language. He doesn't know the way up, or one village from another. And he wouldn't know Suriere from your brother. In the end, he'll start grabbing people. Anyone. Just to make it worth his trip. And if any shooting breaks out, there'll be a man-o-war. It'll be like the *Fantome* at Malekula. They won't care much who they hit.'

She rolls away from the wall, eyes flashing. 'You don't know Suriere either, William. Just because a man comes down the river to spy or buy a nail from you and tells you his name doesn't mean you know him. Every man who comes out of the bush and tells you a joke or some piece of gossip or a lie isn't your friend.'

He replies in English.

'Better me than Seagoe.'

Does she not understand all they have to lose, he thinks. The decades of risk? How far they have come? Ancient grievances against recruiters are dying out. The trees they planted after the hurricanes of 1912 are beginning to yield. Profits from copra are finally up, and his language is getting stronger—he and Frederick had only just finished translating the book of Acts. One visit from the man-o-war, one over-

eager mission sent inland, and all this progress—these lives they had cut out of the jungle, and not just his and Marie's—would be over. Pakatema is less than a half-day's walk up the river. If the man-o-war were to shell it, it might just as well shell Tasiriki too.

William thinks it more likely that she understands completely, but that all of just means so much less to her. He is fairly sure what her answer will be, but he asks anyway.

'What would you have us do?'

'Leave.'

'Where?'

'You know where.'

Ambrym. No. He will not do it. He will not put them at the mercy of her family. Over the years, especially the hard ones, he'd come to appreciate just how much their success depended on the situation being the other way around. They wouldn't last two years on Ambrym. Favour by favour, obligation by obligation her people would hollow them out.

'I think Sydney is too cold for you this time of year, love.'

He can't help grinning as he says it, but she does not return the smile. She regards him flatly, then she grabs his nearest foot with both hands before he can pull it away. He flinches but he lets her hold it. She slides her fingers up and isolates the ring toe from the rest. She bends it backwards, and he lets her. She bends it till it hurts and still he doesn't pull away.

'We could sell all of this,' she says, sweeping her head to indicate the property. 'Enough for a jacket.'

'Enough for two. But we're not going. Not to Sydney or anywhere else. Not yet.'

She shoves his foot away.

William wakes again a few hours after sundown. Marie is already awake. He hears her moving in the dark.

Moonlight has climbed in through the window and painted blue-white and black borders into the room. He makes her out across the

panelled space. She is putting candles one by one into a haversack that rests atop their simple dresser. Moonlight slices across one of her calves. It bleaches the hem of her nightdress a more luminous white, dyes her brown foot indigo. William reaches a hand under the sheets to the place where her body should curl beside his. From the cool that greets his palm, he can guess how long since she woke.

He touches the fingers of his other hand to the bed-frame, this bed-frame he built for them, and scratches it lightly with his fingernails, calling to her. She looks his way, but puts the last of the candles into the sack before she comes. William watches the curves of her body beneath the nightdress disappear and reappear as she crosses through the broken and slanting light.

She stops beside the bed. William reaches down and takes her by the ankle. She lets him lift her foot to the mattress. There he cups her toes with both hands, returning warmth to them. Her face is shadowed, he cannot read her eyes, but she reaches down and touches his hair: a spot where his grey is coming in, a spot they've laughed at together and tracked separately. She brushes it tenderly. William looks for fear in her face, her stance, but finds none.

Later, while he dresses in the dark, she brings him cold black pudding and yams. He eats with his hands until he is satisfied, then forces himself to eat more. He brings the leavings to her in the bungalow's front room, but she waves these off. William does not insist. Back in their bedroom, he collects the haversack and then removes a box of shotgun cartridges from behind a false back in the dresser's top drawer. He takes the box out into the front room and seats himself next to her on the sofa, showing her again, in silence this time, how to breach-load the gun she's laid out on the low table before them, next to his rifle.

At the door, before he opens it, she presses into him and says, in a harsh whisper, 'Don't hurt anyone. Don't hurt yourself.'

He kisses her forehead. Once she positions herself at the window, he slips out the door.

The moon is higher now, halved and tilted like a shallow cup. It spills its pale light all about him, flooding the open grass his goats have chewed down to the quick. Behind him, he hears the steady, sleepy breathing of the sea. He crosses open land, toward the bush, in erratic, zigzagging tacks, keeping low, knowing Marie watches from the window behind him. If a shadow detaches itself from behind a tree or she spots moonlight sliding across a gun barrel that tracks his course, she will shout. This is the plan they agreed to. She will shout once so he knows to throw himself flat and then she will shoot. William will look for muzzle flares from any answering shots and fire in their direction.

He makes it to the edge of the cleared land. He is panting, the breaths exploding out of him. He tries to quiet himself. He closes his mouth and snatches at the air with his nose, but still he thinks he is too loud. He turns to face the bungalow and the sea beyond. He tucks his rifle under his arm and raises his right hand above his head. The shutter in the bungalow's front window blinks. Once. Twice. Then it closes.

There is a grove of bamboo that William knows and he makes his way to this, moving as quietly as he can through the undergrowth. He can watch the ground before his feet or the trees around him. Choosing the latter, he snaps twigs beneath his boot and kicks fallen fruit. He steps on a papaya rotting on the ground and scent pours out of it: sickly and sweet.

The bamboo thicket looms ahead. The blades of its slender leaves bristle in the fractured moonlight. William squeezes himself sideways between the stalks until they open out and he enters a small sanctuary about twice his size. He drops his haversack and rifle to the ground. From the haversack he takes a candle and an antic lantern fashioned from a smooth section of horn. An ancestor on his mother's side, some Norseman out-posted to the Shetlands, must have cut it from the skull of a massive bull. He must have severed the tip and patiently hollowed out the horn with artistry long since forgotten. A nail has been driven through the lantern's bottom and William fits one of the candles onto this and sets the horn aside. He unbuttons his linen shirt and drops it to the ground. From the haversack he pulls another, this one of cheap white cotton, the

common stuff of all trade-stores. The shirt is horribly wrinkled and stained with great swathes of faded goat's blood. He buttons it across his chest.

Last he eases a papier-mâché mask from out the sack. The skin is pearl-white, faintly yellow, like margarine, like greasy bones. He had the mask off a quartermaster of the Japanese vessel *Nisshin* and it bears the silvery horsehair, jutting chin, and rawboned scowl of an oriental demon. Its wicked teeth are painted with a dark, metallic pigment; William turns the mask and they glint like fool's gold. He has widened its eyeholes to allow maximum peripheral vision; he has cut nostrils into its nose and a wide hole into the open red of the mouth behind the gleaming teeth, so he can smell and taste the air. But this, he knows is vanity.

If he smells pipe tobacco, or the coconut oil the warriors lubricate themselves with, it will be too late. He might just have time to wing a shot into the animated darkness, before they cut him down. Awareness alone won't save him, and so he must invest his faith in other things: the gentlemen's agreement among whites to only sell inferior and inaccurate firearms to the native, the preciousness with which the bushman treats his scarce ammunition...God. Most of all, William puts faith in the bushman's superstition: their belief that the dead traffic by night. Whatever their reason for being on the paths that follow the riverbed between Tasiriki and Pakatema, if he crosses paths with any islanders before dawn, William hopes the ghostly mask will send them running.

He fits it over his face, then buckles its leather straps across the back of his head and sweeps some of the silvery horse mane back to cover these. He stuffs the linen shirt into the haversack and hoists this onto one shoulder. All of this he does quickly, then he pauses for a long while, peering out where the stalks permit him, quietly sniffing the air, listening with his whole body until every muscle cries out against the strain. Nothing. Not even a breeze to ruffle the high palms.

He slings his rifle from the other shoulder and takes a crushed box of matches from a trouser pocket. He rasps a match-tip against his belt's rough leather. It flares to life, and he cups the tiny flame. He touches the

match to the candlewick inside the lantern and waits for the flame to leap across. When it does, spectral light suffuses the horn. He pinches the match out and parts a path in the bamboo.

When he announces himself in the morning, he does so from a safe distance, with stout tree ferns nearby that he can duck behind for cover, and only a short sprint separating him from a stretch of flooded taro fields and then the river. It is a woman he first hails. He watches her stumble from the encircled huts and disappear into the undergrowth to visit the latrine for her sex, and when she re-emerges into view he hails her in what he thinks is the appropriate dialect and she nearly falls backward into the low branches of a tree. Her eyes, wide as portholes take him in and she clammers against the branches, the only thing holding her upright, and then runs, screaming into the village. He waits.

When the others begin to emerge he shouts and keeps shouting, cycling through every dialect he knows and variations he merely guesses at that he is alone, he is armed, and that he wants to talk not shoot. Eventually he stops to let someone get a word in edgewise and, after a long pause, a sharp voices hollers for him to come on ahead, but to carry his gun by the barrel and with only one hand.

As he gets closer he recognizes faces, though not as many names. Suriere, Lulumoli. The former stands with his legs wide, as if ready to wrestle William should he charge him. Lulumoli stands to the side with two other fellows, the three of them leaning on French Gras rifles in fine condition. One of the men spits.

Behind Suriere and the other men at the edge of the village, William can see women and some children peering from just inside the low doorways to their huts. The air is filled with smoke from fires rekindled upon waking. An old man with wide, glassy eyes and a slight palsy watches from the centre of the dancing ground. William walks directly toward Suriere, then pulls up some ten feet short of the men.

‘Good morning,’ he says in English. Then, in the Tasiriki dialect he says, ‘I am looking for Suriere. Does Suriere live in this village?’

The three men with the rifles chuckle nervously, but William stays focused on Suriere. The man narrows his eyes. He raises his hands and rests them to either side of an eight-inch wide leather belt that encircles his waist, his arms akimbo. Beneath his belt he wears a red calico William himself sold him.

'I am looking for Suriere. I was told he lived in this village. Is he here? Does he live in this village?'

Now the men with rifles shift. William can see their feet shuffling out of the corner of his eye.

Suriere speaks slowly, in the Tasiriki dialect, 'Who told you that he lives here?'

William looks him directly in the eye. He has a hard time imagining it, this man as a cannibal. He seems too young. At least a generation removed from the practice, but since discovering Reginald at Tasmalum he has had to question much of what he thought safe to assume.

'Suriere did. He bought calico from me during the wet season, and he asked to buy liquor, but I said no. Is he here? Will he talk? If he is gone, or if he's from another village, would anyone take word to him?' He won't answer, not the question I'm asking anyways, William thinks, looking again at the other man's wide stance. He will want to make his own way to answering.

'You say you came alone?' Suriere asks.

'I did. It is only me.'

'And you're here for Suriere?'

'Yes.'

'We haven't seen him. He is off recruiting.'

'Can you tell him something? Are you a friend of his?' At this one of the young men has to suppress a laugh. Suriere turns slightly to share a smile with them. It is the first he's moved his feet, and he doesn't return them to their original position, keeping his body angled slightly toward the younger men.

To William he says, 'Sure. He is my friend. Give me a message, I will tell him when I see him.'

'It won't be safe to recruit for a while. Not even in Segond Channel. Maybe nowhere on Santo. Not for awhile. The soldiers are looking for him.'

'What would they do if they found him?'

'They would ask him to come down to the coast, where the little man-of-war is now, and talk to them.' William uses the diminutive, native term for the government yacht *Euphrosyne*. The notion that the village big man would come down to the coast to parlay sets the young men to snickering again. Suriere leans back on his heels.

'The little man-of-war is the same as a woman. They can ask, but why should Suriere obey.'

William fakes a half-grin to humour the men and shrugs. 'Because the little man-of-war has powerful husbands: the *Prometheus*, the *Kersaint*, the *Fantome*.... She asks to talk on their behalf.'

William watches the young men out of the corner of his eye, hoping for some sign of nervousness at the names of these ships, but the men stand silent and still, as if he hadn't finished his sentence.

Suriere on the other hand tips his chin up, flexing his jaw muscles and exposing his throat.

'What would they do if they couldn't find him?'

William picks his words carefully. 'I'm not sure. Where is he recruiting? Segond Channel? Big Bay? Hog Harbour? It will take some days to get a message to him. And then he would have to come to Tasmalum, which would be more days. The little man-of-war has no patience—she wants to return home to Port Vila—but the soldiers want to talk to men from Pakatema about Clapcott and Ronovuro. Suriere would be best, but if he is gone they would be happy to talk to others instead. Next time she comes to Santo, Suriere can talk to those who come aboard the little man-of-war. Or he can go to speak to the Government Agent, Mr. Salisbury, at Hog Harbour, or the Rev. Bowie at Tangoa.'

'Your brother.'

'My brother.'

Squealing erupts from one of the huts. A young pig dashes out through the open doorway with a papaya skin in its mouth and a half-dozen other pigs scrabble out immediately after, giving chase. The old man who has stood, shaking in middle of the dancing ground rounds on the animals and starts cursing them, lowering himself into a squat and then raising himself to standing and doing so again and again, the whole time unleashing a stream of invective against the young pigs—now tumbling and tugging the papaya skin to pieces between them. The ancient's profanities are foreign to William. He can only half-grasp them before they are swept onwards in the torrent.

The young men watch, but Suriere dismisses the scene.

'What will happen if no one goes down.'

William looks back into the village, to the hut the pigs came out of. A woman of the place crouches at the edge of the doorway, hissing and entreating the pigs to get back inside. William catches her eye, and she recedes further into the dark interior.

He is almost there, William thinks. He has given the man as many options as he can think of to keep himself at liberty—to navigate the circumstances as best befits him and his. Even if the big man evades blame or punishment, even if he pays or intimidates the other men in the village to take his share of responsibility, it will better for all. Better to let them decide who of their own to scapegoat than give them cause to unite in a standoff against police and soldiers. William remembers Reginald's trimmed bones stretching out beneath him like the spindly legs of a heron and pushes the thought away. He forces his focus backward, and tries to layer images of Tasiriki over those of Tasmalum. He will not forfeit the future to what is irrevocably past, and so, in place of Reginald's slaughtered shanks, he pictures Marie, shod in sturdy boots and standing in their bay of nearly twenty years, the good, stiff surf tilling the shallows around her. He holds the image tightly.

'If Suriere or others won't come down, the soldiers will come up. Maybe soldiers from the little man-of-war, maybe soldiers from one of her husbands. Maybe more than one of her husbands will come. Maybe more

than once. But they will come, and when they do they will destroy Pakatema. And if there is no one here to shoot or take because everyone has gone into the mountains, they will burn your houses and dig up your gardens. They will destroy other villages and take their people and say it was because they couldn't find you. Your neighbours will want revenge on the soldiers, but they will want revenge on Pakatema too. And so they will hunt you. If your people move into the mountains, you will have to pay whatever tribe welcomes you: pigs, wives, yams, taro, and you will have to keep paying to outbid your old neighbours who will be trying to buy the right to murder you. Your enemies will claim this land—your land—and you will be forced to live at the mercy of others, in a new place. Or some of the men can go down to Tasiriki with me, and I will take them to the little man-of-war. Or maybe Suriere is not recruiting so far away.'

It takes the afternoon, but William gets four of the five men he'd set out for: Lulumoli, Maile, Karaimele, and Karaitova, the one who spit. Not all come from the same village, and so William spends hours at Suriere's side in the other villages while the man negotiates pig prices and cajoles his neighbours into sending the wanted men with he and William. William's unlikely partner refers to himself in the third person all the while; never once throughout the day do either of them betray the lie they've agreed upon.

Each new village draws him taut as a piano wire. Despite his exhaustion, he monitors every movement of every bushman within his field of vision, trying to adjust his posture, his tone, the expression on his face to even the smallest signs of aggression. He pushes into a state of hyper-awareness. He feels the approach of birds before he looks up to see them winging overhead. He senses the shapes of women and children, the elderly and the sick where they are hidden away in their huts, and senses the contours of objects taken from Clapcott's home likewise hidden in the darkness. A reaping hook, hung within the low rafters of this home. Pages from one of Reginald's ledgers stoking the cook-fire in another. The dialects and new vocabulary he overhears in Suriere's conversations with

the various big men and elders begin to knit together and, in his silence, William shapes these new words inside his mouth.

He lets Suriere do most of the talking, tries to complement him, and only reins him in when the other's exaggerations balloon into the incredible or the overly threatening. At one point, in Maile's village, he lets the other man enlist the children to collect double handfuls of gravel from the river and hurl the stones in cascading order at a hut for storing yams in order to simulate the effect of the Condominium's new Maxim gun. William does not restrain them. The outbuilding conceals Reginald's dinner table. It is turned over in the corner, its four legs piercing the air. William can see it without looking.

In the late afternoon, delirium begins to chew the sharp corners off of his perception. Leading the four cannibals down the riverbed, he stumbles more than once and has to continuously splash his face with the lukewarm water. He forgets his mask, lantern and bloody shirt inside their haversack, and so he forces the men to backtrack half a mile upstream so he can retrieve them from where he'd hidden them at daybreak in the hollow of a tree.

Sometimes they walk in silence. Sometimes they talk of local gossip. All tacitly agree not to speak of Clapcott, though they talk of Ronovuro's sing-sing: anecdotes overheard, folk remedies for impotence and yaws exchanged, then Lulumoli brings up Ronovuro's wild and solitary dance with a scrap of calico. All talk of the event peters out and does not come up again.

As they near the coast, all that William can think about is coffee. Grinding it fine. Rubbing his gums with it and taking it up his nose like snuff. And so, when he sees the four men walking ahead looking back with expectation, it takes a minute for him to realize he has been spoken to.

Maile repeats his question, 'How much farther to your house?'
'Not far.'

The man is young. Long since initiation and circumcision, but still unmarried, William guesses. Soft. He has taken a passive role in every conversation William has seen.

After hesitating, the young man looks back over his shoulder and asks, 'Is your wife from Ambrym? I heard that she's from there.'

Karaitova, walking at the centre of the four men, says without looking back at William, 'I heard that she's a witch. Everyone on Ambrym's a sorcerer.'

Coffee. William thinks. Fucking coffee. Christ, help me. He feels split out of himself, like a dragonfly, moving down the riverbed, riding on the carapace of his own abandoned self. He has to pee and imagines excreting it through the entire organ of his new skin. He thinks of Ronovuro: the prophet capering with his silly, trade-store towel. William wants to fold the landscape ahead of them in two, to emerge, right now, from the river and onto the coast where wind off the sea can lick the moisture from his skin.

'This is far. How did you get to our village so early this morning?' Karaitova is looking back at him now.

'I flew. I've lived on Ambrym too.'

Chapter 4: Tangoa, Espiritu Santo, 15th & 16th August

If it was the spectre of their mother in his brother's frail face that stopped William from flattening Frederick the night before they found Reginald at Tasmalum, it was Ernest Goldfinch Seagoe who kept Frederick safe when William brought the cannibals from Tasiriki to Tangoa.

When he reaches the islet, William ferries the suspects out to the *Euphrosyne* first thing. Two native constables stand guard on deck under the supervision of T.O. Thomas, who preens in a starched and spotless shirt as if he were the most debonair warden to ever accessorize a belt with keys. When William comes aboard, they escort him and the four men down below to where the prisoners are kept in the empty cargo hold, and when Thomas swings the door open William finds himself looking straight at Susumoli. The little chief sits with his back against iron room's far wall. Shirtless, barefoot, skirted in patterned calico, his has his knees drawn up against his chest and his arms crossed around them. Mouth shut, lips pressed tight, his head is cocked slightly to one side. He stares at William, who stands framed within the doorway of the hold, as if he has been waiting for him: as if he were sighting him down the barrel of a gun.

William tells the four cannibals to go inside, that they'll be interviewed soon and he'll have food sent down for them. A cabal huddled in the far right corner of room shifts and Ronovuro calls out from it, welcoming the new arrivals in his weird high-tenor, declaring they are all inside the belly of the shark and asking if they have tobacco or dynamite to spare. Someone says William's name, plaintively. Maile, he thinks, but the native constables are pushing the new prisoners in with the rest and he has already backed out of the doorframe. He turns away and strides down the narrow passage to the stairs. Taking two at a time, he emerges onto the deck so fast he startles the *Euphrosyne*'s Chinese cook where he stands, smoking against the bulwarks and attempting to hide a pint bottle of what smells to William like squareface gin. It isn't until he's rowed the lighter hallway to Tangoa's shore that he remembers to call back that the

newcomers need feeding, and, when he does, the Chinaman makes no sign he's heard or understood.

Long strides take him up the hill, past the mission's arrowroot fields where native teacher trainees and labourers from the village holler greetings to him he does not answer. Two students in white cottons walking a bullock loaded down with corn stop the beast short so he can pass. Crossing the mission's paddock he hears someone, Seagoe, hail him once, then twice from the narthex of the church, but he does not respond.

In two steps he clears the veranda of Frederick's 'Number Three' house. Inside, he finds his brother in the study, seated at the desk below the portrait of the prior mission principal and blowing ink dry on a letter. Catching sight of William, he manages to set the page aside, saying, 'Brother! Any luck—' before William has the much smaller man up and out of his chair by his shirtfront and suspenders, cannoning across the room into the nearest of the wingback chairs.

The table lamp between the wingbacks crashes to floor. Through the walls William hears Jeannie, Frederick's wife call his brother's name and then the rapid thudding of her footsteps down the hall. He puts a knee onto Frederick's chest, and knocks his brother's flailing hands away. Then he gets his own hand around Frederick's shaved neck, pushing the Reverend's chin up and his head back, all the while ignoring Jeannie's screams from the study doorway and the large shape that pushes past her into the room. Before something bursts above his right ear and the study goes violet and formless and his head is flooded with the stink of spilled paraffin, he notices blood on Frederick's teeth and stops to think whether or not he wants to add to it.

The first thing he sees is a thin, white veil surrounding him. A mosquito net. Furrows in the fabric let the light in unevenly; where the material is bunched or folded over it looks like rivulets of darkness running down the netting. He is in a bed. The guest bed in Number Three. He recognizes the bureau and mirror opposite him. A lamp atop the

bureau produces a soft orb of light against the mosquito netting. Beside the lamp he sees a vase with an orchid rearing from it.

He smells something savoury. Turning to his left he sees another lamp on the bedside table, and a bowl of dark broth with a soupspoon laid beside it. Beyond these, legs crossed, a journal spread open across his lap, is Ernest Seagoe. A large man, the British Commandant sits packed into his chair and uniform like a massive block of pink quartz swaddled in khaki. A light sweat sheens his skin. Catching William's movement, he regards the other for a moment before returning to his journal.

'Beef tea there for you.'

William works his jaw in a circular motion. The whole head aches and the right side of it feels wrong, like a piece of shoddy joinery. He fears his skull is broken. He thinks of the haemorrhage that took his mother, the way his brother James described it in his letter—her complaint of a dull throb while peeling carrots in the Lerwick kitchen and then going silently to her knees 'like Paul on the road to Damascus.' He remembers blood staining Frederick's teeth pink and the smothering scent of the raw paraffin. These recollections mix with the salty odour from the Bovril on the table, and William feels nausea welling up inside him. He rolls away from the lamp and broth and picks out a single dark run in the mosquito netting to anchor the spinning room. He focuses on its width, its length, its varying opacities and waits for his stomach to settle.

Before he plummets into sleep, he hears the click of the metal spoon against the bowl behind him and pages being turned in the journal. Then Seagoe quietly slurps the bouillon.

The next morning, he is awake when Frederick appears in the doorframe. The mission's roosters woke him sometime before five and he spent the first hour testing his mind: counting to one hundred and then back down to zero, doing the same in Marie's strand of Ambrymese, and then to twenty and back in Shetland Scots. His alphabets were no trouble, nor were simple maths. He went through the catalogue of the tools in his workshop: his moulding planes, braces, drill bits, vices, fillisters. As

shades of lavender saturate the room, he interrogates himself over the proper care of these objects, when he last used them, where he bought them, how much they cost. He is not overgenerous with himself. What he doesn't know he forces himself to keep returning to, until his questions yield up at least an approximate answer. Satisfied he hasn't been rendered an idiot, he turns his mind to other things. He works his jaw and touches the aching, oblong shape above his right ear, but he tries to not touch it often.

He has completed a mental sketch of his family tree and is about to commence upon Marie's when he sees Frederick through the mosquito netting. His brother doesn't enter the guestroom, but merely stands in the hallway with both hands in the pockets of his sleeping robe. It occurs to William that Frederick might not be able to tell through the mosquito net whether he is awake.

'I laid charges against you with Seagoe last night,' William says.

'Oh?' Still Frederick does not enter the room.

'Attempted fratricide.' William says, sitting up in the bed. 'He witnessed it. You tried to murder me with that awful beef tea.'

'Is that what we're talking about, William? Attempted fratricide?' Frederick asks quietly.

'No.'

Outside, the church bell tolls six. After it goes silent, William says, 'Come in, Brother. Too much straining to talk and I'm afraid my head will come apart. It's your house anyways.'

Frederick eases himself into the seat Seagoe occupied the night before. Then he leans forward with his elbows on his knees and fingers steepled. Now that he is closer, William can see his silver hair is uncombed. Frederick works up the courage to look at him directly through the mosquito netting.

'Were you drunk yesterday, William? You didn't smell drunk. None of us thought so.'

The question catches William by surprise. He thinks of himself in Suriere's village, giving the big man the chance to evade capture and

responsibility right from the offing. He did it because he knew it was his only chance at getting the others—at getting any of the cannibals at all—without filling the river with blood. Why was Frederick offering, suggesting even, alcohol as an excuse for yesterday? Was it even William he was offering it to?

‘Exhausted, maybe delirious even, but no—not drunk.’ Part of William wants to be more conciliatory, to apologize for the assault, but part of him is angry now too. Rather than consider what share of blame might be his, Frederick wants reduce the matter to a drunken fit—as if William couldn’t run an errand and be out of his brother’s sight for a few nights without blottering himself and turning lunatic. As if they hadn’t come anywhere in the last ten years. As if that had even been the way it had been back then.

‘I saw Susumoli, Fred. Don’t play like you’re surprised. You know I took the cannibals aboard the boat. You probably knew an hour after Seagoe clapped me. Right, so it *was* Seagoe. I thought so. In any case, what’s he doing there in the hold with Ronovuro and the rest. He had nothing to do with it. Everyone you asked said as much. So what’s he doing down there?’

Frederick lets him go on until he’s finished. ‘I’m not the one making arrests, William. Maybe I can persuade the commandant to sit at my desk. He can playact like he’s writing letters, and you can try approaching him the way you did me. I wouldn’t recommend it though. You didn’t fare well in the first instance.’

‘The two of you stitched yourselves together the moment he got here: your eyes, your ears, his muscle. You think I don’t know what you’re up to? He never would have arrested Susumoli without insinuations from you.’

‘I insinuated nothing. He asked me for known antagonists in the area and I told him, and I wasn’t the only one. Go have your gentle words with Seagoe, William. Then, if you emerge upright, you might take your misgivings on tour. You can launch them at the Watsons, at Axam, at Hooker and Thom Stephens. Ask them—their children, their wives, their

labour—whether they'd prefer to have Susumoli off the island. You might even ask your own.'

'My own what?' He's never once heard his brother refer to his marriage in terms wedlock.

'You might even ask Marie.'

William laughs dryly. Though the one side of his face aches, he rubs it to hide his disappointment, embarrassed with himself for hoping Frederick might have acknowledged his and Marie's marriage, even in a slip.

'You're a coward, Frederick. A damn coward. You waited till I was off in the bush chasing geese. You intended to get him all along.'

'I've never seen geese nor doves clean a man's legs down to the bone, but perhaps this is just you and your wonderful imagination, William. Little William the wee bailiff of Water Street, then William the great builder, now William the moral farmer, the hidden voice of Cambridge anthropology, the absent-but-loving son and all the rest. With this power God has heaped upon you, Brother, imagine, for a moment, that you're not who you are and I'm not who I am. Clear away the old clutter and *listen* to what I am telling you: Susumoli is dangerous. He would use our bones for combs and wind chimes if he could. How you of all people fancy yourself excluded is beyond anyone's fathoming: the man has tried to murder you twice. He ranted for years that the dead would return at Tasmalum if not for Clapcott before Ronovuro cottoned on, and Seagoe quite rightly says this makes him a conspirator. He's promised rains and waves to drown all of us on this coast for years: not just me, not just the whites. That it excites you to live cheek to jowl with his threats has been your own mad business. But the rest of this community says no more, not after what happened to Mr. Clapcott. The Axams are fled to Hog Harbour. The Hookers spent two nights sleeping in their dinghy on the open water for fear of being next. Natives and whites alike, we are done living in fear of butchery. If Seagoe is keen to remove Susumoli to Vila, he can do so with our blessing. The cranky fellow can wait for his ancestors and fits of weather there.'

William listens to his brother's harangue, but what he hears, creeping in by the end, after the barbs, is weariness. Throughout his speech, Frederick has hardly moved. He remains leaned forward, his hair unkempt, his fingers steepled. He has hardly looked at William, but instead seems absorbed with the floor.

'It's not as if I love the man, Fred. It's been years since our troubles, but I would never say I've forgiven him, exactly. But I do know him. And I think I understand him. I feel like I've come to know what to fear from him and what to let be. I can pretty well predict our quarrels before they happen, and I can talk to him—well, through others, he hasn't spoken a word to me directly in eight years. But no matter: we've had peace.'

'All right, William.'

'He didn't kill Reginald. You know he didn't: he wouldn't be coy about it if he had. And he didn't accept any of the plunder. Don't you see? If he goes down to Vila and never comes back, having done nothing, do you think it will be Seagoe that his people will blame? How many years since the Constabulary last anchored near this district?'

'Three this June.'

'Do you think Susumoli's people will wait another three to avenge themselves on Seagoe, if he's even still acting-bobby then? Do you think the rest of us will be left unmolested in the interim? You'll be safe here on Tangoa, but what about your teachers or their families when they're farming on the mainland? What about the Axams or the Watsons or Marie and I? We'll be going to bed every night afraid of someone poking a shotgun through our blinds.'

'So move here then. Or to that land of yours on Malekula. Or Ambrym.'

'I don't want to move. I'm forty-six. I can't afford to start again somewhere else. I won't.' There was truth to this, but it wasn't all truth. They would take losses if they picked up stakes. Large losses, but with a little luck....

'You're only forty-five, William.' Frederick says absently, still looking at the floor. He is right. William's birthday wouldn't be for

another two months. For God's sake, William thinks, even half-there he could be censorious. The Reverend shrugs his shoulders, as if hearing his little brother's thoughts.

'Stay on at Tasiriki then, William,' he continues. 'It's certainly in keeping with your character. No one would ever accuse you of sparing yourself difficulty or cultivating any steady sense of what's good for you. Your refusal of the Bovril is a case in point.' Now he looks up, giving William a better view of the swollen crescents beneath each eye. 'But you needn't bother wasting your time defending Susumoli and his lot to those of us here. Clapcott's legs make for a more convincing counter. Save your no doubt generous arguments for the trial. Seagoe and I have agreed that you'll accompany him to Vila to act as interpreter. It was you or I. I told him you would want to go. I thought justice for your friend would motivate you. It appears I was right despite having my people wrong.'

Clever, Frederick. William leans back against the pillows. He looks at the tall posters rising from the corners of the bed to join the canopy rails overhead and he notes the dark varnish on the hardwood. The morning light in the room is soft and indirect. A sort of bluish grey. It marks less contrast between the wrinkles and runs in the mosquito net that encloses him. He recalls how, when the beef tea had made him nauseous, he had taken comfort in those dark rivulets he noticed against the lamplight. He didn't appreciate it then, but now he sees their resemblance to bars.

Frederick rises from the chair.

'Love thy neighbour as thyself. Who would have taken you for a literalist, William? Since it seems there's no sundering you or Susumoli from one another, go on and defend the neighbour and life you choose. You'll be leaving tomorrow morning. Jeannie and I will invite Marie to join us here while you're away, though I'll be as surprised as you should she say yes.'

Synopsis for *Hang Law and Prophets*

The primary plotline of this story follows the historical figure, William Bowie, a Scots-Presbyterian missionary-artisan turned independent planter, as he discovers the murder of his neighbour, Reginald Clapcott, and brings the accused to justice in his capacities as a witness and interpreter in the case. William occupies his place as legal interpreter uncomfortably. As a local translator, he is better suited to the role than most, but he is far from perfect; as a man of multiple communities, he tries to live morally, but diverse loyalties and his own ambitions sometimes take him outside of the law.

The novella is constructed in three acts. After the inciting incident—Bowie's hearing word of Clapcott's murder—the first act witnesses the discovery of the body and the apprehension of the accused islanders. The first act also serves to foreground differences within the European community and (to a lesser extent) differences within the indigenous community, all against the background of interracial conflict evidenced in the murder.

The second act continues to develop these themes as Bowie works to interpret the investigation and court proceedings, aided and obstructed by the islanders, settlers and government officials alike. This action is supplemented by incremental revelations of William's own troubles in the archipelago: a history of violence and alcoholism and a current illegality that underwrites his success. At the root of this illegality is an act of compassion. A decade prior to present events within the novella Bowie rescued numerous islanders from a volcanic eruption that devastated the nearby island of Ambrym and for years these refugees have worked and lived as labourers on the Scotsman's land on Espiritu Santo. By the year of novella's present action (1923) this once-displaced community is largely free to come and go between the two islands as they please, but many of the Ambrymese have stayed on at the plantation where Bowie has married-in and treats them fairly. The Great War and its fallout have preoccupied the authorities for the last decade, but the fact remains that William is breaking British (though not French) law by employing labour from another island, and, in light of the Clapcott killing, the Condominium officials are beginning to take a closer look into operations on Santo, including Bowie's.

The third act follows the rendering of verdicts in the murder trial, some of which are just and others unjust. Here the main plot and a key subplot of the novella collide: in order to commute three of the six death sentences handed down in the case, Bowie threatens to lead British nationals on South Santo in petitioning for French citizenship. This was not uncommon in the New Hebrides, and the prospect, which would put the archipelago's largest and most promising island more squarely in the hands of France ahead of a historically outlined and seemingly imminent Partition, alarms the British officials. William's threat is a bluff, but it proves successful: the three sentences are commuted. As it was historically, Partition in the New Hebrides does not occur, but while William returns to his home on Espiritu Santo having retained his nationality, the novella concludes with him having lost much of his status among Europeans and islanders alike.

Come John Frum (a novella)

1.

Irving turned on the radio. He caught the last of the shipping news on Vanuatu National Broadcast. The *Clydesdale* was touring the Banks and Torres Islands. The *Morinda*, southbound from Port Vila, was already at capacity. For the second time in two months, a ship would take its cargo directly to Sydney. All stops in Irving's district had been cancelled. It would be another ten days before the next ship visited Tanna Island. Ten days at least.

The news did not ruffle Irving. He felt no flash of temper, no blood rising his cheeks. He felt no urge to complain to himself about the *Morinda*'s predictably erratic service. Instead, he felt a quiet excitement. He wasn't waiting on goods expected in port; today his guests would be arriving by plane. It was a beautiful day: the skies a pure, unmarred blue. Seemingly limitless. A high-pressure system was lingering over the islands, and the weather report out of Vila had promised the clear skies would continue.

The broadcaster, wrapping up the shipping news, announced that the pidgin gossip spot 'Mi Hearum Say!' would be coming up next. Irving switched the frequency to shortwave, searching, instead, for news of the war in Iraq and Kuwait. It was probably too late in the hour to catch the regular program, but he tried the usual frequencies—9435, 11705, 15155. He lingered at each of these, but Voice of America was silent. A faint crackle issued from the truck's speakers, and that was all. Irving left the radio on just in case.

He adjusted the rear-view mirror to check his reflection. The headrest had flattened the short, black curls at the back of his head. He plucked at them with his fingers. He took a small tube of Australian skin cream out of the glove box and squeezed a dab onto his fingertips. He

applied this to his face and forehead, oiling away some ashiness he'd seen there. Then he inspected his white shirt. Mrs. Davies had one of the maids, the more experienced one, starch and iron it for today, and the lines of its collar and shoulders were crisp as folded paper.

Mindful of the time, Irving readjusted the mirror and started the engine. He smoothed his eyebrows. The Americans arriving today were journalists. They might take a picture of him. Maybe of him standing next to the Friendly Bungalows' truck. He wanted to look his best.

If only it weren't a Friday. Why did the Americans have to come on a Friday? Fridays were the John Frumers' Sabbath. Irving thought of his father and the other believers, scattered along Tanna's eastern coast. The elders would be under the tin roof of their *nakamal* all day today, huddled around the single radio they shared. They too would be following the news of the fighting overseas and grafting their own stories onto it, and Irving knew his father would be leading the rhetoric. There would be dancing at Sulphur Bay come nightfall. Dancing and island hymns sung to John Frum, that he might drop Cargo from the American planes on their way to defend this country called Kuwait. Irving pictured his father—a tottering old man dressed up in a second-hand khaki uniform with bottle cap medals pinned to his chest, preaching fictions and making absurd salutes to the empty skies. If the journalists saw it, they would be embarrassed by all the nonsense. Irving would have to keep them well clear of it. They'd have to avoid the eastside of the island for the day, but that was all right, Irving thought. There were plenty of other interesting things to see.

Leaning over to check himself in the mirror once more, Irving saw that a frown was pinching his forehead into furrows. He inhaled through his nose and exhaled through his mouth. He closed his eyes and pushed his father and the John Frumers out of his mind. He thought, instead, about the Americans: about whether they would come lightly packed or with heaps of luggage. Whether the luggage would all match. After a few seconds, Irving opened his eyes and checked the mirror again. He noted,

with satisfaction, that his skin was now smooth. Then he released the parking brake and shifted the truck into drive.

When he pulled up in front of Burton Airfield the American couple were waiting out in front of the gate in the chain-link fencing. They were not alone. A third person stood between the American man and woman. An islander—a boy or maybe a young man. A student down from Malapoa College, perhaps. Approaching the three figures, Irving tried to time the truck's deceleration perfectly, to ease the truck to a stop so the passenger side door would be right in front of them. But when Irving saw that the young man between the man and woman was Baby-Face Antoine, he hit the brake too hard and too early. The truck hiccupped to a stop with the door a full two meters short of the group. Irving cursed Baby-Face under his breath, moving his lips as little as possible in case anyone was watching.

Baby-Face had his arms over the Americans' shoulders. He was talking through a big smile, turning his head to face the woman, then the man, his arms coiling the three of them closer together, then releasing and clapping the couple on their backs, before he hooked his arms across their shoulders again to keep them from moving away. The Americans were smiling and nodding along, but Irving imagined their discomfort. He had read once how Americans prefer a bit of physical distance between themselves and others, and so Irving always tried to be mindful of this when in their company, no matter how informal they came across. Watching Baby-Face jostling the Americans, invading their space, Irving felt embarrassed for all of his fellow Ni-Vanuatu.

At thirty, Baby-Face was still baby-faced. Irving hadn't seen him in more than a year, but his teak skin remained uncrossed by a single line, like he was forever just ripening into the world. Shorter than most men, with a slight, wiry build, he wore a shiny rugby jersey, one of the cheap New Zealand 'All Blacks' ones sold in the Chinese shops in the capital, and he had its short collar flipped up. His hair was done in the new fashion—shaved short with a small patch of braids, beaded in the black, red, yellow,

and green of Vanuatu, trailing down from the back of his head. Lumped next to the couple's black suitcases and photography equipment on the grass was a threadbare, orange rucksack Irving guessed was Baby-Face's. While Baby-Face kept talking, the Americans cast a few glances at the waiting truck. Irving took these as a sign. They were asking him to step out of the truck and rescue them from this overbearing stranger.

Irving checked himself one more time in the driver's side mirror. Then he got out. He swung the door shut, hoping the sound would interrupt the conversation, but it was too soft to break through Baby-Face's chatter. He was going on about the All-Tanna soccer team. '...they're very talented, these boys, and they look up to me,' he was saying. The depth of his voice was completely at odds with false-youth of his face. 'Like I told you, my brother is a striker. He gets the ball on the kick-off and, WHAM, he shoots. From midfield. No other team has that.' The Americans nodded, making noises of agreement. 'But, E fate, Santo, those teams have moneys, you know? Some sponsors. These boys here, they are so strong, but like I said, they have no shoes, you know? No matching uniforms. It is very sad.' He said this to the woman. She stuck her bottom lip out in a tiny, sympathetic frown. 'You should come to White Sands,' Baby-Face continued. 'You should come and watch them play.'

Irving came around the front of the truck, which was still shining from the washing and waxing he had given it that morning, and extended a hand to the man, who was tall and thick-chested beneath his off-white oxford shirt. The American's sleeves were rolled halfway up his forearms, revealing carpets of brown hair darker than the hair on his head, and a heavy silver watch that glistened around his wrist like a ring of ice.

'Welcome to Tanna,' Irving said to the couple. The man extricated himself from Baby-Face's grip and gave Irving's hand a couple firm pumps. When the man released him, Irving felt his knuckles slide back into place.

'Happy to be here,' the man said. He wore chromed Aviators, the lenses hanging like two huge mirrors from his eyebrows. Irving could see himself reflected in the lenses and, behind him, the luminous truck. Irving

liked how the truck and his own clean white shirt matched the American's spotless smile. 'I'm Donaldson,' the American went on. 'Latitudes and Attitudes. And this prize-winning prize over here is Ms. Keifer, our photographer.'

'Pleased to meet you, Mr. Donaldson. And you, Ms. Keifer. Welcome to Tanna.' The woman reached a hand out to Irving and he shook it gently. Baby-Face Antoine's arm was still flopped over the her shoulders like a dead animal. 'I'm Irving. I'll be your driver and guide while you stay with us.'

Irving had gone by this name for years, but it wasn't the one he'd been born with. Baby-Face knew this. Irving stole a glance at the other man, fearing what he might say. Baby-Face caught the look and snorted in derision. 'That's not his name. His name is Joshua.'

Panic pulsed at Irving's shoulder blades. It felt like they were being forced uncomfortably close together in his back. 'Antoine is right,' he managed. 'Some local people know me as Joshua, but please, call me Irving.' He didn't look at Baby-Face. He hoped the other man wouldn't push the matter any farther.

'They're going to Friendly Bungalows,' was all Baby-Face Antoine said, as if Irving needed to hear this from him. The name 'Friendly Bungalows' was detailed on both doors of the truck, the green letters slung like a hammock between two stencilled palm trees.

The tension in Irving's back receded. He worked up a small smile for the couple and said, 'We've been looking forward to your visit. Let me help you with your things.'

'No, no. Don't trouble yourself,' the woman, Ms. Keifer, said as she slid out from under Baby-Face's arm and gathered her photography equipment. She was thin and pretty, with blue eyes, and lank blond hair pulled back into a ponytail. Unlike most of the women that flew down from Port Vila to visit, there was very little excess to her. Her blue linen-shirt had crescents of sweat under the armpits, and she moved briskly, more like the Canadian doctor women that volunteered on the island from time to time than any female American tourists Irving had met.

When Baby-Face tried to help her, she flashed him a smile with no teeth, saying, 'No really, we're all right. You've got your own things,' leaving Baby-Face to deal with his single, orange rucksack.

When she climbed into the passenger seat, Donaldson asked with mock-indignation, 'Oh, so I'm in the back with the luggage?'

'I'm sure Antoine's dying to hear some of your jokes. Why don't you tell him that one about the octopus that goes into the bar to join the band,' she replied, smiling.

'Irving here's probably never heard that one either, and I could tell it much better from inside the cab. You know, the acoustics and all.'

The photographer buckled herself in. 'Too dangerous. You might put him to sleep at the wheel and kill us all.' Then she shut the door and waved at Donaldson through the closed window.

Donaldson tapped three fleshy fingers against the glass, 'Three. That's three massages you owe me now! Keep it up—I've got aches in places you wouldn't believe.' The writer was smiling. He turned to Baby-Face, saying, 'Looks like you and I are two peas in a pod,' before he gathered the cases and went around to the back of the truck, leaving just the two men of Tanna facing one another.

Irving and Baby-Face had avoided eye contact since their first exchange. Irving knew the other man would want a ride across the island, but non-guests had to pay a two-vatu fare and the Davies family liked that Irving allowed no exceptions. Even if he got out at the Bungalows and continued east to White Sands by foot, Baby-Face would still have to pay the modest fare. When Irving put his hand out to collect the money, Baby-Face just stared at it. Irving watched Antoine's childlike face, a lighter black than his. Antoine squinted, like he was trying to read something written on Irving's palm. Irving looked to see if there was really something there and so he never saw the blow coming. There was a sound like two pieces of wood cracking together. Pain bloomed in his open hand: enormous, purple and sickly yellow, uncurling from his palm to his fingers like the petals of a banana blossom.

'Ooh!' Antoine said through pursed lips, shaking the sting out of his own hand. Then he smiled. 'Don't you know? That's what friends do in America.' He boosted himself up on one of the truck's wheels, climbed into the bed and settled in for the ride.

2.

Someone must have made a mistake up at the Tourist Bureau in Port Vila, Irving thought, when they had called Friendly Bungalows and told Mr. and Mrs. Davies that an American 'couple' was coming down to write up Tanna for a guidebook. These Americans were obviously unmarried. Neither wore a wedding band. And other, little things—the way Mr. Donaldson hadn't helped Ms. Keifer with her equipment, the way she didn't turn around at all to see whether he was comfortable or enjoying the ride in the back—made Irving suspect that theirs was only a professional relationship. An American couple. A couple of Americans. Irving's English was as strong as any Ni-Van's. Better than most. He could see where someone might have made a mistake.

He took the northbound road, along the island's longer, western coast. In the back, Donaldson and Baby-Face were sitting up on the truck bed's sidewalls. Baby-Face was asking about the famous American baseball player who ran the Erakor Island Resort in Vila: if Donaldson had heard of the man or the man's wife who had been a Playboy pinup. Donaldson told him he didn't recognize either of their names, but admitted he never watched baseball. He was from Massachusetts. He said being a baseball fan in Massachusetts was a torture he wouldn't wish on anyone. Inside the cab, Irving told Ms. Keifer that there were a few cassette tapes in the glove compartment. He encouraged her to put one in if she cared to listen to some music, but he was secretly happy when she declined.

The tapes were classics, Mr. Davies had said: Al Green, Jim Croce, and an album from Woodstock, a music festival Mr. and Mrs. Davies had

been to. While Irving liked them all—especially the Al Green cassette whose cover had the singer, shirtless, on the front. Irving wouldn't tell anyone, but he liked to think he looked a little like Mr. Green. They had the same black skin, the same haircut and build. And while Irving liked listening to Al Green, the other tapes and the news, he often preferred to drive in the quiet. He liked to listen to the truck: the low hum of the engine, the ricochet of gravel against the chassis. It was as if these sounds were the whisperings of some sacred order. The taps of a secret code. Mr. and Mrs. Davies paid him both to drive the truck and perform the odd bit of maintenance. He was no expert, but he could change the oil and wipers when the S-10 needed them. In November one of the brake pads started complaining. He ordered new pads and replaced the old ones. So he could do that now, too. On longer drives he sometimes slipped his feet from their thongs and touched his bare skin to the pedals. In these moments, with the stereo off, Irving could gently press the brake and, in the hush, feel he was hearing the truck sighing, murmuring the word 'Peace.'

The coast stretched northwards. It was wide and treeless with pockets of black sand and spots of brighter blue where there were holes in the coral reef. The road turned inland at the White Grass Plains, and, for several kilometres, Irving hoped Ms. Keifer would ask him to pull over so she could take some photographs. He waited, even slowing down a bit, but she didn't seem impressed by the scenery. Silence filled the cab. Irving felt it plugging up his ears. He could not even hear the comforting sounds of the truck and road through it. Determined not to speak about the fighting in the Middle East unless the woman brought it up, Irving tried to make some other, pre-emptive conversation.

'These are the White Grass Plains, Ms. Keifer. We are not quite to the height the dry season yet, so the grasses are still yellow, but in another month or two all of this will be white. There's nothing else quite like it in all of Vanuatu.'

She looked out the window at the coastal plains that stretched around them, as flat as paper. The road they were on was slightly

elevated—a streak of dirt and gravel. To either side of it the grass was waist-high and pale yellow, yet still green near its roots.

‘That must really be something,’ the photographer said. Irving waited and, after an awkward pause she asked ‘Is all of the island like this?’

‘No, no. I’m afraid not. This side of the island has the hospital, the government offices in Isangel, the harbour at Lenakel. On the other side of the mountains is East Tanna.’ Irving shook his head. ‘Over here it’s sunny. Over there there’s lots of rain and mud, John Frum and *kastom* people. But then again, that side has the volcano. And Port Resolution is very nice. The great English Captain Cook anchored there.’

‘I’m sure it’s all very beautiful,’ she said.

‘There is no white grass on that side, though. This is the only place you can see it. We raise cattle here, now. Beef is our fastest growing export, behind coffee, but there used to be wild horses on the plain.’

‘Ahhh...Okay.’ She nodded, before going back to staring silently out the window. Irving was disappointed by her lack of interest, but then he remembered reading how America is full of grasslands. And horses. He licked his lips. He thought he must seem ridiculous, trying impress her with Tanna’s tiny stretch of plains. She could have grown up in such a place, bigger even. Bigger for certain. With horses of her own, maybe. What a fool he was for bringing it up. And yet, for him, the Plains were a fascination.

He thought back to a Christmas Day, years ago. It had been soon after he had been hired on at the Friendly Bungalows, and the owner, Mr. Davies, had just taught him to drive. A Canadian physician from the Doctors Without Borders clinic in Isangel had telephoned. A boy from Fetukai had run the twelve kilometres to Isangel to fetch a doctor for his mother, who was dying in labour. All the government offices in Isangel were closed for the holiday, and the doctor could find no one to drive him to save the woman. Friendly Bungalows had the nearest truck. Mrs. Davies had told him that the doctor was Canadian, from Vancouver, so Irving was surprised to see an Asian man waiting for him in front of the

clinic when he pulled up. The little man had short grey hair, spectacles that seemed small in his wide face, and a black athletic bag, like the soccer players from Santo and Efate carried. Irving thought he was a Japanese tourist--the Japanese didn't celebrate Christmas--waiting for a ride to one of the black sand beaches, maybe.

'Do you speak English?' the man asked, getting into the passenger side, bag first. Irving remembered the clipped tones of his accent, how his words sounded like someone snapping their fingers or hands clapping.

'Are you Doctor Lee?' Irving stammered.

'OK. You do. Good. Fetukai. Drive fast. Two lives depend on it.'

Apparently, this was the doctor.

Neither man said a word the whole way to Fetukai. Irving had never seen an Asian doctor before. He kept flicking glances at the other man in the truck's mirrors. The doctor had a habit of sucking in and chewing on the inside of his right cheek. Every time Irving stole a glance at him he was doing it. Irving drove fast. Faster than Mr. Davies ever allowed him to, and he only slowed down to avoid bottoming out in the ruts in the road.

When they reached the village, Irving waited in the truck. For over an hour he watched the village women go in and out of the birthing house like birds building a nest, fetching steaming buckets of boiled water and T-shirts they collected from other villagers and tore into strips. Minutes after the newborn's squalls started from inside the hut, the doctor emerged. He tugged off a pair of rubber gloves, shining with blood and birthing fluids, dropping them to the dirt where one of the village dogs snatched them up. He kicked after the dog. Then he looked back into the hut's dim interior, and yelled, 'Out-rage-ous!' his voice breaking the word into three pieces. He stopped one of the women carrying a bucket and hissed as he poured the scalding water over his bare hands and forearms. Then he made his way over to the waiting truck, shaking his hands dry, and climbed in without another word. He made a vague gesture towards the road. Irving started the truck and put it into drive.

That had been late December. The height of the dry season. Driving back through the White Grass Plains, the truck had been buffeted by winds. Radio broadcasts earlier that day had warned of a cyclone blowing in, and the evening sky during the doctor and Irving's return was a mash of rich purples with stray ribbons of orange, like oil on water. Beneath it all, the bleached grass was a sea of singing bones, bending crazily and whistling in the gusts, and by the time the Asian doctor said, 'look,' Irving had already seen it—a wild, pale horse out on the plains, keeping pace with the white truck like a gull and its shadow skating upon the ocean. Irving slowed to get a better look, and the horse dropped into a canter, its mane snapping like a naval flag. He sped up, and the horse pressed forward, closing the gap until it was even with them again. And then, like a door closing in a dream, it was gone, veering off into the purple and orange. The doctor rumbled, 'Hmmm...' and turned his face back to the road ahead.

'Where are all the horses now?' Ms. Keifer asked, after minute or so. Irving had completely forgotten about her.

He sighed.

'Most have been tamed, or eaten, or killed by droughts. It is a sad story. But a few are still out there. I saw one, once, on this road. We passed the place a few minutes back. I was taking a doctor to Isangel after he saved a woman in labour and her pikanini—her newborn.'

'That doesn't sound like such a sad story,' she remarked.

Irving smiled. 'What I meant is that it is sad that the horses are so rare now.' He knew she was making a joke, but he said this anyways. The truth was that remembering that day always did make him strangely sad. Yet often he went out of his way to drive down this same road through the plains, as he was doing now, in hopes of seeing the horse again. 'I wish you had been with the doctor and I that day, Ms. Keifer. No doubt it would have made an excellent photograph.'

Irving turned a bit to share his smile with her. He could see Donaldson through the cab window, the bright shields of his sunglasses angled out, reflecting white sun, white grass. And though he could not see

him, Irving could feel Baby-Face behind him. It was like the soft touch of something across the back of one's neck when alone. Irving felt Baby-Face watching the woman and him.

3.

British Army engineers had built the road that went over Tanna's central mountain range in 1990. There was a small pull-off with a lookout at the crest of Mount Loanialu, and, beyond this, the road would plunge down into the eastern side of the island through a series of switchbacks. Irving mentioned this to Ms. Keifer. When the view of the eastern coast opened before them, she rapped on the cab's back window to alert Donaldson and then she asked Irving to pull over so she could take some photos. Minutes later the truck was parked on the road's thin shoulder, and Baby-Face and Irving stood across the road while the Americans photographed the view, Donaldson directing Ms. Keifer's shots so the images would reinforce the article he was planning.

Watching Ms. Keifer on the roof of the truck's cab, hunched over her tripod and camera, with Donaldson gesturing from below, Irving tried to view things from their perspective. He tried to see the patchwork of bright and dark blues that was Resolution Bay, the ash plain and Yasur Volcano standing out in the sea of green jungle like a smoking mole, and the distant whale's back of Futuna Island to the northeast, breaching the waters of the Pacific. But try as he may, Irving couldn't see why this view might excite the Americans where the White Grass Plains hadn't. Irving drove this route across the highlands regularly, several times a day in some cases, and any magic the scenery had ever held for him was now so familiar it was forgotten. This side of the mountains was all mud to him. Mud and jungle and people squatting in it, bare feet and shins caked in dirt, waiting for John Frum and the American military to return.

Irving was surprised when Baby-Face offered to share a cigarette with him. Though he rarely smoked, he took it as a sign of amicability and so he accepted. It was an Australian brand. While they passed it back and

forth, Baby-Face glared in the direction of the Americans, but Irving couldn't tell who it was directed at: Donaldson, Ms. Keifer, or both. When they had smoked the cigarette down to the filter, Irving thanked the younger man for sharing. Baby-Face snorted and said he had cartons of them: presents from Port Vila.

'What you should really thank me for is for smacking your hand back there and not your silly face—asking me for coin while you tote these whites around for free like a fucking donkey.' Baby Face's voice was harsh, but he was smiling. Irving stared at his profile. One faint dimple puckered the younger man's cheek. Irving marvelled at him: how easily he wore his falsehoods. 'But that's all right, Joshua. That's just fine. I'll accept your thank-you. For now. I'll accept it until I figure out a way for you to make up for insulting me.' Then Baby-Face flicked the cigarette butt away and walked back to where Donaldson was helping Ms. Keifer down from the top of the truck, leaving Irving standing on the side of the road.

Driving down the mountainside in low gear, Irving found himself looking forward to reaching the Friendly Bungalows. Baby-Face would have to walk the rest of the way to White Sands and Irving would sit down to lunch with Mrs. Davies and the visiting Americans. Mrs. Davies would make her famous 'Pacific Sky' burgers: fresh ground beef patties from the ranches in the White Grass Plains, sharp cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion, a thick square of bacon, topped with a ring of pineapple and thousand-island dressing. Irving would sip sweet iced tea and listen to them talk about the war—real talk—not his father's wishful nonsense about John Frum and American bombers dropping televisions and refrigerators down for the believers. Iraq was in the Middle East, and Irving knew Tanna was completely out of the way. Why would the Americans come this way? No, he'd listen to them and hear the story told straight.

Maybe then he would tell them about his dream of building and managing Tanna's first gasoline station. Maybe the timing would be right. Surely Mrs. Davies wouldn't mind if he mentioned it. She and Mr. Davies

had two sons in university, back in America; they couldn't help Irving financially beyond paying him to drive their truck, but they were always supportive, always encouraging. Irving could never go so far as to ask Donaldson or Ms. Keifer for money. But they did work for a big magazine. Maybe there was something in that. Irving could see the Bungalows' ceiling fans reflected in the plates and silverware, the napkins fluttering lazily against the chequered tablecloth. He could almost taste the hamburger. He was sure it wouldn't be impolite to mention the gas station, so long as an opportunity presented itself.

At the base of the mountain the road's slant evened out abruptly and the truck hit the flatlands with a jolt that bounced everything in the pickup's bed into the air. Ms. Keifer looked back in alarm at the equipment. It hadn't been too violent a bounce, but her nervousness made Irving glance into the rear-view mirror just the same. Donaldson was laughing, readjusting his sunglasses. Baby-Face Antoine had been standing, probably getting the most of the scare. He banged on the top of the cab, his slaps floating through the metal and fabric inches above Irving's head.

'I'm sorry about that, Ms. Keifer. The roadwork on this side of the mountains is not quite up to British Army standards. I can pull over if you would like to check on your equipment.'

In the back Donaldson was singing out, 'We want a driver, not-a-pitching-wedge!'

Ms. Keifer laughed. Irving didn't know if it was at his concern, or Donaldson's song. 'It's no big deal. It was kind of fun.' She rapped on the window behind them, flashing a smile at Donaldson. It was as if the jolt had shaken them all awake, reminding everyone of each other's company and the brilliant day they were traveling through. Irving had her get the Jim Croce cassette out of the glove, and slip it into the tape deck. He turned the volume up and slid open the cab's panelled back-window, so the men could hear the music. Before long he could hear Donaldson drumming along to 'Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown', keeping the beat with measured smacks against the Chevy's gleaming, white side. Irving

watched Ms. Keifer tapping the camera case on her lap out of the corner of his eye. What a lunch they would have, once they got rid of Baby-Face.

4.

The Davies family built the Friendly Bungalows Resort on what remained of a long defunct copra plantation. The previous owner, an ancient Frenchman named Daques, had sold the property to the ANZ bank out of New Zealand when post-independence politics and a failing liver forced him home to France. He never returned to the islands. Mrs. Davies said he'd died in hospital in Toulouse: that he'd murdered his liver and his liver had murdered him back. Back in Vanuatu, a broad legacy survived the Frenchman: he left behind mixed-race bastards with at least thirteen different local women that Irving knew of. After word of his death abroad reached the islands, every black man in eastern Tanna with a drop of white blood in him, French or otherwise, began claiming some relation to Daques and the land the ANZ bank now leased to Mr. and Mrs. Davies. Baby-Face Antoine was one such man, though everyone knew his dead mother had had him with a half-white ship's engineer from Malekula.

The Davies had had the bungalows remodelled to reflect a mixture of island and western styles: white-washed concrete walls, floors and doors of oiled teakwood, full-sized western beds, mosquito nets, en suite bathrooms, a ceiling fan and two screened windows in every unit. From the outside the roofs appeared thatched with coconut fronds, but Irving knew this was really just for show. Below the thatching the real roofs were done in red, ceramic tile, as dust from the nearby volcano would constantly trickle down into the rooms if the ceilings were made of coconut fronds alone.

The driveway connecting the resort to the main road was little more than a pair of wheel-ruts with a low mound of dirt and grass running between them, but when Irving turned onto it, a sense of quiet splendour always seemed to rise up in him. Everything seemed to open

out before the Chevy's polished hood ornament, spreading wide and welcome. High, vaulting coconut trees grew on either side of the track and the considerable space between each tree was open to wind and sun and lit to a bright green. Here and there, papaya and banana trees cropped up, riddled with orange and yellow fruit. Roosters criss-crossed the lawns as if they owned it, their finely plumed necks pumping forward and backward with each step. When the white walls of the Bungalows took shape in the distance, and he pushed the stop button on the tape deck, Irving wondered if the Americans could appreciate the silence through the crunching of the tires. He wondered if they felt the quiet sanctity of the place. He hesitated, then honked the horn to announce their arrival.

Dan Davies was a skilled carpenter, and mostly did contract work away in Port Vila, but the resort was more Julie Davies' project and she mostly ran it by herself. Irving saw her waiting for them outside the old plantation house she'd converted into a single-story bar, kitchen, and lounge. She was wearing a long, denim skirt and a faded, red polo. Even from a distance, Irving could see she'd applied the rare bit of lipstick to match her polo. She waved at them with both hands as they approached. Irving gauged the distance. He glided the truck to a smooth and perfect stop so that when Ms. Keifer opened the passenger side door, Mrs. Davies was standing close enough to reach in and shake her hand without Ms. Keifer having to leave her seat.

The two women had spoken on the phone earlier in the week, and they now exchanged happy greetings while Donaldson passed luggage and camera equipment down to Irving from the back of the truck. You can go on and get out now, Baby-Face, Irving thought, but the man-boy from Whitesands was going nowhere. He stood in the back of the truck, near the cab, watching the pleasantries between Ms. Keifer and Mrs. Davies sullenly while he plucked at the hem of his black jersey.

Irving stacked the luggage down near the door to the lounge. Through the open doorway he could see the tables laid-out for lunch. He pictured himself smacking Baby-Face's hand before Mrs. Davies sent the

would-be grandson of Daques, the dead Frenchman, on his solitary way east.

Soon the burger, Irving thought. Soon the iced tea.

Irving anticipated some contented lull that would open up in the conversation as they dined, and he imagined, when it came, that Ms. Keifer would ask him about himself, or maybe Mrs. Davies would say wistfully, 'Irving is our faithful driver, a real Godsend, but we'll only have him so long. He's got big ideas. Tell them, Irving. Tell them about your ideas...' and Irving would. Under the lazy spin of the ceiling fans he would describe a new gas station, shining with fresh paint, near the harbour at Lenakel, with a trading post, a bulletin board for notices and tourist flyers, a cooler for ice cream bars and bottled water, outrigger canoes and bicycles for rent, and a long counter for him to stand behind. He would paint a view for them, worthy of a photo in a magazine.

Mrs. Davies stepped over to Irving, laying an affectionate hand on his arm in greeting. 'Mr. Donaldson, are you going to come down from on high and let me shake your hand?' she asked, her voice steeped in exaggerated indignity.

Donaldson smiled, 'You'll have to excuse me, Mrs. Davies. Gretchen over there is uncouth and it's been rubbing off on me. Traveling with her really takes a toll on my manners.' He jumped down from the back and they shook hands warmly. 'Besides,' he continued, 'I was admiring your spread. We'll have to grab a couple photos.'

'By "we" he means me, Mrs. Davies. Tom's last camera was before colour film. He's better with his little pen and notepad. Photos wouldn't give him enough latitude for his BS,' Ms. Keifer said, checking the lenses in one of her hard black cases.

Irving liked their quick banter. Mrs. Davies was an excellent hostess, and he admired how she could instantly make strangers feel familiar. Mr. Davies was the same way, with his crushing handshakes and the old U.S. Coastguard hat he kept perched upon his greying head. When he had given Irving his own set of keys to the Chevrolet S-10, with a warning about locking them in behind him, he'd nearly rattled the arm

out of Irving's socket with one of those handshakes. He'd clapped Irving on the shoulder with his other huge hand and grinned at him with pride and a little excitement, as if Irving were his own son: a man in his mid-thirties receiving keys to the family vehicle. Irving regretted that the big man was away, working in Vila. He'd have liked to hear the two American men discuss the new war.

'Of course! Take all the photos you need! A picture AND a thousand words? You two will have me booked solid all year. We'll have to expand and dig a pool.' Mrs. Davies put one hand on Donaldson's arm, the other on Ms. Keifer's, patting them both before she turned her attention to the only person she had yet to acknowledge. 'And hi there, Antoine! You're looking well.'

The change in Baby-Face was so fast, Irving would wonder later if he had really seen it. It seemed fantastical—too convenient a way to visualize the other man—but the moment before Mrs. Davies looked up at Baby-Face, where he still stood in the truck bed, toeing at the ugly orange rucksack at his feet and glaring at the introductions unfolding below and without him, Irving would swear he saw Baby-Face transform himself like a demon of folklore. His feet, once squared angrily in their cheap flip-flops, crossed at the ankles; his posture, stiff with outrage at being ignored, loosened until he was leaning with a casual arm against the cab; his 'All Blacks' jersey suddenly seemed almost authentic, gaining a lustre that seemed to punch a hole in the white of pickup; and somehow, just before Mrs. Davies' eyes took him in, Baby-Face Antoine got one of his foreign cigarettes lit and into his mouth, centring it in his childlike face and twisting an easy smirk around it.

'And you, Madam.'

The Davies family had no love for Baby-Face. When they had first emigrated from America after the birth of their second son, nearly twenty years ago, they had lived in Port Vila, running a café. To escape the noise and the city's growing crime, they leased and began working on the plantation on Tanna, changing the outbuildings into guesthouses. After a decade of city-living, they had been unused to the quiet nights that

swooped down on their new property after dark. The first year after they'd gotten the pickup—before they started hiring men to drive it—Mr. Davies had awoken one night to the sound of someone closing one of the truck's doors. The big man tiptoed out of the two-room, master bungalow where the family slept and stepped out into the yard, armed with a hammer and flashlight. The S-10 had been pale blue in the moonlight and so he could see his way across the lawn to it with the flashlight turned off. Someone was messing around inside the cab. Not knowing what exactly to fear, he crept along until he was even with the driver's side window. He turned on the flashlight, and shined it in through the window, the beam falling square on the terrified face of a boy that looked no older than twelve.

The boy had been trying to pry the truck's stereo out of the dashboard with an old folding-knife, but now, with the light on him, the boy dropped the knife and put both his hands up in the air. Then he lunged at the door and almost slammed the lock pins down before Mr. Davies got the door handle up. The thief tried to escape out the passenger-side door, but Mr. Davies got a fistful of his ragged shirt and hauled him out by it. Out on the grass the boy started bawling, crying that he was lost and looking for a place to sleep and that he had found the truck door open and didn't want to wake up anyone in the house. This last was true. And the truck door had been unlocked. But the boy hadn't been lost; he had been planning to steal the radio and trade it for passage on the next cargo boat bound for Port Vila. The 'boy' wasn't even a boy. He was Baby-Face Antoine and he was already over twenty years old. He had already led raids on Fat-Man Jonah's store in Lenakel, slashed a sailor in port across the face over a game of cards, and slept with a white Peace Corps worker based in Port Resolution. But Mr. Davies didn't know this. He wouldn't know it until later when the gossip started going around. So, to calm the sobbing, terrified child on the grass, he brought him a cold Coke from the refrigerator and drove him, in the middle of the night, to White Sands, where the boy said his family lived. He even returned the

boy's pocketknife to him, which he said he'd inherited from a grandfather, long deceased, who was buried in France.

Irving looked at his countryman. Baby-Face could have been posing for one of Ms. Keifer's photos, lounging in the truck bed as if it were his. A puff of wind sent smoke into one of his eyes, screwing up that side of his face, but he kept the cigarette where it was, anchoring his half-smile. Get out of the truck you bastard, Irving thought, but Mrs. Davies was still chatting.

'Back from Efate, are you? How goes things in the big city?' The tone in Mrs. Davies' voice was cordial, warm even, but Irving knew this was just her playing hostess. She knew full well what Baby-Face was like. Irving wondered how long it would be before she sent the criminal on his way.

'Things in the city, they are exciting. But expensive too, you know? So I work. I work and I make some savings, you know.' He lifted his rucksack, giving it a shake. Irving saw outlines of the long, boxy shapes of cigarette cartons weighing down one end of the bag, and when Baby-Face shook it, he also heard the clinking of coins against a bottle. 'Gifts for my family and my friends. And money for my brother's team.'

Mrs. Davies knew as well as anyone how Antoine made his money in Vila, but she surprised Irving when she smiled up at the thief. 'Yes, you are good to those boys. For a fact. They think you're quite the hero.'

'They are good boys. A good team. But they need some moneys. Matching uniforms and shoes.... They need a sponsor, you know? Someone who can do more for them than me.' Baby-Face leaned over the side of the truck, looking at the green 'Friendly Bungalows' insignia, detailed on the truck's door. Straightening back up, he took a long, last drag on his cigarette, holding the smoke inside and cracking a wide, white smile, before exhaling. He gestured at the insignia with the nub, 'Imagine the boys playing in Vila, and Santo, with "Friendly Bungalows" on some matching uniforms.'

'Why Antoine, who'd have guessed you had such a head for advertising!' Mrs. Davies slapped her thighs with both hands, turning to

the Americans. 'Now, I had planned on whipping-up a few of my famous burgers for ya'll, but I've got some bad news.'

Irving's mouth went dry. He had a sinking feeling in his stomach and he felt he knew what was coming.

'Mr. Donaldson, your editor routed a message through the Tourist Bureau in Vila,' she went on. 'Apparently he wants some mention of the John Frumists in your article? Lucky you, they do their singing and dancing on Fridays, so if we send you onwards to Port Resolution you'll be just in time for the big show!'

Irving had a vision of Donaldson chatting with his father: Moses puffed up like a balloon and self-important in his fake American serviceman's uniform. He pictured the old man, who had never done an honest day's work in his life, immortalized in a full-page colour photo in *Latitudes and Attitudes*.

'Never fear though, I'm not gonna let ya'll starve,' Mrs. Davies was saying. 'I packed you BLTs, my special potato salad, and some papaya with fresh lime.'

Donaldson licked his lips and Ms. Keifer said it all sounded delicious.

Mrs. Davies continued, 'Ya'll will need the photo equipment, but, if you just give us a minute, Irving and I'll set aside any luggage you don't need and be back with your lunches.' Irving thought of the sandwiches and didn't know if he could eat. John Frum. Dancing. Singing. The 'big show.' He took the suitcases Donaldson and Ms. Keifer handed him and caught sight of Baby-Face grinning at him.

When he followed Mrs. Davies into the plantation house, out of earshot, she turned to him. 'I'm so sorry, Irving. I know it's uncomfortable, with your father and all. But with Dan away on a job, I really need a hand with these folks. You don't have to stick by them the whole time. Just drive them over and wait till they're done. I hope I'm not asking too much.'

Irving felt foolish, standing there with her in the middle of the lounge, a suitcase in each hand, the breeze from the ceiling fan ruffling her

short hair. What could he say? The suitcases weren't heavy, yet he only just managed to shrug his shoulders.

'Good. You're a good man, Irving. A prince. Dan and I would be lost without you. You know that, don't you?' She put a hand on his arm and he nodded. 'You can put those down, hon. I'll have one of the girls take care of them. Just hold on while I get the lunches. There's one for you, too.'

After she returned from the kitchen, before they stepped back outside with the bagged lunches, she stopped Irving just inside the door and asked in a whisper, 'Did Baby-Face pay his riding fare?'

Irving needed a moment before he could reply. His cheeks ached from the effort of keeping his face from crumpling. He looked out at Baby-Face, who was still in the back of the pickup, chatting with the Americans. When his answer came out, he almost choked on it.

'No. He wouldn't pay.' Irving looked away from Mrs. Davies. He wouldn't be able to keep his face straight if their eyes met. 'He smacked my hand. He threatened to do the same to my face.' Irving's gaze found his feet and he kept it there where it was safe. His toenails were getting long. He'd have to cut them back. 'I didn't want to make a scene, Mrs. Davies.'

'You poor thing. You poor, poor thing. Such a prince.' She reached up and touched him: a light stroke just above his ear. 'That was probably the smartest thing you could do. After what he did to that man in Lenakel...to his poor face.' She shivered. 'You did the right thing. The smart thing. Definitely.' She frowned, narrowing her eyes. 'Let's go out there and send the little monster packing.' And with that she strolled out into the sunshine, holding the lunch bags high in both hands. She sang out, 'Drive-thru, island-style!' and Irving followed her.

When she'd handed the lunches to Donaldson and Ms. Keifer, she laid her hands on the top of the truck's siding, despite the heat of its having been parked out under the blazing sun. 'Now, Antoine, you know how expensive gas is. Guests staying at the Bungalows ride for free, but I can't imagine you'd want to spend the night here when your friends must be waiting over in White Sands.'

Baby-Face's hazel eyes went wide. He reached for his orange rucksack and, for the first time since Mrs. Davies informed them of the change in itinerary, Irving felt the nausea that had swirled in his stomach, like a cold fog, begin to lift. Antoine was going to have to pay.

Baby-Face unzipped his rucksack and began rummaging around inside for coins. 'My apologies, Mrs. Davies. It's just that—Irv said I was paid up, you know? He said, "Antoine, you give me one pack of cigarettes, I take you to the other side of the island." My apologies. I thought I was paid up.'

Irving had circled around to the driver's side, so he stood face to face with Mrs. Davies across the truck, with Baby-Face and the equipment in the bed between them. The Davies had had a different driver, before Irving, but he had been unable to say 'no' to the friends and family that asked him to waive their riding fares. Mr. Davies caught him driving to the weekend market at Lenakel one day with ten of his family members from Green Point squatting in the back of the pickup and not a single fare collected. A truck cannot run without gasoline, and the drums the Davies bought off of the cargo freighters were anything but free. And so they let that driver go; he had been warned. Every now and then, Irving saw the man skulking on the roads outside of Lenakel, where people said he trolled the kava bars, praising or cursing the Davies, depending on the night. Baby-Face was still digging around in his bag. He kept casting innocent looks at everyone, his eyes round and bright as the lenses of Donaldson's sunglasses. Neither of the Americans came to Irving's defence.

'I know I have the coins, but the pack is right there—right inside the cab,' Baby-Face tapped the back window of the cab. 'Australian smokes—presents I brought back from Port Vila.' He still had a hand in his bag, but he had stopped fishing for coins.

Mrs. Davies leaned over to peer through the passenger side window. Irving couldn't to look, himself—he was frozen in place—but he didn't need to. The Americans were trying to be polite: Donaldson checking first his watch, then the sun, Ms. Keifer inspecting the contents

of her lunch bag. Irving stared at Baby-Face and the cab's back window, left open since they'd come down from the highlands, listening to Jim Croce on the tape deck the boy-faced man had once tried to steal. Irving knew the cigarettes would be there, lying on the seat, probably right under the open window. He didn't need to see Mrs. Davies straighten or hear her sniff and say to the team from Latitudes and Attitudes that the John Frum folks were nice people and to Irving that she would speak to him later that night. When he got in behind the wheel, Irving saw the pack had even fallen in such a way that the top was slightly open. One of the cork-coloured filters was sticking out, begging to be plucked from the box.

The Americans opted to ride in the back, in order to discuss the new developments in the article. Baby-Face Antoine should ride inside. Ms. Keifer insisted she didn't mind.

When Baby-Face hopped into the other seat, he slid the back window shut, and took the smoke peaking out from the pack. Then he put the pack into the orange sack on the floor between his feet, zipped it shut, and pressed the black knob of the dashboard cigarette lighter, leaning back.

Irving couldn't think to start the truck. He just sat there in the driver's seat, watching Baby-Face. He stared at the other man and thought of Mr. Davies: the big man, who had crept across his own lawn in the dark, barefoot, hammer in hand, and startled Baby-Face in the act of cutting the stereo out of the truck's dashboard. He could have hit him, Irving thought. He could have split the 'boy's' face with the hammer. It was the middle of the night, and Mr. Davies was no doubt exhausted, so he couldn't have known. But if he would have looked—really looked—Irving was sure that Mr. Davies would have seen the man lurking in the boy. And he might have hit him then. He might have beaten Baby-Face into submission and secured him for the police. But he didn't. Instead he drove Baby-Face to Whitesands. He gave him a Coke and his knife back and drove him home in the dark.

Baby-Face Antoine didn't return Irving's gaze. He tapped the interior of the passenger side window lightly, absently, with a knuckle.

When he spoke, his strange, deep voice emerged from his child's face solemn and flat, 'You think you're better than me. You change your name from Joshua to Irving. You put on an ironed shirt. You drive a white woman's truck and you think you're better than me. But I know you. I know you to the backbone.' Baby-Face stared at the depressed knob on the dashboard. When it popped out, he put the cigarette between his lips and brought the burning coil, glowing orange like a ripe date, to its tip. He leaned back against the headrest and inhaled deeply. Irving watched the dimple sink in the other man's cheek. Baby-Face exhaled, blowing a jet of rank smoke all over the cab: the dashboard, the windshield, the ceiling. He made a show of it. Then he inhaled again, more softly this time, and turned to Irving. He blew a single, tight ring of smoke at Irving's face. Irving blinked. When he opened his eyes, the smoke ring was gone. Baby-Face had his lips screwed up, pantomiming a friendly smile. Irving almost gagged. The younger man nodded his head at the road.

'Port Resolution, donkey. And drive fast.'

5.

They drove to Port Resolution with hardly a word. Not far past the Friendly Bungalows the road began to fade until it was little more than a wide ditch between two high hummocks of grey dirt, crowned with yellowed weeds. Then this ditch likewise faded and they were out upon the hard-packed flats of the ash plains. Irving was lost in his own head; he drove as if on autopilot. Remembering the Americans in the back at the last minute, he shouted through the cab window for them to cover their faces against the dust kicked up by the tires. All vegetation was gone, all traces of it buried under the constant fall of ash generated by Yasur Volcano's active vents. Irving navigated the white pickup across the blighted stretch with the smoking mountain as his sole marker. He had grown up in this area before he grew out of it. The way was as familiar to him as anything.

Baby-Face was napping in the passenger seat and the Americans were silent in the truck bed, their shirts pulled up over their faces, sealing their noses and mouths against the grit. The sun was a muted white disk, a dull pearl centred in the grey. Irving tried not to think about the scene back at the Bungalows, the look of disappointment Mrs. Davies fixed on him before she sent them on their way. Where he had hoped to have a picture in Donaldson's article, maybe a note about his plans for a gas station, now he could only hope to escape any mention at all. Scarce chance of that, however. Most likely he would be written up in connection to his father, the self-proclaimed prophet of some mad bush-cult, a scam-artist and good-for-nothing. Irving saw no way he could keep the truth from them.

There was an expression the Davies often used with their children. When they were warning them off of playing with this child or that, they often claimed it was to avoid 'guilt by association.' Irving found meaning in this term in his relationship with his father, Moses. If one of the Davies boys was sent home from the missionary school for involvement in a fight, it made no difference if he'd only been watching nearby, Mrs. Davies would tell him. You were guilty by association. Likewise, when people cursed the John Frum believers for being troublemakers, for being lazy with their sitting around, waiting for their saviour to return and drop his Cargo from the sky, they did so with a sideways glance for Irving. What does it matter that this man works, that this driver never fails to demand the riding fare, that this ni-Van has ideas for a gas station? His father is the worst of the good-for-nothings—a chief of fools—and so Irving must be the same. Like father, like son.

But if his Moses's position among the John Frumists was a curse, it was also a blessing for Irving. Over the course of Irving's life, Moses was imprisoned in far away Port Vila as often as not. He had even shared a cell with Jimmy Stevens, the infamous leader of the Coconut War in the northern islands, and it was said that Moses almost made a believer of the rebel. But this was before someone set fire to the prison mess and the system changed. Many claimed that Moses had set the fire, making a

beacon for John Frum in a fit of prophecy, but others had heard he had nothing to do with it.

Tales of imprisonments, stories from the Big War where he acted as a coast-watcher for the American troops on Santo, and his accounts of one-on-one conversations with John Frum had made Irving's father a big man on Tanna. And for decades, whenever he chanced to be home between prison spells, he had led the dances and sing-alongs of the John Frumists. Renown powered Moses's life, but, by chance, Irving had been there when this engine first began to fail.

When the islands held elections in 1979, ahead of Vanuatu's independence from the Franco-British Condominium, Moses helped create a phony platform, running John Frum for prime minister with Jimmy Carter, the sitting American President, as John's deputy. When Father Lini, an ordained Anglican priest from the island of Pentecost, was elected as Vanuatu's first prime minister instead, Moses talked of leading the people of eastern Tanna in a movement for secession, earning himself a 5-year prison sentence in Port Vila for sedition. In his absence, all talks of secession disappeared, buried, like tracks on the ash plain, under the thrill of a new beginning for the new nation, free of colonial powers. The John Frum Movement floundered as well, quietly losing followers to the congregations of the Seventh Day Adventist and Presbyterian churches.

Moses had must have gotten word, in prison, of the situation amongst his flock. Irving never understood how, but his father had always been able to maintain some sort of communication with his people on Tanna, despite the bars and concrete that kept him far away. He had managed to get word to them, before his release, that John had appeared to him in his prison cell and that there would be a new message for the believers upon the prophet's arrival, back on Tanna. Like worms after a hard rain, rumours had sprung up everywhere: when he returned, Moses would be accompanied by Jesus Christ and John the Baptist, who would herald the second coming of John Frum; the American army, long hidden in the vents of Yasur Volcano, would be called forth with John as Supreme Commander of the new Pacific Front; Yasur was actually the sleeping

giant of local myth, a demon defeated by the first boy-chief of Tanna, and the volcano-demon would awake and carry John off into a renewed war against the Japanese; the wreck of the S.S. Coolidge would rise off the coast of Santo, and Moses would salvage all the treasured Cargo sunk at Million Dollar Point, whereupon he and Prime Minister Lini, the native preacher from Pentecost, would broker a deal to purchase America from John; the Europeans would ask for delegates from Tanna, that they might exchange their technology for the secret rituals of *kastom*; the ancestors would rise from their graves with white faces; there would be a feast of pigs that would last for years, and death itself would die.

When Moses did finally return to Tanna after serving his time for sedition, arriving aboard a cargo ship that came into port at Lenakel on the west coast, the faithful were waiting. Despite heckling and warnings from the government representatives in Isangel, they had hiked across the breadth of the island, their children strapped across their backs, freighting all the food they could spare the U.S. troops that would be arriving with Moses. The women had dressed in bright colours, donning the skirts and headdresses they reserved for ceremony, the men who had such outfits had dressed in the khaki button-downs and slacks of American servicemen and the elders had encircled themselves with ill-fitting sashes adorned with decorations of scrap. They had fashioned mock-rifles from wood and the cast-offs from junked machinery. One young man had even dismantled his motorbike, the only one in all the towns east of the mountains, parcelling out the metal to accent wooden rifles that would never shoot for he and his three brothers. Surely John would provide him with a new motorcycle. Crossing through the highlands, the faithful had inspired spontaneous revivals amongst the *kastom* villages of Fetukai, Middle Bush, and other villages too small to have names known beyond their own people. There had been singing and dancing long into the night, pig-killings, and betrothals. Rivalries between clans had been forgotten, and enemies had sat down to feast together. All could be eaten, all gifted to friends. Moses had sent word from his cell in Vila: John Frum was coming—his love all consuming, all giving. And so the

inspired faithful were lining the quay, exhausted from their journey, yet still animated, with fervour burning upon their faces, open hearts and empty hands, when the ship that bore Moses home anchored in the harbour at Lenakel.

Irving had long ago denounced his father's beliefs. He had called Moses a charlatan to his face and for it his father had crumpled him with a single blow. Irving had scrupulously avoided Moses after that, but the Davies family had drums of gasoline that were being shipped on the same boat Moses was on; one of Irving's jobs was to receive incoming cargoes for the bungalows, so was waiting there at Lenakel that day as well, and so he witnessed the spectacle from a distance, on a low bluff, overlooking the wharf and thronging crowd. Something had been wrong from the start. The captain had anchored the ship in the harbour, rather than coming in to dock at the L-shaped, concrete quay. The faithful didn't understand. They called out to the ship for Moses, for the cargo that was promised. Where was Jesus? Where was John the Baptist? Where was Prime Minister Lini?

Irving had been sharing a cigarette with some government staffers, who had driven one of their Jeeps up from the offices in Isangel to observe the goings-on. They had looked important, in collared short-sleeve shirts and dark linen slacks. They had been some of the first black men to hold elected offices on Tanna, and with them, Irving had watched the growing tension of the crowd and the silent response of the ship out in the harbour. Irving remembered one of the men saying, almost jovially, 'Here comes trouble.'

A scuffle had broken out between a few of the young men in the crowd, the swarm of bodies roiling like a kicked termite mound, but then the elders quelled the disturbance. Escaping the excitement, the women took their small children back to the beach at the edges of the flock, where the non-John Frumers were waiting for the ship to come up to the wharf and let the legitimate cargo be unloaded. The John Frum elders stood at the end of the dock, in their glinting sashes and brimless service caps, backed by the younger men, shaking fists at the boat and demanding the

release of Moses and the Cargo. No response came from the ship. The captain had not emerged from the wheelhouse and the men above deck were unimpressed, unintimidated by the costumed rabble.

Most of the government men Irving smoked with had been to the national offices in Port Vila, at one point or another. They said the John Frum Cult was generally regarded as a hoax outside of Tanna: a desperate superstition, perpetrated on the ignorant by men like Moses, or an unruly form of dissent against the old French and British colonials at best. Irving did not reveal that Moses was his father, but he had little doubt they knew. The looks the men exchanged when not addressing Irving to his face seemed pregnant with some joke being had at his expense. As it was, the crew of the ship waiting in the harbour didn't seem overly concerned with the shouting congregation until a handful of young men stripped down and began swimming out to the hulking freighter.

The captain emerged from the wheelhouse then. A squat man, black as bike tire, he wore a camouflage t-shirt and a short-brimmed naval cap. He yelled at the crew, directing them into the wheelhouse where they armed themselves with gaff hooks on long poles and short, polished clubs. Irving, the government men and the John Frumists on the wharf all watched alike as the shipping vessel's crew took to the deck rails, angry now, and leaned out to wave their weapons menacingly at the men treading water below. One of the swimmers tried to climb the anchor chain, but it was greased and too thin to provide much purchase. He fell off several times and returned to treading, the crew's laughter too stiff a defence against further approach. Through all the theatrics the captain kept scowling at the rabble jamming up the wharf and stomping across the deck to howl things down into the passengers' berths.

The non-believers were losing patience: the John Frumers were standing between them and people and goods they were expecting to come off the ship. Families who had come to meet kin returning from other islands, merchants who were waiting to purchase goods for retail and staff from the hospital there to pickup medical supplies all started shouting and gesturing to John Frumers to clear off from the wharf. Too

intimidated to march through press of believers and down to the end of the quay, these people started in on the gaily-dressed Frumer women, who had brought their children out of the thick of things and huddled together at the fringe. Arguments started, and some of the children began to wail where they hid behind their mothers' legs or lay tucked against their breasts. This drew the attention of the young Frum men and elders. Fathers, brothers and sons left off cursing the captain and his crew. They turned to meet the furious crowd behind them, and the boundary between believers and non-believers erupted into threats and shoving. A violent, jagged line flashed in and out of sight between the groups. Men threw punches across the divide and were repelled, and the women and children screamed as bodies—both familiar and hostile—crashed into them and they found themselves engulfed or hauled out of group or the other.

Sitting in the cab, the wind whipping clouds of grey dust across the ash plain and buffeting the truck, Irving stuck to the straightest, most efficient route he knew through the waste. The American's were silent in the back. Irving would have loved to put on some music, but Baby-Face was mercifully asleep in the passenger seat. There was little to distract him from his own thoughts, little to stop him from recalling that day on the bluff at Lenakel and the memories from flooding in..

The government staffers, who had laughed when the John Frumer had tried to climb the ship's anchor line, had grown nervous and unsure of what to do about the fighting. Irving had kept his eyes on the ship captain, who stormed to the wheelhouse once again, stumping across the deck on his squat legs. When he came out, he shouted to his men, and two lanky crew members jumped to life from where they had been leaning over the deck rails trying to spit on the John Frumers still swimming below. At the captain's word, they ran over to the stairwell at the middle of the ship and thumped down the steps into the lower decks. Irving made out a pistol in the captain's hand, no bigger than a tack, dully reflecting the sunlight like a spot of tar.

The fighting on the wharf had gotten worse, where members from each side had been pulled by the tides of mad shoving deep into the opposing party's ranks. These castaways thrashed about in the pockets surrounding them, trying to fight or plead their way out, their faces desperate, hateful. The situation was getting out of hand. The men from Isangel were at a loss for what to do, deciding to drive back to the government offices for guns and reinforcements. The man who had said, 'Here comes trouble,' warned Irving that he'd better get himself and the truck out of there; that the mob might turn on him. Then the Jeep peeled out, swinging in a shallow arc away from the scene unfolding below, the tires sent a stinging spray of dust and gravel across Irving, pinging off the white side of the Friendly Bungalows truck.

On the beach, a group of cowboys from the White Grass Plains had isolated a John Frum worshiper. The man had a wide flap of skin missing where someone had stomped his forehead. He wove around in the circle of cowboys, swinging his arms as if he were fighting in his sleep, the torn patch on his forehead gumming his eyes in a blindfold of blood. Out on the ship, Irving saw the crewmembers that had disappeared below decks dragging someone up the stair. The captain was watching this, too, hollering at them and waving his pistol. The captive was hopelessly skinny, his shirt hanging limply from one shoulder, torn in the struggle to get him above decks. Only the wild bush of hair, gone patriarchal-white, perched on his father's head like a gull, convinced Irving that the emaciated man being shoved against the rails was Moses. Raising the gun high above his head, as if he were going to start a race, the captain cracked off a single round that killed all fighting on the beach and quay, but sounded to Irving no louder than the striking of a match.

Now the crewmen held Moses in front of the captain, who was speaking to the skinny man, gesturing to the stilled chaos on the wharf with the hand opposite the one that held the gun. The John Frumers who had swum out to the ship must have heard what he was saying. They started yelling and slapping the surface of the water, looking for all the world as if they were drowning. Some had tired and were dangling from

the anchor chain, but those still treading alongside the ship paddled closer, banging fists against the hull. The captain bellowed something at them, leaning over the rail with the pistol threatening, skipping his aim from head to bobbing head until the swimmers went silent. Then he turned back to Moses, again speaking, again pointing. The old man merely shook his head slowly, as if he could only understand half of the words being said to him, and liked none of them. The captain argued harder, his gestures more violent, thrusting the gun at Moses's chest as if it were a finger. Irving's father shook his head faster now, his ridiculous crown of hair shaking like a briar with some small animal trembling inside. The captain's men shook him, casting glances at the crowd of faithful drifting away from their interrupted battles to form up again at the end of the quay. Then the captain took a step back from Moses, levelling the barrel of the gun at the old prophet's face, starved thin as a foot, and issued some quiet ultimatum. The swimmers started yelling again, but held back from touching the ship's side. A word from the captain and the sailors quit shaking the old man. Moses was talking now, and captain appeared to be listening. From his spot high on the ridge, Irving could well imagine his father's voice, the rich, slow words floating out of him as they had always done, percolating up, almost effortlessly, from the old man's well of slick chicanery.

Whether the captain actually meant to shoot him or not, whatever Moses said made him turn away in disgust, jamming his naval cap down on his head with both hands, the pistol still in one fist. He stomped off, gesturing to the crewman holding Moses, ducking into the wheelhouse without looking back. Moses barely had time to flinch before the crewmen had him up and over the rail, spinning through ten meters of freeboard and empty air, hitting the water with a slap.

A loud rattle started issuing from within the ship, and the anchor began to disappear, link by link, into its housing in the prow. Standing by his truck on the hill, Irving watched a mesmerizing transference as the John Frum worshipers and non-believers, who had fought only minutes ago, melted into and through each other without a single blow, the

Frumists making their way to the beach where the swimmers were emerging with Moses in tow, and everyone else dashing to the end of the wharf to howl at the ship preparing to put back out to sea with all of the goods inside. The other passengers on board the ship, who had been made to stay below decks during the conflict, now came rushing up the stair, throwing themselves and their luggage over the handrails. Last came two women with small children, and the captain had the crew lower them to the water in a lifeboat. The women passed their children over the side of the tiny craft into the hands of the swimming Frumers, then clambered into the water themselves, taking the crying children back from that strange baptism, and paddling into shore, their shapeless dresses spread out around them like lily-pads.

Down on the beach, the John Frum worshipers were helping Moses out of the rolling surf, two of the faithful holding him slung between them not unlike the ship's crewmen had. Where is John? Where is the Cargo? Irving could hear the questions clearly, but Moses seemed lost in a dream, and Irving tried to spot the young man with the bloody eyes, who had been fighting the cowboys, but he could not find him. The John Frum elders, Moses's friends and peers, waved back the rest of the flock, tunnelling through the gauntlet, ushering Moses back from the beach to sit in the shade of a cypress tree.

The ship had started its engines as soon as the women and children had swum a safe distance away, the pistons hammering inside, sending the craft slowly out into the deep, floating and plunging through the swells. The government staffers from Isangel returned just in time to keep the crowd out on the quay from attacking the John Frumists again for having scared off the ship. A few of the men, important in their slacks and collared shirts, wove through the two crowds, attempting to dispense peace and calm. He pointed to their reinforcements atop the hill—two jeeps bristling with men and rifles—when soothing words failed.

As Irving would hear the story later, the captain had demanded that Moses tell the worshipers that he was a fake, that there was no mythical Cargo for them on the ship, or anywhere for that matter. What

Moses said in reply to the captain's question of why he shouldn't empty his brain right on the deck like a netted shark, was not clear. Most had it that Moses threatened to call down the wrath of John and God on the ship, cursing the crew to a harbourless eternity where they'd have but saltwater to drink. Others said Moses offered the captain lands overseas, on behalf of John Frum, to be granted when America annexed Vanuatu. Some claimed to have had it from the crew members themselves, years later, that Moses simply said, 'I am Cargo,' angling his head out to the believers, 'Let them have me.'

It mattered little to Irving. In the nearly ten years between then and now, he had scarcely thought about what his father might have said. And in all the rare occasions during that time, when Irving couldn't possibly avoid Moses for one reason or another, he never bothered to ask the old man. On that day in Lenakel, Irving had watched the cargo boat spear out of harbour, leaving an apron of foam in its wake. Without a word to the Isangel men, poised with their guns on the hill, eyeing him with suspicion, Irving had backed off of the bluff in reverse. Then he turned onto the road that would take him up through the highlands, down the switchbacks, and across the eastern flats to the Friendly Bungalows Resort, where he would have to explain to Mister and Mrs. Davies how there would be no gasoline—for several weeks, at the very earliest.

The truck reached the far side of the ash plain, and Irving relished the green was starting to crop up before them. There came a soft rapping against the windowpane behind his head. It was Donaldson. He had a huge smile on his face, full of blackened teeth where soot had gotten in, mixing with saliva to make an inky pigment in his mouth. The wind, curling down from across the top of the cab, was lifting the American's hair back from his head, so that the white face, with its grisly smile, its empty sunglass lenses and billowing mane, floated over the shirt collar below like a burning skull. Grinning, Donaldson pointed at the Volcano behind them and gave Irving a hearty thumbs-up. The image disturbed him, but Irving was more than happy to escape from his own thoughts. He nodded to Donaldson, turning his eyes back to the road ahead.

Only a thick swatch of jungle remained between them and Port Resolution, the rough trailhead cutting into the wall of green right where Irving knew it would be. Baby-Face twitched in his sleep, snorting like a hog. Surely Mrs. Davies couldn't believe he'd take a bribe. Of cigarettes? From this man? Wake up you bastard, Irving thought, eyeing the other man's boyish profile. You black-hearted bastard. Irving twisted the volume dial up to full before pressing the power button on the dashboard radio.

News of the American conflict in Iraq blasted from the speakers, and even though he was prepared for it, the sound was so loud it pressed against Irving's eardrums like someone jamming fingers into his brain. Dogfights were exploding over the Arab desert; the Kuwaiti people would soon be liberated. Irving held the wheel straight as the truck hit the jungle road, enduring the volume, waiting until he saw the flickering of an eyelash, the raising of the lid, and then the pretty hazel iris, the pupil searching for focus, hovering in Baby-Face Antoine's bloodshot eye. Then Irving killed the radio.

6.

At Port Resolution the jungle road spilled into an immense lawn. The grass gleamed in the late afternoon sunlight. Next to a small bamboo piazza, posted at the far end of the field's gentle rise, was a bright red cross. This was the enduring symbol of the John Frum Movement—a painted replica of the heraldry of the American Red Cross that had been ubiquitous during the Pacific War. Lying on the ground behind it, like a chalk line demarcating the entrance to the village, was the white mast of a wrecked yacht, some thirty feet in length, that no one had quite found a use for yet. On opposite ends of the clearing bamboo brackets had been fashioned into goal posts and out on the grass some thirty young men in their teens were playing football.

When the group from Friendly Bungalows emerged from the brambles, Baby-Face cried back to Ms. Keifer, 'You see, there are the boys! There is my brother's team!' Then he hissed to Irving, 'Blow the horn. You blow that fucking horn,' before he climbed half-out the S-10's moving window, seating himself on the sill, so everyone could see what a big-shot he was, riding in the cab. Irving gave the centre of the steering wheel a short punch. The horn sent a single squawk out amongst the players and spectators seated on the grass. The crowd responded with a cheer.

The boys on the field made space and Irving drove slowly, right through the centre of the game. The players patted the hood and sides of the truck. They plucked and waved at the two Americans smiling in the back, and some of the boys greeted Baby-Face the island way, taking his knuckle between two of theirs, then pulling their hands apart with a gentle pop. Both Ms. Keifer and Donaldson were standing in the truck bed. Irving could not see them in the mirrors, but he could hear their voices through the roof of the cab, shouting 'Hello! Hello!'

Some of the people Irving knew to be John Frumers, but there were just as many Catholics, Presbyterians and *kastom* followers relaxing on the rise below the cross. He scanned the various groups for his father, then the houses beyond the clearing and the trailheads that led back to the sea and the kava grounds. There was no sign of Moses or his lieutenants.

Irving parked at the top of the rise, a little ways away from the cross. All the noise and cheering had brought the whole village out. Irving saw Werry, the acting chief, break off from the conversation he was having with a pretty girl to make his way over to the pickup. Werry was a handsome man, just thirty, with skin the colour of milk chocolate, a cap of dark hair, and a trimmed goatee framing his smile. He was dressed in a navy polo with black shorts and rubber sandals. He was the old chief's firstborn son and friendly to everyone, but before dying of a flu, his father had passed the title of chief onto Werry's younger brother, Ramuro, who was attending university in Port Vila.

The chiefs of Port Resolution had been Christian for generations, ever since they had protected the first Presbyterian missionaries against rival tribes that would have eaten them. The Port Resolution Yacht Club was built on the foundation of that first church, and next to it was a huge headstone marking the grave of a long-dead missionary said to have been killed by the black magic of a native sorcerer. Despite the village's ties to the Christian church, Werry's father had never tolerated any ill-will against the primarily John Frum worshiping people of nearby Sulphur Bay. And so with his mother dead and his father unable to prevent the education from behind bars, Irving had been welcomed into the care of Port Resolution's mission school.

Though Werry was a bit younger, Irving had entered the school late, on account of his father. The two of them and another man, Willie, who ran the Yacht Club, had been friends and classmates. His hands loose on the wheel, watching the acting chief approaching the driver's side window with a grin, Irving was reminded of his happiest days, days stolen while his father was imprisoned in Vila, when he, Werry, and Willie would play cards for a handful of nude pinups they shared, cut out of a magazine that they had gotten from a departing Peace Corps worker. They would sit under a mango tree during weekends when the other boys would return home and Werry would shuffle the deck with that same grin, repeating their inside joke, 'This is the way we do it...when the girls are not around.' Irving smiled at the thought of those glossy, crinkled pages and the women pictured on them. They were so predictable, he and his friends. Willie and Werry always battled over the blondes. They never let anyone leave the game empty handed, so Willy and Werry could afford to be cocky and impulsive with their bets. Irving, on the other hand, played conservatively, saving the strongest wagers he could muster for the dark-haired woman, the sole brunette in the pile. She was beautiful and white, like all the girls in the magazine, but something about her, some maturity, fascinated him. The blondes always seemed surprised or frivolous as they roller-skated naked or stood up in the bath, soap bubbles mounded in their hands. Compared to these the brunette seemed subtle. She stood in

profile in the outdoors, looking over one shoulder, her forearms braced against a tree. She hardly even smiled and Irving liked this about her. He liked that she was different. He liked to think that she was slightly older, possibly. That she had seen a little more of life, and come to understand the gravity of desire.

Werry, still grinning, knocked lightly on the window. Irving rolled it down.

'Halo Irving. Long time, no see.' He reached a hand in, but when Irving took it Werry switched his grip, so they were thumb wrestling, 'Still strong! You're still masturbating, I see.'

Irving laughed, despite himself, wriggling his hand free before he got pinned. His face was hot. He cast a glance back through the cab window, but the Americans were busy discussing something and hadn't seen. Baby-Face had folded himself down on the windowsill so that part of his sneering face was looking into the cab.

'So you're calling him that now too?' Baby-Face said, snorting.

Werry shrugged. 'I call my friends what they want to be called, Baby-Face,' he said, pushing the syllables of Antoine's nickname ever so subtly. Irving could have reached up and patted his younger friend's cheek. Baby-Face turned away from the window and spat. Werry winked at Irving, but then his face clouded over and he said, too low for anyone else to hear, 'You need to find Willie up at the Club. Something about your father.'

Irving nodded, then he looked to the Americans in the back. They had finished their discussion and were waiting to be introduced. 'This is a team from *Latitudes and Attitudes*: a big American travel magazine. They are staying with us at the Bungalows.'

Werry reached up to Donaldson's hand, then Ms. Keifer's.
'Welcome to Port Resolution. I'm Werry.'

Donaldson jumped down from the truck while Ms. Keifer took the opportunity to undo her ponytail. She sat down and began combing out tangles from the ride with a man's black plastic comb she took from the pocket of her shorts. Irving watched her in the rear-view mirror. She bent

forward at the waist and tilted her head towards the comb, the brassy curtain of her hair draping just above her thigh. Irving was reminded again of the pinups. Ms. Keifer was wearing clothes, and nowhere near as pretty, but the pose was strikingly similar. Werry didn't seem to notice anything in her posture, but Baby-Face did. He had slid back into his seat and he watched her through the cab window. It seemed to Irving that the green spokes in his hazel eyes were spinning in the irises, revolving around the pupil's black peg. It wasn't right—the way he was looking at her: leaning forward, making no effort to disguise his interest. Irving didn't want the photographer to see him. Ms. Keifer had worked the worst of the tangles out, and now she was sweeping the comb in long, smooth strokes from root to tip. Irving wished that she would stop. She didn't seem to understand the attention that she was drawing to herself. Her hair looked straight enough to him. Why did she persist? Then it struck him. Perhaps she knew Baby-Face was leering at her. Had she seen him and looked away? Was she trapped there by his gaze, her own eyes seeking safety in the truck bed's blank floor?

'Antoine,' he said. Then, louder, 'Antoine!'

This got the other man's attention. He rolled his eyes as he turned to look at Irving. He waited.

'Roll the window up when you get out.' Irving said it quietly, in a voice he hoped was neutral but assured.

Baby-Face regarded him flatly for a moment. Then his face broke into a grin. He flicked a glance at the photographer, then gave Irving a conspiratorial look, wriggling his eyebrows in appreciation. Irving felt sick—the palms of his hands had gone clammy. It was all right though. Ms. Keifer was free. She had put her comb away and was rummaging in her bags for something else. Irving got out of the truck, trying not to rush his exit.

'So Werry, you the chief around here?' Donaldson boomed, slapping his stomach and arching back until his spine popped. 'Julie packed us a lunch back at the bungalows, but we'd love to throw a little business the way of anyone that could top us off. Right Gretch?'

Ms. Keifer gave Werry a relaxed smile, putting her hair back into its ponytail 'Some boiled water would be nice.'

'They're here to see the John Frumers-HAH!' Baby-Face laughed. He got out of the truck, leaving the window down. 'I ask them back at my grandfather's plantation—I ask them, "Why go all the way to Port Rez to talk to John Frumers?"' He slapped the top of the truck's cab, cuing them for some joke. 'Funny thing, you know, that I don't tell them how close they can find one!' Irving watched the Americans look at one another. If it was a joke, they were waiting for Baby-Face to deliver the punch line.

It was as if all the sunlight in the great clearing had dilated to a single beam, lancing down on Irving. He felt the heat scorching his neck. It shimmered off the shoulders of his ironed shirt. He waited for Baby-Face's eyes to hit him, to see the man-boy's lips twist into a smirk and then begin forming the words that would expose him. Here is where he does it, Irving thought. Here is where he tells them.

But Baby-Face left off. He retreated into the truck and Irving watched stupidly as he grabbed his orange sack off of the floor. He slammed the door with a broad, toothy smile and hung one of his Australian cigarettes from his lips. 'Good-for-nothing John Frumers,' he chuckled. He set his bag in the truck bed next to Ms. Keifer's bare legs so he could rasp a match along its zipper. Then he raised the cupped and flickering flame to his mouth as if to drink it.

Werry studied Baby-Face's theatrics with amusement, then said, 'Your brother's out there on the field, Antoine. Why don't you go kick it around with the boys.' He turned to Donaldson and Ms. Keifer, 'I'm not the chief, Mr. Donaldson, my brother is, but he's away at university, and so I keep an eye on things. Why don't you two come with me? If you're hungry, my girlfriend will fix us something. Irving, I'll see you up at the Club.'

Ms. Keifer crossed the bed and hopped over the side, landing squarely, 'Sounds great, Werry.'

Irving looked at Donaldson. Baby-Face was reflected in the chrome lenses of the man's sunglasses, and Irving thought he saw a smile

twitching at the corners of American's mouth before he turned away. Baby-Face, alone on the other side of the truck, shrugged at no one in particular. He took up his bag and walked off down the slope.

The football game was resuming, the arrival of the truck with the Americans having provided a break. The two teams were squared off against each other across an imaginary midfield line, with the ball at the feet of a shirtless boy who was playing barefoot. Baby-Face's brother was next to him, wearing Adidas shoes his brother must have acquired for him in Vila. A young man, a *kastom* follower Irving recognized from Middle Bush, was refereeing the game and stood in front of the two boys. Irving watched him look to both goalies, making sure they were fit to start. The goalies raised their hands, to signal they were ready, and the referee stepped away from the centre, whistling with his fingers to start the game. The shirtless boy tapped the black and white ball to the right even before whistle's piercing note had pinched shut. From the back of the crowd, Baby-Face Antoine screamed, 'SHOOT!' and his little brother hammered forward, firing a searing shot through the flat-footed defenders before any of them could step in front. It caught the goalie unawares as well. He leapt sideways, extending to his limits, but his hands weren't strong enough to push the shot wide. The ball ricocheted off the bamboo post and through the net-less goal.

The crowd erupted.

Before Werry ushered the Americans into the village, past the red cross of the John Frum Movement and the mast from the shattered boat, they saw Baby-Face grinning amongst the cheering spectators. The man-boy from White Sand's eyes were horribly wide, gaping, and empty of anything save the madness of some fanatical triumph, as if this were what his money-making, his mugging and thieving up in Vila, earned him—the power to run these ragged boys, to buy their hearts with stolen presents, to send them chasing across the fields for glory and a pair of shoes, shooting when he screamed for it. He was pointing, directing Irving and the rest out to the scene on the lawn, where players on both sides were shoving each other out of sheer enthusiasm. Baby-Face's brother, the

pride of the All-Tanna football team, was running in circles at midfield, the waist of his threadbare shirt pulled up over his head, covering his face, his arms stretched out like the wings of plane. A harmless thing, happy even, but before Werry led the Americans away, Irving assured them that their things would be safe with him.

7.

Alone in the truck, steering around the perimeter so as not to interrupt the game, Irving headed for the old mission bell, twined in Bougainvillea, where the trail to the Yewao Point and Port Resolution's bay began. Beside it was the Presbyterian church, open-aired and island-style, with its roof of thick thatch bleached from sun and the salty coastal air. Irving slowed the truck to glance at messages written on the large chalkboard standing beside the tiny stone-lined path that led inside the church. He recognized the Biblical verse and elegant script as Reverend Tom's:

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed.

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed.

(Corinthians 15:51-52)

Below it, in large, simple letters, someone had written, 'Come John Frum. Dancing tonight. Hello Friends,' and, in an erratic slant along the bottom of the board, a message said, 'Lucy Namalkin, findem mother biilong yu!'

Beyond the little church there was a small garden with perfectly parallel rows of island spinach laid out in the sandy ground, a few fat tomatoes growing on vines tied with string to wooden dowels, and at the far end Irving passed the privy, the whitewashed stall that housed it sailing gently across his window. He rounded a steep bend, up under a

cool canopy of ironwood, where the truck swayed left and right in the ruts. Then the road fanned out into a wide clearing that looked out over the bay. Here the Port Resolution Yacht Club stood, in the slight shade of a mango and some papaya trees, on the foundation of Tanna's first mission.

The club was wooden and rectangular, shaped like a brick on its side, with a modest closed kitchen and bar at one end, the other three sides split halfway up their walls to permit a wide, windowless view of the bay. It was painted red like the American barns and schoolhouses Irving had seen in books, and beyond it the bay's thin ribbon was visible over the cliff's edge, a blade of bluest blue, fenced off with bamboo rails for safety.

Parking behind the kitchen, Irving rolled up the truck's windows. Inside the Yacht Club, Irving found his other childhood friend, Willie, seated on a folding wooden chair, chewing on the soggy, purple end of a sugarcane stalk. He was humming between bites and reading *Seen!*, a glossy celebrity magazine out of Australia. Princess Diana was on the cover and the headline read, 'How Much Should She Endure?' The radio on the bar was repeating the week's broadcast of 'Mi Hearum Say!', and when Irving approached, smiling, his friend tossed what was left of the sugarcane aside and the two of them snapped knuckles, the island way. A bit of sugary drool had fallen onto the magazine and Willie wiped this away with the hem of his singlet, then smiled at his friend.

Willie's teeth were the best Irving had ever seen on any man: large, straight and perfectly stainless. The face around his smile was raw-boned though, with a jutting forehead and cheekbones, and a cleft chin thrust out like a handshake. He was only thirty-four, but he looked half a dozen years older—closer to Irving's age. He had never said as much to Willie, but Irving suspected that fear of being mistaken for being older, rather than personal pride or vanity, was what compelled his friend to do one hundred push-ups a day, moisturize religiously with coconut oil and show his arms off in tank-tops and, on special occasions, a sleeveless Chicago Bulls jersey he'd sent away for by mail.

Willie gestured at the copy of *Seen!*. 'Poor Princess Diana,' he said, his voice heavy. 'This Charles...I don't think he treats her right.'

Irving took the magazine from his friend's lap.

'She is beautiful, she gives him two sons, she is nice to people all over the world,' Willie continued, 'This Charles. What more does he want?'

'Where did you get this?' Irving asked, flipping through the pages. He lingered on a full-page advertisement of a white Land Rover being inspected by a circle of lions. The jeep was off-centre in a flat, beautiful landscape thick with yellow grass, and Irving was reminded of the pale horse in the White Grass Plains for the second time that day.

'There's a yachtie out there,' Willie said, nodding his head in the direction of the bay. 'She gave it to me.'

Irving's friend got up and walked over through the door that led back into the kitchen and bar. The bar wasn't really a bar, so much as a long serving window through which drinks could be passed. Willie kept the liquor in a closed cabinet inside the room behind the window. Both the door and the solid panel that could swing down on hinges to close the window had heavy padlocks. Irving and Willie often chatted about their work, and Irving knew the door and panel were closed more often than open. Hanging from a peg near the door was a yacht buoy with chips in the Styrofoam and writing scrawled all over in black marker. It and the magazine were the only new additions to the place that Irving could see.

'She?' he asked.

'It's a woman. Sailing solo,' Willie said, his voice soft and nearly swallowed by the dark room. 'She's South African.' He emerged with two beers. Tusker. Bottled in Port Vila. In Vanuatu, the joke was that there were two kinds of beer. Tusker, which came in cans and bottles, and 'black man's beer' which was kava. Irving thanked him.

'That's new,' Irving said, pointing with his bottle to where the buoy hung on the wall.

'Not so new, friend. You haven't been around.'

'Sorry, I've been busy on the other side. I ferried all the lumber for the new plant nursery in Isangel. We were short on guests so the Davies suggested I help and use the truck. I had to pay for the gas and a small fee for wear-and-tear, but I saved the rest.'

'How is the gas station going?' Willie asked. He leaned forward with what seemed like real interest, the bottle in his hand still awaiting its first sip.

How was it going, Irving wondered. He thought of the savings from piecework and his job at the Bungalows, which he wired monthly from Fat-Man Jonah's store in Lenakel up to the ANZ Bank in Port Vila. Not much there, but there was also the promise of help he'd gotten from the Kiwi who owned the Tanna Coffee plantation in the western highlands. He only needed a few more promises like that. Maybe Donaldson and Ms. Keifer couldn't help him directly, but Irving held out hope that if their article went well, if they left with a good impression of Tanna, of the Bungalows, of him, more guests would come. More tips. More potential investors. More tourists coming to see the island and needing to be driven around.

He'd thought it all out: showing Donaldson and Ms. Keifer Black Sand Beach on the northwest coast, the flower nursery at Isangel, the good hospital, the hot springs welling up between the stones at Yakuveran where the local people still boiled eggs. Ms. Keifer would take the photos and, while she changed rolls or lenses, she would ask Irving to recruit some nice local people he knew to be included in the shots. Donaldson would take down all Irving could tell him about these places and their stories in the slim leather notebook Irving noticed in the writer's back pocket. He would chuckle at how fast his pencil had gone dull and Irving would produce from the truck's glove box the little pencil sharpener he had bought for just such an occasion. And in the quiet, when he drove them between these attractions, Irving would tell these new friends of his plans for the gas station, politely, so as not to offend. But then there'd been Baby-Face. And now the Americans wanted John Frum.

Still, Irving thought, maybe there was still time. His father hadn't come down from Sulphur Bay yet. Maybe Irving could bring the Americans here to the Club, to speak with Willie about the Movement: he was a John Frumist, and not a fanatic. They could hear some stories, maybe photograph the red cross, and go before things got started. Before Moses arrived. But even if they avoided the whole thing, the Americans hadn't said a word to Irving since Baby-Face's lies at the Friendly Bungalows. There was only Donaldson's thumbs-up on the ash plain. And hadn't Mrs. Davies looked at him funny? A flash of uncertainty—like she'd seen something new in him, something she didn't like? Irving was sure he'd seen it. What would she say to him when they returned the Bungalows, when the Americans were fed and settled and it was just the two of them. *The truck cannot run without gasoline.* Would it be that again? *Gas is expensive. Carrying cargo burns it faster. People are cargo* and all the rest?

Did she think that he'd forgotten the old driver? Could she really believe he would make a deal with Baby-Face, that he would make such a deal with anyone?

No, Irving thought. She couldn't. Whatever look he thought Mrs. Davies had given him, whatever thought might lay behind it, Irving was certain that it was only the shock of a single moment. With time enough to think, she would compare Baby-Face's word and Irving's years of faithful service and see there was no comparison at all.

It struck Irving that he'd been selling his employer short: here he was, dreading what she would say and do to him when she had probably cleared him of all wrongdoing already. There was the initial surprise, of course, but Baby-Face's word over his? After they drove off she'd probably worked it all out and had a good laugh. Irving pictured it: her laughing and dabbing at the corners of her eyes with a napkin where tears were making her rare touch of mascara run. She'd probably sat down with her Reader's Digest and iced-tea before they'd even made the ash plain. Irving was a good man. He wouldn't trade his life at the

Bungalows and his plans for the future away for cigarettes. She knew him better than that. She had to.

Irving noticed that Willie was still waiting to drink.

Irving said, 'Cheers,' and the men clinked bottles. 'Things are going slowly. I need some more investors. It's all capital, you know?' Irving sipped, wondering if Willie could really understand him. Irving had loaned Willie a book on small businesses once. He'd later found it under the leg of an uneven table in the Yacht Club.

'But, I thought you wanted to have a gas station here, on Tanna. You'd be just one out of many in Port Vila....'

Irving stared at his friend, about to tell him the difference between the one capital and the other, but then Willie's face slowly cracked, revealing his perfect teeth, letting Irving see the joke playing in his smile before he touched his lips to the mouth of the bottle. Irving hung his head, his shoulders collapsing in soundless, exhausted laughter.

Willie got up, walking over to the buoy, rubbing his bare chest with one hand through the huge, empty armpit of his tank top. 'We saved some yachties last week. Werry, some of the boys, and me. Two Americans, their Japanese friend, and a Filipino cook named "Boy." He spun the buoy, the dry Styrofoam whispering against the wall, blurring the writing. 'They wrecked just outside of the bay. A cyclone was coming. Big waves in there,' he nodded out at the bay again, still spinning the buoy. 'They thought it'd be safer to pull up anchor, make for New Caledonia and sail ahead of the wind.'

'The mast out in the yard?'

Willie smiled. 'Theirs. The rest is smashed up on the shoals. They barely made it out of Resolution Bay. Werry saw the flare. They were trapped on the boat, afraid of the waves. Werry swam out to them with a rope. They all held on while the boys and me pulled them in. All this writing here is thank-yous.'

Irving couldn't believe it. He couldn't believe the news hadn't reached him, that it hadn't made it up to Vila, or been broadcasted over

the radio. Willie stopped twirling the buoy, remarking seriously, as he had about Princess Diana, "Boy" ...what a strange name for a man?"

Irving was inclined to agree. 'Baby-Face is here,' he said.

Willie spat, walking over to the one of the empty walls to do it out onto the grass.

'He came in on the same flight with two Americans. A photographer and a writer, from an important magazine. Latitudes and Attitudes. They are staying at the resort. Werry is feeding them now. They came to see the dancing, Willie.'

'Good night for it. I hear there's lots of people coming.' Willie came over and sat back down across from Irving, retrieving his bottle of beer from where he left it on the floor next to the chair. His voice was soft. 'Your father's coming, Irving. Maybe there's going to be some big talk. Are you sure you want to be here?'

Irving shrugged like he had back at the Bungalows when he'd had the Americans' suitcases in both hands. It was a little harder this time, even though he only held the beer. He thought of his earlier idea, of getting Donaldson and Ms. Keifer out of Port Resolution before his father arrived, before Moses had a chance to fill their heads with his voice and the viscous stories that he used to cloak his nonsense.

'Where is he, Willie? I didn't see him back at the clearing.'

Willie had just taken a long drink of his Tusker. It filled his checks and he let it stay there for a moment, not looking at Irving. Finally swallowing, he leaned back in the folding chair, saying quietly, 'They're pretty tight about things in Sulphur Bay. All I know is that he's been digging again, Irving. For days straight, this time. Some are saying he's found the dynamite.'

Irving rolled his eyes. It was the same old rumour: that when they worked with the U.S. forces on Santo, during the Big War, one of the officers had entrusted a box filled with explosives to the Tannese labourers, instructing them to destroy the landing strip they'd built once the Americans moved on. There were other variations of the story, a new version seemed to spring up every time people got tired of telling the last

new one: that the box was full of wine and spirits given to them by a friendly black quartermaster when he got drunk at a big soldiers' party; that it was full of dynamite for use against German submarines should they enter Tanna's harbours; that it contained no explosives at all but was, in fact, a radio for listening to President LBJ and, later on, John Frum; no, the box was an entirely new and secret weapon, that the Tannese were supposed to have presented it to the Japanese if America had lost, with instructions that the Japanese take it back to their own country, where, if they opened it, the spirits of all the American soldiers killed in the war would come screaming out with machine guns, grenades and fighter jets to set fire to the very air.

Irving's father claimed to be among those who, upon returning to Tanna after the U.S. forces left, buried the box somewhere along the shore of Lake Siwi. But during one of his imprisonments, this one for throwing a handful of poisonous centipedes into the jeep of a visiting British official from Port Vila just before Irving's mother passed, the marker had been lost, and neither Moses nor anyone else could remember where they had hidden the dynamite.

'There is no box of dynamite. That is just one of his stories. How can you follow him, Willie? You run this Yacht Club. You are a business man. You understand how things work.' Irving didn't like the sound of his own voice. He was talking too fast, too loudly. Irving knew Willie was aware that his being a John Frumist and Irving's father were sore subjects. He had always been grateful of Willie's grace in navigating their friendship around such conversational hazards, and now Irving felt guilty that he was talking them into what they'd avoided so well for so long, but he suddenly needed to understand something of how Willie, a man he liked and admired, could go on believing as he did. 'How can you follow him, Willie? How can you listen to his lies?'

Willie collected their empty bottles and walked them over to a bin just inside the door to the darkened kitchen. 'I don't follow your father, Irving. He's an elder and sometimes a prophet. He's John Frum's prophet, one of them anyway.' Willie rubbed his chest again, thinking. 'When your

father talks, when I listen to his words, I try to hear what John is saying beneath them. Like how when you put a seashell to your ear, you can listen to the sea.'

Irving looked at Willie who was staring out to where the sunset was turning the cloudless sky to the colour of a ripe orange. The flat waters of Resolution Bay had taken on a dark tint, the cauldron Captain Cook named after his ship shining like early morning light in the bowl of a metal spoon. Irving thought how he was the better part of ten years older than his classmate and how, if he cared more about such things and less about Princess Diana, Willie would understand that it wasn't the sea people heard when they listened to a shell. Irving knew that it was only the pulse in their own hands. But all he said to his friend was, 'I'm sorry, Willie. There is no John Frum. I'm sorry for my father's lies.'

The 'Mi Hearum Say!' portion of the broadcast was long since over. It was talk of the war, again. The Americans were calling this new fight, 'Operation Desert Storm,' and the broadcast said that they were winning. Winning easily. The news didn't appear to interest Willie, but then why should it, Irving wondered.

Willie was calm, bent slightly backward and smiling, the hand still tucked inside the armpit of his top. He was looking out over the bay, empty save for the South African woman's single boat. She'd put the bow light on and it gleamed bright and lonely like the night's first star. Irving thought his friend looked as if he were stretching. Like he'd woken up from a dream that had left him happy. 'It would be something, though,' Willie said. 'All that Cargo.'

The Radio was talking about the U.S. Army threatening to escalate their attacks against the enemy leader, Hussein. The newscasters discussed the effectiveness of airstrikes, and all the while Irving wondered about Cargo, imagining how Willie would feel if the bombers dropped refrigerators and televisions through the shingled roof of the Yacht Club. A brand-new Army jeep falling to earth just out on the lawn. All that Cargo. Willie looked over at him, and Irving nodded in agreement. It would be something.

8.

After opening a second Tusker for his friend, Willie left Irving alone in the Yacht Club with the kitchen keys. Irving looked out over Resolution Bay, then softly lowered his eyelids. His father, Mrs. Davies, the Americans, and Baby-Face flickered and crowded together in the darkness. Others joined them. The Davies' previous driver, the whites of his eyes gone sulphur yellow, his gaze pouring out reproach just as it had when Irving declined to pick him up the one time the man had hailed him at the crossroads near Dip Point. He was there. The man Baby-Face had cut was there too. It had been years since Irving had seen him, but he was there and Irving recognized him by his poorly stitched scars, one curving from nose to sideburn, the other from chin to ear, marking his face like seams on a baseball. Irving took a long, slow breath. He tilted his head back slightly and imagined the lot of them sliding away into the back of his mind, disappearing into some dark and silent place. He felt warmth on his cheeks. Sunlight on his lips. Palm fronds rustled and then the wind that stirred them brushed across his lashes. He opened his eyes. Resolution Bay and the South African's single, tiny vessel filled them. He slipped off his thongs and touched the soles of his feet to the cool cement floor. He allowed himself an acceptable moment of enjoyment, then slipped back into the thongs and got up.

He gathered up Ms. Keifer's expensive tripod and other photography equipment and locked them inside the Yacht Club's kitchen. Then Irving rolled up the windows of the S-10, making sure to close the one at the back of the cab, and opened the heavy box of galvanized aluminium under the passenger-side seat. Underneath the tire jack, lug wrench and miscellaneous bolts there was a battered litre-bottle of Sprite filled with dish soap and a soft, clothe diaper. He took these and closed the box. He found the red rubber hose, coiled where it always was along the far side of the Club and he thought of liquorice. He thought of having a

big hoop of red liquorice on the gas station counter, of selling it by the half-meter to the students who boarded on weekdays at the Presbyterian school and how they could enjoy the liquorice on their long walks home for the weekends. He opened the outside tap and walked the hose back to the truck, giving the fruit trees and the flaming Bougainvillea a bit of water as he went.

A film of dust from the ash plain coated the S-10 and he sprayed it down, taking extra care over the emerald of the 'Friendly Bungalows' detailing. He found dust beneath the wipers' blades and he sluiced this away. Then he soaped the windows, windshield and mirrors and buffed them with the diaper before giving them a final rinse. By the end, his shirt hung off his shoulders and he was streaked with grey. He smiled. At least the truck was clean. He wrung out the diaper, folded it and put it and the soap back into the galvanized aluminium box with the jack and wrench set. He reapplied streaks of the Australian skin cream to his cheeks and tossed the tube back into the glove compartment. Using the passenger side mirror to guide him, he quickly worked the cream into his face. Then he gathered the hose and returned it to its place by the spigot.

The sun was dipping west behind the bulk of the island. Shadows leaned out into Resolution Bay and Irving thought he heard faint music coming from the South African woman's boat. He re-entered the Club and picked up the beer that he had left on the floor. He took one small sip from it. Then he emptied the rest out the window into the garden before binning the bottle. He closed the kitchen door and lowered the pressed-wood shutter over serving window, latching and locking the both of them, giving each padlock a firm tug to be sure. Bits of laughter and earthy smells of roasted yam and taro floated up from the village below. Inside Irving took a breath that seemed to begin with his feet. The sharpness of kerosene was there too, and meat roasting luxuriously. He put a hand to the wall to steady himself. He exhaled slowly and made for the trail that descended to the village.

When he reached the clearing, the sun was behind the mountains in the west, capping them with fire. Irving wondered if he should have

looked through Ms. Keifer's bags for a jacket for her. In the tiny gazebo atop the village clearing's rise, one of Port Resolution's kerosene generators was hammering away, powering the two naked light bulbs strung up high under the gazebo's peaked roof. While some of the children chased each other across the crimsoning field, the organized sport on the lawn had come to an end. Football enthusiasts, Christians, John Frumists and *kastom* people alike sat or stood mingling near the little gazebo, which shined like a brass lantern, irradiating the loose dresses of the women. Irving recognized a pair of girls down from Ipeukel, both too young for marriage, but ripening. They plied the space between gazebo and crowd, lithe silhouettes flickering beneath their clothes. Wives and daughters ferried food between their homes and the diners in the clearing. Irving swallowed the water that flooded his mouth and scanned the crowd for Donaldson and Ms. Keifer.

He spotted Werry leading the Americans back from the enormous banyan tree at the heart of the village. His friend was smiling and talking, and Donaldson was making jottings in his leather notebook. Irving watched them stop at the large red cross that stood at the village's edge. Ms. Keifer took a photograph of it, then pressured Werry, with Donaldson's help, to enter the frame. He stood up tall next to the cross, composed a serious face and squinted against the flash, breaking back into his smile after it was over.

Irving wove through the people, saying quick hellos. Old friends urged him to sit and join them and tried to hand pass food up to him. Everywhere coconut-shell bowls brimmed with mounded rice and salted spinach. He smelled sweet, roasted plantains. Winter mangoes and papayas swam in coconut milk and lime. 'Joshua! Joshua!' someone called. Irving turned, startled. A fisherman he knew, an Adventist from Waesisi Bay, was pushing a whole roasted mackerel at him. It was split down the belly and spread, like a smoking butterfly, on a plate of polished bark. Irving's stomach howled. It begged him to stop. He murmured to the fisherman that he couldn't join him. Not right now. Perhaps later. He'd try.

Women sat gossiping. They plaited pandanus-frond mats, or stroked children sleeping in their laps. Irving nodded to those he knew, stepping around them. A band of boys exploded across his path and he crashed into them. Some laughed; some murmured apologies and they were off again, pelting each other with a pig's bladder that had been filled with seawater and sewn shut. By the time he reached the Americans, Monique had arrived with food Werry's mother had prepared for them on plastic plates. Donaldson's notebook and pencil had disappeared into his pockets. Ms. Keifer's camera hung from her neck. Her fingers were already scooping at the rice and tinned tuna.

'Monique, a plate for Irving, please. You'll eat won't you?' Werry looked at Ms. Keifer. 'Good, isn't it?' The photographer nodded, covering her mouth and grinning into her wrist. Grains of rice stuck to her fingers.

"That's just her nocturnal feeding habits, Werry. Good luck getting anything but coffee into her all day, but once the sun's down—watch out!" Donaldson brought the plate up to his face. He inhaled deeply, all the steam from the tuna and rice vanishing up his nose. His eyes were small; there seemed to be too much face to him. Irving realized it was the first he'd seen him without his sunglasses. 'Ahhh,' Donaldson relished. 'All food tastes better outdoors. Take camping: you can wrap some hamburger and potato up in foil and...Well hey there little fella!'

One of the boys that Irving had tripped over had joined them. He stood square in front of Donaldson, naked but for his school shorts. He solemnly thrust his hand out to the journalist. Donaldson shifted his plate of food into one hand and stuck out the other, mimicking the boy's seriousness and giving his hand a slow, firm shake. Then, without letting go, the boy darted out his other tiny hand and grabbed the American's crotch. Donaldson roared and spilled rice all over himself. Both Werry and Irving snatched after the boy, but he'd already escaped and was off to where the others were gathered by a canebrake, laughing themselves to pieces. The shirtless boy executed a cartwheel across the grass and melted into the brake with his mates to tell and retell the tale. Donaldson laughed, 'Shit.' He picked a grain of rice off his shirtfront and ate it.

Werry scratched the back of his head. 'That one, he's always joking.'

Off to the side, Irving heard a choking sound. Ms. Keifer was bent over coughing, her face ember-red. Werry rushed to help her, but she waved him off. She barked out a few more coughs. She leaned back, laughing, sobbing for breath, tears glinting on her cheeks.

'I missed it!' She sobbed for words, 'The mother of all shots and I missed it! My fucking Pulitzer...!'

Irving didn't know what to say. He wished he had a handkerchief for her. She coughed once more and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, smiling. Then she sat down. Irving slid his feet around in his thongs. His soles were sweating ever so slightly despite the cooling evening. He quietly cleared his throat.

'I saw you all taking pictures in front of the cross. Did Werry tell you about it?'

'He sure did. The American Red Cross: one bigfella symbol of free medicine and aid here during the war. And he told us that the story is that John Frum's coming back someday with the goods.'

Irving looked at Werry and then at Donaldson. 'That's...that's some of it, Mr. Donaldson, but there are other opinions too. Some say the cross was chosen as the symbol because it was a something John Frum people could share with the Christians—something everyone can agree to and not fight over. And there are a lot of Christians here in Port Resolution. More Christians than John Frum.' Irving looked down. A nearby mother, a distant cousin of one of the girls Irving worked with at the Bungalows, was cradling her baby. Ms. Keifer was asking her if she could take picture of them. Irving continued, 'People here at Port Resolution defended the first missionaries, too. One missionary woman asked to be buried here. Her grave—'

'Is she the one who challenged the sorcerer to a showdown? The one who got God to break the sorcerer's magic stones?'

'I showed it to them, Irving.' Werry said gently. Monique had come with Irving's food, which Werry passed along.

'Werry showed the headstone already, Irving. Gretchen took a few photos of it, but we're not sure how they'll turn out. Graves make for grim photos. And, nice as it is and all, missionary stories aren't really our thing.'

A band had set up in the gazebo. The musicians were singing scales and tuning a steel guitar. The bulbs dangling above their heads attracted a storm of harmless insects. These skipped up and down in the light like sparks. Out on the lawn, a group of John Frum men were raising the mast recovered from the wrecked yacht. Irving recognized Rexson and Robert-Bob, two of his father's men, leading the effort. His eyes flicked over the rest of the gathering. He tried to peer back into the trails at the clearing's edge. The mast's loose halyard banged against it as the John Frumers fit the bottom of the mast into a hole in the ground.

Irving reached out to Werry. 'You know Mr. Donaldson, Ms. Keifer, there was a big event here recently. Werry and some others here in the village saved two Americans and their friends from dying in a shipwreck. That is the mast from their boat there. And up at the Port Resolution Yacht Club there is a buoy that the survivors signed. Werry and I could take you there and relate the story to you. The Yacht Club itself stands on the grounds of Tanna's first Presbyterian mission. It's only a short walk.'

Donaldson was hunting out the last of his dinner with the spoon. Ms. Keifer was listening though. She had her eyes closed and seemed to be picturing the scene. 'It's getting quite dark, Ms. Keifer, but it might still make for a nice photograph.' He tried to find a balance. Something between sounding excited and excitable.

Ms. Keifer opened her eyes. 'You know Don, I'm thinking a couple shots of the band? What do you think.'

'Yep. I'll talk to them for a minute—see if it's all right.'

'Thanks Don.' Irving watched the photographer roll her neck. 'Yeh, Irving, it sounds good, but we're trying to capture a certain kind of tone here. You know? Right now that mast is just sort of sticking up out of the ground.' She got to her feet and before Irving could say anything she patted his arm and continued, 'And that buoy's not going anywhere, right?'

Thank you for dinner, Werry. Monique. Can I help carrying the plates back? Werry, your mother cooked this? I'd like to meet her.'

Werry sidled up next to Irving while the women gathered the plates and spoons. 'Why don't you come with us and say hello? My mother hasn't seen you in awhile.'

Irving didn't look at his friend. He looked at the mast. And then at his feet. There was a tentative note, and another, then the steady thrumming of the steel guitars began emanating from the gazebo. Another of the musicians joined in with deep, four-count thumps on a tall slit-gong drum and someone else added the clatter of pebbles being rattled in a 2-liter soda bottle. Then Kenny Kaileinni, a girlish boy from Sulphur Bay, launched his delicate voice into the music. It bobbed up and down on the other notes like a tiny boat. The Roman Catholic Church in Isangel occasionally paid Irving and the Davies to taxi Kenny across the island to sing at their services. The boy always asked to listen to his American rap tapes in the truck. Donaldson was no longer talking to the band. Rexson and Robert-Bob had him. Beyond Werry's shoulder Monique and Ms. Keifer were walking side by side amid the plaited walls and palm-frond roofs of the village homes. He looked away. 'Not now. In a little bit. Tell her I said hello, please.'

'Sure buddy. Whenever you get a minute. She'd love to see you. Hey,' he extended his knuckle to Irving. Irving snapped it. 'Eat something. Don't worry so much. They're having a good time.'

Irving nodded. He walked over toward the ship's mast, skirting the crowd to avoid invitations to sit. Rexson and Robert-Bob had sat Donaldson down with a handful of John Frum men only vaguely familiar to Irving. Their shirts had the black crosses of the northern sect done over the hearts with permanent marker. Irving tried to pass by close enough to hear them, but Robert-Bob flashed him a look and Irving angled away. He took up a spot next to the mast, where he could be fairly close to Donaldson, yet appear as if he was listening to the band. One of the northern Frumers was talking and gesturing angrily. The American nodded. He was writing again. Irving tried to catch what was being said,

but Kenny Kaileinni started clapping his hands to the music and some of the crowd joined the boy and all Irving could hear besides was another, closer conversation happening behind him on the clearing, just outside the light from the gazebo.

Baby-Face Antoine lounged on the grass with his brother and a dozen other boys from the All-Tanna football team. He was passing a bottle of clear rum from Queensland around among the youths and recounting his seduction of an American woman, rumoured to be a one-time Playmate, in Port Vila. Irving had never heard Baby-Face talk of it, but the story was already cold gossip in White Sands and around the port at Lenakel. The woman was married to a former baseball star, a famous hitter, and the two of them had come to Vanuatu to buy and run a resort while they ruined themselves with alcohol. Baby-Face had worked at the Erakor Resort as a bellboy before the husband fired him, by most accounts, for stealing toiletries and selling them to the merchants in Vila's four-store Chinatown who then resold them to day-trippers coming off the cruise ships. Before he was dismissed though, Baby-Face developed a secret relationship with the baseball player's wife. For weeks after he had been fired, Baby-Face would stand at sunset amidst the mangroves that grew along the tiny strait separating Erakor Island from Port Vila and wait for the ball player to putter down the strait to the old Officer's Pub in his single-prop rowboat. Then Baby-Face would swim across. While his former boss drank himself to oblivion in town, Baby-Face would dry himself off on resort towels and make love to the wife in a bungalow that never seemed to get booked.

Baby-Face told the boys that sipped the Australian rum to enjoy it. That it cost more than the best sneakers. That he'd gotten the money from the Playmate on his most recent visit. That she paid him every time he was in town now: enough for rum, enough for his new jersey, enough to fly to Tanna rather than buy deck space next to chicken cages on the cargo boat. All this money, just to stay away from her and to stay out of the Officer's Pub if her husband was drinking there. He told them that while the woman had been beautiful before, she'd gotten dumpy lately. She

tried to cover it up with make-up, but she wasn't fooling anyone, and now he preferred getting paid not to have sex with her to doing the real thing for free.

The boys listening to Baby-Face Antoine lolled on the grass, sipping at the bottle, smoking his cigarettes. Even the youngest of them, shapeless in shorts folded over and cinched at the waist with belts of string and oversized shirts they were to grow into, made low whistles and catcalls at the young women that circled the bandstand like stars around the Southern Cross. The two Ipeukel girls, their hair pulled against their matching heads in braided rows, slid around Irving and he watched them sidle up to the rowdy group. They asked something too quiet for Irving to hear and Baby-Face smiled and got to his feet and retrieved the rum. He was scarcely taller than the girls and though he didn't look it, he was more than twice their age. He told them to put their heads side by side, then he parted their lips with the bottle and filled their mouths like cups, sneaking a finger in and wetting it in the alcohol before they could shy their heads away. After they swallowed, grimacing, he slowly traced a glistening line down each startled chin and he whispered something to them. The girls looked at each other and giggled, then flounced away, past Irving, backs arched, pubescent breasts and hard, tiny nipples pushing at their shirts. Back among the other girls, the more timid ones, they squatted down, whispering what happened, all eyes searching out Baby-Face and his team, shining curiosity and hunger through the half-dark.

Inside the village, the matrons uncovered the *umu* earth-ovens and began serving up a second course of delicacies they had baked over the ruddy coals: huge puddings of mashed cassava and shredded pork wrapped in waxy banana leaves; mature roasted coconuts, whose pale, fist-sized cores were quartered like spongy pears; more rice, coloured with the pink of tinned salmon and corned beef hash; and the singular treat of baked sea turtle, its tender flesh and sweetmeats served on the tan shingles of its own breastplate. Sea turtles were animals of great tradition in Port Resolution, and Irving watched Werry fish around in the sparks and ashes of its oven with a stick until he hooked its crooked end

through the eye-sockets of the turtle's naked, trowel-shaped skull. He hoisted this out of the umu and bore it torch-like back to the ceremonial banyan where he left it like a giant, smoking arrowhead, to cool among the old bones and skulls of other turtles. Ms. Keifer was with him, snapping pictures all the way.

Some of the old timers, the patriarchs of the village, had joined the John Frumers and Donaldson. Irving didn't know what to feel anymore as he watched them getting on. The old men kept pushing plates the big man's way, while Donaldson laughed and begged them off, indicating with his hands that his gut was full to bursting. Eventually he selected a piece of the turtle and tried it and the elders nodded with grave faces. An old woman offered Irving a slab of pudding wrapped in a leaf. It was too hot to eat, but rich steam wafted from it and Irving savoured the warmth seeping into his hands.

The band continued to play, but the feast was coming to its close. Everyone thronged to the water pumps to rinse hands and swallow mouthfuls of water. The old men and the John Frumers walked Donaldson to the pumps while Irving followed at a distance, working on his pudding. Then they led the journalist down a footpath through the trees toward a bonfire at its end and Robert-Bob left them to remain standing, stock-straight, at the trailhead. The path and fire belonged to the men's ceremonial clubhouse and Irving knew that there would be more *kastom* elders and John Frumers waiting there with stories for Donaldson: magic stones that could control the rains, John Frum vaccinating children at night with a needle that glowed in the dark. They would ask the American to teach them songs and tell them the news and they would prepare shells of kava for him and instruct him how to spit a mouthful into the darkness outside the firelight and say *kisme tamafa* to bless them. Irving got into the queue for water and both he and Robert-Bob tried to avoid acknowledging that the only person Robert-Bob was guarding the path against was him. Irving took his mouthful of water and shuffled back up the rise.

The music emanating from the gazebo was faster now. Dancers gathered around it. They stomped their feet and jumped, shaking off fatigue from the meal. A child, only a toddler, broke away from her sister, who was engaged in game of clapping with a friend, and tried to run past Irving. He scooped her up and turned her around.

‘Go on now. Go back,’ he said gently. He patted her on the behind and sent her walking.

‘Oooooh...are those the ones you like?’ Baby-Face and his pack were walking down to the water pump. He let out a long, low whistle. The lids were halfway down his hazel eyes and when he stopped near Irving some of the boys tried to clamber over him to get at the bottle he held high in one hand. ‘You’re sick, Donkey. You like the little ones? Hey—’ he grabbed one of the youngest boys in the group by the collar and shoved him Irving’s way. ‘How about him? Is he about right?’ he laughed. The boy recoiled from Irving. ‘Is he little enough for a free ride in that sorry fucking truck of yours?’ Baby-Face made pumping motions with his hips, sending some of his hangers-on into fits of laughter. The boy he’d shoved shoved Baby-Face back and the rest of the group ganged up on their leader, dragging him down to the ground, forcing the nearly empty bottle of rum out of his hands, pinning him while they finished it.

‘Hey! Hey! I’m not done with you. I still owe you for the ride. Hey....Hey, Donkey!’

Irving hastened up the rest of the rise. He weaved through the dancers and then looked back. One of the boys from the football team, drunk, with single-minded purpose, was following him. The boy was trying to maintain a straight line as he made his yawning way across the grass and up the rise. Irving fled deeper into the dancing, mingling with a group that was swaying under the outstretched arms of the giant cross. When he looked back again he only saw the other dancers. Then he spotted the boy, right up next to the gazebo, his feet moving in an awkward mimicry of the unfamiliar steps, his eyes fixated on the sweating, girlish face of Kenny Kaileinni.

Ms. Keifer was crouched at the other side of the gazebo's threshold, angling the camera's eye up so that the revellers' black faces were in complete shadow save smiles and eyes, the host of insects a radiant cloud above them, and Irving watched her turn, the camera never leaving her face, when Robert-Bob came striding up the hill, pushing through the crowd and yelling to cut the music. The guitarists, percussionists and Kenny Kaileinni, the sweet voice of Sulphur Bay, all trailed off into silence. The clapping and stomping evaporated. Then the rattle and slit-gong drum struck up a marching beat and Irving turned, with the rest of the crowd, just in time to see Moses and his khakied lieutenants, their faces powdered with talcum, mustering on the clearing, and Donaldson marching up the flickering footpath, bringing up the rear of the column.

9.

Moses and his lieutenants, the Ropes of Frum, manoeuvred over the uphill terrain, saluting the cross and the crowd gathered below it. Then they split into four short columns with Moses sometimes at the front, sometimes at the back. They swung left and swung right, marching past Irving and the rest of the crowd, goose stepping and staring straight ahead like real soldiers. Then Moses bellowed, 'Company-Left!' and led them down the slope of the clearing, marching them over the scattered coconut shells and greasy banana leaves left out on the darkened field. Donaldson joined Irving.

It had been some time since Irving had seen his father in full regalia. He tried to picture him as Donaldson might. The old man's hair was not the crazed bush it used to be--the way Irving always pictured it. No, these days it was close-cropped and pure white, like the shower caps Ms. Davies had the girls leave on the rim of the washbasins in the guests' bungalows. He looked as if he'd put on weight. And there had been something about his face as he passed. Could he have shaved? He was too

far away now for Irving to see. Moses alone wore a white shirt, with no decorations but for the American-flag patch stitched to his breast, and this was luminous in the dark. And, as always, he was barefooted. Irving had never seen his father in boots or shoes; the bottoms of his feet were stony grey and harder than any rubber sole.

He also wore a special hat. Some years ago, a framed black and white photograph of General Douglas MacArthur had circulated throughout Tanna, with John Frum envoys carrying it through every village between Greenpoint and Port Resolution. The American general was on the deck of a ship wearing a grim expression, the sea behind him. He had a pipe tucked in the corner of his mouth, aviator sunglasses like Donaldson's, and a white hat with army insignia centred above the black brim like a pale flower. When the picture frame was unhinged, the faithful were permitted to look upon the words, 'Cargo coming. 10-4,' scrawled in pen on the back of the photo. Ever since, Moses wore an identical hat. Irving heard that stores in Australia sold such imitations. Authentic or no, the hat was an improvement, as the visor could be pulled down low to conceal the crushed waste that had once been Moses's forehead. Just above where the ridge where his eyebrows should have been the flesh was tattooed with a thick purple scar, where a prison guard on Efate had tried to cave Moses's face in with a rifle butt. The old man's long eyebrows grew straight down from the underside of the huge and swollen ridge and only the bottoms of his eyes peeked out from under the fold. Irving imagined the lieutenants instructing Donaldson to stoop so as to get into Moses's awkward field of vision.

The Movement had been shrinking steadily over the years, but Irving recognized familiar faces beneath their white-plaster masks. There was Noasa, whose wife had disappeared into one of Yasur's deadly paint-pots to escape his vicious beatings; Timothy, an ancient chief of low rank, palsied and penniless since the cyclone Uma destroyed his home, gardens and stock; Lopkuat, whose mother had been bound up and thrown from the cliffs ringing Resolution Bay for witchcraft when he was a child; Kenny Kaileinni's father, who some whispered was in love with his

treasured hermaphrodite pig; walleyed-Nathan, who trotted with a hand on his brother Sebastian's shoulder so that he wouldn't stray from the formations; and a meagre host of others Irving was proud not to know by name. There was Willie too though, of course, and a handful of other good, hard-working men—men who enjoyed pageantry, the social aspects of the cult or humouring their fathers.

Having formed ranks again in the field, again Ropes of Frum paraded past, the elders in their smartest khaki button-downs and slacks, brimless corporal caps tipped rakishly to kiss the arch of an eyebrow, olive sashes slanting across their chests like snakeskin ribbons broached with old buttons championing the names and slogans of local and national politicians and other incoherent trinkets. Some were shod in surplus military boots that had holes in their soles or were cracked with age. In the hollows of their shoulders, masking the damp pits of their arms, each elder bore a shiny mock-rifle with a fragrant bayonet whittled from sandalwood or fashioned from spikes of *nieu* palm. The younger men, lithe and shirtless, glided behind their superiors, the letters 'U-S-A' painted vertically along their catlike spines with the same eggshell plaster that made weird skulls of their faces. Willie was among these. He winked at Irving as he passed. Two of the men at the rear carried a canvas stretcher slung between them. In it was an ancient cannonball that was supposed to have been fired by the Reverend Paton and the British gunboat *Curacao* more than a century ago—a totem the John Frumists had bartered for sometime after the start of the Movement. Flaking lichens of rust bloomed across the whole of the pocked and shrunken orb, and when the boys swung into new manoeuvres the canvas hammock holding it rasped against the relic, rubbing a little more of it away with every turn.

Irving didn't see any sign of the fabled box of dynamite. No doubt it was just another of his father's ploys for attention. Irving was incredulous that the same people could keep falling for the same hoax. Next to him, Donaldson was eating every bit of it up. He was filling pages and pages in his notebook. He'd look to the Ropes doing their exercises out on the

lawn, check to see what the faithful around him were doing, and return to scribbling, shaking his head in disbelief. There was an awful nakedness to his face as he looked around. It embarrassed Irving, though he couldn't say anymore just whom it was in all of the madness that was making him feel ashamed. When Moses's company came around again, passing Irving and Donaldson, Moses flashed a look their way, but Irving couldn't tell if his father had meant it for him or the American spectator. Donaldson brought a hand chopping to the corner of his eyebrow in a salute that seemed to Irving as only partially exaggerated.

At the bottom of the slope, Moses cried, stretching the words, 'Company, halt!'

'About-Face!' The twenty or thirty men in the two-line column pivoted to face the faithful. Some of them were breathing hard. Sweat shined on the skin of the shirtless men.

'Single-File!' The columns became a long, single row in a smooth coordinated motion. Moses came out to stand in front of the stock-still regiment. Does Donaldson know, Irving asked himself. The American had come up from the kava fires with the Ropes, trotting beside his father. How much could they have spoken before they came? Had Irving's name come up? Had Joshua's?

Moses called out, 'Arms-Front,' whereupon the elders angled their rifles forward. The younger men, with the exception of the stretcher-bearers, were also armed with wooden bayonets. They brought these forth from where they'd tucked them into pockets or waists of their camouflage shorts. The whole length of the line bristled like the tines of a snaggletoothed comb. *'Where are you staying?'* His father might have asked the American.

At the centre of the line, Moses drew a novelty saber he had bought from one of the Chinese merchants in Port Vila when he'd spent a year working there after his first spell in prison. Even new, it hadn't cut. Irving had been hit with it many times; there was a period, after his mother died, when he'd been more than open in his blasphemy. Irving could almost plot a timeline in the bends in the flimsy blade. Out on the

clearing, with his lieutenants lined up behind him, Moses was tilting his head back so he could see the crowd gathered under the red cross. Irving wondered if he was looking at him. '*We've got a place to hang our hats, Moses, thanks. The Friendly Bungalows Resort. Nice spread,*' Donaldson might have answered.

Irving knew what was coming. He checked to make sure the American was watching.

Moses swung his saber in a downward arc and the thorned line exploded forward, roaring with fervour as they charged the up the hill, swallowing Moses's last shouted command. The rest of Movement's faithful were still at attention, men and women alike standing with right hands cocked to their brows, the littlest of the children tugging madly at their parents' grips or ducking behind their legs, terrified. The howling company crested the rise, then slowed to a loose-limbed trot, dropping their play-weapons just before they would have trampled the congregation. They crashed gently into the crowd waiting under the cross. Friends and family caught each other up into crushing hugs. Kisses were exchanged, greetings and good-natured barbs traded. Someone tousled Irving's head roughly. Irving glimpsed Willie's huge, white teeth before his friend was swept away. There was no sign of his father in the melee. '*My son works there. Perhaps you know my son?*' Could it have gone like that?

Donaldson turned to him. Irving told himself it was only because he was used to seeing the writer in his sunglasses, but the big man was looking at him strangely—as if Irving were the most curious of all the surrounding spectacles atop the hill. Donaldson's hand clapped down on Irving's shoulder. Irving looked down the hairy arm and rolled-up sleeve to the journalist's grinning face, the gaping whites of his eyes. Donaldson shook him a little, laughing, 'That's your father? He's great! Why didn't you tell us? What the Hell's the matter with you? Why didn't you say something?'

Irving waited for the words, the perfect language to rise in his head, but they would not come. His tongue felt dry, furred; there was a

bitterness in his mouth. Donaldson was looking at him—really looking at him now. What could he say? Irving's eyes fled. He looked at his feet—grey and dusty now despite the expensive lotion he'd rubbed into them the night before, alone in his quarters at the Bungalows. Looking down, he could see that the day had battered his starched, white shirt as well. Hours of sitting in the truck had wrinkled it; sweat and humidity had leached all the starch away.

Irving kept his face angled down. It felt taut, pinched at the cheeks. He didn't want Donaldson to see it. He could hear his father's voice out on the field. It was powerful, issuing commands that could be heard above the rhythmic clapping of the watchers on the rise. A few words bubbled up into Irving's mouth, mingling with the bitterness. He lifted his face, but the American wasn't looking at him anymore. He was watching the John Frumers instead, his strong chin tracing their manoeuvres as if it were attached to them by string. His hand remained clamped to Irving's shoulder. Light from the gazebo was shining off the man's heavy silver watch, and Irving put his own hand over the journalist's, gently pinning it against himself. He waited. When the American's wide eyes flicked back to him again, he said, 'Yes, Mr. Donaldson, Moses is my father.' He hoped the pinched feeling in his face was a smile or something close enough.

Donaldson nodded, grinning. Then his eyes shifted to something to Irving's left and the smile grew wider, more innocent. Irving followed his gaze. Ms. Keifer was trotting towards them, the pendulum of her ponytail a swinging blur. Behind her, Willie and some of the lieutenants were helping to clear a space for Moses in the gazebo amidst the musicians. Like Donaldson's, the whites of her eyes seemed huge to Irving. She looked younger. There was a dusky colour high across her cheeks and a sort of loose energy in her movements. Even though its strap was still looped around her neck, she held her camera before her with both hands as if she were afraid she'd drop it.

Donaldson freed his hand out from under Irving's and hugged the photographer. 'You got all that, right? Tell me you got all of that,' he said, almost hysterical.

'Oh my God, every second of it! I'm completely out. I even had to use all my low exposures.' She was hurrying her words as if each were a breath wasted. 'We might get lucky and they'll turn out all right. But I've got to get more, in any case, like now.' She blew a loose strand of hair back from her face.

'Irving here is the chief-guy's son, he's been driving us around all day without as much as a peep!'

Ms. Keifer angled her body away from her partner, toward Irving. Irving waited, watching her as she considered him, her head slightly cocked on her long neck, the stray strand of hair platinum in the light. Her lips pursed in a half-smile. 'No need for the world to know all of our secrets, right Irving?' Irving wasn't sure what to make of this. He tried to match her half-smile.

The celebrating at the top of the hill had died down, and Moses was quieting the crowd, arranging the believers between the cross and the gazebo. Donaldson saw it, 'He looks like he's gonna start talking, Gretch. Go get the rest of the film.' As the two Americans passed each other, each gave the other a quick pat on the arm, awkward and almost shy with excitement. Ms. Keifer opened her mouth to say something to Irving, but before anything came out they heard Donaldson say, 'Here comes your friend, Gretch. Tell him to get lost already,' and Irving looked around, spotting Baby-Face Antoine, drunk, making his way over to them from across the darkened field.

The man-boy from Whitesands was reeling. His eyes never left the photographer and, seeing her watching him as he got closer, he smiled and tried to balance himself more carefully on his unsteady feet. There were grass stains on his bright shorts and he clutched two of his cigarettes in one hand. He drew up next to the American woman as if Irving was not there. His breath was stale, reeking of tobacco and spirits. The strength of it shocked Irving.

'I thought you might like one of these. They're...' he held one up to the light, squinting at the brand name above the filter, then he gave up. 'The best. The best from Australia, you know?' he shrugged, slurring

lazily. Irving thought he saw something deadly sober playing at the corners of the other man's eyes.

'Um...thanks Antoine, but I'll pass.' She watched Baby-Face and Irving wondered at her manner. She stood still, keeping that American distance between them, warding off any advance, yet Irving thought there was something in her voice; something amused, if not exactly friendly or inviting. He thought of her, retrieving film from the truck where it was parked in the clearing near the Yacht Club, and how she would be alone and far away from anyone who could help her. She had only just met Baby-Face on the flight, Irving thought. There was no way of her knowing what the man was capable of.

Baby-Face pushed the fist holding the cigarettes into her space, gently coaxing her to take one. He stood downhill of them, and was a little shorter than her besides, but he seemed to ignore this. He slanted his gaze up to meet hers. His eyes, soft but steady, seemed to say he knew what she wanted but would not say herself. 'It's all right. Take one.'

'I'm surprised you have any left, Antoine. You seem so free with them.' She was meeting Baby-Face's eyes, challenging him. Irving realized that both of them had forgotten that he was there.

'Ahhh,' Baby-Face said. A smirk split his face and he hung his head. 'It's true. It's true,' he murmured, shuffling his feet like a little boy in front of his mother. When he looked back up at her, though, his smirk was gone, the deep dimples in his cheeks now somehow managing both seriousness and amusement. 'I give a lot away. But I saved some. The best of them. I thought about you driving around the island. I said, "Gretchen will get lonely. She'll get bored or sad or maybe happy and she'll want another smoke." So I've kept some just for you. For us to have together.'

Irving stared at them. Ms. Keifer had her hands on her hips, her camera dangling just above her waist on its Nylon strap. Irving had glanced at her face when Antoine used her first name. Had she heard him? Why was she standing so close? Couldn't she smell the foulness of his breath? He was telling her *this is what will happen, this is what you'll want*.

Was she deaf to his presumptions? Why wasn't she taken aback? Why she even listening at all?

Irving spoke up, 'Ms. Keifer, I can bring the film back for you. Why don't you stay here?'

The photographer looked at him, slightly surprised, as if he had just walked in and interrupted the conversation she'd been having, instead of having been standing there all along. 'That's considerate of you, Irving, but you wouldn't know what film I need.'

Baby-Face nodded at this, his eyes never leaving her.

Irving was confused. Why was she arguing? Didn't she see he was trying to help her? 'I can bring the truck down, Ms. Keifer, with all of your film. You can pick out what you need. Please, I have the keys to the Yacht Club. The way would be unfamiliar. It would dangerous for you in the dark. Please, it's no trouble.'

Baby-Face took a step closer to her. He tucked one of the cigarettes behind his ear and then offered the other to her again. 'I know the way. We could have a smoke. And a walk. Like in Vila.' He never once looked at Irving. Irving watched as the woman visibly took note of the younger man's proximity to her, and Baby-Face didn't step back. Irving felt himself crowded out. Vila? Like what in Vila?

'Ms. Keifer,' he began. Something rough in his voice forced both Baby-Face and the woman to look at him. This thrilled him, but he tried to smooth the roughness out as he continued. Firm, not rough. 'It is not safe for you to go with this man. He is not the sort of person you should be alone with.' Baby-Face's dimples flattened. Irving licked his lips. Worried at what he might see in Antoine's stare, he kept his eyes on Ms. Keifer. Her eyebrows were slightly arched. 'Your equipment is inside the Yacht Club, Ms. Keifer. And the manager—my friend—has trusted *me* with the keys. I won't give them to anyone else, especially this man.' The memory of Baby-Face's 'American Hello' leapt into Irving's mind. His hand throbbed.

Moses began leading the faithful in a song, and Irving heard Donaldson yelling something from behind him where the writer was standing with the crowd. Ms. Keifer cast a glance back up the hill, then at

Irving, then at Baby-Face. 'That'd be great Irving,' she said hurriedly. Irving nodded, but stood where he was until she turned to Baby-Face. 'And, again, thanks Antoine, but the answer's still no thanks. I made a deal with myself to start treating myself better. Healthier living, you know?' She started walking backwards up the hill, away from the two of them.

The younger man cocked his head to one side. 'Oh? Since when?' he asked with amusement.

She was halfway to the crowd. 'Sometime this morning,' she replied. The singing behind her swelled and she half-turned, clutching her camera before she remembered it was empty. Looking back, she said, 'Irving, please hurry.' Then she turned and jogged up the last stretch of slope to join the scene at the crest of the clearing. Irving backed away from Baby-Face, but the other man seemed focused on the photographer's flashing legs. Irving looked over his shoulder many times before setting off down the road to the Yacht Club, but each time he found Baby-Face in the same place they had left him, motionless and alone, at the dim edge of the singing and the light.

10.

Foot-trails cut through the bush between Port Resolution's clearing and the yacht club, but Irving stuck to the road. He looked back, over his shoulder, scanning behind him every three or four meters. At one point, where trees canopied the road and all was dark, he walked backwards, watching for Baby-Face. But no shadow moved within the darkness beneath the trees and the road beyond remained pale, moonlit, and empty. Irving winced as stones kept getting between his flip-flops and the balls of his feet. He wagged his feet with each step to shake the stones out and felt he must look ridiculous. If Baby-Face were stalking him, he'd have given himself away by now with hoots of laughter. Irving forced himself to walk right, facing forward. But it was only a few meters before the urge to look back was tugging at his head again. Baby-Face could be out there.

What use was sight if he was dodging behind trees or freezing in shadows whenever Irving looked back? Irving tried to feel the other man's eyes on his back, his neck, as he had felt them driving the truck earlier that day. He listened. He strained to hear anything beyond the scuffing of his own feet and low roar of blood in his ears.

The dark canopy receded and the road opened into a small straightaway that ran alongside the thatch-and-frame Presbyterian Church, its tiny garden and privy. Moonlight reflected bluish-white off the church's palm-frond roof and the writing on the chalkboard. The message about Lucy Namalkin's mother looking for her had been erased, leaving a dim smudge across the bottom of the chalkboard. Had Irving seen the mother and daughter at the dancing? Yes. At the water pump, maybe. It comforted him--the thought of mother and daughter reunited, the danger and worry retreating. He allowed himself a glance back down the road that led back to the clearing, where Ms. Keifer and Donaldson and Willie and Moses were likely swaying to the John Frum songs. Irving touched the board lightly as he passed.

Hiking up the bend, he saw the Port Resolution Yacht Club, like the church roof, aglow. In the absence of artificial light, the short grass in the club's clearing was pale blue, pocked only by shadowy stands of papaya and hibiscus. The truck stood next to the yacht club, painted with light. Washing it had been worth the time. It was always worth it. All was quiet, beautiful. For a moment, Irving felt light. Weightless. Crossing the clearing to Club and truck, he fancied he was walking on the moon.

He unlocked the doors of the S-10 and turned the key in the ignition just enough to engage the battery. The dashboard display flicked on and yellow light from the headlamps beamed across the lawn and out into the empty air over Resolution Bay. Irving flipped on the radio. Soft, instrumental music piped through the speakers, but there would be news at the top of the hour. Irving adjusted the volume loud enough for him to hear, then he went into the Yacht Club and unlocked the door to its kitchen with Willie's keys. When he found and flipped the light-switch, he noticed there was a magazine photo of a pouting, shirtless black woman

with an Australian-type perm taped next to it. On the wall above the photo, someone—Willie, Irving guessed—had written, 'Don't leave me turned on!' with black magic marker. Irving smiled at Willie's joke and began carrying Ms. Keifer's equipment cases out to the truck. Before locking up, he reached through the doorway and turned the lights off.

Irving climbed into the cab. Through the passenger window he could see the Styrofoam buoy where it hung by the Club's entrance, soaking up moon and starlight. He thought of Willie and Werry and the other boys swimming out from the shore and towing the yachties to safety while storm swells folded their boat to oblivion against the rocks behind them. The yachties owed Willie and Werry and the rest their lives. Irving could read their messages and signatures on the buoy; thick and bold, their gratitude leapt out from the glowing Styrofoam.

Perhaps all was not lost. He would stay with the team from Latitudes and Attitudes for a few more hours, until they and the John Frumers tired of their dancing and his father's nonsense. Then he would drive Donaldson and Ms. Keifer back home to the Friendly Bungalows. The Americans would be happy; they'd have a story. There would be two days left on their stay and they could relax. Irving could answer any follow-up questions they might have about John Frum folklore, but he could also take them to see Tanna's other places, hear its other stories. The clean hospital, the coffee plantations and pristine beaches: there would be plenty of time for these once they were away from all of this John Frum and ash.

Maybe Ms. Davies would invite Irving to have breakfast with them in the morning. She couldn't possibly think he'd take some ridiculous bribe from Baby-Face. He never smoked, almost never, that is. She'd have had time to think it through. Besides, Mr. Donaldson would insist on Irving joining them. He'd bang a spoon against his white plate and holler for Irving to emerge from his bungalow at the back before he ate all the bacon. Ms. Keifer might tell Ms. Davies about how Irving saved her from Baby-Face, how he insisted on rushing alone, into the dark, to retrieve her equipment. Mrs. Davies would like that. She knew what kind of man Baby-

Face was. She would stand behind Irving at the table and put her hands that smelled like lemon dish soap on his shoulders and say how they were lucky to have him at the Bungalows and how he should take a cue from Mr. Donaldson and eat his eggs before they went cold.

It wouldn't end there, of course. The Americans wouldn't just let go of the John Frum story like that. They would probably want to know the same things visitors always wanted to know: who people thought John was, what he looked like, what he promised to bring his followers. They would want to know what made John's Red Cross different from The Red Cross's, what Moses and the others did to help John and Uncle Sam in the Big War, and whether it was true that Chief Isaac got flown to Washington to meet President Nixon. Whether John was alive, dead, or immortal. Whether John was real. Irving wouldn't let these same, tired enquiries irritate him. He wouldn't pretend ignorance this time. Donaldson and Keifer would be more interested in *everything* now—that was the important thing.

And at some point, driving around, or over sweet iced tea at the Bungalows, they would finally ask him what *he* believed. He would tell them that he believed in hard work, honest dealings and being good to those who are good to you, that the S-10 could get 26 miles per gallon if he didn't apply gas during declines or run the air-conditioner, that tourism and agriculture were growing steadily on Tanna's rich soil, and that a beautiful new gas station and convenience store, with the right sort of man behind the counter—a man who didn't believe in refrigerators falling from the sky, but could get on with those who did—would yield a strong return on investment. That's what he believed; that's what he would tell them. Irving dialled down the volume on the radio and started the engine. He put the truck into drive. He should have run from the clearing, he thought. He'd kept Ms. Keifer waiting far too long.

Easing the wheel right, Irving steered the truck in a wide curve that swung the headlamps across the trunks of trees at the edge of the Yacht Club grounds. When they found the beginning of the road that led back to the village, two boys were standing at its head, blinking and

shielding their faces against the bright. They stood square in the middle of the dirt road, not ten meters away. What were they doing here?

Irving nudged the truck a couple meters closer. He flashed the high beams, but the boys just stood there, squinting past the forearms they slanted across their eyes. Irving recognized the boy on the right as Baby-Face's brother. The other was as the boy who'd tapped the ball to him at the kick-off. Irving rolled the truck half a meter closer, laying on the horn. In the silence of the clearing, the blast was deafening. The boys staggered a step backward as if pushed by the sound, but they did not get out of the way. Standing there, shifting nervously, they hardly looked awake. Irving suspected they were drunk and looking to plunder the Club's cabinet for reinforcements. He would just have to back up and go around them. He had just shifted into reverse when he heard the handle of the passenger side door pop. Baby-Face Antoine threw it wide and exploded headfirst into the cab, hazel eyes and glossy black jersey lustrous, like a demon pushing through some seam in the night.

Irving floored the gas-pedal and the truck shot backwards, tumbling Baby-Face against the dashboard. The spurt swung the passenger door wide against its jam, the metal crying out. Baby-Face's feet and legs were still sticking out into the open air. He got a hold of Irving's forearm and tried to pull himself across the bench. Irving hit the brake and the younger man was bucked, fully horizontal, against the seat-back, the impact slamming all the breath out of him, fouling the cab with smells of rum, tobacco, and something faintly sweet. Free from Antoine's grip, Irving cranked the gearshift into park, nearly tearing the gearbox out, and launched himself out the door on his side. He put a safe space between himself and the truck, then cursed as he remembered the keys.

The boys were still standing at the trailhead where Baby-Face had positioned them, skinny as wraiths, barely adolescent, slack-jawed and stupid with rum. Irving marvelled at how much distance the pickup had covered, and that, blindly, he'd gunned it backward without hitting a tree or the Yacht Club itself. Another dozen meters and the truck would have

ploughed through the bamboo fence, sending both he and Baby-Face over the cliff beyond.

Irving could have run then. Baby-Face was still lying across the seat, stunned and coughing. Irving could have run, but that would leave Baby-Face alone with S-10. Had he noticed the keys still swinging on their ring in the ignition? What would he do with the truck, or to the truck if he did? Irving pictured himself locked out, watching Baby-Face burn holes in the faux-leather seats with cigarette after cigarette. Irving could not let Baby-Face see the keys. He could drag him out before he saw them. He had to do it. Now. Now. Now before....Baby-Face rolled over onto his stomach and looked up at Irving, pupils swallowing up the pretty copper irises and his grin revealing traces of blood from a bit tongue. Irving couldn't look away.

'What's this now, Joshua?' Baby-Face grunted, pushing himself up onto all fours. His face and deep voice were affable, but there was pain underneath them. Pain and something else. Irving sensed it stretching towards him like a hand under a table. He watched Baby-Face twist himself feet-first, and slide out the driver side door. Baby-Face coughed again, holding up a hand for Irving to never mind helping him. He spit a little blood onto the grass, dark and thick as cane syrup, and then assumed a wounded air. 'I was only trying to pay what I owe, you know? How much is that riding fare again?' He lifted the hem of his All-Blacks jersey and began fumbling at the rolled elastic waist of his shorts. His eyes never left Irving's. 'See? I've got it right here.'

Something silver and rectangular fell out, slipping through Baby-Face's fingers and thumping heavily into the grass between his feet. Irving knew what it was, and while Baby-Face was quick, sweeping up the knife and fanning open the blade, he was quicker, darting around the front of the truck, cutting through the headlamp's beams, keeping the murmuring engine between them. Irving looked over his shoulder into the overgrowth that surrounded Yacht Club's clearing. He hazarded a second look.

'No no, Joshua,' Baby-Face murmured. 'You don't want me to catch you out there. I don't want to catch you out there either. Up here, where there's light, I can see what I'm doing,' He tapped the knife blade on one cheek, then the other. 'In the dark....' He shrugged, then started after Irving again.

They circled the truck twice. Both of the doors were open, like wings, sheltering Irving, offering obstacles. But they didn't put Baby-Face off his game. As they prepared for a third time around, Baby-Face feinted toward the hood, driving Irving nearly around the passenger side door, but then he dove across the cab bench, sending Irving scrambling back to the front of the truck. This time, Baby-Face didn't follow.

Irving could feel heat pouring through the truck's hood and grill and he could hear the idling engine trembling within. He watched through the windshield as Baby-Face sat up in the middle of the cab. The other man set the open switchblade on top of the dashboard and leaned back, resting his arms across the tops of the seats. The fabric of his jersey glittered in the dome-light. Irving could see a bulge in one of the other man's cheeks, where his tongue might be pressing in thought. Irving's mind flashed to the keys, dangling just inches away from Antoine's knee. Then he remembered the two boys behind him. Were they still standing at the trailhead, or were they creeping closer? He could hear nothing over the engine and the hammering of his heart and he dared not look back. He kept his eyes on Baby-Face. He tried to pin the other man's eyes with his own.

Baby-Face leaned forward and retrieved his knife, then slid himself sideways behind the steering wheel. He put both hands on it in the same ten-and-two-o'clock position Irving had been taught. The knife shone against the wheel's dull plastic. The blade was ten centimetres long at least. Irving tried not to look at it. He tried to bear down on Baby-Face's eyes despite a cold tightness that stole up through his back and shoulders. Baby-Face shifted the knife, like a slice of moonlight, from his left to his right hand, moving it across the top of the steering wheel. Irving couldn't not watch it. When his eyes snapped back to the other man's face he

couldn't find his eyes to hold them. Baby-Face was looking at something inside the cab, down and to the left. Considering it. The keys. Or the gearshift. The engine was already running. All he needed to do was put it in drive and add a little gas and the S-10 would be wearing Irving as a hood ornament. Baby-Face smiled and reached down. Irving tried to shout, to draw Baby-Face's attention back to him, but the tightness had him by the throat. It was choking the sound off somewhere halfway up his neck when the notes of a familiar tune came blasting from inside the truck.

Baby-Face had turned the volume up to its maximum. Irving recognized the song. It was part of an idiotic radio advertisement for the Au Bon Marche Supermarket in Port Vila and it opened with the first verse from 'Yes, We have no Bananas.' Baby-Face added an exaggerated baritone to the lyrics, *'When you ask him anything, Never answers no, He just yesses you to death, And as he takes your dough he says...Yes! We have no bananas.'* The music faded into a message about Au Bon Marche's matchless produce selection, but Baby-Face had already broken off with his singing. He was bouncing in the seat as if the truck were in motion, his face set in a solemn, droopy expression, as he stared ahead mournfully and hunched his shoulders behind the wheel. He looked into the review mirror and picked at imaginary hair with the knife as if it were a comb. Then he began digging into his nose absentmindedly with a slender finger. He took his finger out and inspected it before craning his neck around this way and that, as if to see if anyone was watching. Ignoring Irving, he snuck the finger into his mouth. He shrugged his shoulders to his ears and quivered with relish. Only then did he bring his gaze back to Irving. He took the finger out of his mouth and smiled at him through the windshield, slumping back in the driver's seat. He banged twice, almost as an afterthought, on the horn at the centre of the steering wheel and Irving jumped. Then the man-boy from Whitesands turned the radio volume down and lazily reached a hand out the open door with his palm turned up, the way Irving would to collect a fare.

With Baby-Face leaning back, content with his joke, Irving dared to look behind him. The boys had stayed back. They stood close together at the trailhead, their heads cocked toward one another as if they were whispering. Irving turned back to the truck.

Still lounging, Baby-Face honked the horn again, and shook his outstretched hand emphatically, but this time Irving didn't flinch. Some of the tightness and fear had drained out of him and suddenly there was time enough, space enough, to hate: to hate Baby-Face's trendy clothes, his new shoes and spotless teeth. He hated that Antoine didn't need to keep expensive Australian facial creams to hand, or apply them in multiple, discrete applications each day to maintain an appearance of health or youth. Despite drinking too much, smoking too much, sleeping with his face to the sun and being thirty, Baby-Face looked and was treated like he was twenty. Irving hated that. Though forty, Irving looked and was treated like he was fifty. He hated this too. No one expected Baby-Face to grow crops, be married, or support children. No one expected him to be responsible to an employer, or be gentle with people, or tell an occasional truth. Boys loved him because he was generous with presents he stole in Vila, girls flocked to him because he was the rare sort man that was dangerous to more than just them, and others listened to his lies because that was when he was at his most entertaining. Irving hated that everyone had a story to share whenever his name came up, hated the pretty eyes he could argue came from a rich grandfather, buried in France. But most of all, Irving hated that in one day Baby-Face had gone from standing in the back of the truck to sitting in the passenger seat to lounging comfortably behind the wheel, as he did now, looking like he owned it in a way Irving never allowed himself to dare. Even in private moments, when he drove alone across the island with his sandals off, the pedal warm beneath his naked foot, Irving forced himself to remember, to repeat *It's not yours it's not yours it is not yours*.

Baby-Face must have seen some change in Irving's expression or grown bored with his own antics, because he sat up and quit dangling his open hand out of the door. He slid out on the driver side, and regarded

Irving for a long moment. He grinned and then wagged the knife like a naughty-finger before gently closing the door, removing one of the obstacles between them. 'Now Joshua, no need to get upset. There's no reason we can't come to some agreement about just how much I owe you.' He said it with sympathy and good-humour.

Irving had already backed around to the opposite side of the truck, desperate to keep as much of it between them as he could, but Baby-Face hadn't pursued him. When he'd passed the open passenger door, Irving had seen Ms. Keifer's equipment tumbled about the footwell and that the heavy aluminium box had slid forward of its usual spot under the seat. The radio was still playing softly, and he'd seen his keys dangled at the neck of the steering column like a fancy earring.

Instead of following him around the hood, Baby-Face stood face-to-face with Irving across the truck bed. Irving thought he might try to climb over it this time. But instead he said, 'We can work something out. You just wait right there...' then he sunk beneath the bed's sidewall where Irving could not see him. He saved the blade of the knife for last, flashing it a step right then left, like a shark's fin before it too dropped out of sight. Irving had only a moment to listen, breathlessly, for the sound of the other man's feet. Then he ducked into the open door. There was no time for the keys. His only frantic thought was to tear open the aluminium box that had slid out from under the seat. His fingers closed around the cool iron of the lug wrench and when Baby-Face came around the back of the truck, crouched low and rushing, the blade poised wide for a slash, Irving swung the heavy iron out into the night air and whipped it back, catching his grinning assailant in the temple with a backhand blow that crunched against bone with a sound like hitting a Styrofoam box.

The impact sent Antoine's startled face knocking against the truck's fiberglass siding. Irving scrambled back as the other man went to his knees. He watched Baby-Face reach up and cup his ear and temple with one hand. The man-boy tilted his face to the moonlight. His eyes rolled under their fluttering lids and his mouth kept opening and closing like he was listening to something and trying to respond. Blood inked out

beneath the fingers holding the side of his head together and he began to low like some half-slaughtered animal. Irving was only a few feet away. He was close enough to count the beaded braids that trailed from the back of Antoine's head. Close enough to envy the delicate curl of his eyelashes. The lowing grew louder and raspier, rising until Baby-Face lurched forward, toward Irving's legs, and Irving hit him again, the next swing falling awkwardly, his forearm catching Baby-Face across the mouth and the iron harmlessly whacking against the truck. It left a dent in the white sidewall and, for a moment, Irving gaped at the dent and a string of blood and spittle that had spattered across the newly washed panelling.

Baby-Face's neck, his head and the hand still cupping his ear and temple were black with blood and the metallic smell of it filled Irving's nose. Antoine was moaning and taking quick, huffing breaths through gritted teeth. Irving watched him patting and pawing at the ground until he realized he was searching for the knife. Irving laughed, but it came out more like a sob. He couldn't believe the stupid hopelessness of it. The man just would not let him go. Irving kicked him.

He brought the iron down on Baby-Face's ribs and the other man curled up like a fist. He hit him again and again, the blows cracking bones and thumping hollows. A strike that fell square and hard across Baby-Face's thigh brought a sodden wail up through blood that had been pooling in his mouth. It sounded so strange, so foreign to Irving, that he heard it like a command to wake. He staggered backwards, wracked with shaking, and came up against the open passenger door. He watched Baby-Face begin to drag himself, bit by broken bit, to safety beneath the truck. Out of the corner of his eye, Irving saw the knife. It was meters away and nowhere near them.

Irving heard shouts behind him. The boys had heard Baby-Face's cry too and they were sprinting across the field. Irving grabbed one of Baby-Face's gleaming calves and heaved at it once, desperately, but the man beneath the truck was gibbering incoherently, clinging to some handhold in the undercarriage, and he would not come. Behind Irving, the

boys' footsteps were pounding across the grass. Still armed with the bloody wrench, he broke off from Baby-Face, and swung the passenger door shut. He stumbled to the front of the truck, quaking like something newborn—something slick and shivering—and the boys stopped dead. Irving readied himself for them, but they saw his outline, cutting violently against the bright of the headlamps and brandishing the glistening wrench, and they came no closer.

Unchallenged, Irving made the rest of his way around the truck. He climbed in behind the wheel and hammered down the lock pins sticking up in each door. Slamming a foot to the gas, Irving shifted into drive, so the pickup rocketed forward, sending the two boys diving each to a side. There was a thump beneath one of the back wheels, but it did not stir the scattered equipment or the bloody iron he'd tossed to the floor. Irving didn't want to think about that thump. He wished he'd never felt it at all. He sped across the moonlit clearing, past the lightless Club, to where the trail was gaping black between the trees. The BBC World Report was coming across the radio in subdued tones. A voice with a crisp British accent was reporting how the Iraqi Imperial Guard had retreated across the desert leaving some seven hundred Kuwaiti oil wells burning behind them. And as the truck pitched forward down the dirt road, Irving did not spare a single glance into the rear-view for the boys kneeling beside that figure twitching in the grass.

Down the hill and around the bend, the road flattened out alongside the church's tiny garden. Irving skidded the truck to a halt. He picked the lug wrench up off the floor and, with the cloth diaper he'd used earlier that day to dry the windows, he cleaned it as best he could of blood and spittle. Remembering, through his tears, the dent and the sidewall, he got out and went around the back of the truck. The fiberglass glowed a bluish sort of white, and, below the dent, dust had thickened the bloody, piebald spackles where they stretched across the truck's quarter-panel like a chain of islands in miniature.

Irving remembered kneeling, the ground cool beneath his knees, and searching for a clean spot in the rag. Finding one, he began to scrub

clear the filth from the panel until the sensation of his moving arm became that of rolling down the window of the truck and wiping the inside of the windshield clear of fog with his bare hand, brisk night air storming across his eyes like a black wind.

Donaldson was reaching through the cab's rear window, cupping his shoulder in a meaty paw, and Irving was shouting to be heard over the clattering pistons of the engine. He suspected he'd asked the question already, maybe several times, but he asked it again, 'They can stop them, can't they Ms. Keifer? They can stop them from burning the wells?'

The truck's headlights were boring a tunnel through a trackless grey, illuminating a road swirling with weightless ash. Irving tried to remember when he'd asked the her these questions before, but it was as if he were a tiny fish, swimming upstream, things flowing past him so fast he could only glimpse at them before they were behind and gone. He saw himself, moonlight breaking against his shirt's crinkled back, sobbing madly and scrubbing where mud freckled a banner across a shadowy head cast against the white panelling; a group of silent soldiers in a village clearing, their faces pale as plaster, standing with his father in a half circle about a derelict crate, spotted with fungus gone grey and powdery and labelled with faded red letters he could not decode stencilled through a cartoon flame, and Donaldson saying *Your dad here wants to light these off on the mountain*, followed by the recollection of an argument he suspected he had been happy to have lost; and then there was a more distant memory, tumbling slowly in the current, from when Mr. Davies had been teaching him to drive.

The two of them had parked the S-10 in the exact same spot in the highlands where Irving had pulled over so Ms. Keifer could photograph Tanna's eastern shore. It was cyclone season, and they'd been to Lenakel to buy boards of pressed wood to shutter the Friendly Bungalows' windows. Mr. Davies had stopped the tape deck, saying, 'Storm coming,' to Irving cheerily, and they'd watched as a heavy squall charged across the sea like a fleet of lavender sails. Rain, hanging in opaque curtains, obliterated the coastal villages, the ash plain and Yasur's sulphurous

puffing, then the thrashing jungle, the flatlands, and up the mountainside until all they could see was a wall of water. The deluge that washed over them was so heavy Irving could feel the truck's shocks creaking and, for an instant, the island around them vanished. There was only he and Mr. Davies, sealed inside a world of roaring twilight, terrified and laughing: Irving bracing himself against the dashboard and Mr. Davies holding his Coastguard cap to his head as if it would wash away. But the curtains moved on and the moment passed, leaving Irving staring through the wet windshield, down into the fresh mud and smoking humidity of the lands of his birth and his father's following.

Thinking she might not have heard him, Irving hollered back again, 'Ms. Keifer?' but it was Moses who answered, seated next to him in the cab.

'John can stop it, Joshua. Believe in him. He is coming and when he arrives all will be given back to us.'

Irving saw he was about to miss the turn on his right. Flooring the brake and spinning the wheel, he heard Ms. Keifer gasp as the crate slid across the truck bed and felt Donaldson's hand gripping his shoulder through the cab window and him yelling *Sweet Jesus, careful what's back here!* They crashed through a stand of wild sugarcane, the stalks cracking like the report of rifles, and then they were back on the road, slanting up under hardy branches of kauri and pepper trees until the vegetation dwindled and the stars were thick about them. They were driving up a wide lava-run lined with small boulders that had been cleared to each side. It was difficult to steer the truck up it and the wheel pulled this way and that under Irving's hands. His eyes were streaming. He couldn't stop blinking them for sadness or exhaustion.

'Who will come if there is no gas?' he murmured to no one. Then he scanned the rear-view and other two mirrors for Baby-Face's boys, to see if they were loping behind, painted bloody brilliant and incandescent like burning wells, erasing his world behind them.

11.

The slope levelled off into a lava field, riddled with head-sized missiles of pumice, fallen where they had arced out of Yasur Volcano over millennia. The last hundred meters of the volcano's cone were fissured and shale grey, littered with rubble. Smoke hung low above the crater and Irving could just make out stars through it, as if he were looking through gauze. He parked the truck and rolled down his window. The Americans were inquiring after one another and the camera equipment in the back. Irving tried to block them out, to listen beyond them and gauge the volcano's activity. He switched the motor off. Yasur rumbled quietly. No quaking. No coughing. Just a faint sucking and wheezing sounding out from the deep vents beyond the crater's rim, like the ragged sleep-breath of an old man.

'What will you say to John, if he comes?' Donaldson's asked Moses, his face filling the open window at the rear of the cab. Irving's father sat motionless in the seat. Silent. With his eyes tucked up behind the broken shelf of his forehead, it was impossible to tell if he was even awake. Yasur's acrid smell crept in through the open windows. Donaldson glanced at Irving, seeking help.

Irving turned the key its last bit, cutting the truck's battery. With the lights from the speedometer and radio out, there was only faint star and moonlight providing illumination, laying pale blue across the dashboard, the top of the steering wheel, and Irving and the old man's lap. When Moses beckoned, Irving leaned over and felt his father's words, in their thick Narak dialect, pouring into his ear, flowing over the drum.

Irving licked his lips. The distance from his listening ear to his speaking mouth was so short, so minimal, that it seemed to him the words should come quickly, directly, like water from one end of a tube to another. But they didn't. Instead, Irving felt his father's words seep into him, where they broke into rivulets, trickling through something complex, vaguely honeycombed, before Irving found them again, collecting on his tongue. 'He will ask John for Cargo, Mr. Donaldson,' Irving translated, answering for his father. He began rolling up the driver side window. 'He

will ask John to keep his promise and protect the *kastom* of the people.' Irving unbuckled his seatbelt, then his father's. Then he opened the door and stepped into the acrid night.

Ms. Keifer was busy attaching a large flash to the top of her camera. Irving went around and opened the hatch at the back of the pickup. Moses hadn't moved from the passenger seat and Donaldson was still crouched by the rear window. He had his notepad out.

'But what sort of cargo do you expect him to bring, Moses? I mean, has John ever been specific?'

'I'm sorry, Mr. Donaldson, but you must put your notepad away.'

'How's that?' He said it without looking back.

'Your notebook. My father said that he will not say anything if he sees you writing it down.' Both of the Americans were looking at him now; Donaldson regarded him flatly while Ms. Keifer swept tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. 'His words—any conversations he might have with John—are a sort of property belonging to him and the Movement.'

Donaldson and Keifer looked at each other. The photographer nodded, first at Donaldson, then at Irving. Then Donaldson began nodding as well. 'Okay Irving,' he said, standing up in the back of the truck. 'If those are the rules.... Do you want this back window open or shut?'

The question flooded Irving's mind with thoughts of Baby-Face at the Friendly Bungalows: the damning perfection of his pack of cigarettes he'd dropped onto the seat through that very window, top open, the single cigarette shaken half out, and Ms. Davies' eyes going hard and unfamiliar. The Americans hadn't stuck up for him, but they didn't know him. They hardly knew him still. Irving looked to the photographer, but she was busying herself with strapping a large silver tripod to her backpack and she wouldn't look at him. Donaldson already had his fingers pressed against the window's glass. Irving nodded and gestured for him to do it. Donaldson slid the window shut. Then he walked to the back of the truck bed and climbed down to join Irving on the ground.

'What do you propose we do then, Irving? What would make him comfortable?' He said it quietly. His voice was even. Patient.

Donaldson was standing too close. Irving had to reach awkwardly around him to get a grip on the dynamite's derelict crate. Irving tried to not look at him. 'Ms. Keifer, your camera is acceptable. Mr. Donaldson, later tonight, or perhaps tomorrow, you and I and my father will sit down and talk. He will think about his conversation with John and tell you what parts he thinks appropriate. Maybe John himself will tell him what should be shared. In any case, we will sit and talk and my father will share something of the conversation with you, and I will help him. He is most comfortable speaking in our local Whitesands dialect, so I will do my best to translate this for you.' The crate was too heavy for Irving to move alone. And he could not drag it—the rope handle nearest him looked as if it would crumble at first touch. Irving took a step back and wiped his forehead. He was sweating. 'Can you please help me with this, Mr. Donaldson?'

Donaldson hadn't moved. He looked at Irving for a second. He was very still and Irving could not read his expression. Then he reached out and patted Irving lightly on the shoulder. 'Sure, Irving. Just let me get a firm hold on it.' Then the two of them reached down and hoisted the crate by its base.

Irving and Donaldson carried the box between them as they struggled up the wide slope of the volcano, stumbling over loose rocks and drifts of ash. Ms. Keifer followed behind with Moses, sometimes climbing several meters ahead to snap off shots of him feeling his way through the rubble, sometimes helping the old man past her so she could capture all three men scaling the barren cone together. A westward breeze blew most of the dust and grit out over the ash plain and away from them, but, several times before they reached the rim, the wind changed, doubling back into their eyes, and Irving and Donaldson were forced to set the decaying crate down as fast as they dared so they could raise arms and hands to shield their faces from the reeking clouds.

When they made the top, Donaldson crouched at the precipice and took a drink from a water bottle he'd clipped to his belt. Irving crouched next to him. The air was thicker here, choked with dust, ash and steam. The crater cupped what little moon and starlight made it through. The glowing vents were sunk far off, belching up acrid fumes and sucking in air as if something huge and alive was deep inside of Yasur, inhaling and exhaling air from the surface through a giant straw. Irving doubted that Donaldson would be interested, but he pointed the vents out and named them anyway. There was a deep clanking, then the farther of the two vents boomed, coughing up wads of bright orange phlegm that cooled as they scattered through the air, so that when they thudded to the crater floor they were already dimming to black.

The men waited for Moses and Ms. Keifer to finish the climb. Irving used the moment to read the box's stencilled lettering, black in the weak moonlight, in full for the first time. When he looked up, Donaldson was watching with a small, earnest grin. He gave the crate a soft thump of appreciation. 'Your Dad doesn't know what he's got here.'

Irving looked back down the slope at his father. Ms. Keifer had posed Moses at a solemn three-quarters view amidst a run of rubble. His cap was pulled as low as possible over his shattered forehead and he covered the American flag stitched to the breast of his white shirt with his right hand. Irving felt a strange sort of pride in the old man. He wondered how many muddy holes Moses had left around the coast of Lake Siwi looking for this crumbling relic? How many men from Lownow, Namakara, and Dip Point had he enlisted into the search? How many times had he led them to disappointment, only to renew their faith again in year or so with yet another of John Frum's coded messages?

Irving knew the number. He had catalogued and indexed it along with so many others into his thick record of grievances: the beatings; the instances of indifference, irresponsibility, and abandonment; the obvious, self-preserving ignorances, endless variations upon the same humiliations and out-and-out lies. Irving knew where the count stood. But it also seemed to Irving that he could not know it—that he could stop. It

seemed to him, now, that he might be able to leave off from all this painful accounting—that there was finally a reason to stop keeping track. Moses and his box of fables had brought Irving and the Americans up the volcano to a place that seemed outside of time—a place where, for the moment, Irving felt safe from his future. Moses suffered a few more photographs, then pushed on up the cone, climbing it barefoot and nearly blind. Irving turned back to Donaldson, who was cleaning ash out from one ear with a pinkie finger.

‘He doesn’t read.’

When they were all together a stray wind curled back across the top of the crater, pushing a sulphurous fog before it. It carried flakes of congealed ash big as wasps and Irving felt them exploding lightly against his shirt as he turned his back to the cloud. Even through his shirt he felt like he was inhaling spoiled eggs. After it had passed, he coughed and spit as discreetly as he could to get the taste out. Through his coughs he heard Donaldson say, from under his shirt collar, ‘Moses, what do you say we get started?’

Irving blinked and rubbed ash and dust from his eyes. He looked to Moses. His father was the only one who hadn’t turned away from the fog in time. The wind had knocked his cap off and the old man’s shattered face, his neck and shirt were powdered greyish-white with dust, the whole of him looking as if he’d been blasted with talcum. But Moses didn’t cough or spit or brush himself off. He stood grey and unbent, looking thrust out of Yasur’s rim like the ancient stump of a petrified tree. The old man gave the slightest inclination of his head, bowing it in the direction of the crate.

Donaldson and Irving set to the task of cracking it open. The lid was fastened to the wood frame with rusty nails, and they simply broke the slats, Donaldson setting his weight against the middle of the boards and pressing with short spurts, like he was reviving a drowned body, snapping the ribs all the while. The slats were wired together at each end of the lid, and the two men worked each broken piece free of the iron threads, flashes from Ms. Keifer’s camera occasionally illuminating them.

Finally there was no lid left but for those two slats nailed to the rest of the crate's frame, and these were no obstacle to what lay within. Donaldson produced a penknife from his shirt pocket, and cut a seam in the ancient oilcloth concealing the trove.

It was too dark to fully make out what was inside the sacking. A low cannonade boomed deep inside the distant vents followed by something that sounded like the clanking and clattering of an iron winch. Moses kept back, but Ms. Keifer handed Irving a cigarette lighter, which he then passed to Donaldson. It was purple and detailed with the logo of the Officers' Pub in Port Vila. Donaldson read the logo too and cast a wry glance at his partner.

'So I didn't quit,' she said.

Irving heard a sort of challenge beneath the banter in her voice, but Donaldson didn't bother answering. Instead, he turned away from the crate to spark the lighter, using his body and other hand to shield it from the wind. He turned back, cupping the tiny flame, and Irving opened the sliced oilcloth wide enough to receive the light. Donaldson smiled and let the lighter's flame go out. Then he reached carefully into the crate and withdrew a wand-like cylinder from the pile the lighter had revealed inside the ragged sacking. He looked at Irving and Moses for a moment, before passing the cylinder and lighter to Moses, who had stood by, silently, as this box he had buried half a century ago had been cracked open like a grave.

'Moses, I do believe it's your honours.'

The old man moved around the crate, positioning himself at the very edge of the crater's rim, and rasped the lighter's starter. Again and again he struck sparks, his head tilted far back so as to see the wick at the end of the paper cylinder, but the wind was too much and the flame kept sputtering out before anything could catch.

'Why don't you help him, Irving,' Ms. Keifer said. 'You know, block the wind...' She was holding her camera high against her chest. Its strap was looped behind her neck and she blew dust away from where it had gathered on the lens. Irving understood. He went to stand next to his

father. When Moses next flicked the lighter the sparks sent several pinprick explosions off on Irving's palms where loose grains of powder from inside the sacking had gotten on them. Irving recoiled, shaking his prickling hands and rubbing them together. He saw the Americans watching him, speaking to one another in words he couldn't quite make out, Ms. Keifer's camera at the ready. Irving put his hands up again. He cupped the lighter. Moses flicked the striker and Irving shielded the sputtering flame when it finally came. Moses brought the lighter and wick together under the shelter of Irving's hands. The flame leapt onto wick's braided fibres, crackling and exploding as it chased its way towards the cylinder.

'Whoa, whoa, turn it over, quick!' Donaldson flipped the cylinder in Moses's hands and turned him to face the crater. The flame disappeared into the paper roll with a hiss and they all waited silently. Then the cylinder bucked and a ball of green flame shot out of the end, trailing a line of smoke and exploding over the desolate crater with a soft pop. Irving saw that Moses's hands were shaking. He reached out and took his father by wrists.

A blinding white flash blanked Irving's vision. And then another. When they faded Irving saw Ms. Keifer, clutching her camera, slowly emerging from her own negative outline. She had crawled down a few yards into the crater in front of them and was shooting Irving and Moses from below. A second burst exploded from the cylinder. Blue this time. It bathed Keifer's face and neck and hair and shoulders in a light monochrome. Irving slid his hands over Moses's, steadying them and the trembling wand they held. His father's skin was covered in dust. It felt papery and thin. The knuckles impossibly huge.

'It's a roman candle.' Donaldson said. A third, red flame shot out over the crater, weaker than the first two. The wind carried it out of its path, down and to the left of them, into the rocks where it fizzled and went dark. The American put a new candle into Moses's hands, taking the lighter and sparking the end himself before backing away amidst the bright burst of another photograph.

Moses began to chant, his lips a dark purple where the dust had not yet reached them.

'Come, John Frum. You come and keep *kastom*.'

The fire, phosphorescent and twisting, circled up the wick.

'I have seen you, John. I have seen your smiling face. I have seen you in a candle. I have seen you in a rope. You sleep with your face to the fire, don't you John? You sleep with an ember by your pillow. When you wake you brush away the ash and touch your rope to the ember. And then you carry the rope to your candle. You blow the fire from thread to thread, don't you John? That's how you spread light, isn't it? Moving it along, with just a puff of your breath? I can be your rope John. Would you touch me to your coals? I can carry your fire John. I could carry it all the way from America.' The first flare leapt from the new roman candle. Irving heard it pop far out over the crater. Its faint and distant green reflected on his father's lips.

'Some of the old fellas used to say you have a beard, John. A beard from here to there. But I know you've got a smooth face, John, smooth as stones in the river. And not a single shoe for your two feet, isn't that right, John. I know you've got a thousand secrets. Some you've told to me. I wish you'd tell me another one, John. I want medicine and an airplane.' The candle fired its blue shot, illuminating Ms. Keifer crouching behind her camera not a foot away from Moses. Irving closed his eyes, but he could still see the flash through his eyelids.

'They thought I was dead, John, when the guard smashed my face. But when I was flat against the floor, I heard you talking in the ground. I listened while the others ran over me, trying to get out. That's the way it is, isn't it John? You know all about the paver, John, and the bulldozers and the hands that make and bend the roads. You made me one of your roads that day, John. Those men ran down me to you.' The candle's third burst came, its red transforming the scar across Moses's brow into a huge and fraying vein.

'Here's another one,' Donaldson said, relaying another burning candle into their hands.

Moses leaned into Irving, both hands clutching the firework, 'I cannot see, Joshua. Is it John?' His lips were so close. Moses's breath and words tunnelled down Irving's ear, hot and thick and heavy, breaking through everything so Irving's head listed to the side, resting for a moment against his father's.

Irving straightened up and positioned himself shoulder to shoulder with Moses. The paper tube at the end of the roman candle was longer than usual and it was on fire and burning off. The first flare shot through the fire, leaping emerald into the air, the thick wake of smoke behind it blurring in the breeze. The shot seemed to float out across the crater, until a column of hot air launched it skyward, where it exploded high enough to light the far rim, and Irving clenched his hands over his father's so the old man's knuckles dug into his palms.

The burning green spilled up and outward, the coloured smoke spreading across the sky like a table top, pouring out of the crater like some new earth, fresh with bright grasses. Chunks of umber ash and pumice floated in the maelstrom, spinning and large, before they rose higher and higher on thermals that bore them off and out of sight.

An arc of blue followed, and the green and undulating field became a bright sea. Standing there, holding his father's hands at the base of the torch, Irving tried to envision the Cargo coming, the moment his father and Willie and all rest of them sang about, the forever-imminent arrival they waited and prayed for. Out in the milky-blue, shapes started to appear, bobbing to the surface as if gravity had been reversed and they'd been released from where they'd been submerged in space. They floated down, slow as feathers, acquiring definition, gradually filling the air above the crater. There were sleek, wedge-shaped speed boats and four-wheel drive automobiles, walk-in refrigerators, huge bottles with pills by the thousands nestled beneath soft cotton balls, nurses in crisp white uniforms sitting together on rolls of sterile gauze the size of fifty-gallon barrels, sandbags like giant pillows, ropes of red liquorice like spooled fire-hoses, a new model S-10 with a V6 engine and extended cab without dents or detailing anywhere upon it; an authentic 1950's American gas

station, complete with two bright pumps and coin-operated air compressor that floated like an island all its own; and, lastly, a pale horse reared up out of the flare, its forelegs wheeling, and Baby-Face Antoine sat astride it, clinging to its mane. Other, innumerable horses followed, wriggling out of the flare's milky trail like newborn seahorses, chasing and dodging each other, growing larger all the time, until Baby-Face and his horse thundered through them, leading them in a charge across the azure field. Then, an explosion of white seemed to fill the air with sheaves of fluttering paper, and this was followed by a mechanical whirring and Irving blinked until the receding outlines of Ms. Keifer and her camera became clear.

Through his palms, Irving felt the little rumble of the fire inside the roman candle come to an abrupt halt before the last red flare fired. Bitter smelling smoke wisped out of both the candle's ends and this was pulled apart by the wind. Moses brought his lips closer to the bottom of the cylinder, chanting at it, encouraging it, 'Thank you for the day John, thank you for the sun, thank you for the moonlight that us leads home from the kava fires, thank you for your breath that kindles the fire. John I doubted you when you took my wife, but you have said all will be given back. I know that she is with you, John. I know you keep her tucked inside a tree. Thank you for the boat-shaped leaf you sent, thank you for the wind that carried the leaf through the prison window, John. Thank you for her scent that was riding on the leaf.'

Irving looked at his father. Tears were seeping from under the broken shelf of Moses's forehead like a mountain spring. They were washing the white off his cheeks. Irving leaned down to find his father's eyes where they were tucked up under the crease. They were closed. There was a gasp and low rumble from Yasur's nearest vent. Moses's hands fumbled beneath Irving's, but Irving would not let him release the candle. 'Is it John?' the old man whispered, tilting his face up in an attempt to see. 'Joshua, can you see him? Has he brought America?'

The candle gave one last buck. The wind had cleared the blue-green smoke away, and the spark fired out into an oil-dark space above

the crater's barren grey. The little red flare burst amidst that vastness, its snap no louder than a cap gun's. Then Yasur began clattering and wheezing, both vents coughing up bright orange gobs of magma that flopped and darkened in the air. More lava bubbled up in the vents and smaller fumaroles, and rocks exploded as the water trapped inside them was converted to steam. The eruptions were minor and far off, but they excited the Americans and the lava and flare's ruddy light stained the smoke above the crater to a sea of reds and darker reds. For a moment, above the din of the volcano's inner workings, and Donaldson's exclamations, Irving let himself believe he heard the drone of aircraft.

He felt a hand on his shoulder. Donaldson was behind them. He was gripping Moses too. He put his head between theirs, smiling. He shouted to be heard over Yasur, 'It's like our very own Fourth of July up here!' Then he lit another roman candle for them and touched a sparkler to the flame for himself.

Irving scanned the air above their heads, above the crater, and then east and windward, where the stars stared back at him—cold, unblinking, naked of smoke or clouds or the silhouette of even a single passing plane. Turning to his father, his mouth full of grit, he said, 'It was John, Father. He rose up from inside the crater for a second, and saluted us. Then he descended again. He was in an army helicopter with a big star on its side. He was piloting it and wearing his big white hat. He saluted us, Father...I think he wants for us to wait.'

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