

(RE) WRITING THE ISLAND

CARTOGRAPHIES OF DESIRE IN DANIEL DEFOE'S *ROBINSON CRUSOE*, J. M. COETZEE'S *FOE*, JANE GARDAM'S *CRUSOE'S DAUGHTER* AND JULIETA CAMPOS' *THE FEAR OF LOSING EURYDICE*

&

A NOVEL, *BODEG*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis writes back against the representation of the island in colonial discourse as a *tabula rasa*, easily possessed and inscribed. In colonial narratives island possession also emerges as explicitly gendered: the male castaway seeks to control the permissive, feminised territory of the island. It is this interpretation of the island, this gendered process of possession and inscription, that my thesis interrogates and subverts.

My critical thesis is an analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* and three of its revisionary texts — J M Coetzee's *Foe*, Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* and Julieta Campos' *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*. I conduct a 'ground-clearing' exercise of *Robinson Crusoe*, critically remapping the island from a *tabula rasa* to an embodied construction of appetite and desire. My analysis of *Foe* and *Crusoe's Daughter* explores how the texts' women protagonists navigate the masculine terrain of Crusoe's island, and how their authors negotiate an intertextual relationship with *Robinson Crusoe*. My analysis of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* shows how Campos draws upon a discourse of desire to delegitimise linear narratives of colonial island possession. The desire for the island becomes a call uttered across multiple times and spaces, leading to Campos' creation of the 'archipelago of desire'; a motif which remaps Western insular cartographies to stress the relationality between the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, and Africa. I trace these cartographies of desire, charting the ways in which these novels disturb the terrain, and transgress the boundaries of Crusoe's island.

My novel, *Bodeg*, is set on a fictional island in the Arctic circle. Remote, desolate, bubbling with a molten undercurrent of menace, Bodeg is a volcanic island which has claimed the lives and minds of travellers. The novel follows Rebecca and her adult twins, Anna and Daniel, who visit the island. Rebecca is retracing the steps of an old love, Jake, whilst Anna seeks respite from a stale marriage. Daniel suffers from a mental health disorder that causes aural and visual hallucinations. Soon he becomes convinced the island is talking to him – that he understands Bodeg in a way nobody else can. But his sister and mother are too caught up in their own problems to notice. Rebecca's search for answers produces only more questions. Meanwhile, Anna has become obsessively attracted to the strange, stormy Ferryman. Over the course of their trip the family find their lives intersecting with the island in ways that are both alluring yet deadly. In Bodeg they each find something they crave, not realising the island is wielding its own magnetic influence, steadily pulling them closer and closer and threatening to never let them go.

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PROLOGUE | CASTING OFF

He saw so many islands that he could not count them all [...] He believes that these islands are those innumerable ones that are depicted on the maps of the world in the Far East. He believed that they yielded very great riches in precious stones and spices [...] He gave the name of La Mar de Nuestra Señora...

– *The Journal of Christopher Columbus (During His First Voyage, 1492-93)*

I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale, surveying it with a secret Kind of Pleasure (tho' mixt with my other afflicting Thoughts) to think that this was all my own, that I was King and Lord of all this Country indefeasibly, and had a Right of Possession; and if I could convey it, I might have it in Inheritance, as compleatly as any Lord of a Mannor in *England*.

– Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719

Harding lit the end of the sulphured fibre [...] Five and twenty minutes afterwards a most tremendous explosion was heard. The island appeared to tremble to its very foundation. Stones were projected in the air as if by the eruption of a volcano [...] A cheer escaped them! A large rent was seen in the granite! A rapid stream of water rushed foaming across the plateau and dashed down a height of three hundred feet on to the beach!

– Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island*, 1874

A gesture repeats itself, echoing across different times and spaces. Before the journey, the dreams of islands. The voyage. A confusion of geography as imagined utopias are associated with the islands looming on the horizon. Christopher Columbus was one such island-dreamer, inspired by Marco Polo's voyage of discovery to Asia, especially to the mythical isle of Cipango. William Philips informs us that upon reaching the Caribbean, Columbus 'thought he had reached parts of Asia previously unknown to Europeans and certainly unknown to Marco Polo.'¹ After arrival, the act of possession. This begins with the gaze. The explorer ascends to the highest point of the landscape and looking down upon it from a panoptic position of control, mentally charts all he can see – an act Mary Louise Pratt refers to as the 'Monarch-of-all-I-survey scene.'² Visual surveys are followed by the legal appropriation of territory:

¹ William D. Philips, 'Africa and the Atlantic Islands Meet the Garden of Eden: Christopher Columbus's View of America', *Journal of World History*, 3.2, (1992), 149-164, p.150

² Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2008), p.198

The “discovery” itself, even within the ideology of discovery, has no existence of its own. It only gets “made” for real after the traveler (or other survivor) returns home, and brings it into being through texts: a name on a map, a report to the Royal Geographical society, a diary, a lecture, a travel book. Here, language is charged with making the world in the most singlehanded way.³

Colonisation is not just territorial, it is textual. Language erects territorial boundaries. European claims to a territory were often conducted in the language of the colonising speakers, denying indigenous speakers the right to response. Colonies were often given European names – the prefix “New” or “Little” diminished the importance of the colony in relation to the “motherland” – it is through naming that the right of possession is established.

The island’s resources are plundered and its territory transformed to suit the needs of the castaway. In colonial novels and discovery narratives, the island is often represented as a feminised space. In Jules Verne’s *The Mysterious Island*, mining is depicted in terms of violent sexual congress. The repeated use of exclamation marks is indicative of the castaways’ feverish excitement as they watch the island foam and ‘tremble.’⁴ In explorers’ accounts, land was often rendered as a virginal woman – ‘a countrey that hath yet her maydenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought’⁵ – waiting to be explored, conquered and possessed. These colonial texts suggest that by recognising the island as a permissive, feminine space, rather than an unfamiliar other, it can be more easily captured and controlled. The gesture of island possession within colonial discourse therefore appears explicitly gendered: the male castaway attempts to possess and transform the feminised island.

Often, in colonial island narratives, the island appears to emerge as a *tabula rasa*, ‘an empty slate on which to write our dreams.’⁶ It seems to be the site of a double-inscription: textually marked by writing that renders it as a permissive, empty space, and territorially marked by the male castaway. Crusoe, for example, inscribes his island with a series of enclosures for storing crops and domesticating livestock. It is this colonial interpretation of the island, this gendered process of possession and inscription, that I negotiate and re-assemble in both the critical and creative components of this thesis. In both my critical essay and *Bodeg*, my novel, the island emerges not as a passive, feminised territory, but a dynamic, volatile space that transforms the subjectivities of those who inhabit it.

³ Ibid., p.200

⁴ Jules Verne, *The Mysterious Island* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2017), p.128

⁵ Quoted in Annette Kolodny, ‘Surveying the Virgin Land,’ *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p.11

⁶ Jill Franks, *Islands and the Modernists: The Allure of Isolation in Art, Literature and Science* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2006), p.188

PART ONE | CARTOGRAPHIES OF DESIRE

In Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* & Julieta Campos' *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*

INTRODUCTION | WRITING ISLANDS OF DESIRE

CHARTING A COURSE

The question this thesis asks is a simple one: “how do we write the island without marginalising it?” The work undertaken in pursuing an answer constitutes a literary-critical contribution to island studies, an interdisciplinary field that aims to challenge the territorial and textual colonisation of islands through ‘a reclaiming of island histories and cultures, particularly for those island people which have endured decades of colonialism.’¹ However, as this introduction shows, within island studies there has been a failure to engage with the island from a feminist perspective. Since both woman and island have historically been marginalised within masculine discourses of power, it is surprising that there are so few feminist readings of island spaces. This thesis argues that an interdisciplinary analysis of island texts – including discourses of desire, feminist theory and archipelagic geographies – can provide an invaluable insight into a critical rewriting of the island, challenging the island’s conception within colonial discourse as both a *tabula rasa* and a passive, feminised space.

In this thesis, I embark upon a critical rewriting of Robinson Crusoe’s island through an analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* and three revisionary texts explicitly writing back against it: J M Coetzee’s *Foe* (1985), Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter* (1986) and Julieta Campos’ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* (published in Spanish in 1979, translated into English in 1993). *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* reframe the Crusoean narrative from the perspective of a woman castaway, encoding the island with currents of woman’s desire. This appears to be a radical departure from the representation of the island in *Robinson Crusoe* as a space unmarked both by desire or a feminine presence, where Crusoe purports to experience ‘neither *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, or the Pride of Life*’² – a representation I challenge in this thesis. Meanwhile, in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, the island is inhabited by ‘the perfect couple, the archetypal couple,’³ and Campos draws upon the discourse of desire they embody to delegitimise linear narratives of island possession exemplified by *Robinson Crusoe*. I trace

¹ Godfrey Baldachinno, ‘Studying Islands: On Whose Terms? Some Epistemological and Methodological Challenges to the Pursuit of Island studies’, *Island studies Journal*, 3.2 (2008) 37-56, p.37

² Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.109

³ Julieta Campos, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, trans. by Leland Chambers (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1993), p.3

these cartographies of desire, charting the ways in which these revisionary texts disturb the terrain, and the boundaries, of Crusoe's island.

To begin remapping the colonial island, it is necessary both to establish a critical framework for the project and to conduct a review of current literatures. This introduction does so in three fundamental ways. First, it explores the historical representation of the island within the western cultural imaginary and shows how island studies theorists are writing back against this figuration. In doing so it also probes the palpable absence of woman-centred studies of islands, and argues for their importance. Second, it contextualises the texts I have selected, both individually and by tracing the thematic relations between them. Finally, it outlines the methodologies and theories that underpin this thesis, from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome to a Caribbean historiography, 'archipelagraphy,'⁴ which I have developed into my own literary methodology for reading island texts.

THE ISLAND IN THE WESTERN CULTURAL IMAGINARY

To Yi-Fu Tuan, 'the island has always had a tenacious hold on the human imagination,' featuring in the mythic consciousness of multiple cultures. But, he continues, 'it is in the imagination of the Western world that the island has taken the strongest hold.'⁵ The Western fascination with the island is contingent upon three factors: the island's boundedness, its perceived isolation from the continental mainland and the feminisation of the island territory. The island's bounded appearance is intensified by the symbolic geographies of the Western world, which have long considered land and sea as elements with diametrically opposed symbolic functions. In both Ancient Greek and biblical cosmogonies land represents stability, order and fruitfulness whilst the sea stands for chaos, emptiness and disorder.⁶ This symbolic dichotomy between land and sea not only reinforces the island's enclosure; it also intensifies the feeling of distance between island and mainland. Indeed, Elizabeth Deloughrey believes that 'one of the central but unacknowledged ways in which European colonialism has constructed the trope of the isolated island is by mystifying the importance

⁴ Elizabeth Deloughrey, "The litany of islands, the rosary of archipelagoes," *Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagraphy* *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 32 (January 2001), 22-51, p.22

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.118

⁶ See John Gillis, 'Island Sojourns', *Geographical Review: Islands*, 97.2 (April 2007), 274-287

of the sea and the migrations across its expanse.⁷ It is this perceived boundedness and isolation that makes the island such a popular object of representation within the western cultural imaginary and positions it as a desired object, for as Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith have observed, ‘islands, unlike continents, look like property.’⁸ In other words, it is islands’ limits that are attractive, designating them as controllable spaces and inspiring fantasies of sovereignty and ownership.

Imagining an island, then, is not simply an inchoate longing for a utopian space – it is also an expression of power, which is manifested in both literary and scientific discourses. One such example can be found within the field of island biogeography, where the island is referred to as ‘the first unit that the mind can pick out and begin to comprehend [...] a simpler microcosm of the seemingly infinite complexity of continental and oceanic biogeography.’⁹ The language in which the island is written here places it within a hierarchical system – a ‘simpler’ and more comprehensible space, sealed-off from the continents and vast oceans that surround it. This conception of the island also pervades sociocultural discourses. Indeed, as John Gillis informs us, ‘closely associated with the myths of both origins and extinctions, islands are perceived as being occupied by peoples without history, seeming to exist in some atemporal dimension.’¹⁰ In William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for example, Caliban embodies the stereotype of the primitive islander.

According to Deloughrey, by the end of the nineteenth century islands in Western literature had begun to circulate around several ‘persistently rigid tropes.’¹¹ Their rigidity suggests there is an ideological structure at work in their representation, and indeed, through examining these island figures we can see the discourses of power in which they are entrenched. One such trope is the utopian narrative, which represents the island as a fecund paradise. This representation is often eroticised, for the island’s perceived spatial and temporal isolation leads writers to depict it as a space of sexual licentiousness, cut-off from civilized society. In Paul Gaugin’s *Noa Noa*, for example, the “real” Tahiti emerges only in his encounters with Tahitian women:

⁷ Elizabeth Deloughrey, *Routes and roots: navigating Caribbean and Pacific island literatures*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007, p.2

⁸ Rod Edmond & Vanessa Smith ‘Editors’ Introduction’ in *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.1

⁹ Robert MacArthur & Edward Wilson, *The Theory of Island Biogeography*, 2nd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) p.3

¹⁰ Gillis, ‘Island Sojourns’, p.280

¹¹ Deloughrey, “The litany of islands, the rosary of archipelagoes,” *Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagrophy*’ p.23

In her eyes there sometimes burned something like a vague presentiment of passions which flared up suddenly and set aflame all the life round about. Perhaps, it is thus that the island itself once rose from the ocean, and that the plants upon it burst into flower under the first ray of the sun...¹²

Racial difference is eroticised. The ellipsis at the end of the passage, a signifier of hesitation or something left unsaid, emphasises the image of the mysterious feminine that Gauguin's writing evokes. The island is also entrenched in this discourse of feminine mystique; indeed, Gauguin imagines that the island is *produced* by female desire, for the words 'rose' and 'burst' are movements replicating sexual climax. Meanwhile, a second literary trope, that of the dystopian novel, plays upon the mainlander's fear of "going native," of 'being transformed into something wild, like the island and its natives, instead of being able to transform Others into being civilized, like him.'¹³ The boundedness of the island, and the subsequent feeling of being "cut-off from civilization," intensifies this fear of contagion. H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) is one such example. Utopian and dystopian islands, when taken together, position the island as an embodiment of both fear and desire – an intertwining that I trace through the pages of *Robinson Crusoe* in the next chapter of this thesis.

A desire to encompass and discipline the island drives the plot of the most popular island narrative within the western world, that of the Robinsonade: the story of a solitary castaway who washes up a desert island, which he then establishes sovereignty over. Such novels have had enduring popularity, especially *Robinson Crusoe*: 'by 1895, 196 editions of *Robinson Crusoe* had been published, 114 revisions, 277 imitations, and 110 translations.'¹⁴ The allure of such narratives stems from the apparent representation of the island as an empty, uninhabited space – a *tabula rasa* waiting to be transformed. Many Robinsonade narratives contain descriptions which feminise the island. They explore the island in movements evocative of sexual congress: Crusoe discovers an 'Opening' leading to a verdant valley, and 'descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale'¹⁵ in *Robinson Crusoe*. Sue Best suggests that spaces are discursively feminised to control and contain them

¹² Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa: The Tahitian Journal*, trans. by O. Feis (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), p.3

¹³ Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p.132

¹⁴ Brooklyn College, *Defoe's Reputation*, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18c/defoe/> [Accessed 12th February 2017]

¹⁵ Defoe, p.85

‘within a human horizon.’¹⁶ However, she shows that when body is invoked as a metaphor for space ‘the boundary is probably most uncertain.’¹⁷ My analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* explores the precariousness of the identification between woman and island.

I have sketched out these literary tropes to establish the position of the island in the western cultural imaginary. But this is not a mapping project, it is a *remapping* project – a search for new ways of perceiving and writing the island. As Rita Felski writes, ‘we *shortchange the significance of art by focusing on the “de” prefix (its power to demystify, destabilise, denaturalize) at the expense of the “re” prefix: its ability to recontextualize, reconfigure, or recharge perception.*’¹⁸ In this thesis, then, I focus my attention on rethinking and remapping one trope in particular: the feminised island. I question the stability of the metaphorical identification between woman and island in *Robinson Crusoe*, and explore how the Robinsonade’s gendered topographies are translated and negotiated across contexts in the three revisionary texts I examine: Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter*, J.M Coetzee’s *Foe*, and Julieta Campos’ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*.

WRITING BACK: A LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, a growing body of island studies research has focussed its attention on rethinking both the island’s boundedness and isolation, whilst neglecting to pay attention to the island’s feminisation. For example, Gillis traces the changing symbolic representations of islands throughout history: their movement from the edges of western maps to become ‘the most closely examined, mapped, and inventoried parts of the world’ in the eighteenth century, and subsequent return to the western-constructed periphery following ‘the collapse of plantation economies.’¹⁹ Meanwhile, Owe Ronström positions islands as dynamic constructions of language: ‘What is an island? The obvious answer: a word. What are words? Beautifully small and magically tensile forms, tools for thought and emotion [...] storehouses for knowledge and experiences accumulated over centuries.’²⁰ Ronström analyses the original word for ‘island’ in multiple languages, and discovers ‘the somewhat

¹⁶ ‘Sexualizing Space’ *Sexy Bodies: Strange Carnalities of Feminism* ed. by Elizabeth Grosz & Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1995), p.183

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.183

¹⁸ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.17

¹⁹ John Gillis, ‘Taking history offshore: Atlantic islands in European minds’, *Islands in History and Representation* ed. by Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, (London: Routledge, 2003), p.27, p.31

²⁰ Owe Ronström, ‘Island Words, Island Worlds: The Origins and Meanings of Words for ‘Islands’ in North-West Europe’ *Island studies Journal*, 4. 2 (2009), 227-244, p.163

pejorative connotations that some island-related words – such as ‘isolate’, ‘insulate’ or ‘insular/insularity’ – carry today may be fairly recent.’²¹ He also discovers there is no common etymological source for the word ‘island’ across languages, which shows him that ‘islands, like languages, are systems constituted by series of differences.’²² In both Gillis and Ronström’s work, the island is a dynamic figure, its representation changing according to sociocultural conditions, an idea which challenges the island’s symbolic boundedness.

But island studies is not without its problems. Lisa Fletcher’s work highlights two problematic binaries that have emerged within the discipline: that of islander/non-islander and literature/geography. An example of the former can be found in the work of Grant McCall, who advocates a necessity for ‘the study of islands on their own terms,’ rather than viewing them through the eyes of ‘continental dwellers.’²³ This differentiation between islander and continental perspectives results in a self/other dichotomy, where the binary relation between continent and island is still in place but its values are inverted. Such categorisations fail to take into account, in Fletcher’s words, ‘the complexities of liminality, hybridity and migration which blur the distinction between island and non-island spaces and peoples.’²⁴ Furthermore, McCall initially named island studies *nissology*, a word ‘derived from ‘the Greek root for island (nisos) and Study of (logos).’²⁵ The suffix, *logos*, pertains to a very specific type of study – that of ‘speech, discourse, reason’ and divinity, for *logos* is also synonymous with Christ²⁶ – a rationalist, western perspective of knowledge that could be in danger of entrenching the island within the very same system of representation it seeks to rescue it from.

To avoid replicating the very ontologies they critique, island studies scholars must be aware of the type of gaze they level at the island, and the methodologies and metaphors through which they choose to represent it. Postcolonial studies can offer island studies a lot in terms of thinking through positionality, for as Benita Parry states, postcolonialism can be perceived as ‘a site for the production of theoretical work which, although indelibly marked by colonialism, transcends its cognitive modes.’²⁷ Meanwhile, to Gayatri Spivak,

²¹ Ibid., p.170

²² Ibid., p.164

²³ Ibid., Grant McCall, ‘Nissology: A Proposal for Consideration,’ *Journal of the Pacific Society*, 17.63 (1994) 1-14, pp.1-2

²⁴ Lisa Fletcher, “‘...some distance to go’: A Critical Survey of Island Studies’, *New Literatures Review*, 47 (2011) 17-34, p.22

²⁵ McCall, p.1

²⁶ ‘Logos’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online Database* [Accessed 14th February 2018]

²⁷ Benita Parry, ‘The Postcolonial: Conceptual Category or Chimera?’ *The Yearbook of English Studies: The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism*, Vol. 27, (1997), 3-21, p.4

negotiation, the idea ‘that one tries to change something that one is obliged to inhabit,’²⁸ is a key aspect of effective postcolonial critique. Viewed from this perspective, island studies scholars are not *outside* the island but working from *within* a power structure that has historically marginalised it – a structure they are therefore in a position to intervene with, deconstruct and transcend.

One such intervention in island studies emerges through the figure of the archipelago, which has informed the most fundamental paradigm shift within island studies discourse – that of a critical movement from island to archipelago. This is because, as Elizabeth Stratford et al. explain, the archipelago contains the potential to unsettle ‘two somewhat overworked topological relations²⁹’ in contemporary island scholarship, that of land and sea, continent and mainland. Instead the archipelago embodies ‘an experience of disjuncture, connection and entanglement *between* and *among* islands’³⁰ – a reference to the oceanic journeys and trade connections between islands within an archipelago, as well as the complex flows of migration and settlement that characterise island populations. The archipelago challenges the concept of the island as isolated and peripheral, instead stressing its *relationality* to the surrounding environment. Indeed, the Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau’ofa stresses the difference between an Oceanic perspective of the Pacific compared to a more insular, western perspective:

There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands’. The first emphasises dry surfaces in a vast ocean ...The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships...’³¹

To Hau’ofa, land and sea are not symbolically and geographically opposed elements; they are interconnected. His use of ellipses in place of full stops, which clearly separate clauses from each other, replicates this dissolution of demarcating boundaries. Archipelagographic cartographies are therefore decolonizing narratives, ones which unsettle the simplistic dichotomy between ‘continental-dweller’ and ‘islander.’

The second problematic binary in island studies is that which places geography and literature in opposition with one another. Fletcher explains that island studies is entrenched

²⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. by Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), p.72

²⁹ Elaine Stratford et. al. ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, *Island studies Journal*, Vol 6, (2011), 113-130, p.114

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114

³¹ Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our sea of islands”, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering our Sea of Islands* ed. by Epeli Hau’ofa, Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu (Suva: USP, 1993), p.7

in the perception that ‘in seeking to describe reality, geography opens the pathway to a fuller appreciation of places, peoples and their imbrication.’³² Meanwhile, ‘literature is frequently characterised as the field of falsehoods, misinformation and fancy which is responsible for creating and circulating (utopian and dystopian) stereotypes of islands.’³³ One does not have to look too hard to find island studies research that reflects this critical position: Pete Hay, for example, asserts that island studies scholars working within literary and cultural studies ‘exhibit an understandable tendency to see the reality of islands as of less interest and import than the ‘virtual’ status of the island as metaphor,’³⁴ and makes a case for excluding the latter from the island studies discipline. But how can one exclude literature from geography? The two are always already intertwined, for as Emmanuelle Peraldo points out, ‘Geography (geo-graphia/graphein), etymologically speaking, means writing the world, leaving traces and records of the actions of humans on earth.’³⁵ Our understanding of the spaces we inhabit and the topographies we traverse are *textually mediated* through travel diaries, postcards, maps and novels. Fletcher takes this idea one step further when she puts forward the concept of performative geographies as a lens through which to read island texts. She explicitly draws upon Judith Butler’s definition of performativity as ‘that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names’³⁶ – in other words, that meaning is *produced* through language, an idea which unsettles the concept of ‘real’ geographical islands versus their constraining ‘virtual’ significations. Fletcher also draws upon Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s understanding of the performative act, which she explains as ‘an interaction between human subjects in a spatial context’³⁷; an idea which grants significance to the space in which the act takes place, as well as the act itself. Viewed in this way, the island is not simply a backdrop but a ‘dynamic player’³⁸, which highlights the influence of geography upon individual subjectivities in a textually mediated relationship. In this thesis, I show that the islands and archipelagos in the texts I examine are not simply stages upon which the action unfolds. Instead I stress their dynamism and explore the ways in which their topographies generate affects, both upon the reader and the characters that inhabit them.

³² Fletcher, pp.23-24

³³ Ibid., p.24

³⁴ Pete Hay, ‘A Phenomenology of Islands,’ *Island Studies Journal*, 1.1 (2006) 19-42, p.26

³⁵ Emmanuelle Peraldo, “‘Two broad shining eyes’: Optic Impressions and Landscape in Robinson Crusoe’ *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & His Contemporaries*, 4.1(Fall 2012), 17-30, p.25

³⁶ Judith Butler, ‘Gender as Performance’, in Fletcher, 2011, p.27

³⁷ Fletcher, p.28

³⁸ Ibid., p.28

Suzanne Thomas is another theorist who seeks to unsettle the problematic binaries of self/other, subject/object and real/virtual that threaten island studies discourse. She desires ‘to deterritorialize linear monological concepts of geographic island space [...] shifting our lens from the study of islands as something out there, objective Other, to focusing on island as a geographical entity acting on us and in us.’³⁹ To facilitate this process, Thomas has developed a methodology, nissopoesis – the suffix, *poesis*, refers to ‘the process of making; production, creation’⁴⁰ – which conceives of the island as both a figurative and material construction, a space ‘textured with intricately woven strands of the semiotic, material, social, poetical, cultural and aesthetic.’⁴¹ Here, Thomas’ conception of the island is no longer a *tabula rasa*, but a multi-dimensional image or palimpsest that has been constructed, or woven, from multiple discourses. In the second chapter of this thesis, ‘Islands of Intertextuality: Negotiations and Interpretations of Space(s) in Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*’, I develop the metaphor of the island-as-palimpsest when I discuss the intertextual relations that shape the islands in these two revisionary texts.

Similarly, in their discussion of island poetics, Daniel Graziadei et al. state an intention to move away from a reductionist perception of the island as mere metaphor, instead emphasising the ‘sensory, corporeal, and material *textures* of islands in different media.’⁴² Both they and Thomas refer to ‘texture’, a concept which, to Renu Bora, occupies a liminal space ‘on the borders of touch and vision’⁴³; one which evokes an *embodied* response. The texture of a literary narrative, then, refers to the materiality of language – its smoothness, its roughness, or its sharpness – and the bodily effect it has upon the reader. Take this example from *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*: ‘the gaze touches her and wraps her in a gelatinous substance, in amber still uncongealed.’⁴⁴ Here, the viscosity of the imagery evokes feelings of disgust. Sarah Jackson compares the text to the skin of a body, ‘shedding, exposing, and dissolving its own limits’, that is ‘perpetually generating new meanings and

³⁹ Suzanne Thomas, ‘Nissopoesis: A Spatializing and Narrativizing Practice’, paper delivered at conference entitled *Finding their Place: Islands in Social Theory*, Islands Commission of the International Geographical Union (IGU) in collaboration with the Department of Human Geography, Lund University, Sweden, (August 27-30, 2010), p.1

⁴⁰ ‘Poesis,’ *The Oxford English Dictionary Online Database* [Accessed 13th February]

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.3

⁴² Daniel Graziadei et al. “On sensing island spaces and the spatial practice of island-making: introducing island poetics, Part I” *Island studies Journal*, 12.2 (November 2017), 239-252, p.240

⁴³ Renu Bora, “Outing Texture” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p.96

⁴⁴ Campos, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, p.9

alternative lines of thought⁴⁵; a tactile surface that has the capacity to emotionally “touch” the reader. Therefore, to explore the texture of islands is to challenge their designation as *tabula rasa*. Instead it evokes islands as spaces with agency, textured spaces that have the capacity to generate sensory impressions upon the reader.

The work of Fletcher, Thomas and Graziadei shows that literary studies heightens our awareness of the multi-dimensionality and complexity of island representations, and enables us to unpack the affects and meanings they induce within the cultural imaginary. The work of these scholars has informed my own critical approach. However, in this thesis I wish to extend the discussion of alternative methodologies for reading and writing the island one step further. I believe that feminist discourses of writing, spatiality and embodiment can also aid our understanding of the complexity of island representations. They can also do much to rethink a binary rarely discussed within island studies, but very much in place in western island literature: that of masculine/feminine.

A FEMINIST INTERVENTION

Island studies scholars rarely draw upon feminist discourses to help them rethink the island. As Marina Karides observes in ‘Why Island Feminism?’ (2017), ‘research or theoretical consideration of how island societies construct and are shaped by gender and sexuality is almost entirely absent in journals and publications dedicated to Island Studies.’⁴⁶ She believes that one of the goals of island feminism is to explore ‘how the spatial imaginary of islands guides gender and informs sexualities on islands (or not).’⁴⁷ Since our spatial imaginaries are shaped and mediated by literary texts, it follows that the study of island narratives can deepen our understanding of the relationship between woman and the island. This thesis makes a literary-critical contribution to island feminism in two fundamental ways. The first is through rethinking the gendered binary of island possession described in the prologue of this thesis, whereby the male castaway possesses and transforms the passive, feminised island. The second is to show that certain feminisms are integral to the project of writing the island without embedding it within the western ontologies that designate it as peripheral, passive and bounded.

⁴⁵ Sarah Jackson, *Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp.1-2

⁴⁶ Marina Karides, ‘Why Island Feminism?’ *Shima Journal*, Vol. 11.1 (2017), 30-39, p.30

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.30

Whilst island studies scholars have spent time rethinking notions of the island's boundedness, the binary of feminised island and male castaway remains very much in place. This gendered relationship is deeply entrenched in the uneven hierarchies of western metaphysics, which creates pairings based upon a self-other dichotomy: subject/object, culture/nature, reason/passion. For example, to Rene Descartes, physical matter (*res extensa*) such as the material body and the physical environment was passive and unmoving, in contrast to the active, immaterial, thinking self (*res cogitans*).⁴⁸ Primary importance was attributed to the latter, as the infamous phrase "cogito, ergo sum" illustrates. These binaries are gendered, with women situated in the corporeal and men in the immaterial. As Best informs us, 'woman becomes the body-matter for philosophy as the necessary condition for man to appear to transcend his corporeal, material existence through reflection and speculation.'⁴⁹ An example of woman as 'matter' for man's transcendence can be found within the Robinsonade narrative: the castaway's identity formation, his mental and bodily self-discipline, is connected to his colonisation and transformation of the natural, uncultivated space of the island. Within the system of the Cartesian cogito, the island-as-female-body emerges as a passive, material space; object matter to be tamed and controlled. To rethink the island, then, it becomes necessary to find theories or methodologies that write back against the uneven dichotomies of western philosophy. This is where contemporary feminist theories of space and embodiment, which challenge the Cartesian dualisms that have historically marginalised women, come into play.

Sue Best's work exemplifies how the comparison between woman's body and the island can enable us to recuperate the island from a passive space to a site of agency and dynamism. Central to her ideas is the concept that 'woman is not simply compared to space, the body of woman is integral to the production of these concepts of space.'⁵⁰ One of these concepts is Plato's *chôra*, or maternal space, which is represented as 'devoid of all character in order to receive in itself every possible character.'⁵¹ Best argues that conceptualizing and understanding this schema would not be possible for the Greeks without their understanding that 'women played no part in active gestation.'⁵² So whilst *chôra* represents passivity, the process via which this representation is generated involves woman's body, her biological system, as an *active producer* of meaning. This is a form of recuperation, for feminists have

⁴⁸ Yrjö Haila, 'Beyond the nature-culture dualism,' *Biology and Philosophy* 15 (2000), 155–175

⁴⁹ Best, p.187

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.186

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.185

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.186

long been in flight from the body, a reminder of their marginal position within the Cartesian cogito. As Elizabeth Wilson points out, feminists have tended to position the body as a metaphor, as a social or cultural construction, whilst also seeking to ‘seal themselves off from [...] the domain of the biological.’⁵³ However, new materialists such as Wilson and Samantha Frost believe that biology, neurology and anatomy can provide new insights into feminism, showing us that the body is not passive but a site of active biological processes, not bounded but part of a broader ecological system. In doing so they aim ‘to undo the opposition between reason and passions, and to question the distinction between self and world’⁵⁴ – challenging the gendered dichotomies of western philosophy; the binary system that designates the island as passive/ feminine/nature.

This thesis also engages with feminised styles of writing – by ‘feminised’ I mean writing that engages with symbolic representations or the body-matter of women – which threatens to unsettle binary systems of representation. For example, Jacques Derrida applies the concept of invagination – a biological term often used in reference to embryonic development, which put simply means ‘to turn or double [...] back within itself’⁵⁵ – to both texts and genres, suggesting their capacity to be ‘to be reentered and reiterated.’⁵⁶ I use Derrida’s concept of invagination, an affirmative, feminised poetics, to discuss the revisionary strategies exhibited by *Crusoe’s Daughter* and *Foe* as they engage with genre and gender. Meanwhile, I also engage with the lyrical poetics of Campos’ writing in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*; a style she likens to ‘una música iridescente, acuática, que desvanece los límites’/‘an iridescent, aquatic music which dissolves limits,’⁵⁷ thereby self-consciously invoking a comparison between the oceanic imaginary of *écriture féminine* (a discourse I also briefly touch upon). I show how these aquatic movements of desire have the power to redraw western cartographies in which the island is viewed as a passive space, peripheral to the mainland, instead positioning it as a dynamic, shifting multiplicity.

Therefore, the work of the new materialists, Best’s reconceptualization of space and the feminised narrative poetics briefly delineated above have the potential to contribute to

⁵³ Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p.8

⁵⁴ Samantha Frost, ‘Chapter 4: The Implications of the New Materialisms for Feminist Epistemology’, *Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science: Power in Knowledge*, ed. by Heidi E. Grasswick (London: Springer, 2011), p.72

⁵⁵ ‘Invagination’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online Database*, [Accessed 30th January, 2018]

⁵⁶ Jonathon Crimmins, ‘Gender, Genre, and the Near Future in Derrida’s “The Law of Genre,”’ *Diacritics*, 39.1 (spring 2009), 45-60, p.54

⁵⁷ Julieta Campos, ‘Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro’, *Un Heroísmo Secreto* (México, D.F: Vuelta, 1988), p. 67

island studies by illustrating how the island can be recuperated from a passive, feminised space and reconceptualised as something more active, dynamic and embodied. There is also a link between the archipelagic turn in island studies – which seeks to explore the island’s relationality to, rather than its isolation from, the surrounding environment – and the new materialists’ call to ‘think ecologically,’⁵⁸ for as Jane Bennett states, ‘to call something ecological is to draw attention to its necessary implication in a network of relations.’⁵⁹ Framed in these terms, this thesis can be considered ecological, for it draws upon aspects of the interlinked discourses of feminism, new materialism and archipelagraphy to reconceptualise the island’s boundedness, peripherality and feminisation.

The first chapter of this thesis, ‘Unstable enclosures and fragmentary shorelines: the appetitive topographies of Crusoe’s island,’ explores the link between Crusoe’s identity-formation and his transformation of the island space. It also functions as a ground-clearing exercise, enabling the remapping of the island from a *tabula rasa* to an embodied construction of appetite and desire. This transition calls into question both Crusoe’s possessive hold on the island and the stability of his identity formation. Meanwhile, the second chapter of this thesis, ‘Islands of Intertextuality: Negotiations and Interpretations of Space(s) in Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*,’ shows how the representation of the Crusoean island alters when the castaway who washes up on its shores is a woman. I explore how Gardam and Coetzee negotiate the confines of genre and gender, a negotiation played out in each woman protagonist’s navigation of her island. I also examine the literary strategies Gardam and Coetzee employ to break out of these confines; how they redraw and reshape the Crusoean island. The final chapter of this thesis, ‘Reading the archipelago of desire in Julieta Campos’ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*,’ makes a literary contribution to island studies, as I outline a literary methodology I developed, derived from archipelagic geographies. Campos’ novel is saturated with references to islands both real and imagined, connected through her ‘archipelago of desire’⁶⁰ motif. I trace the relations between and among these islands, drawing upon the work of Caribbean theorists such as Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* to inform my archipelagic analysis. In doing so I show how the text delegitimises the linear thrust of colonial island possession, instead providing an alternative, emancipatory

⁵⁸ Frost, p.78

⁵⁹ Jane Bennett, ‘The Force of Things: Towards an Ecology of Matter’, *Political Theory*, Vol. 32. 3 (June 2004), 347-372, p.365

⁶⁰ Campos, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, p.102

cartography which stresses the relationality between the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, and Africa – a form of remapping I also analyse from a feminist perspective.

AN ARCHIPELAGO OF ENQUIRY

At first glance, the writers of the texts I shall be looking at in this thesis – Daniel Defoe, J M Coetzee, Jane Gardam and Julieta Campos – appear to have little in common. Defoe is a religious Dissenter and an ardent advocate of mercantile trade. To Carol Houlihan Flynn, Crusoe's relationship towards capitalism is complex, for he is also preoccupied with the problems of a rapidly expanding population, 'a society dedicated to the consumption not just of goods, but of flesh, a society crowded with need that will not go away'⁶¹; concerned, in other words, with how best to order and contain the desiring, disorderly body. On the other hand, J. M. Coetzee is a South African born writer whose work functions as a critique of what he believes *Robinson Crusoe* to represent; he refers to Defoe's novel as 'unabashed propaganda for the extension of British mercantile power in the New World and the establishment of new British colonies.'⁶² Coetzee's Nobel prizewinning fiction addresses vital questions and tensions in postcolonialism, postmodernism, and South African apartheid politics. Meanwhile, the fiction of British writer Jane Gardam is set in a post-imperial context. A journalist from *The New Yorker* achieves a tone of satirical fondness when remarking on the Britishness of both author and her novels: 'in her England, manners mask seismic desires. There is longing in the umbrella stand and violence in the string of pearls.'⁶³ Despite writing over twenty novels and receiving an OBE there is a remarkable lack of literary scholarship on Gardam's writing; I found only three short essays and an occasional mention of *Crusoe's Daughter* in critical texts focussing on revisions of *Robinson Crusoe*. The same is true of Cuban born writer Julieta Campos, who, despite a considerable intellectual presence – being elected the president of PEN Mexico in 1975, writing five novels, numerous essays, and 'translations of over thirty-eight books of social science, history, and psychoanalysis'⁶⁴ – is not well known to an Anglophone audience, and rarely critically discussed by Anglophone scholars. I believe both these women's work is of interest

⁶¹ Carol Houlihan Flynn, *The Body in Swift and Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.6

⁶² J M Coetzee, 'Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe', *Stranger Shores, Essays 1986-1999* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), p.24

⁶³ Lauren Collins, 'Retrospective', *The New Yorker*, June 30th 2014, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/30/retrospective>>, [Accessed 3rd December 2017]

⁶⁴ Ann-Marie Fallon, 'Julieta Campos and the Repeating island,' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, (June 2006), 36-65, p.38

to island studies scholars. *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* makes a particularly important contribution to the paradigm shift from island to archipelago within island studies.

At first glance these four writers appear poles apart. But they are linked by the figure of the island; the three revisionary texts by their desire to rewrite colonial island narratives. *Foe*, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* and *Crusoe's Daughter* are texts connected through the discourses of feminism, postmodernism and postcolonialism – discourses that, to Bill Ashcroft, overlap in their attempts 'to dismantle assumptions about language and textuality and to stress the importance of ideological constructions in social-textual relations.'⁶⁵ To Stuart Hall, postcolonialism is not simply deconstructive; it is also a 're-narrativisation project [...] a reconstitution of the epistemic and power/knowledge fields around the relations of globalisation.'⁶⁶ Both feminist and postcolonial writers are interested in writing back against eighteenth-century texts. This is because the eighteenth century saw the emergence of the Cartesian subject and the mind/body dualism that has proven problematic for feminists critical of the association of women with the passive, material body, and for postcolonial writers, since the Cartesian cogito is 'rationalizing an imperialism that would put the European *mind* in control of the colonial *body*, and put *us* in control of *them*'⁶⁷ – a hierarchy of bodies that places the white male body in the centre.

Robinson Crusoe is an eighteenth-century text which depicts the emergence of the Cartesian subject; a narrative in which (male) reason predominates over bodily desires, in which (feminine) passions are, in Gardam's words, 'monitored, dissected, pondered – and dispersed.'⁶⁸ *Foe*, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* and *Crusoe's Daughter* all explicitly write back against *Robinson Crusoe's* imperial, masculine power dynamics. They desire to re-narrativise the Crusoean myth, which the postcolonial author V.S Naipaul refers to as:

The dream of being the first man in the world, of watching the first crop grow. Not only a dream of innocence: it is the dream of being suddenly, just as one is, in unquestionable control of the physical world [...] it is the dream of total power.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Bill Ashcroft, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd edn, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin & Gareth Griffiths (London: Routledge, 2002), p.165

⁶⁶ Stuart Hall, 'When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the limit,' *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* eds. Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti (London: Routledge, 1996) p.250

⁶⁷ Donna Heiland, 'Historical Subjects: Recent Fiction about the Eighteenth Century' *Eighteenth Century Life*, Vol. 21.1, (February 1997),108-122, p.110

⁶⁸ Jane Gardam, *Crusoe's Daughter* (London: Abacus, 2012), p.299

⁶⁹ V. S Naipaul, 'Columbus and Crusoe', *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (New York: Vintage, 1984), p.225

Naipaul highlights the mechanisms of power and control lurking behind the Crusoean myth of solitude, contemplation and transformation. It is this appearance of ‘unquestionable control’ that the three revisionary texts challenge. However, although they are writing back against the narratives of colonialism, each writer still draws upon the figure of the island to give voice and shape to their desires. This means that in each text, the island is resituated in a new network of power relations and continues to symbolise the ‘entwined notions of rebirth, reformulation and renewal’⁷⁰ that can be found within *Robinson Crusoe*.

This thesis refuses to place *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe*, *Crusoe’s Daughter* and *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* within a hierarchical system. It does not attribute more significance to the woman-authored texts than to those penned by their male counterparts. It does not assume that the original is more ‘authentic’ and therefore more valuable than the revisionary texts, any more than it assumes their greater value for writing back against problematic colonial politics. Like Felski, I question the superior attitude some critics and writers adopt when discussing texts that precede the contemporary era: ‘the advantage of our hindsight is compensated for by their robustness, resilience, and continuing resonance [...] they speak to, rather than beyond, their own moment.’⁷¹ We are, after all, still in dialogue with *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel written in 1719. I also make an effort to avoid what Felski refers to as a *hermeneutics of suspicion*: ‘to expose hidden truths and draw out unflattering and counterintuitive meanings that others fail to see.’⁷² She believes this approach is symbolically violent and reductive, positioning the text as something to be broken open, or a symptom illustrative of larger social inequalities. She suggests that ‘rather than looking behind the text – for its hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motives – we might place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible.’⁷³ This is a position that this thesis also aims to adopt. The word, ‘island,’ is viewed not as a constraint evoking rigid representations and marginalising discourses of power, but a site of multiple possibilities, a figure which has the capacity to generate emotional affects.

Felski acknowledges that these ‘in front’ methodologies can be found within the discourses of feminism, queer theory and postcolonialism. One such example is Eve Sedgwick’s critical position of *Beside*:

⁷⁰ Ian Kinane, *Theorising Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), p.9

⁷¹ Felski, p.159

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.12

Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings.⁷⁴

Sedgwick's concept of the *Beside* functions as a critique of dualistic thinking by highlighting the complex interrelationships that comprise critical thinking. It is also, unmistakably, *embodied*, as situating a discussion of power relations in an example of siblings sharing a bed shows. The approach is embodied because it is spatial: a consideration of the multiple 'desiring, identifying, representing, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing'⁷⁵ power relations that lend texture to a text. Sedgwick's *Beside* evokes textual space as active, dynamic and interrelational, suggesting its suitability as a methodology for thinking about and discussing islands in literary narratives.

I place the four literary texts being analysed *beside* each other. My analysis has been dictated by the spatial and embodied relations between them. The first chapter explores how the island in *Robinson Crusoe* is shaped according to appetitive currents of desire: within the novel the word 'eat' occurs sixty times, 'devour/devour'd' occurs thirty-four times, 'fed' fourteen times and 'swallow/swallow'd' occurs six times. Meanwhile, in the second chapter, I focus on the act of female authorship, the process of being able to find a space for oneself in the world. This is because in Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* 'mouth' is mentioned twenty-six times and 'lips' eight times, whereas in J M Coetzee's *Foe* the word 'mouth' occurs sixteen times, 'lips' eighteen times, and 'tongue' twenty-nine times; both organs which shape and form words, representing the embodied nature of meaning-making. Meanwhile, in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* the island is often depicted in terms of movement, specifically the words 'surge/surging', 'emerge/emerging' and 'rises/rising.' These words are also indicative of the movements of desire, of sexual climax. I trace these movements to show how surges of desire simultaneously produce and destabilise the island.

This thesis therefore constitutes an archipelago of enquiry, one which remaps and reassembles colonial island cartographies. I have already discussed some of the ways in which these texts relate to one another. Another connection is the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They are the spectres that hover behind the thought of archipelagraphy, and they are the explicit inspiration for both Thomas' nissopoesis and Glissant's *Poetics of*

⁷⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) p.8

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8

Relation. This thesis does not undertake a detailed analysis of Deleuzian theories but has a more oblique engagement with their work through the methodologies and theories it employs; theories that necessitate a brief explanation.

Deleuze and Guattari's work stresses the importance of geographical territory to societal and identity formation, and the importance of desire in codification of this territory. Desire, to Deleuze and Guattari, is comprised of a series of partial and fragmentary flows that join, produce and separate objects: it is an assemblage or 'flow-producing machine.'⁷⁶ Each new regime or *socius* must dismantle these flows and establish a new assemblage: processes known as deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In Deleuzian thought, according to Paul Patton, 'a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, social, or affective.'⁷⁷ It is, furthermore, bounded; identities are determined whether one dwells *inside* or *outside* a given territory. Deterritorialization is explained as 'a movement of process by which something escapes or departs from a territory'⁷⁸ – 'something' can be anything from social customs to a flower such as the orchid – and reterritorialization as 'the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old.'⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari explain that the orchid deterritorializes itself by camouflaging itself as a wasp, and it is reterritorialized when the wasp takes its pollen and enables it to reproduce. However, they show that this is a double-deterritorialization: the wasp is simultaneously deterritorialized, by becoming an aspect of the orchid's reproductive system, and reterritorialized, through its extraction of pollen. This means that movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialization are 'relative, always connected, caught up in one another [...] Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome.'⁸⁰ I have used this example to show that Deleuze and Guattari's thought can be applied to an ecological system: to show, in other words, that it can be used in a thesis that discusses the relational ecologies of islands.

The concept of the rhizome is also relevant to this thesis. The rhizome is a biologically-situated figure deployed by Deleuze and Guattari to explain their ideas of relational, heterogeneous thought:

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et. al, 10th Reprint (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.5

⁷⁷ Paul Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), p.52

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.52

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.52

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* 5th Edition, translated by Brian Masumi, (London: Continuum Press, 2004), p.11

Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions [...] the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis [...] the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight.⁸¹

The rhizome is a series of viewpoints emerging from different perspectives, stratifying and intersecting. Two ideas cannot be placed in a linear, comparative relationship with one another. The rhizome therefore shatters the dualisms of western philosophy by positing ideas as relational multiplicities, which can be approached and understood from a variety of perspectives. They also challenge the notion of inscription, for the rhizome is ‘detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable’; not a static image but a dynamic process of becoming. This thesis is explicitly rhizomatic, for it approaches the island from a variety of critical perspectives to counteract the possessive gaze that has been historically levelled at it. Ultimately, it provides no authoritative definition of the island, instead stressing its dynamic, shifting and relational construction.

However, the application of a Deleuzian methodology to a literary project that straddles both feminist and postcolonial discourses must be problematised. Simone Bignall and Paul Patton explain that Deleuze is ‘condemned for his lack of explicit engagement with the body of postcolonial thought and with colonialism as a problematic site of analysis.’⁸² Deleuzian thought is also criticised for the essentialising of indigenous experiences to formulate intellectual concepts, specifically ‘nomadology’. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak accuses Deleuze and Guattari of reintroducing ‘the individual subject through totalizing concepts of desire and power,’⁸³ exemplifying a Eurocentric discourse that marginalises the female and postcolonial ‘other’ by speaking for her. However, Rosi Braidotti recuperates the figure of the nomad. To her it represents the dispossessed subject in a society which contrasts an ideology of globalization and free mobility with an economy of disposable bodies. She argues ‘a figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self; it’s no metaphor [...] being homeless, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a tourist [...] a citizen of a country that

⁸¹ Ibid., p.23

⁸² Simone Bignall and Paul Patton, ‘Introduction’, *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p.1

⁸³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) p.279

no longer exists: these are no metaphors.’⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Glissant also uses the figure of the rhizome to inform his understanding of creolization, the tangle of cultures and languages that form the islands of the Caribbean. To Glissant, the rhizome ‘challenges the idea of a totalitarian root’⁸⁵, instead allowing him to position creolization as ‘a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open.’⁸⁶ Rhizomatic thought subverts the hierarchy that positions Creole languages as ‘impure,’ inferior forms of their linguistic roots. Both Braidotti and Glissant show that Deleuzian thought can be applied to material geographies and used to articulate a non-western subjectivity.

This thesis represents an encounter between Deleuzian thought, feminism and postcolonialism, which according to Patton and Bignall is shaped by ‘the shared problem of finding lines of escape from forms of capture and containment, but also to identify some of the ways in which these lines of escape might come together, mutually informing each other.’⁸⁷ Feminism and postcolonialism can be linked to a desire to escape containment, for as Vrushali Patel states: ‘the notion of borders, whether of nation, sex, gender, or race, that emerged during the colonial period and shaped the nascent disciplines continues to discipline these disciplines, and even interdisciplines.’⁸⁸ This is not a thesis about the ‘other’. Instead, this thesis negotiates and redraws boundaries both geographic and social – the boundaries of Crusoe’s island. In doing so it highlights the permeability of these island borders. Crusoe’s island is no longer a symbol of masculine boundedness, but a proliferating space representative of multiple hybrid subjectivities; an island ‘re-plotted, redrawn, remapped and renamed to become a messy collage of associations and narrative desires.’⁸⁹ The motivations behind doing so have by now been made obvious. As Deloughrey states, ‘the process of decolonization must begin with revised cartographies.’⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 2nd edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.10

⁸⁵ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.11

⁸⁶ Glissant, p.34

⁸⁷ Bignall, *Deleuze and the Postcolonial*, p.9

⁸⁸ Vrushali Patil ‘From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment of How Far We’ve Really Come,’ *Signs*, Vol. 38, No. 4, (Summer 2013) *Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory*, 847-867, p.847

⁸⁹ Ann-Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.15

⁹⁰ Deloughrey, ‘Rosaries of Islands, Litanies of Archipelagoes’, p.34

CHAPTER ONE | UNSTABLE ENCLOSURES AND FRAGMENTARY SHORELINES: THE APPETITIVE TOPOGRAPHIES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE'S ISLAND

I'd have
nightmares of other islands
stretching away from mine, infinities
of islands, islands spawning islands,
like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs
of islands, knowing that I had to live
on each and every one.

– Elizabeth Bishop, 'Crusoe in England'

(RE)MAPPING

There seem to be no limits to *Robinson Crusoe*'s popularity. As Ian Kinane informs us, since its publication in 1719 'there have been two hundred English and six hundred international editions of *Robinson Crusoe* alone.'¹ There have been numerous parodies and revisions of the novel, and it has also inspired the Robinsonade, a genre of island shipwreck and survival stories ranging from Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* to the television show *Survivor*. One reason for this popularity is because the Crusoean island has come to represent a space where man – a gendered noun I use deliberately, provocatively – can not only refashion himself but his environment, an idea that has inspired the popular and poetic imagination. As V S Naipaul writes, alluding to the text's colonial contexts, *Robinson Crusoe* represents 'the dream of total power'² – the ability to master and conquer territory. In the prologue to this thesis, I showed that the colonial gesture of island possession is often framed in gendered terms: the male castaway builds upon and civilizes the permissive, feminised space of the island to establish his sovereignty. However, this chapter questions Crusoe's dominance and the island's passivity, instead suggesting a more complex (inter)relationship between man and island, one which blurs the boundaries between subject and object, which redraws the cartographies of possession and control. The two questions it asks are therefore interrelated:

¹ Ian Kinane, *Theorising Literary Islands: The Island Trope in Contemporary Robinsonade Narratives* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), p.33

² V. S Naipaul, 'Columbus and Crusoe', *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (New York: Vintage, 1984), p.225

Does the island figure as a passive, feminised space within *Robinson Crusoe*? Does Crusoe ultimately succeed in mastering it?

This chapter is not the first piece of contemporary criticism aiming to provide fresh insights into *Robinson Crusoe*. In recent years, Daniel Defoe's novel has been the site of numerous postcolonial, Marxist, psychoanalytic, queer and phenomenological readings. Many of these readings function as a challenge to *Robinson Crusoe's* original status as a 'conduct book [...] a way of producing a normative masculine subject' through the message of 'hard work, self-sufficiency, and the sublimation of sexual impulses.'³ However, within these readings the island is often the *site*, rather than the *subject*, of analysis. As Kinane states, 'though the figure of Crusoe has been given much attention, [...] the trope of the island, the conceptual constant to the physically variable Crusoe figure, has received relatively less critical treatment.'⁴ For example, Hans Turley calls Crusoe's (a)sexuality into question, challenging the colonial figuration of the normative masculine subject within the text. But his reconfiguration of desire and subjectivity does not extend to the island, which he refers to as 'the feminized incarnation of Crusoe's desire for economic profit and wealth, [which] implicitly gives all of herself to Crusoe.'⁵ However, I believe that Crusoe's male body and the island are, to use the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'relative, always connected, caught up in one another.'⁶ This chapter shows that whilst Crusoe shapes and cultivates the island, the island also affects and transforms Crusoe's subjectivity. In this chapter I draw upon psychoanalytic discourse, new materialist thought and ecocriticism to explore the interconnectivity between male subject and island in greater detail.

In this chapter, I conduct a geographically-situated analysis – a word I use in the etymological sense to reflect the intertwining of 'geo' (earth) and 'graphy' (writing) – to critically remap the space of the island. This remapping project begins in the centre of the island through an exploration of Crusoe's shelter, his 'Fence or Fortress,'⁷ and the series of enclosures he builds to keep animals and grow crops. I do not perceive these enclosures as a sign of Crusoe's ability to transform and tame the passive island space, but as sites of ambiguity that highlight the precariousness of his control. I then move onto a discussion of

³ Diana Loxley, *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp.25-26

⁴ Kinane, p.32

⁵ Hans Turley, 'The Sublimation of Desire to Apocalyptic Passion in Defoe's Crusoe Trilogy,' *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities in Colonial Literature*, ed. by Philip Holden, and Richard J. Ruppel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) p.4

⁶ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* 5th edn, trans. by Brian Masumi, (London: Continuum Press, 2004), p.11

⁷ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.52

the island's interstitial spaces, which are littered with material signifiers: 'the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore' (*RC*, 130); the 'Marks of Horror' (*RC*, 155), cannibalistic remains described in increasingly gory detail; and mismatching items from Crusoe's drowned shipmates, 'three of their Hats, one Cap, and two Shoes that were not Fellows' (*RC*, 141). My close-reading of these signifiers shows how the fragmentary shorelines of the island threaten the stability of Crusoe's enclosures, challenging both his possession of the island and his sense of self. However, this is not to suggest that the island is simply codified by Crusoe's desires and fears. Instead, in this chapter I show that it is integral to the production of these emotional affects.

In asserting the island's affective capacities, this chapter appears to challenge previous critical interpretations that emphasise Crusoe's control and the island's passivity. However, according to Dorothy Lane, 'the island can be regarded as a space which enables interaction and polyphony'⁸ – it is a site where apparently competing discourses and meta-histories can coexist. The island in *Robinson Crusoe* is no exception. Whilst I read it as a precarious, affective space, I also believe it cannot be divorced from its colonial contexts, and consequently the discourse of colonial disciplining and enclosure it perpetuates. Indeed, as this chapter shows, the island in *Robinson Crusoe* is a space of polyphony precisely because it bears traces of two apparently contradictory poetics: order and appetite. Whilst I discuss Crusoe's enclosures as an aspect of his will-to-order the island, my analysis of the island's shorelines enable me to discuss a poetics of appetite that courses through the novel, threatening to disrupt this system of containment. I show that the island is a space where order and appetite interpenetrate each other. My evocation of the island as an unstable construction of appetite therefore does not deny, but is dependent upon, previous critical work on Crusoe's enclosure and possession of the island.

Whilst this chapter ostensibly functions as a remapping of a geographical terrain, it does not consider the map it creates to be a gesture of power and encompassment. Rather, it adopts a Deleuzian perspective of the map as 'detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable.'⁹ Consequently, rather than clearly demarcating and enclosing the island, my critical map opens out the island space as a site of possibility for alternative analyses and perspectives. Furthermore, although in places this chapter draws upon psychoanalytic terminology and discourses, it is not aiming to uncover "hidden meaning" or to diagnose

⁸ Dorothy Lane, *The Island as a Site of Resistance: An Examination of Caribbean and New Zealand Texts* (New York: Peter Laing, 1995), p.15

⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.23

Crusoe's character. To do so would be at odds with what is an implicitly Deleuzian reading. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari believe that the oedipal complex is a repressive mechanism since it denies the 'endless connections, nonexclusive disjunctions, nonspecific conjunctions, partial objects and flows'¹⁰ of desiring production, instead reducing and directing the subject's desire into one mould, an imagined relationship of 'daddy-mommy-me.'¹¹ Instead, I adhere to the queer methodology of Eve Sedgwick, who instead of probing psychoanalytic models of homosexual and heterosexual desire, asks 'how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating.'¹² Instead of fixating on character, she focusses on the 'sites of definitional creation, violence and rupture'¹³ within literary texts. The psychoanalytic currents of meaning within this chapter therefore serve not as a repressive mechanism but as a possible way of reading the unstable boundaries, threatened bodies and uncanny objects that shape and transform the island in *Robinson Crusoe*.

'FENC'D IN, AND FORTIFY'D'

Crusoe's first encounter with the island evinces anxiety. As he stands on the deck of his sinking ship, he remarks that 'the Land look'd more frightful than the Sea' (*RC*, 39). The fear emerges because the island is an unmapped space: 'what the Shore was, whether Rock or Sand, whether Steep or Shoal, we knew not' (*RC*, 39). Gazing upon this space of alterity, Crusoe fears 'perishing with hunger, or being devour'd by wild Beasts' (*RC*, 39). To assuage these anxieties, he needs to transform the territory into something familiar, something that more closely resembles home. He does so by cultivating the island through building enclosures – a defensive dwelling on the island's coast; a bower in the island's verdant interior; numerous walled enclosures for growing crops and keeping goats – and in doing so imposes an anglicised spatial order onto the territory. In this section, Crusoe's enclosures are situated within a historical context, discussed as mechanisms of control within a colonial apparatus. They are also explored as psychic mechanisms integral to Crusoe's identity formation. The relationship between man and island that occurs through the act of enclosure

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley et. al, 10th Reprint (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.54

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.xxi

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), p.27

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.3

is also examined; an ambiguous relationship which challenges the very cartographies of possession and control that the building of enclosures initially appears to establish.

Before discussing the enclosures in detail, it is first necessary to make a ‘map’ of them. The first enclosure Crusoe builds is a shelter for himself. He locates it on a hillside plateau, sheltered from the wind and facing the sea, so he can watch for ships. It starts out as a tent made of sail-cloth, which he pitches next to a hollow in the hillside; a hollow he burrows into, creating space to store his possessions. He then surrounds the front of the tent with two semi-circular rows of sharp, pointed stakes, ‘the biggest End being out of the Ground about Five Foot and a Half’ (*RC*, 51). By the time Crusoe is finished his shelter can only be entered by using a ladder to climb over the two rows of stakes. He describes himself as ‘compleatly fenc’d in, and fortify’d, as I thought, from all the World’, (*RC*, 52) suggesting that one of the primary functions of this enclosure is as a defensive border. After finishing his dwelling, he proceeds to explore inland: he comes to ‘an Opening’ in the undergrowth where he discovers the island’s fecund interior, ‘so fresh, so green, so flourishing’, which he proceeds to enter, in movements evocative of sexual congress – ‘I descended a little on the Side of that delicious Vale’ (*RC*, 85). Following verbal possession, he builds a second shelter that he names his ‘Bower’ (*RC*, 90), which is also surrounded with a double circle of stakes and filled in with thick brushwood. His final act of building is to create a series of circular enclosures to grow crops and domesticate goats: movements which show he is trying to “tame” and cultivate the island.

As I explained in the prologue to this thesis, within colonial exploration accounts territory was rendered a feminine object to be mastered. Defoe replicates these movements – it appears that the island is most explicitly feminised in the moment when Crusoe feels as if he has taken possession of the territory. But Defoe’s feminisation of space in this moment can also be placed within a broader historical tradition that has permeated western culture: as Sue Best states, ‘in an extraordinary array of contexts, space is conceived of as a woman. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the ‘bounded’ spatial entities which are seen as the context of, and for, human habitation.’¹⁴ Best uses countries as examples – the personification of Britain as Britannia, of France as Marianne, of the concept of the ‘motherland’ – but I believe her work also applies to the bounded space of Crusoe’s island. Spaces are feminised to make them appear ‘appropriately docile or able to be dominated.’¹⁵

¹⁴ Best, p.181

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.183

The feminisation of the island is therefore not indicative of possession. Rather, Crusoe must feminise it to feel as if he *can take possession* of it. Indeed, Best also believes that the need to produce this bounded, feminised body-model ‘underscores an anxiety about this ‘entity’ and the precariousness of its boundedness.’¹⁶ The word entity means ‘being’, something with an independent existence and even, perhaps, an agenda. In other words, Crusoe’s feminisation of the island, and his desire to enclose it, can be linked to an anxiety concerning the stability of its, and his, boundaries – an idea I return to later in this section.

The enclosures that Crusoe builds are given symbolic resonance through the act of naming. He emphasises the defensive qualities of his dwelling by the names he chooses to bestow upon it: ‘Fence,’ ‘Fortress,’ ‘Wall’ and ‘Castle’ (*RC* 52, 62, 137, 128). Within colonial discourse, explorers both indicated possession and discursively refashioned places by (re)naming the territories they discovered. For example, Christopher Columbus named entire islands, shorelines, capes, and bays in his conquest of the Caribbean; ‘he transformed them through language into parts of Spain.’¹⁷ In *Robinson Crusoe*, the island is discursively refashioned through the combined processes of naming and enclosure. It begins to assume qualities of a British estate, as Crusoe indulges in a fantasy of naming: ‘I fancy’d now I had my Country House, and my Sea-Coast-House’ (*RC*, 87). The island is compared to a ‘Mannor in England’ (*RC*, 85), showing that Crusoe is beginning to confer an anglicised spatial order onto it.

The island can be compared to the representation of England in Defoe’s travelogue, *A Tour thro’ the whole of Great Britain*. In this narrative, Defoe describes how ‘the entire Kingdom is employ’d to furnish something, and I may add, the best of every thing, to supply the city of London with provisions.’¹⁸ Meanwhile, Crusoe’s ‘castle’ represents a miniaturised version of London – it too occupies the geopolitical centre of the island and all the resources in Crusoe’s ‘little Kingdom’ (*RC*, 116) are diverted towards it. Furthermore, Crusoe’s enclosure of the land is characteristic of 18th century British agricultural practices. I refer specifically to the Enclosure Movement, which involved the fencing-off of public land into privately owned portions, a process which increased crop yields but disenfranchised those used to free right of access. Indeed, Defoe was an ardent supporter of this movement, describing agricultural enclosures as ‘islands of improvement in a sea of

¹⁶ Ibid., p.183

¹⁷ Maximilian Novak, ‘Friday: or, The Power of Naming,’ *Augustan Subjects: Essays in Honor of Martin C. Battestin*, ed. Albert Rivero (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 110-122, p.113

¹⁸ Daniel Defoe, ‘Volume 1,’ *A Tour thro’ the whole island of Great Britain* (1724)

<<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/d/defoe/daniel/britain/letter1.html>> [Accessed December 12th, 2017]

open field.¹⁹ These enclosures were replicated abroad, preparing the way ‘for England’s relocation in the expanding circle of the colonial world map.’²⁰ Crusoe’s enclosures can therefore be viewed as part of a colonial apparatus for controlling ‘savage’ lands and peoples.

Within *Robinson Crusoe* it is not just space but time that is enclosed, for Crusoe obsessively marks time with a calendar, and aims to ‘order times of Work,’ ‘time of Sleep,’ and ‘time of Diversion’ (RC, 53). In other words, both male subject and island are enclosed to make them economically productive. Enclosure is therefore part of a broader discourse of self-disciplining characteristic of colonial masculinity, described by Philip Holden and Richard Ruppel as ‘an act of self-governance, a series of technologies of the self applied to an unruly body.’²¹ Crusoe must enclose the island, but he must also enclose himself by trying to contain his own desires. He enacts a discourse of bodily discipline upon himself, working ‘excessive Hard’ (RC, 68) on his enclosures and observing the Sabbath through a ‘Solemn Fast’ (RC, 88). At one point, he discovers ‘Mellons upon the ground in great Abundance, and Grapes upon the Trees [...] very ripe and rich’ (RC, 85). Yet Crusoe feels threatened, rather than tempted, by the island’s feminised fecundity and decides to ‘eat sparingly of them’ (RC, 85). The eroticised depiction of the island suggests that Crusoe’s moderation exemplifies the disciplining of both alimentary and sexual appetites. Indeed, many eighteenth-century theorists connected the two: in his polemical tract, *Conjugal Lewdness; or Matrimonial Whoredom. A Treatise concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, Defoe warns his readers that ‘a luxurious Appetite in eating and drinking raises an ungoverned Appetite in other Pleasures.’²² Moderating appetite is therefore a way of controlling sexual desires. Crusoe eventually claims ‘I had neither *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, or the Pride of Life*’ (RC, 109) – as if to state that his body is immune to temptation, unimpeachable by outside forces.

Defoe’s depiction of Crusoe is in line with the discourse of western individualism found in the work of thinkers such as Rene Descartes and John Hobbes, who depicted modern man as ‘alone (divided from others), secular (divided from God), and dual (internally divided) [...] succinctly expressed in the Cartesian ‘*Cogito, ergo sum*’²³ – a

¹⁹ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour thro the whole Island of Great Britain*, qtd in Robert Marzec, *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature from Daniel Defoe to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p.3

²⁰ Marzec, p.3

²¹ Philip Holden & Richard Ruppel *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.xiii

²² Daniel Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness: or Matrimonial Whoredom. A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (London, 1727: Gainesville, Florida: Scholar’s Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967) p.310

²³ Anthony Synott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1993) p.19

bounded, isolated body. Crusoe expresses this sense of isolation before he even arrives on the island: of his solitary existence as a plantation owner, he states ‘I liv’d just like a Man cast away upon some desolate island, that had no body there but himself’ (*RC*, 31). There is, then, a link between ensiled male subject and geographically-bounded island. To Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, this affinity is what allows Crusoe to take psychic possession of the island. She suggests that to control the island, Crusoe must ‘re-map it to be like him, thus imagining his masculine control of the island to be innate, like his perceived control of his own body,’²⁴ through a process of projective identification initially mobilised during the Monarch-of-all-I-survey scene.

Projection occurs when, looking down upon the island from a panoptic position of power, Crusoe projects his wants and fears onto the territory. The island is initially a space of alterity haunted by his fear of engulfment, populated by ‘wild beasts, of whom however I saw none’ (*RC*, 46). But Crusoe designates the island as ‘barren,’ a word indicative of female infertility, which suggests the island requires his custodianship. After this process of projection, Weaver-Hightower informs us, Crusoe proceeds to identify his own bounded body with that of the geographically-bounded island. When he builds his first enclosure, the two semi-circular rows of stakes around his shelter are a way of fortifying the boundaries of his own body: ‘Crusoe’s labors to shore up his body with concentric circles of boundaries, with the largest being the island shores, reflect his altered body image; his body and his island have become subconsciously sutured together.’²⁵ The word ‘sutured,’ which refers to the stitching of a wound, evokes an embodied relationship between Crusoe and the island; indeed, to Weaver-Hightower, the boundaries of the island have become Crusoe’s ‘symbolic skin.’²⁶ Her understanding of skin is drawn from Didier Anzieu’s definition of it as ‘an interface, permitting a distinction between inside and outside.’²⁷ Viewed in this light, the boundary wall of Crusoe’s enclosure allows him to protect himself and keep the ‘other’ out, making him feel as if he has mastered the island and also himself. I find Weaver-Hightower’s analysis a compelling alternative to the gendered discourse of island possession described in the prologue, and believe it can teach us a lot about the psychic mechanisms underpinning the urge to control and build upon territories (and, indeed, about colonial masculinity). However, within her work the island remains a passive space that is incorporated into

²⁴ Rebecca Weaver-Hightower, *Empire Islands: Castaways, Cannibals, and Fantasies of Conquest* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) p.18

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.33

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.31

²⁷ Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), pp.36-7

Crusoe's body. I believe the island has a more active role in transforming Crusoe's subjectivity. Furthermore, as Best states – in a discussion of the embodiment of space – whilst 'the use of the body-model indicates the demand for a clear limit or boundary [...] it is when the body is invoked that the boundary is probably most uncertain.'²⁸ The invocation of the body is indicative not of absolute boundaries, but of instability.

Whilst to Weaver-Hightower the skin designates a site of recognition between self and other, I agree with Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, who point out that there is an inherent danger in 'the fetishizing of the skin as a boundary-object'²⁹, for it becomes a way to 'contain either the body, the identity, well-being or value'³⁰; a reduction of identity to the colour or texture of one's skin. Instead, Ahmed and Stacey view the skin as a *transforming surface*, expanding, contracting and disintegrating as time passes, and as a *transformative surface* of inter-embodiment – 'skin opens our bodies to other bodies: through touch, the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter.'³¹ I draw upon this model to show that positioning both Crusoe's enclosures and the boundaries of the island as 'skin' is to designate them as spaces of continual transformation, as sites of ambiguity that complicate the relationship between inner and outer, between order and appetite.

To Martin Gliserman, the enclosures Crusoe builds are manifestations of appetite:

An aerial view of Crusoe's island, after he has been there for some time, would reveal a number of circular structures – his dwelling, bower, and numerous enclosures for crops and cattle. He encircles land for food: he draws the body – breasts, bowel and womb —into the landscape.³²

Crusoe shapes the island according his appetites, drawing what appears to be a grotesque feminine into the land. However, Gliserman doesn't unify the breasts, bowel and womb into a solitary female figure. Instead he suggests this pattern of circles represents a matrix of 'primitive bodily relations – in the womb, being bathed, being fed – in which we are contained and container, exchanging stuff between and within.'³³ Crusoe both contains the

²⁸ Best, p.183

²⁹ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey eds. 'Introduction: Dermographies', *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.3

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.6

³² Martin Gliserman, 'Robinson Crusoe and the Vicissitudes of Greed: Cannibalism and Capitalism', *Psychoanalysis, Language, and the Body of the Text* (Florida: The University Press of Florida, 1996), p.70

³³ *Ibid.*, p.62

island and is contained within it: his enclosures are islands within islands connected to each other by a variety of relational possibilities. The enclosures therefore have multiple functions. They keep “bad” elements out and hold “good” elements in. For example, his agricultural enclosures not only store crops but keep out his ‘Enemies’ (*RC*, 99); the goats, hares and birds. They allow him to control the food supply, both by indicating his ownership of the land and all it produces, and by enabling him to domesticate his animal ‘subjects’. The first animal he tames is a young kid goat, which he keeps ‘penn’d in within my little Circle’ for a week until it ‘almost starv’d for want of food [...] and as I continually fed it, the Creature became so loving, so gentle, and so fond...and would never leave me’ (*RC*, 95-96). This enclosure is imbricated in the appetitive politics through which Crusoe attempts to control the island. Crusoe’s enclosures are therefore manifestations of order and appetite. This discursive interpenetration is understandable, for the function of order is not to remove appetite, but to control it – in which case, it has to be present. Gliserman also perceives the enclosures as sites of gendered ambiguity: the pointed stakes around Crusoe’s shelter are symbolic phalluses, whereas inside is ‘a place of fetal sleep, or nurturance, and of containing things. It is a womb but also a bowel.’³⁴ Gliserman is evoking a third model of the island: not a passive female body, nor a disciplined male body, but something altogether more androgynous and fragmentary; a relational assemblage connected through a process of bodily exchanges.

As well as being connected to discourses of appetite and models of the body, Crusoe’s enclosures are also sites of transformation. They are not fixed in position, but have changing borders, for the stakes Crusoe uses to build his fences sprout branches and continue to grow. He marvels at the transformation of his bower – ‘it is scarce credible how beautiful a Figure they grew into in three Years; so that the Hedge made a Circle of about twenty-five Yards in Diameter’ (*RC*, 90) – and the fence surrounding his castle, which soon transforms into a wood ‘growing so monstrous thick and strong, it was indeed perfectly impassable’ (*RC*, 137). Whilst it could be argued that this hyper-fertility designates the island as a passive space, aiding Crusoe in his desire for enclosure, I believe it indicates that the island has the capacity to easily erase any marks Crusoe makes upon it. In the previous sentence, I deliberately imbued the island with agency. This is because I believe the island is not just a transforming space but a transformative space. Crusoe may make his mark upon the island, but the island also makes its mark upon Crusoe.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.72

Whilst theorists such as Weaver-Hightower view Crusoe's initial visual survey of the island as a way of imprinting his subjectivity upon the landscape, Defoe's contemporaries, John Locke and Isaac Newton, would have instead stressed how Crusoe is *imprinted upon* by the landscape. To Locke, one of the characteristics of the human mind is that it 'is fitted to receive the impressions made on it, either through the senses by outward objects, or by its own operations when it reflects on them.'³⁵ Meanwhile, to Newton, vision is not an active but a passive process of 'a number of little Globules striking briskly on the Bottom of the Eye.'³⁶ Crusoe's body, within this discourse, is not the bounded, invulnerable entity he wishes it to be; it has the capacity to be entered and affected by external stimuli. His subjectivity is transformed by his relationship with the island. He oscillates between despair, resignation, gratitude and fear. For example, soon after arriving he upends the remainder of a bag of chicken feed onto the ground. These 'Husks and Dust' (*RC*, 67) take root and grow into stalks of barley, the sight of which, he confesses, 'touch'd my Heart a little, and brought Tears out of my Eyes' (*RC*, 68). The verbs 'touch'd' and 'brought' suggest that the island is actively inducing emotional affect from Crusoe's passive body. The island affects both mind and body; its sudden gales and heavy rains disrupt Crusoe's carefully controlled rhythms of work and impinge his movements: 'the violent rain forced me to a new work' (*RC*, 70), 'incessant rain, so that I could not stir' (*RC*, 88). Whilst it is possible to argue that Crusoe incorporates the island, it can also be argued that the island threatens to incorporate Crusoe when a 'terrible Earthquake' makes 'the Earth come crumbling down from the Roof of my Cave,' causing him to run from his shelter (*RC*, 69). The island therefore exposes both the fragility of Crusoe's body and his fortifications.

I do not wish this analysis to function as a form of reverse colonisation; to suggest that the island dominates Crusoe, rather than the other way around. Instead, I wish to stress the *mutually affective* relationship between man and island. I follow Emmanuelle Peraldo in her belief that 'the island, because it can change him, has the capacity to act, which is characteristic of the actant, a non-human entity capable of changing or transforming an individual.'³⁷ The concept of the actant emerges from Actor network theory developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. It designates the actant as something without

³⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p.39

³⁶ Isaac Newton, *Optiks* (166-67), quoted in Emmanuelle Peraldo, "'Two broad shining eyes": Optic Impressions and Landscape in Robinson Crusoe' *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & His Contemporaries*, 4.1(Fall 2012), 17-30, p.25

³⁷ Emmanuelle Peraldo, "'Two broad shining eyes": Optic Impressions and Landscape in Robinson Crusoe' *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & His Contemporaries*, 4.1(Fall 2012), 17-30, p.25

subjective interiority, but with the capacity to evoke an emotional response or affect a transformation, as the island does to Crusoe. But most importantly to this analysis, the actant also has the capacity to enter into associations with other actants and non-human actors (beings endowed with subjectivity). In other words, as Jane Bennet explains, agency emerges as a ‘relational affect [...] as a continuum, as a power differently expressed by all material bodies.’³⁸ Therefore, the relationship between Crusoe and the island should not be perceived as a unidirectional, linear flow of power but as *a continuum of affect*, a relational assemblage comprised of “‘things,” “identities,” relations, and inscriptions’³⁹; an ecology of bodies, places and objects. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the island itself is an assemblage, comprised of a variety of microhabitats from its verdant interior to its exposed rocky shores. Crusoe’s enclosures can also be integrated into this assemblage. I now move on to discussing the effects generated by the island’s shorelines, which are inscribed with a series of signifiers that threaten to disorder and destabilise Crusoe’s fragile economy, challenging his attempts at possession.

‘MARKS OF HORROR’: A THREAT TO ORDER

The enclosures Crusoe builds are an aspect of his will-to-order; a desire to make sure that within his island economy everything has a function and a ‘proper place’ (*RC*, 62). *Robinson Crusoe* is populated by long lists of such items: ‘I brought away several things very useful to me [...] I found two or three bags full of nails and spikes, a great skrew-jack, a dozen or two of hatchets’ (*RC*, 47). Such lists occur frequently in the novel. Material objects are enumerated, quantified and classified; considered only in terms of their use value. As Wolfram Schmidgen suggests, ‘Crusoe’s list removes things from concrete contextualized relationships and encloses them in a zone of heightened visibility – reminding us, in fact, of the older meaning of the list as a boundary.’⁴⁰ In *Robinson Crusoe* then, lists function as another form of enclosure. However, not all the ‘things’ on Crusoe’s island can be so carefully and easily incorporated into his economy of utility. Throughout *Robinson Crusoe*, a number of melancholic signifiers, including nauseating cannibalistic remains, are

³⁸ Jane Bennett, ‘The Force of Things: Steps Towards an Ecology of Matter,’ *Political Theory*, 32.3 (June 2004) 347-372, p.354

³⁹ George Ritzer and J. Michael Ryan eds. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), p.4

⁴⁰ Wolfram Schmidgen, *Robinson Crusoe, Enumeration, and the Mercantile Fetish*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.1 (2001) 19-39, pp.21-22

discovered on the island's shorelines. These, alongside the novel's preoccupation with violent orality – eating and being eaten – constitute a transgressive poetics that threatens Crusoe's economy of order and disrupts his sense of self.

The first of these signifiers, at the beginning of the novel, are the only traces of the shipwrecked crew: 'I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them, except three of their Hats, one Cap, and two Shoes that were not Fellows' (*RC*, 41). Here the paragraph ends, and the reader is left not with Crusoe's emotional reaction to these items, but with a description of the material objects themselves. These odd items resist Crusoe's will-to-order. Although he tries to categorise them through a list, the fact that the shoes 'were not Fellows' frustrates his desire for use – as Joseph Campana states, 'the mismatched pair attests to a singularity that resists Crusoe's mastering subjectivity.'⁴¹ These objects reflect what Bennett refers to as 'thing-power', a non-human materiality that refers to 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.'⁴² Readers are emotionally affected by these 'things': Virginia Woolf, for example, marvels at how they convey 'a sense of desolation and the deaths of many men [...] in the most prosaic way in the world.'⁴³ These mismatching items have symbolic resonance, in that they are evocative of an absence, yet they are also stubbornly materialistic, 'not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.'⁴⁴ Bennett also stresses the way in which 'things' are both individuated but are also 'located within an assemblage'⁴⁵, for they are connected to the environment, to the subject perceiving them and also to each other. In *Robinson Crusoe* the assemblage is a *mise-en-scène* of a desolate shoreline, a lonely figure and a collection of mismatching objects that each emphasise the non-fittingness of the other, collectively evoking a crew of absent shipmates. These mismatching items therefore not only highlight Crusoe's inability to order the objects that appear on the island, but allude to a non-human structure of materiality; an assemblage including, but not centred around Crusoe. An analysis of the 'things' that appear on the island's shorelines allows us deeper insight into some of the components and qualities of this assemblage.

⁴¹ Joseph Campana, 'Cruising Crusoe: Diving into the Wreck of Sexuality' in *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800* ed. by Chris Mounsey & Caroline Gonda (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2007) p.172

⁴² Bennett, p. 351

⁴³ Virginia Woolf, 'Robinson Crusoe', *The Common Reader*, Volume 2, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage, 2003) p.52

⁴⁴ Bennett, p.351

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.351

The most well-known and frequently discussed signifier that marks the shorelines of the island is, of course, ‘the Print of a Man’s naked Foot on the Shore’ (*RC*, 130). This solitary footprint, surrounded by no other traces, appears as an ambiguous, almost magical chimaera; an imprint of an absent foot, yet an indicator of presence. It generates a violent and extreme reaction in Crusoe, who flees to his shelter:

Whether I went over by the Ladder as first contriv’d, or went in at the Hole in the Rock, which I call’d a Door, I cannot remember; no, nor could I remember the next Morning, for never frighted Hare fled to Cover, or Fox to Earth, with more Terror of Mind than I to this Retreat (*RC*, 131).

Here the usage of adverbs, ‘or’, ‘no’, ‘never’ and ‘more’, all indicate various degrees of modality. Alongside the repetition of ‘cannot remember’/ ‘nor could I remember’, they express an increasing accumulation of doubt, expressive of Crusoe’s increasingly unsettled state of mind. This moment also shows how easily the symbolic order Crusoe establishes on the island can crumble, as that which he ‘called a door’ has quickly reverted to a natural geographical feature, a ‘Hole in the Rock’. He refers to himself as both a ‘frighted Hare’ and a ‘Fox’, suggesting he is no longer at the top of the food chain and consequently highlighting the precariousness of his sovereignty. After deciding that the footprint is neither the work of the devil, nor a print of his own foot, Crusoe concludes it belongs to savage peoples who will return to ‘devour’ him, who will ‘find my Enclosures, destroy all my Corn, carry away all my Flock of tame Goats, and I should perish at last for meer Want’ (*RC*, 132) – a reversal of the appetitive poetics through which he gained control of the island. His first thought is to dig up his fields of corn and free his flocks of goats, thereby erasing any signs of his presence on the land. However, since these enclosures are vital to his sense of self, he decides instead to conceal and fortify them: ‘I thickned my wall to above ten Foot thick [...] and through the seven Holes, I contriv’d to plant the musquets’ (*RC*, 136). Following this, he lives ‘in Expectation every Night of being Murthered and devour’d’ (*RC*, 138), and remains close to his dwelling for the next couple of years.

The footprint therefore marks a turning point in the narrative, not only transforming Crusoe’s state of mind but also the island’s topography, for his enclosures are now concealed, made to look ‘as wild and natural as possible’ (*RC*, 153). But what explains the violence of this reaction? The footprint not only represents a threat to alterity, but also, Lynn Festa informs us, ‘a blow to human narcissism [...] In the footprint, Crusoe meets with a start his own absence: the world has continued to record the impress of other creatures,

indifferent to the fact that he is not there.’⁴⁶ In other words, it is a reminder that Crusoe is unable to control all that he surrounds himself with – it challenges his Cartesian perspective of himself as the centre of the universe. Despite Crusoe’s attempts to break down the footprint into discrete parts (‘Foot, Toes, Heel’) (*RC*, 130), to measure it against his own as he tries to categorise and understand it, the footprint resists such categorisation. It is a powerfully affective signifier not just because it embodies the threat of alterity, but because of its resistance to order.

This solitary footprint is not the only material signifier on the island that evades categorisation, for the island economy consists of many other ‘irremediably heterogeneous elements’⁴⁷ with outlines that are not entirely clear: ‘large earthen ugly things, I cannot call them Jarrs,’ (*RC*, 102); Crusoe’s goat-skin breeches with ‘hair that hung down on such a length either side’ (*RC*, 127); his flock of goats, which he refers to as ‘a living Magazine of Flesh, Milk, Butter and Cheese’ (*RC*, 129). One imagines that Defoe deployed these descriptions to show how Crusoe is able to control the environment, using it to fashion objects to suit his needs. However, these objects do not represent Crusoe’s mastery, for they don’t quite conform to his, or the reader’s, expectations: the ‘ugly things’ may function as intended by holding water, but their appearance is so misshapen that Crusoe finds himself unable to categorise them as ‘jarrs’. Meanwhile, the clothes he makes are intended to cover him, to designate him as a “civilized being” in contrast to the naked ‘savages’, but they succeed only in obscuring his humanity, for the outline of his body takes on unmistakably animal qualities when covered in skins. If Crusoe’s skin-clothes allow him to take on animal qualities, his description of the goats transforms them into food; a series of material objects. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Festa concludes, it is difficult to know ‘where the categories of person, animal and thing, begin and end [...] which reminds us of the fragility of the barriers that distinguish one kind of being from another.’⁴⁸ These objects therefore do not constitute a hierarchy where everything is allotted its ‘proper place’ in a system. Instead they suggest that the island is a place where boundaries between self and other, subject and object, slowly begin to blur.

Nowhere is this blurring of boundaries more apparent than in the gory cannibalistic remains Crusoe finds on the island’s shorelines:

⁴⁶ Lynn Festa, ‘Crusoe’s Island of Misfit Things’ Vol. 52, No. 3/4, *The Drift of Fiction: Reconsidering the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2011) 443-471, p.461

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 446

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.446

I was perfectly confounded and amaz'd; nor is it possible for me to express the Horror of my Mind, at seeing the Shore spread with Skulls, Hands, Feet, and other Bones of humane Bodies; and particularly I observ'd a Place where there had been a Fire made, and a Circle dug in the Earth, like a Cockpit, where it is suppos'd the Savage Wretches had sat down to their inhumane Feastings upon the Bodies of their Fellow-Creatures [...] my Stomach grew sick, and I was just at the Point of Fainting, when nature discharg'd the Disorder from my Stomach; and having vomited with an uncommon Violence, I was a little reliev'd (RC, 139-140).

Crusoe initially uses his powers of description to construct a hierarchical system which preserves his sovereignty. He dehumanizes the cannibals, referring to them as 'inhumane' and 'Savage Wretches', whilst the victims are placed on the same level as the cannibals as their 'Fellow Creatures'. Looking at the cannibalistic remains allows Crusoe to distance and elevate himself from the savage 'other', thereby seemingly enforcing the idea that 'what is outside the "territory" of the self is bad, and what is "inside" is good.'⁴⁹ However, as Maggie Kilgour informs us, this is in fact deceptive: 'in the act itself that opposition disappears, dissolving the structure it appears to produce.'⁵⁰ This is because the consumed subject is digested by the 'other' body and becomes part of it, violating the distinction between self and other. Meanwhile, the cannibalistic remains are signifiers of what Julie Kristeva refers to as the abject: once a subject, now a grotesque, uncanny reminder of our materiality. Kristeva states that 'refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live [...] the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything.'⁵¹ It shocks us because it shows that that which we deem foul, polluting – that which we aim to eject from our bodies for self-preservation – is what we eventually become. Crusoe reacts to the sight by vomiting, attempting to eject the 'Disorder' from his stomach; an action through which he aims to distinguish himself from the cannibals by indicating his disgust. Yet vomiting, like the act of cannibalism, also violates boundaries, for it is an attempt to reverse the processes of digestion whereby food (the object) has already been partially absorbed by the body. As Kristeva states, 'since food is not an "other" for "me" [...] I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject *myself* within the very same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*.'⁵² Crusoe's act of vomiting, like the cannibalistic acts

⁴⁹ Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.4

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4

⁵¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.3

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.3

of violence, draws us to the border between subject and object to the place of the abject; the place where meaning collapses.

As the novel continues, Crusoe encounters several more deposits of cannibalistic remains, which are rendered in increasingly gory terms: ‘the Ground dy’d with their Blood, great Pieces of Flesh left here and there, half eaten, mangl’d and scorch’d’ (*RC*, 175). Many contemporary critics, such as Minaz Jooma, Gliserman and Campana, find these cannibal scenes to be erotically charged, detecting in them ‘the orgiastic rapacity of the satisfaction of bodily appetites [...] of bodies touching bodies in a feast of mouth and lip, tooth and tongue, of men tasting men.’⁵³ Indeed, critical links have been made between homosexuality and cannibalism, both of which represent a threat to the colonial masculine body. Caleb Crain states that ‘cannibalism and homosexuality violate the distinctions between identity and desire; between self and other; between what we want, what we want to be, and what we are’⁵⁴, for it confuses the historically established models of sexual difference established by the Cartesian cogito. However, it is not my intention to suggest that the cannibalistic remains are signifiers of homosexual desire, and that Crusoe is aroused by them. Instead, I reiterate Sedgwick’s definition of a queer reading mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: rather than categorising or diagnosing bodies, one should probe ‘how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating.’⁵⁵ A queer reading of the cannibalistic remains in *Robinson Crusoe* highlights them as signifiers of a violent orality that violate boundaries, resist distinction and constitute a threat to order.

The disturbing orality of the island’s interstitial spaces is comprised not just of the cannibalistic remains on the island’s shorelines, but also the fluid, appetitive space of the ocean, which is codified with Crusoe’s fear of engulfment. Crusoe, in early life, ‘would be satisfied with nothing but running away to sea’ (*RC*, 5), but is forced by his father to stay at home and embrace the ‘middle State’ of life (*RC*, 6): embracing moderation and avoiding excess. Turley suggests that the desire to go to sea ‘reveals Crusoe’s anxiety toward domesticity and thus normative sexuality’⁵⁶, an idea which I believe functions as a diagnosis of character. Instead of focussing on Crusoe, I prefer to explore the representation of the ocean as a hungry, punitive force – a manifestation of the consequences of flight, hubris and

⁵³ Campana, p.171

⁵⁴ Caleb Crain, ‘Lovers of Human Flesh: Homosexuality and Cannibalism in Melville’s Novels,’ *American Literature*, 66 (1994), 25-53, p.34

⁵⁵ Sedgwick, p.27

⁵⁶ Turley, p.4

filial disobedience – depicted through metaphors of engulfment. When Crusoe falls overboard shortly before reaching the island, he describes how one of the waves ‘buried me at once 20 or 30 Foot deep in its own Body’ (*RC*, 40). I mention this experience because it establishes a pattern – continued by the appearance of a solitary footprint, and nauseating cannibalistic remains – of moments that leading to Crusoe feeling ‘quite out of my body’ (*RC*, 40). These dissociative moments, which highlight a loss of bodily control, suggest that Crusoe is dominated by, rather than dominating, his island environment.

At the end of the novel, a second shipwreck washes onto the island’s shores. When Crusoe summons up the courage to enter, he discovers ‘two Men drown’d, in the Cookroom, or Forecastle of the Ship, with their Arms fast about one another’ and concludes that ‘the men were strangled with the constant rushing in of the water’ (*RC*, 161). To Campana, the bodies of these two men are ‘melancholic signifiers of queer desire [...] the *real* danger, the *true* end of Crusoe’s perversions and propensities, which he believes will lead him to misery, ruin and death’⁵⁷ (my italics). However, this is a moment in which Campana’s otherwise insightful analysis, his search for the ‘real’ and the ‘true’ within a text, is in danger of participating in a hermeneutics of suspicion; the desire ‘to expose hidden truths and draw out unflattering and counterintuitive meanings that others fail to see’⁵⁸ – a symbolically reductive and violent act. Instead, Rita Felski believes it more productive to remain ‘in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible.’⁵⁹ What, then, do the two drowned men call forth? Whilst Campana reads their underwater embrace in almost romanticised terms, it could equally be perceived as a violent fight; grappling with each other whilst trying to escape. The intentions, desires of these men are unclear – instead we are faced with the stubborn materiality of their corpses, which as previously stated are signifiers of abjection: something which ‘disturbs identity, system, order.’⁶⁰ The cannibalistic remains, also signifiers of abjection, evoked strong emotional reactions in Crusoe. However, here Crusoe does not react, apart from to remark ‘I had indeed gotten two pair of Shoes now, which I took off of the Feet of the two drown’d men’ (*RC*, 163). Does this show he has managed to create order out of that which cannot be ordered? That he has finally managed to master the island?

⁵⁷ Campana, p.173

⁵⁸ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.1

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.12

⁶⁰ Kristeva, p.4

The final chapters of *Robinson Crusoe* seem to provide evidence of this mastery, for they highlight Crusoe's possessive hold over the island and his sovereignty over its growing population: boatloads of cannibals with their prisoners, including Friday and later his father; sixteen Spaniards followed by eleven Englishmen, with whom Crusoe returns to England. Arguably, Crusoe's sovereignty over these men is reflected in the changing topography of the island. First, Friday is ordered to clean away the cannibalized body parts: 'I caus'd Friday to gather all the Skulls, Bones, Flesh, and whatever remain'd, and lay them together on a Heap, and make a great Fire upon it, and burn them all to Ashes' (*RC*, 175). The shorelines are therefore cleared of the nauseating fragments and the threat to order they embodied. Second, Crusoe's sovereignty is reinforced through the way in which he shelters his 'subjects'. Whilst he remains inside his 'Castle', Friday is lodged in between its walls, 'in the vacant Place between my two Fortifications' (*RC*, 176). Meanwhile, the Spaniard and Friday's father are placed in a tent just outside the main fortification, 'between that and the Grove of the young Wood which I had planted' (*RC*, 203). This is a geopolitical model in which Crusoe occupies the nucleus of power, and the hierarchy of his subjects is represented by their position within the concentric circles that surround the 'Castle'. Finally, the island's interior is also transformed: the flock of goats is increased and the agricultural enclosures are enlarged to support the growing population and to create a surplus of goods and enable trade.

However, despite this evidence, I believe that the island's interstitial spaces continue to challenge Crusoe's mastery of the island. Neither the gory remains of the cannibal feasts, the mismatching shoes, or the bodies of the two drowned men can be incorporated into Crusoe's domestic economy. They are signifiers which collectively suggest 'the emergence of assemblages of power and longing that counter the dominant logic of masculine, bourgeois subjectivity Crusoe struggles desperately to maintain.'⁶¹ This assemblage constitutes a matrix of oral violence, hunger, satiation and the fear of engulfment, which exposes both the fragility of Crusoe's hold over the island and his self-disciplined identity. In summary, the orality which allows Crusoe mastery over the island and his subjects is also the very thing that destabilises his possessive hold over it. Campana states:

As opposed to Crusoe's will to possess valuable objects of any variety or orientation, queer orality is appetitive but not acquisitive, thus disrupting the island's nascent capitalism; it seeks textures and surfaces, thus exploding the subject-object paradigm

⁶¹ Campana, p.160

that motors Crusoe's island economy. It makes the body flesh in making meat of us all.⁶²

Orality challenges Crusoe's sovereignty because it destabilises a system of phallic ordering (i.e. the will to possess). This is because currents of orality disrupt and confuse subject-object paradigms: Crusoe, for example, is both swallowed (by the waves) and swallower, whilst Friday the cannibal becomes incorporated into Crusoe's domestic economy as his subject (swallower becomes swallowed). As the previous section of this chapter showed, it is not just the island's shorelines that reflect the blurred boundaries between subject and object – the island's enclosures are also sites of ambiguity, reflecting a variety of relational possibilities surrounding eating and being eaten. Viewed in this way, as a space shaped by currents of orality, Crusoe's island emerges as a *site of resistance* to a colonial idyll of containment and order.

OVERFLOWING ITS BOUNDS

In the introduction to this thesis, I discussed how representations of the island in the western cultural imaginary appear to circulate around rigid representations of bounded, feminised spaces, easily possessed and controlled. The island in *Robinson Crusoe* has long been considered in these terms by critics; as a 'blank space awaiting Crusoe's arrival'⁶³, or as the 'feminized incarnation of Crusoe's desire for economic profit and wealth, [which] implicitly gives all of herself to Crusoe'⁶⁴, both descriptions which highlight the island's passivity. My remapping of the island challenges these designations. It shows that the island can be read both as a fecund, feminised space of alterity, a bounded, disciplined male body, or even as a sexually ambiguous space that both nurtures and threatens Crusoe. I do not prioritise one of these interpretations over another. Instead, I believe that the island's ability to be read in more than one way highlights its dynamism and polysemy. However, it is designating the island as *embodied*, rather than ascribing it a gender, that has proven helpful to this analysis. For example, comparing the island's surface to skin, according to the theories of Ahmed and Stacey, enables me to position the island as a space that is both transforming and transformative.

⁶² Ibid., p.173

⁶³ Brett McInelly, "Expanding Empires, Expanding Selves: Colonialism, The Novel, and "Robinson Crusoe" *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (spring 2003), p.13

⁶⁴ Turley, p.4

The island in *Robinson Crusoe* is a material space that ‘matters’. This is not an allusion to matter as an inert, opaque mass, but according to Samantha Frost and Diana Coole’s definition of matter:

Indeterminate, constantly forming and reforming in unexpected ways. One could conclude, accordingly, that “matter becomes” rather than that “matter is.” It is in these choreographies of becoming that we find cosmic forces assembling and disintegrating to forge more or less enduring patterns [...] or potencies that emerge hazardingly and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes.⁶⁵

The island is not so much a ‘being’ but a series of dynamic processes – an elemental ecosystem racked by earthquakes and rainstorms, where ‘Husks and Dust’ (*RC*, 67) grow into ears of corn, and where the fragmentary shorelines have the capacity to shatter Crusoe’s sense of self. However, the island is also shaped by Crusoe’s own ‘choreographies of becoming’ – his desires and appetites lead to the land being inscribed and enclosed. Crusoe’s desire alters and shapes the topographies of the island, for as Ahmed remarks, ‘matter is affected by orientations, by the ways in which bodies are directed toward things.’⁶⁶ This seems at odds with the concept of the island as an active space. However, Ahmed is not evoking inscribability but a mutually affective relationship between two bodies: ‘we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken.’⁶⁷ The island makes its mark upon Crusoe, then, just as Crusoe makes his mark upon it.

My analysis of the island is therefore ecological. As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, Bennett believes that ‘to call something ecological is to draw attention to its necessary implication in a network of relations.’⁶⁸ This chapter has not simply highlighted the affective qualities of the island but also its relational capacities. It has shown the island can be perceived as an assemblage of “‘things,” “identities,” relations, and inscriptions”⁶⁹ – from the mismatching shoes to the cannibalistic remains; the island’s different micro-environments, its lush interior and fragmentary shores – acting in concert with one another to exert affect. However, like Bennett, I divert from the view ‘that “ecological” means “harmonious” or tending toward equilibrium.’⁷⁰ My ecological analysis of *Robinson Crusoe*

⁶⁵ Diana Coole & Samantha Frost (ed.) ‘Introduction’, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency & Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) p.10

⁶⁶ Sara Ahmed, ‘Orientations Matter’, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency & Politics*, p.234

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.234

⁶⁸ Bennett, p.365

⁶⁹ Ritzer and Ryan, p.4

⁷⁰ Bennett, p.365

shows that the island-assemblage is the site of conflict between the desire for discipline and violent appetite. It therefore functions as a remapping of the island in two fundamental ways. First, it suggests that whilst Crusoe is part of the island system, this is not a system centred around, or controlled by him, thereby writing back against the representation of the island as a space easily mastered. Second, it challenges the concept of the island as a bounded space, instead stressing it as a site of relationality. This chapter therefore counteracts the perception of literature by some island studies theorists as that which ‘closes down meaning’⁷¹, instead showing that literary analyses have the capacity to remap and reassemble marginalising cartographies of islands.

Viewed in this context, the island in *Robinson Crusoe* no longer emerges as a signifier of self-sufficiency, isolation, and enclosure. In a contemporary context, it “matters” differently. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Crusoe’s island has been subject to endless revisions, translations and transformations. To Ann-Marie Fallon it can no longer be considered in isolation, but as a site of multiple authorship; a ‘revisionary archipelago’⁷² of translations and rewritings across times periods, nationalities and borders. Indeed, Kinane draws upon the etymology of Crusoe’s original name, Kreutznaeur (related to the German kreuz, ‘to cross’), to suggest that ‘the very cornerstone of the Robinsonade genre hangs on the conceits of transport, of transition, and of movement.’⁷³ If we examine *Robinson Crusoe* in its entirety, we see it is the story of a man crossing the globe, travelling from Africa, to the Americas and to Europe; restless movements stemming from a ‘wand’ring inclination’ (*RC*, 5) and a desire to find a place for oneself in the world. Many contemporary texts in *Robinson Crusoe*’s revisionary archipelago take up this theme of searching for home, which they couple with a critique of the text’s colonial presumption that home can be built anywhere. Fallon maps out these revisionary geographies:

I would like to borrow a metaphor that Defoe himself might have appreciated, that of currency. Pieces of Crusoe and his story circulate throughout these narrative and geographical places, marking the passage of colonialism and postcolonialism, recognizing the violent distinctions of race, gender and nation, but also reweaving narratives of connectedness and transnational intertextuality.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Lisa Fletcher, “...some distance to go”: A Critical Survey of Island Studies, *New Literatures Review*, 47 (2011) 17-34, p.24

⁷² Ann-Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.3

⁷³ Kinane, p.24

⁷⁴ Fallon, p.51

The geographic movements across borders in *Robinson Crusoe* are repeated throughout the revisionary archipelago. These movements are ones of negotiation. Despite recognising the ‘violent distinctions of race, gender and nation’ that *Robinson Crusoe* embodies, an understanding of these revisionary narratives can be achieved only by ‘testing the new text against the known one, identifying the significance of changed and retained elements.’⁷⁵ These revisionary texts therefore occupy an ambiguous position of being dependent upon, yet seeking to distance themselves from, *Robinson Crusoe* and all that it embodies. In the next chapter of this thesis, I explore how two revisionary texts, J M Coetzee’s *Foe* and Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter*, negotiate a relationship with *Robinson Crusoe*. I focus on the texts’ women protagonists, Susan Barton and Polly Flint, and their attempts to negotiate the gendered topographies of Crusoe’s island; a space, in *Robinson Crusoe*, from which their bodies and their desires are absent.

⁷⁵ Tisha Turk, ‘Intertextuality and the Collaborative Construction of Narrative: J. M. Coetzee’s “Foe”’, *Narrative*, Vol. 19. 3 (October 2011), 295-310, p.296

CHAPTER TWO | ISLANDS OF INTERTEXTUALITY: NEGOTIATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF SPACE(S) IN JANE GARDAM'S *CRUSOE'S DAUGHTER* AND J.M. COETZEE'S *FOE*

"I do not wish to hear of your desire," said Cruso. "It concerns other things, it does not concern the island, it is not a matter of the island."

– J.M Coetzee, *Foe*

SETTING LIMITS

In this chapter I explore the relationship between *Robinson Crusoe* and two texts from its 'revisionary archipelago'¹, Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* (1985) and J. M Coetzee's *Foe* (1986). According to C M Owen, these novels emerge as part of a 'number of literary works portraying female castaways and castaway themes, and engaging both indirectly and directly with *Robinson Crusoe*, [that] appeared in the mid 1980's.'² Other examples include Marianne Wiggins' *John Dollar* (1988), and Barbara Einzig's *Robinson Crusoe: A New Fiction* (1983). Owen believes that the castaway is a popular trope amongst woman writers because it is about the 'struggle to come into being as an individual,'³ thereby providing a narrative to frame woman's search for selfhood. Meanwhile, Avril Horner and Angela Keane suggest that the eighteenth century was the period which 'granted the body discursive centrality whilst making it newly problematic'⁴ through the emergence of a series of disciplines and systems of classification, from natural history to phrenology, which resulted in a hierarchy of bodies with 'predictable consequences for women and people of colour.'⁵ Therefore, the study of eighteenth-century texts, including *Robinson Crusoe*, enables twentieth-century writers to interrogate the socio-historical conditions from which the modern body emerged and the discourses of power that marginalised it. Both *Foe* and *Crusoe's Daughter* adopt these themes, using the figure of Crusoe's island to explore woman's position within a system of power. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which both authors navigate and negotiate the limits imposed on both the body of woman and the space

¹ Ann-Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p.3

² C M Owen, *The Female Crusoe: Hybridity, Trade and the Eighteenth-Century Individual* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010) p. 230

³ *Ibid.*, p.230

⁴ Avril Horner & Angela Keane eds. 'Introduction', *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.6

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.7

of the island by genre and gender. I also analyse the literary strategies that both Gardam and Coetzee employ to transgress and redraw these limits, and in doing so explore the potential of these revisionary texts to transform how Crusoe's island 'matters.'

To Jacques Derrida, 'gender' and 'genre' are analogous – indeed, the French word for gender is '*le genre*'. But the similarities are more than lexical, for as Derrida states in 'The Law of Genre', 'as soon as the word "genre" is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn.'⁶ Therefore, both genre and gender operate as a process of containment, drawing lines and establishing binaries between 'I' and 'Other.' The limits imposed by the Robinsonade genre are delineated by Susan Noramore Maher, who believes that the Robinsonade genre 'establishes a 'language' that expresses crucial dialectical poles: form versus formlessness, construction versus destruction, nature versus nurture, survival versus death, self versus other.'⁷ These are, in short, the binaries established within the discourse of literary realism – indeed, as Maximilian Novak informs us, Daniel Defoe is often considered 'the founder of modern fictional realism'⁸ – so this chapter therefore places the generic negotiations it analyses within a broader realist context. Whilst *Robinson Crusoe* works to maintain these binaries by championing an ideology of rationalist self-disciplining, to the woman protagonists in *Crusoe's Daughter* and *Foe* these binaries reinforce their position as 'the degraded half of Cartesian dualism'⁹ and must therefore be challenged. This chapter explores their various degrees of success in negotiating the terrain of Crusoe's island and the system of binaries it evokes.

There are many stylistic and contextual differences between Jane Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* and J. M Coetzee's *Foe*. Coetzee is a South African author with a significant international reputation. According to David Attwell, his work 'implicitly reflects on an encounter in which the legacies of European modernism and modern linguistics enter the turbulent waters of colonialism and apartheid.'¹⁰ Meanwhile, Gardam is a British author who is yet to receive any significant critical attention: as Milada Franková observes, 'despite the numerous awards for her fiction, Jane Gardam's name does not always make it onto lists of

⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre,' trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), 55-81, p.56

⁷ Susan Noramore Maher, 'Recasting Crusoe: Frederick Marryat, R.M. Ballantyne, and the Nineteenth-Century Robinsonade,' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 13.4 (1988), 169-75, p.169

⁸ Maximilian Novak, *Transformations, Ideology and the Real in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe and Other Narratives: Finding the "Thing Itself"* (London: The University of Delaware Press, 2015), p.45

⁹ Avril Horner & Angela Keane ed. *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 1p.2

¹⁰ David Atwell, ed. 'Introduction' *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews, J M Coetzee* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p.3

the illustrious literary figures of our time.’¹¹ However, there is a connection between the two texts – they both have a British woman protagonist actively engaged in the process of rewriting the Crusoean island. They can therefore be defined as what Linda Hutcheon refers to as ‘historiographic metafiction,’ a genre engaging with a ‘theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [...] [which] is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past.’¹² Both *Crusoe’s Daughter* and *Foe* exhibit a self-conscious reflexivity that allows me to discuss not just how material island spaces are navigated but how they are *produced*. My analysis of the literary strategies they employ therefore provides insight into the foundational question that underpins this entire thesis: ‘how do we write the island without marginalising it?’

This chapter constitutes both a discussion of limits and the way in they are overcome. Indeed, Derrida draws lines only to draw attention to the way in which they can be crossed, or curved, or folded. He evokes an affirmative, feminised poetics, which he terms ‘invagination’¹³, to show how the limits of genre and of gender are ‘without beginning and without end, without content and without edge.’¹⁴ In this chapter, then, I explore the revisionist literary strategies employed by *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* – my analysis of the former is underpinned by Derrida’s concept of invagination – which allow them to challenge binary systems of representation and overcome limits imposed by genre and gender. Furthermore, both texts have short final chapters which are stylistically and temporally distinct from the rest of the novel, a radical break from the conventions of storytelling already established. I explore the extent to which these endings threaten to both unsettle the texts’ beginnings and expand their textual limits. My analysis therefore aims to answer two questions. Does the island ‘matter’ differently when the castaway who washes up on its shores is a woman? Do *Crusoe’s Daughter* and *Foe* successfully draw upon literary strategies that offer an alternative way to write the island, one which challenges its representation within the western cultural imaginary as a passive feminised space?

¹¹ Milada Franková, ‘The Subtle Art of Jane Gardam,’ *Brno Studies in English* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita v Brně, 2001) p.57

¹² Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.5

¹³ Derrida, p.59

¹⁴ Derrida, p.70

NEGOTIATING TERRITORIAL AND TEXTUAL SPACE IN *FOE* AND *CRUSOE'S DAUGHTER*

This section explores how the limits of gender and genre are manifested, and then negotiated in *Crusoe's Daughter* and *Foe*; a negotiation played out through each woman protagonist's relationship to the island she inhabits. It is, in other words, an account of what Lisa Fletcher refers to as the text's 'performative geographies,'¹⁵ a methodology which draws upon Judith Butler's definition of performative as 'the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.'¹⁶ Viewed in these terms, the concept of performative geographies suggests that representations of islands are produced through discursive repetition, thereby enforcing what the signifier "island" is supposed to represent. But Butler herself doesn't use this definition of performativity to discuss islands; she uses it to discuss gender. In her opinion, 'the regulatory norms of "sex" work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies.'¹⁷ In other words, bodies, like islands, are constituted through the limits enforced by the effects of power. Furthermore, to Fletcher the performative consists of 'an interaction between human subjects in a spatial context,'¹⁸ meaning that the way in which a subject relates to the territory she inhabits is a vital aspect of how she "performs" her gender. In exploring the link between female identity and the space of the island, my analysis of *Foe* and *Crusoe's Daughter* contributes knowledge to 'how the spatial imaginary of islands guides gender and informs sexualities on islands (or not),'¹⁹ which Marina Karides believes is one of the fundamental goals of island feminism.

Crusoe's Daughter addresses an absence in *Robinson Crusoe*: after leaving the island, Crusoe marries and has 'two Sons and one Daughter,'²⁰ children infamously introduced and dismissed in a sentence. In a book that spans from 1904 to the 1980's, Gardam imagines this missing daughter through the life of Polly Flint, a woman cast away in an isolated area of England. Polly's favourite novel is *Robinson Crusoe*, which she reads numerous times, and begins to translate into German in adulthood. At the beginning of the novel, Polly is taken by her seafaring father to Oversands, an isolated house surrounded by

¹⁵ Lisa Fletcher, "'...some distance to go': A Critical Survey of Island Studies, *New Literatures Review*, 47 (2011) 17-34, p.26

¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.2

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2

¹⁸ Fletcher, p.28

¹⁹ Marina Karides, 'Why Island Feminism?' *Shima Journal*, Vol. 11.1 (2017), 30-39, p.30

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.256

sea on one side and a marshland on the other – a symbolic, rather than a geographically bounded island. Oversands is an all-female enclave, inhabited by Polly's two elderly Aunts, their companion, and a servant; a gendered reversal of Crusoe's masculine island. Beyond the marshes lie some industrial works surrounded by a town of 'back-to-back row of gritty, filthy houses,'²¹ a description that highlights the marginal position of Polly's island. Yet at the beginning of the novel, this industrial space barely impinges upon Polly's consciousness; it is a 'kind of bruise in the sky' (*CD*, 17) that is temporally and spatially removed from the beauty of the island:

Sometimes the marsh dazzled. Sometimes it was so pale and unnoticeable that it seemed only an extension of the sea [...] Blue-green salt-marsh grasses, shadowy fields of sea-lavender reflected and were reflected in the sky, and the buildings between the salt and fresh-water flats and the rolling skies gave definition and authority to what otherwise would have seemed in the power of the haphazard (*CD*, 18).

This description positions the island as a liminal space. The term 'liminal' is defined as 'of or pertaining to a threshold or initial stage of a process.'²² As Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts point out, this definition shows that the liminal can be situated in a spatial context – it evokes borderlands and in-between spaces – but it is also durational, evoking 'the unfolding of a spatio-temporal process: liminality as a generative act, as a psychosocial intentionality of being.'²³ Liminality, then, is not just a *space*, but a *state* of transition. Liminal spaces are, as Kevin Meethan informs us, 'spaces of performativity, places of interaction where roles and identities can be negotiated, and embodied.'²⁴ My designation of the island in *Crusoe's Daughter* as liminal, then, is not just a reference to its indistinguishable interstices, where the land seems to be 'an extension of the sea', but also as a space where Polly's identity is transformed and negotiated. But this passage from *Crusoe's Daughter* does not just evoke a poetics of liminality, it also evokes a poetics of containment. A contrast is established between the liminal marshes and the buildings that surround it, which give 'definition and authority' to the landscape and impose a system of ordering onto it. Taken together, the description of the island embodies the system of binaries

²¹ Jane Gardam, *Crusoe's Daughter* (London: Abacus, 2012) p.67

²² 'Liminal', *Oxford Dictionary Online Database* [Accessed 3rd March 2018]

²³ Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts eds. 'Introduction: Remapping Liminality,' *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experiences and Spaces in-between* (London: Routledge, 2012), p.1

²⁴ Kevin Meethan, 'Walking the edges: towards a visual ethnography of beachscapes,' *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experiences and Spaces in-between*, p.69

Noramore Maher believes are represented in the Robinsonade genre: culture/nature, form/formlessness, rationality/irrationality and masculine/feminine. Polly's negotiation of the island territory reflects her negotiation of this binary system.

Polly's relation to the island is one of ambiguity. On the one hand, she relishes her walks across the island's shorelines. It is here that she feels most free to articulate her desires: 'I wanted to kiss someone [...] the wind battered me, the sun shone on me' (CD, 40-1). Her relationship to the island is embodied, for it is a space that makes her more aware of her body and her desires; desires which reflect the elemental seascape she is surrounded by. The island's liminal shorelines therefore represent a space of embodied freedom which contrasts sharply with the other spaces Polly inhabits: the yellow house where she undertakes a daily regimen of lessons; the church, with its processions and sermons. Polly feels guilt at her disdain for these rituals, which contrasts sharply with her experience of the marshes – 'no guilt ever on the marsh, just joy' (CD, 29). But the island is not just a space of freedom. It is also a space of physical contraction, for the iron works that bruise the horizon at the beginning of the novel encroach ever more onto the island: 'the marsh itself had diminished. The chimneys had crept up on us' (CD, 157). The shrinking island represents Polly's own diminishing prospects. As she grows older she becomes gradually more conscious of the strictures of her gender: 'because I am a girl, Aunt Frances, I was to be stood in a vacuum. I was to be left in the bell-jar of Oversands' (CD, 99). Most readers will immediately make the connection to Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, in which the bell jar symbolises the 'stifling distortions'²⁵ and isolations of madness. Ironically, this allusion *opens out*, rather than *closing down*, the territorial space of the island by connecting it to another textual space – an idea I shall return to in the next section of this chapter. However, this is a connection that Polly is naïve to, for the period in which *Crusoe's Daughter* is set predates *The Bell Jar*. Instead, isolated at Oversands, the only books Polly has access to are the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels in her Grandfather's study. It is not a book by a woman writer in which she first identifies herself, but *Robinson Crusoe*.

Polly draws parallels between Crusoe's castaway condition and that of her own experience: 'He was like women have to be almost always, on an island. Stuck. Imprisoned' (CD, 178). Polly admires Crusoe's 'most extraordinary and unnatural steadiness' and rationality; the way his emotions are 'monitored, dissected, pondered – and dispersed' (CD, 228-229). She admires, in other words, the masculine-inflected half of the Robinsonade

²⁵ Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber & Faber, 1966), p.197

genre's language of opposites (reason-logic-civilization). She seeks to use *Robinson Crusoe* as a conduct book following her first and only heartbreak: 'Monumental and Godlike Crusoe. Monumentally and deistically taking control of his emotions. I, Polly Flint, [...] set out to be the same' (CD, 229). But whilst searching for similarities Polly finds only differences. She is unable to master herself in the same way as her literary hero, instead sinking into alcoholism and depression: 'I became very odd. Oh, really quite odd then' (CD, 230). Finally, she also becomes aware of Crusoe's freedom to travel the globe whilst she remains confined at Oversands.

This experience of marginalisation can be placed within a larger realist context. According to April Alliston, varieties of realism are linked by a common truth referent: 'the truth about female sexuality and its conformity (or lack thereof) to patriline control [...] In patriline terms, the question of female sexuality is identical with the question of legitimacy.'²⁶ In eighteenth and nineteenth-century realist novels, female characters had to prove their own virtue according to legal and historical proof, which contributes to what Alliston refers to as 'the hegemony of mimetic realism's verisimilitude.'²⁷ Patrilineal control is therefore not just a reference to gender, but to genre: a genealogy of (masculine) bodies and of texts, both of which challenge Polly's legitimacy and her claim to the Robinsonade narrative, a challenge played out in Polly's negotiation of the island space. She writes mournfully, of her identification with the island, 'I am being dissolved into a landscape and all hope for me is that someone will come and marry me to make things complete' (CD, 98), which is simultaneously suggestive of being dissolved into a system and the feeling that legitimacy can only be established through conforming to it. In other words, this dissolution alludes to Polly's status as a revisionary character, whilst the island, a space of liminality and contraction, represents the entangled discourses of effacement and containment historically enacted upon woman's body within the tradition of realism.

However, there are also instances where Polly's body functions as a site of resistance. One example is Polly's refusal to marry, which would have been considered an act of transgression in the Edwardian period, when *Crusoe's Daughter* is set, for it constitutes a resistance to traditional female roles; to becoming a docile, reproductive body. Another instance is when Polly has her first period, which stains a sheepskin rug and her bedsheets.

²⁶ April Alliston, 'Female Sexuality and the Referent of Enlightenment Realisms', *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, ed. Margaret Cohen & Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p.15

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.15

This moment does not initially appear to signify feminine assertions of power. Polly describes the ‘terrible shame of the sheepskin rug’ and her horror as she learns about ‘our common female doom’ (CD, 38). As Breanne Fahs writes, ‘menstrual leaks [...] always subjected to patriarchal notions of containment and management, get framed throughout women’s lives as something approaching misery and death.’²⁸ Indeed, Polly finds in her period yet another difference between herself and Crusoe: ‘he didn’t have blood pouring out of himself every four weeks until he was old. He would never feel disgusting’ (CD, 43-44). Polly here is reinforcing the dualism between body and mind found in the binary system of the Robinsonade. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the body and its desires must be managed, controlled and contained. But the depiction of Polly’s menstruation is of something that cannot be managed or controlled – the phrase ‘pouring out’ evokes a movement from inner to outer, a body characterised by fluidity. Indeed, to Fahs, menstrual blood symbolises a narrative contrary to most depictions of femaleness: ‘rather than representing lack, want, absence, castration, masochism and passivity, menstrual blood symbolizes *productivity*, presence, desire, threat, action.’²⁹ Polly’s body emerges as an active presence within the text, a presence that cannot be effaced or enclosed – an example of gender challenging genre.

The negotiations of gender and genre that *Crusoe’s Daughter* undertakes are examples of feminist revision. *Crusoe’s Daughter* therefore highlights the importance of revision to certain feminist projects. According to Adrienne Rich:

Re-vision – the art of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – it is for us more than a chapter in a cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the presumptions we are drenched in we cannot understand ourselves.³⁰

Whilst Rich’s passage might convince us of the necessity and utility of revisionary writing, its hermeneutic movements are problematic. The description of ‘entering an old text from a new direction’ replicates the poetics of penetration that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a ‘paranoid reading’: that which aims ‘to *expose* residual forms of essentialism’, ‘to *unearth* unconscious drives’, and to ‘*uncover* violent or oppressive historical forces’³¹, and in doing so restages the violence it aims to write back against. The term ‘act of survival’ is also

²⁸ Breanne Fahs, *Out for Blood: Essays on Menstruation and Resistance* (New York: Suny Press, 2016), p.36

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.35

³⁰ Adrienne Rich, ‘When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision’ *College English: Women, Writing and Teaching*, 34.1, (Oct. 1972), 18-30, p.18

³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p.8

problematic, evocative of conflict and competition. We can therefore draw two conclusions from Rich's passage. First, there is a necessity for new metaphors and systems of language; new models of storytelling and a new ethics of reading to represent woman's subjectivity. The second is that feminist revision is not straightforward, for without a language of its own it redeploys the very masculine discourse that has marginalised and contained it, and is in danger of reinscribing itself within the system it desires to move beyond. But *Crusoe's Daughter* is not a text that explicitly articulates these problems. Instead, we can unpack and expand upon the more problematic aspects of feminist revision in Coetzee's *Foe* through a discussion of the novel's protagonist, Susan Barton, and her negotiation of the island space, an island that is always already inhabited.

Foe, set in a period contemporaneous to *Robinson Crusoe*, tells the story of Susan Barton, who is voyaging home from the Americas after searching in vain for her lost daughter when she is shipwrecked on an island already inhabited by Cruso and his manservant, Friday. The island in *Foe* simultaneously departs from, and reflects, its colonial origins. This is the terrain that Susan must navigate and negotiate, an island not simply shaped by gender (the labour of Cruso and Friday), but by genre:

For readers reared on travellers' tales, the words *desert isle* may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees where brooks run to quench the castaway's thirst and ripe fruit falls into his hand [...] But the island on which I was cast away was quite another place: a great rocky hill with a flat top, rising sharply from the sea on all sides except one, dotted with drab bushes that never flowered and never shed their leaves [...] There were ants scurrying everywhere, of the same kind we had in Bahia, and another pest too, living in the dunes: a tiny insect that hid between your toes and ate its way into the flesh (*F*, 7).

In the opening sentence of this extract, Coetzee evokes the trope of the desert island: a fecund, feminised space; not just passive but permissive, for the ripe fruit simply falls into the castaway's hand and the brooks seem to flow just to quench his thirst. As I showed in the previous chapter, this feminised perception of the island represents an idyll of colonialism, a fantasy whereby the male castaway can convince himself that the island not only necessitates but welcomes his presence. But this island image is evoked to contrast with the island Susan is cast away upon; a flowerless, inhospitable place. Whilst the colonial island feeds and waters the male castaways, here Susan is *fed upon* by the flesh-eating pests; an inversion of colonial poetics of consumption. Furthermore, whilst most castaway narratives begin with the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey-scene' (the moment where the castaway

looks down upon the island from its highest point and feels psychically able to possess it), here Susan looks *up* at the island, a space ‘rising sharply’ above her. The designation of the island as a ‘great rocky hill’ is connotative of a monolith; a ludic depiction of the position *Robinson Crusoe* occupies within the western imaginary. Susan’s position therefore emerges as marginal in relation to the island, meaning her negotiation of territory is representative of the difficulties encountered in feminist revision when encountering an oppressive, hegemonic discourse.

Susan struggles to assert herself on the island, for Cruso initially attempts to restrict her movement. He delays making the shoes that will enable her to walk across the thorny ground, and plays up the dangers of the island: ‘the apes, he said, would not be as wary of a woman as they were of him and Friday’ (*F*, 15). Instead, he asks Susan to remain in his compound; an enclosure that operates as the geopolitical centre of power on the island:

In the centre of the flat hilltop was a cluster of rocks as high as a house. In the angle between two of these rocks Cruso had built himself a hut of poles and reeds, the reeds artfully thatched together and woven in and out of the poles with fronds to form roof and walls. A fence, with a gate on leather hinges, completed an encampment in the shape of a triangle which Cruso termed his castle (*F*,9).

Similarly to *Robinson Crusoe*, the hut is fortified with a series of concentric boundaries, and the sides of the hill constitute one border, the encampment fence another. Cruso, like his colonial namesake, calls this his castle. These enclosures are therefore socio-symbolic marks of his dominance over the island space. Yet when Susan describes this encampment she highlights his act of naming as a fantasy she does not invest in, for that which ‘Cruso *termed* his castle’ she refers to as a ‘hut of poles and reeds.’ Rather than commenting on the defensive qualities of the encampment she drily observes ‘the reeds artfully thatched together’, a description which feminises Cruso’s structure by highlighting its delicacy and artistry. The word ‘artful’ has an alternative meaning, ‘cunning, crafty, deceitful’³² which further emphasizes the deceptive nature of these enclosures; that their appearance doesn’t correspond to their intended function. Susan’s description therefore suggests she doubts Cruso’s mastery over the island.

Unlike his eighteenth-century counterpart, Cruso is less interested in cultivating, building and transforming the island – the missing ‘e’ in his name reflects his position as an

³² ‘Artful’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online Database*, [Accessed 9th January, 2018]

‘almost-absent presence’³³ in the text. As Gayatri Spivak states, ‘this Crusoe bequeathes a lightly inscribed space to an indefinite future.’³⁴ Indeed, Crusoe refuses to explain the story of his life on the island; refuses to mark time, and spends his days creating bare earthen terraces: “‘The planting is not for us,” said he. “We have nothing to plant – that is our misfortune”” (*F*, 33). Still, however faint Crusoe’s inscriptions, Susan doesn’t challenge his claim upon the island. Instead, she reinforces Crusoe’s sovereignty by resolving to fit in: ‘after years of solitary mastery, he sees his realm invaded and has tasks set upon him by a woman. I vowed to keep a tighter rein on my tongue’ (*F*, 25). Her navigation of the island also reflects this desire for compliance: ‘I found a hollow in the rocks where I could lie sheltered from the wind and gaze out to sea. In time I grew to think of this as my private retreat, the one place reserved for me on an island owned by another’ (*F*, 26). But by trying to find a space within the island without questioning its societal construction, Susan is complicit in the very system that marginalises her. This is problematic because the island hierarchy is not just patriarchal but racial: “‘If Providence were to watch over all of us,” said Crusoe, “who would be left to pick the cotton and cut the sugar-cane?”” (*F*, 33). Susan therefore becomes complicit in Crusoe’s marginalisation and enslavement of Friday – indeed, once Crusoe dies on the ship home, Susan not only takes over the responsibility of telling the story of the island, but also of Friday, thereby replicating Crusoe’s problematic mastery.

Once in England Susan dreams of returning to the island to ‘plant the terraces and make them bloom,’ (*F*, 44). She also asserts her right to tell her own story: ‘I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling the story according to her own desire [...] the story I desire to be known by is the story of the island’ (*F*, 121). As Chris Bongie writes, this struggle to find an alternative to the masculine master-narrative ‘would appear to lay the foundation for an authentic retrieval of woman’s hitherto silenced voice,’³⁵ especially when one looks at her conflict with the novelist Foe. He represents a ‘narrato-logical perspective’³⁶ of storytelling, for he desires to place Susan’s island narrative within a broader sequentially-orientated narrative, beginning with Susan’s search for her daughter and ending with their reunion: ‘It is thus we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then

³³ Brian Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran, ‘Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee’s “Foe”’, *Contemporary Literature*, 33. 3 (1992), 432-457, p.439

³⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Theory in the Margin: Coetzee’s Foe Reading Defoe’s “Crusoe/Roxana”’ *English in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Oct. 1990), p.8

³⁵ Chris Bongie, “‘Lost in the Maze of Doubting’: J.M. Coetzee’s Foe and the Politics of Unlikeness” *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.2 (Summer 1993) 261-281, p.264

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.267

middle, then end. As to novelty, this is lent by the island episode' (*F*, 117). The problems with such a totalitarian narrative are apparent, for parts of the story Susan wants to include are suppressed, and that which she wishes to exclude is added. Towards the end of *Foe* Susan begins to wonder whether she has become 'a mere receptacle ready to accommodate whatever story is stuffed in me' (*F*, 131). Meanwhile, Foe describes the island as 'no better than a waterlogged boat drifting day after day in an empty ocean till one day, humbly and without commotion, it sinks' (*F*, 117). Like Susan's body, the island also emerges as a container. Both are designated as passive, receptive spaces that can be imprinted upon, an idea that suggests an identification between woman and island can be construed as problematic. However, it is for this reason that Susan, like Polly Flint in *Crusoe's Daughter*, insists upon her corporeality and her desires: 'I was as much a body as Cruso. I ate and drank, I woke and slept. I longed (*F*, 51).' She also describes the island as a substantial body' (*F*, 53), imbuing it with rhythms of corporeality as she discusses its 'living, breathing quality of the island' (*F*, 89). However, within the self-consciously meta-textual terrain of *Foe*, corporeality is equated to textuality: 'return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty (*F*, 51).' Therefore, Susan will only regain 'substance' when her body, and her story, is rendered into text. Her body is a site of double-marginalisation, inscribed both by the novelist Foe and by Coetzee himself.

Readers will therefore sympathise with Susan's struggle not to be marginalised within her own narrative. However, Coetzee problematises Susan's approach to telling her story. Her narrative strategy replicates a masculine hegemonic discourse; indeed, she expresses the desire 'to be father to my story' (*F*, 123). She compares the act of writing her island narrative to that of building: 'think of each mark as a stone, and think of the paper as the island, and imagine that I must disperse these stones over the face of the island' (*F*, 37). Here, writing emerges as an act of inscription, an imprinting of one's own subjectivity upon a *tabula rasa*: the very form of writing the island that I articulated a desire to intervene with and write back against in the introduction to this thesis. As Bongie informs us, 'Barton is over and over again depicted as pursuing essentially the same *authoritative*, and *authoritarian*, projects as the male writer Foe [...] (this) woman's voice is clearly founded upon the same presuppositions of plenitude, of "substantiality", and propriety.'³⁷ Most problematic is the concept of 'propriety', for Susan desires to take ownership of Friday's story, thereby re-enacting her own marginalisation on the body of the 'other'. Friday is mute,

³⁷ Ibid., p.265

his tongue having been cut out (the reader never discovers by whom). To Susan, his silence constitutes ‘a puzzle or hole in the narrative’ (*F*, 120) that she desires to uncover. Susan’s narrative represents a ‘hermeneutic perspective’³⁸ of writing, for she eventually comes to believe that ‘the true story is buried within Friday’ (*F*, 31), and her own story is dependent on bringing to light this buried truth. Her writing constitutes a language of surface and depths – it bears a resemblance to Rita Felski’s ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ or Sedgwick’s ‘paranoid reading,’ which I problematised in my discussion of Rich.

Having failed to bring Friday to speech, Susan decides to teach him to write. But Friday resists these attempts, instead engaging in forming patterns that neither Foe nor Susan can decipher. Towards the end of the novel, she tries to teach Friday to write. The first word she attempts is ‘house’, which she spells ‘h-o-u-s’ (*F*, 145) She has produced an (un)likeness, unwittingly showing, through the missing ‘e’, that language is not a series of fixed meanings, but a play of linguistic differences. Friday reflects an (un)likeness back at her, not so much writing ‘h-o-u-s’, but ‘four shapes passably like them’ (*F*, 145). Later, she sees Friday filling the slate with oblique symbols: ‘eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes.’ (*F*, 147). Perhaps it is possible to extrapolate meaning from these symbols – indeed, Foe concludes that Friday is writing the letter ‘o’ – but to search too deeply for meaning replicates Susan’s hermeneutic approach. Friday’s indeterminate hieroglyphics therefore complicate Susan’s revisionary project. This seems to highlight a fundamental incommensurability between postcolonial and feminist narratives. This incompatibility is also highlighted in *Crusoe’s Daughter*, for in Gardam’s novel there is no mention of Friday. The book itself is silent on the reasons for this, but perhaps Gardam believed that Friday’s signification within the narrative would disrupt Polly’s negotiations of novelistic terrain, as it does in *Foe*. However, this erasure is undeniably problematic, for it performs an exclusionary move. It is therefore possible to see why Coetzee chooses not to disentangle postcolonial and feminist narrative products: in *Foe* they coexist, albeit uneasily, alongside each other.

In summary, then Coetzee exposes the inadequacies of both ‘narrato-logical’ and ‘hermeneutic’ literary strategies represented by Foe and Susan, highlighting them as exclusionary, marginalising discourses. As Bongie states, ‘Coetzee is arguing that the foundational “weakness” of writing, white or otherwise, is that one can never occupy a

³⁸ Ibid., p. 266

position of weakness without transforming it into one of power.’³⁹ Such a statement appears to highlight the impossibility of either writing the other, or writing *as* the other. However, Coetzee is also suggesting the importance of alternative narrative strategies; new ways of rendering bodies and islands into text. In the next section of this thesis I explore the ways in which *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* use intertextual literary strategies to overcome the problems encountered in feminist revisionary discourse.

REVISIONS, REFLECTIONS AND INTERTEXTUALITY: FEMINISED POETICS IN *FOE* AND *CRUSOE’S DAUGHTER*

So far, in this chapter, I have suggested *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* are interrogating boundaries of gender and genre. But the novels themselves are not bounded; they are connected to other novels in an intertextual relationship, and readers must look beyond the page to understand them. *Crusoe’s Daughter* has numerous intertexts. The most obvious of these is *Robinson Crusoe*, Polly’s favourite novel, which, as a revisionary character, her existence is both divergent from and dependent upon. But Russell McDougall also brings to our attention to the ‘extraordinary range and quantity of the references to other works of literature from every other period in the history of the English novel since *Robinson Crusoe*.’⁴⁰ The island in *Crusoe’s Daughter* bears traces of multiple authors. To McDougall, it evokes the bleak, liminal marshland of Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, whilst Polly compares her island to the rural farms of George Eliot’s *Mill on the Floss*: ‘great dark ominous places. Solitary’ (CD, 132). However, I believe the island’s most significant shaping force is the liminal landscapes of Virginia Woolf, especially in *To the Lighthouse*. Woolf description of ‘that wavering line of sea and sky, [on] the tree trunks which the smoke of steamers made waver on the horizon [...] all that power sweeping savagely in and inevitably withdrawing’⁴¹ can be compared to Polly’s depiction of her island’s horizons:

The wind battered me, the sun shone on me and the sea was far away with a silver line along the edge of it. The horizon was broken, so broken and curved that it seemed strange it had taken everyone so long to know that the world was round – smoke then ship came sailing towards me, ship then smoke went sailing away (CD, 141).

³⁹ Bongie, p.274

⁴⁰ Russell McDougall, “A Novel Atlas: Tradition and the Individual Text of *Crusoe’s Daughter*”, *(Un)Common Ground: Essays in Literatures in English*, ed. by Andrew Taylor and Russell McDougall (CRNLE: Adelaide, 1990), 119-132, p.127

⁴¹ Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.63

Points of comparison include the mention of the distant ship/steamer, an image of industrial modernity that hovers out of reach, behind ‘wavering’ and ‘fragmentary’ horizons, as well as the elemental power of the landscape. The connection with Woolf is not accidental. It is one Gardam herself claims in the novel’s epigraph, a quotation from Virginia Woolf’s essay, ‘Robinson Crusoe’: ‘The pressure of life when one is fending for oneself alone on a desert island is really no laughing matter. It is no crying one either.’⁴² To Ann-Marie Fallon, Gardam’s use of the Woolf quotation ‘establishes a clear matrilineage through the history of Crusoe.’⁴³ This matrilineal identification constitutes an alternative to the patrilineal discourses of realism. There are two fundamental aspects to this Woolfean matrilineage: the gendered revision of traditionally masculine spaces, and the use of intertextual literary strategies.

Certain feminisms are foregrounded in theories of space, for as Kerstin Shands states, ‘feminism’s central agenda has everything to do with surveying and assessing environmental conditions – and changing them.’⁴⁴ Woolf belongs to an archive of female writers who use spatial metaphors to “find space” for themselves within a male-dominated literary tradition. The motif of the island appears on several occasions in Woolf’s work. For example, in the short story, ‘The Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn,’ a mother urges her daughter to view herself as ‘the Ruler of a small island set in the midst of turbulent waters.’⁴⁵ To Jane Garrity, Woolf desires to subvert male dominated spaces by resituating them as metaphors for female subjectivity; yet despite being dismissive of the logic of empire, she still has the capacity to be ‘seduced’⁴⁶ by tropes of exploration and colonisation. Woolf’s work also implies that this access to space is a privilege of class: in *A Room of One’s Own* she states that ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.’⁴⁷ *Crusoe’s Daughter* replicates some of Woolf’s spatial strategies. It also reflects a socioeconomic conception of

⁴² Virginia Woolf, ‘Robinson Crusoe’, *The Common Reader*, Volume 2, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Vintage, 2003), p.50

⁴³ Ann-Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2016) p.102

⁴⁴ Kerstin Shands, *Embracing Space: Spatial Metaphors in Feminist Discourse* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999) p.2

⁴⁵ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Journal of Mistress Joan Martin’, quoted in Jane Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British women modernists and the national imaginary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.243

⁴⁶ Jane Garrity, *Step-daughters of England: British women modernists and the national imaginary* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.3

⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf, ‘A Room of One’s Own’, *A Room of One’s Own; Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3

space, for Polly's isolated house, Oversands, is not just a signifier of isolation but privilege: she achieves a degree of freedom by her translation and research on *Robinson Crusoe*, written in the 'precious quiet of a study' (CD, 254). But is Gardam's novel, like Woolf's, also dependent upon the very masculine, imperial discourse it seeks to disavow? To McDougall, this appears to be the case. He evokes *Crusoe's Daughter* as a remapping project, a novel which 'shows that the 'map' of English Literature can be redrawn.⁴⁸ Within the context of 'the canon', a map evokes a hierarchy of space; the fixing of borders and the positioning of places at a fixed distance from one another. However, whilst the socially stratified conception of spaces in *Crusoe's Daughter* does invoke a value system, an analysis of the intertextual relations within the text suggests the island is not a symbolic hierarchy, but a relational multiplicity.

Gardam's use of intertextuality in *Crusoe's Daughter* can be compared to what Anne Fernald describes as Woolf's 'ironic buried commentaries.'⁴⁹ Like Woolf, Gardam's intertextuality 'operates at every level, from the word and phoneme through sentence, character and plot to genre itself.'⁵⁰ For example, Captain Flint, the name of Polly's father, is also the name of the pirate captain from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Polly refers to her Aunt's new husband as 'so much, much worse than Mr Causubon' (CD, 79), a reference to a character from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The description of a female poet contemplating a hyacinth, which then 'tipped slowly and inevitably over like a soldier fainting' (CD, 117) is a comedic evocation of the description of returning from the hyacinth garden in T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, 'I could not/ Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither/Living nor dead, and I knew nothing.'⁵¹ The reference to Eliot places Gardam's intertextual experimentation in a modernist context, and simultaneously provides a humorous take on Eliot's somewhat ponderous suggestion that a poet must acknowledge 'the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country'⁵² as he writes. Fernald characterizes Eliot's intertextuality as a form of 'phallogocentric anxiety'⁵³ in its desire to demonstrate mastery over a tradition; an anxiety she places in contrast to Woolf's 'politically and historically aware jouissance.'⁵⁴ I believe that

⁴⁸ McDougall, p.125

⁴⁹ Anne Fernald, 'Woolf and Intertextuality' *Woolf in Context*, ed. Bryony Randall & Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.55

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.55

⁵¹ T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland', The Poetry Foundation, < <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47311/the-waste-land> > [Accessed 30th January, 2018]

⁵² T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' *Perspecta*, Vol. 19 (1982), 36-42, p. 37

⁵³ Fernald, p.55

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.55

this jousiance can also be found in Gardam's seamless, humorous use of intertextuality. In drawing upon these feminised intertextual strategies, then, Gardam has encountered a way to open out the textual space of the novel. This is a stark contrast to the text's relationship with *Robinson Crusoe*, which erects a system of binaries that must be negotiated and overcome.

The island in *Crusoe's Daughter*, its terrain contoured by multiple texts, can be seen as a palimpsest, 'a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing'⁵⁵ – a material skin on which nothing is ever truly erased. Sara Dillon uses the palimpsest as a figure for intertextuality, describing it as an 'involved phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other.'⁵⁶ Dillon's depiction of the palimpsest is as a multi-textured signifier of relationality. Does this mean that the concept of the island-as-palimpsest challenges the colonial designation of the island as a container or *tabula rasa*, easily inscribed and controlled? An answer can be found in the work of Elizabeth Grosz, for whom palimpsests are not just signifiers of texts but of bodies: 'the tools of body engraving – social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary – all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways.'⁵⁷ To Grosz, the body-as-palimpsest represents a site of multiple inscription which can be interpreted in one of two ways, 'as an agent, a labouring, exchanging being, a subject of social contracts and thus of rights and responsibilities', or as 'a body shell capable of being overtaken by the other's messages.'⁵⁸ The island-as-palimpsest can therefore be read as both 'agent' and 'body shell', but in embodying both interpretations, it becomes a site of ambiguity. It is this very ambiguity, coupled with the evocation of its materiality, that enables the island-as-palimpsest to challenge the notion of the island as *tabula rasa*.

Since I have designated *Crusoe's Daughter* as a palimpsest, a figure which challenges the designation of the *tabula rasa*, the text also seems placed to resist MacDougall's depiction of *Crusoe's Daughter* as a map, with its associated significations of encompassment and power. Yet despite its palimpsestic features, Gardam's novel is firmly located within the traditions of English literature. Its references come predominantly from British textual sources, meaning the palimpsestuous terrain of the novel, and the island

⁵⁵ 'Palimpsest', *Oxford English Dictionary Online Database*, [Accessed December 12th, 2017]

⁵⁶ Sara Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Continuum, 2007), p.4

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) p.117

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.119

within it, are signifiers of British identity. The connection to Woolf places *Crusoe's Daughter* in a relation to British modernism, whilst the connection to *Robinson Crusoe* conjures up the genealogies of British realism. Despite Gardam's use of intertextuality, then, *Crusoe's Daughter* is still mapped according to constructs of genre and literary traditions. But unlike *Foe*, a deconstructive text which seeks to disrupt and transgress generic boundaries, *Crusoe's Daughter* doesn't seem to want to break free of these confines. Polly overcomes her isolation through reading, and makes connections with books, not people. The extent of her intimacy with *Robinson Crusoe* makes her worry that 'the book, being so much more than a book to me, might lie so deep in the bone that it would be difficult to lay bare' (CD, 154). This reference reveals Polly's status as a revisionary character, her bodily existence dependent upon *Robinson Crusoe*. The connection between Polly and her intertext is framed as an intimate, embodied one. In doing so, Gardam appears to be arguing for the importance of intertextuality in the shaping of our bodily identities and desires. Therefore, in *Crusoe's Daughter*, intertextuality disrupts the Robinsonade's representation of the castaway figure as an isolated, self-sufficient individual, instead stressing the connections between bodies and texts.

If *Crusoe's Daughter* believes intertextuality to be a shaping force for narrative and identity, in *Foe* it functions as a deconstructive force. Whilst Gardam seamlessly integrates multiple intertexts into *Crusoe's Daughter*, the intertextual relations in *Foe* create a narrative schism. Susan's narrative is not just connected to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but his novel *Roxana*, which tells the story of a courtesan (whose name is Susan) whose existence is threatened by a missing daughter. Here the similarities with *Roxana* end, for in *Foe* the daughter is an unthreatening, embodied, figment of Foe's imagination, and whilst Susan copulates with both Cruso and Foe – 'I drew off my shift and straddled him' (*F*, 139) – she is not a courtesan. When trying to write Susan's story, Foe grapples with the problem of integrating narrative elements from these two different texts: as Spivak notes, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* have different 'narrative frames', for whilst the former is about 'capitalism and colony', the latter is framed by 'the mother-daughter story.'⁵⁹ The presence of the two intertexts in *Foe* means that, as Tisha Turk explains, 'the audience can pretend that Foe is the "real story" on which *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* are based.'⁶⁰ The reader is invited to believe that Foe split Susan's story in two, producing two separate narratives,

⁵⁹ Spivak, p.12

⁶⁰ Tisha Turk, Intertextuality and the Collaborative Construction of Narrative: J. M. Coetzee's "Foe", *Narrative*, Vol. 19. 3 (October 2011), 295-310, p.304

Robinson Crusoe and *Roxana*. To Turk, this division is a marginalising, exclusionary move, for Susan is written into the role of whore in a move that ‘seems also to derive from his discomfort with Susan's sexual experience and particularly her sexual assertiveness [...] *Roxana* is Foe's attempt to control Susan's sexuality and her story.’⁶¹ The novel's relationship to its intertexts therefore reinforces the idea, discussed earlier in this chapter, that the act of writing is an assertion of power. But the use of intertextuality in *Foe* also functions as a critique of realist discourse, which *Robinson Crusoe* is a part of.

Georg Lukács believes that the aim of realism should be ‘to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction between appearance and reality [...] is so resolved that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art.’⁶² He believes that in order to achieve this the realist text needs to constitute a totality, ‘a self-contained, circumscribed and complete context with its own *immediately* self-evident movement and structure.’⁶³ Foe's hunt for the ‘larger story’ and Susan's search for the ‘true story’ (*F*, 117-118) – both problematic narrative strategies due to their exclusionary nature – can be connected to a discourse of realism. The elements of realism described above are challenged in *Foe*. Although realist novels do probe the contradictions between appearance and reality, Hutcheon believes that this ambivalence is more overtly problematised in historical metafiction such as *Foe*. She argues that in *Foe* there are two ‘realities’ that need to be considered separately, the novel's historical legacy and what Coetzee offers as the novel's (fictional) reality, Susan Barton's suppressed voice: ‘this may not be ‘true’ of Defoe's particular story, but it does have something to say about the position of women and the politics of representation in both the fiction and the nonfiction of the eighteenth century.’⁶⁴ The second element of realism *Foe* critiques is that of the concept of the text as a bounded totality. The placing of characters from different texts into the same physical space does not create the sense of circumscription but what Spivak believes to be a ‘textual porosity: physical boundaries between books on a shelf have broken down; characters from one novel have wandered into the neighboring book; confusion if not chaos ensues.’⁶⁵ But alongside this porosity the reader encounters fragmentary, distorted reflections; inversions of *Robinson Crusoe*.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.303

⁶² Georg Lukács, ‘Art and Objective Truth’, *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays*, trans. by Arthur Kahn (London: Authors Guild, 2005), p.32

⁶³ Ibid., p.35

⁶⁴ Hutcheon, p.73

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.305

I have already described how the island both departs from, yet reflects, its colonial origins, as well as the differences between Cruso and Crusoe – a difference that is first registered linguistically, for the two names are homophones and the difference between them is indicated by the missing ‘e’. To Brianne Mackaskill and Jeanne Colleran, the missing ‘e’ is one of many examples of Derridean *différance* within the text, which they define as a ‘differential play of meaning deferred along the chain of linguistic supplementarity and displacement.’⁶⁶ Another example of *différance* is the fictional novelist, Foe, whose name is linked to Daniel Defoe (who was born with the name Daniel Foe), and whose presence confounds the appearance of reality within the text. However, María José Chivite de León believes that although *Foe* draws upon realism to subvert its ‘representational absolutism’⁶⁷, this doesn’t mean it considers realist discourse as antithetical to its own processes of representation – instead realism becomes one of the frames of reference for understanding *Foe*.

The metaphor of the mirror is central to realist discourse, ‘where the work of representation is expressed in the traditional image of holding a mirror up to reality.’⁶⁸ This is a metaphor de León plays with in her depiction of *Foe*:

The specular logic of the novel widely differs from realist pacts: it manages to reflect the process of reflection itself, instead of the object of reflection [...] Moreover, this metafictional mirror reflects both sides of the mirror, the gazing and the gazed [...] Let’s add that this mirror does not rest on any fixed point, but instead keeps repositioning the discursive optics simultaneously at different angles, levels, times and histories.⁶⁹

The key to understanding this description is the word ‘specular’. The *speculum* is a figure used by Luce Irigaray to recuperate feminine desire and subjectivity. Irigaray believes that within psychoanalytic discourse woman is ‘charged simply with reflecting man’s image back at him – albeit inverted.’⁷⁰ She uses the metaphor of the *speculum* to invoke an alternative form of narrative production, one which, to Hilary Robinson, ‘shatters the ice-

⁶⁶ Brian Macaskill and Jeanne Colleran, ‘Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee’s “Foe”’, *Contemporary Literature*, 33. 3 (1992), 432-457, p.439

⁶⁷ María José Chivite de León, *Echoes of History, Shadowed Identities: Rewriting Alterity in J. M. Coetzee’s Foe and Marina Warner’s Indigo* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), p.53

⁶⁸ J. Hillis Miller, ‘Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*,’ *A Practical Reader in Contemporary Literary Theory*, ed. Peter Brooker and Peter Widdowson (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 171-2

⁶⁹ De León, pp.52-3

⁷⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p.51

glass mirror that is the two-dimensional representation, ‘woman’, exposing the device that it is and recognising the brilliance that is the mirror’s backing, unseen and unknown in phallogocular structures.’⁷¹ De León invokes the metaphor of the speculum in full knowledge of its feminist contexts, and suggests that when *Foe* shifts towards ‘the logic of inclusion, differentiability and supplementation [...] its underlying identity politics get feminised.’⁷² In summary, then, whilst Coetzee problematises Susan’s authoritarian, phallogocentric style of feminist revision, *Foe* also showcases an alternative feminised poetics, one which seeks to deconstruct binary systems instead of reinscribing them.

Foe’s specularised poetics are evocative of Derrida’s concept of invagination. In ‘The Law of Genre’ Derrida suggests that ‘genre’ shouldn’t appear as a constraining circle: instead, ‘the boundary of the set comes to form, by invagination, an internal pocket larger than the whole [...] as singular as it is limitless.’⁷³ The meaning that can be ascribed to this passage is that the ‘pocket’ of a genre constitutes texts which have not yet come into existence, texts which will continue to (re)inscribe the genre but will not circumscribe it. Invagination is a term that means ‘to turn or double (a tubular sheath) back within itself,’⁷⁴ often used in reference to a stage of embryonic development (when the hollow ball of cells, the blastula, turns inside out to become the gastrula) – a word of multiple movements and inversions. Indeed, both texts and genres have the capacity to be invaginated, for as Derrida says, they are both comprised of a series of folds. Jonathon Crimmins explains that the “fold” was a metaphor Derrida first used in ‘The Double Session’ to refer both to book folds and the vulva, a metaphor that highlights the text’s capacity ‘to be reentered and reiterated.’⁷⁵ Invagination, then, constitutes a feminised poetics of genre, one which frees it from boundaries and constraints. It also situates woman’s body as an active generator of meaning. But it is problematic that woman’s body has had its meanings and significations appropriated by Derrida, a male author. Does this mean that Coetzee’s specular poetics are similarly problematic? On the one hand, specularity is used within *Foe* to undermine the very authorial (masculine) perspective that seeks to appropriate and inscribe bodies and texts. It is also important to remember that specularity is a term that has been critically applied to *Foe*, rather than a strategy Coetzee has explicitly claimed for himself. However, the oblique final section

⁷¹ Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p.72

⁷² De León, p.54

⁷³ Derrida, p.59

⁷⁴ ‘Invagination’, Oxford English Dictionary Online Database, [Accessed 30th January, 2018]

⁷⁵ Jonathon Crimmins, ‘Gender, Genre, and the Near Future in Derrida’s “The Law of Genre,”’ *Diacritics*, 39.1 (spring 2009), 45-60, p.54

of *Foe* can be problematised, for it evokes a space of embodiment where woman's body appears to function as object matter for meaning-making.

(UN)ENDINGS

Towards the end of *Foe*, the novelist Foe suggests that 'it is for us to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds', and Susan replies, 'who will do it? [...]Who will dive into the wreck?' (*F*,142). I include this conversation to provide context for the final section of the novel, which requires a brief description before it is analysed in depth. In this section, an unnamed narrator enters Foe's attic and finds the dead bodies of Foe and Susan and the sleeping form of Friday. She places her ear against Friday's mouth and hears the 'sounds of the island' (*F*, 154). The narrative stops, and begins again. Now, the unnamed narrator is standing outside the house. On the wall is a blue black on which the words '*Daniel Defoe, Author*' (*F*, 155) are written in white – a signifier that places this narrative in the present day. For the second time, the narrator goes upstairs to Foe's attic. This time she picks up a yellowing manuscript, and reads the lines 'Dear Mr Foe, at last I could row no further' (*F*, 155), the first lines of Susan's story. Like Susan the unnamed narrator slips overboard, and finds herself sinking to the bottom of the ocean, where she discovers a wreck. Inside are the dead bodies of Susan and Foe and the sleeping body of Friday. Again, the narrator presses an ear to Friday's mouth and a stream of oceanic sound, the noises of the island, emerges. These five pages evoke a variety of questions. Who is the unnamed narrator? What hermeneutic space is being depicted here? In whose hands does meaning ultimately rest?

Bongie ventures that the narrator in the second part of this end section is Friday, 'forced into speaking about his original self in the third person [...] impossibly trying to find a way back into his own mouth.'⁷⁶ I, however, follow Marco Caracciolo in his belief that the unnamed narrator is in fact the reader, and that '*Foe* is an allegory of interpretation in which the reader's meaning constructions are projected onto the narrator's exploration of an environment.'⁷⁷ The fact that two such contradictory interpretations exist highlights the ambiguity of *Foe*'s conclusion – it is ultimately in the reader's hands that meaning rests. In its indeterminacy, then, *Foe* becomes a novel which shifts away from providing a final, definitive meaning, thereby critiquing both the narrato-logical and hermeneutic narrative

⁷⁶ Bongie, p.279

⁷⁷ Marco Caracciolo, 'J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Embodiment of Meaning,' *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 36.1 (2012), 90-103, p.91

strategies represented through Foe and Susan. Indeed, in this section, both Foe and Susan are described as ‘fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks’ (*F*,157) – in this textual space, this is what their desire for plenitude and narrative substance looks like.

This final section takes place in an oceanic space of meaning. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar explain, drawing upon Hélène Cixous’ *l’écriture féminine*, ‘for Cixous, as for countless mythologies, water is the feminine element *par excellence*: the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother’s womb.’⁷⁸ Within this oceanic, feminine discourse, woman’s body actively generates meaning (although the situating of female difference within the biological can, and has, been criticised). *Foe*’s use of oceanic metaphors can therefore be seen as an appropriation of woman’s body and its meanings – it is, after all, Susan’s text that is being ‘penetrated’ and its meanings analysed by the reader. Furthermore, the idea of searching ‘beneath the words’ also repeats Susan’s problematic hermeneutic perspective of surface and depths.

I believe that Coetzee overcomes the problem of surface and depths in two fundamental ways. The first is through the ambiguity surrounding the narrator, who may or may not be the reader, which makes this chapter’s movements of interpretation more indeterminate. Second, Coetzee complicates the image of surface and depths by introducing distorted reflections – the final section stops, doubles back and repeats itself, whilst there is a doubling in the reader holding the material text in their hands, her search for understanding mirroring the narrator’s hermeneutic movements as she delves deeper into the text. These indeterminacies and (un)likenesses constitute a poetics that challenges the conception of writing as an assertion of power. As John Thieme states, ‘through its labyrinthine twists and turns, it refuses, however, to do one thing: to speak for black subjectivity.’⁷⁹ Meaning rests not in words but in the sounds that emanate from Friday’s body. These sounds, ‘the faintest faraway roar [...] and over that, as if once a violin were touched, the whine of the wind and the cry of a bird’ (*F*, 154) do not evoke the linear structure of writing but the simultaneity found in musical symphonies – they do not generate meaning but an emotional affect. Bongie’s postcolonial reading of *Foe* shows that within this space ‘Friday returns to himself, in an impossible and necessary gesture of recuperation that marks the infinitely rehearsed

⁷⁸ Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) p.117

⁷⁹ John Thieme, “‘On England’s Desert Island cast away’: protean Crusoes, exiled Fridays,’ *Postcolonial con-texts: Writing back to the Canon* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001), p.69

beginnings of a postcolonial poetics.’⁸⁰ However, Susan’s body appears to have become little more than a ‘body-shell’; a vehicle for a different story. Indeed, to many critics, this final chapter suggests that ‘Susan’s desires and difficulties seem to be overwhelmed and washed away,’⁸¹ that feminist concerns have been swept aside in favour of postcolonial poetics.

However, *Foe’s* final image is one of transferral:

From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face (*F*, 157).

This transferral is explicitly embodied; it is a transmission that is sensed, felt, rather than explicitly articulating as a meaning. Meaning, then, does not rest with the author: rather, it is situated in the interaction between the ‘other’ and the embodied reader. This reader, then, insists that Susan’s desire is the motivating force behind the narrative, that the reader is affected by her emotions and complexities. Jared Zimble’s analysis of Coetzee’s fiction shows that Susan has a more distinctive voice than his earlier narrators, that she ‘is constituted in the use of her own syntax, turn of phrase, choice of terms: speaking in an antiquated tongue, Susan Barton acquires a voice all her own.’⁸² Furthermore, when we are first introduced to the new narrative voice, the abrupt transition in tone highlights ‘how accustomed we have become to the cadences of her tongue [...] she yet has her own substance and effectuality.’⁸³ It is also undeniable that it is within Susan’s narrative, Susan’s scene of writing, that the reader discovers the possibility of other spaces, other islands of meaning.

Like *Foe*, the ending of *Crusoe’s Daughter* also represents an alternative hermeneutic space: laid out like a screenplay, it is set in the present day. Polly, now an old woman, has barricaded herself inside her house, protesting its upcoming demolition to make space for a nuclear waste site. Outside, her adopted daughter discusses Polly with a journalist, whilst inside the house a conversation between Polly and Crusoe takes place. The island has undergone a transformation:

⁸⁰ Bongie, p.280

⁸¹ Jared Zimble, *J M Coetzee and the Politics of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.168

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.162

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.165

Outside the yellow house the traffic zips past continually. At its gates there is a busy roundabout. Beyond them the old Iron-Works stand, dwarfed by the huge chemical city which has grown around them, its chimneys like silver pencils, its cooling towers like vast Christmas puddings directed with a spaghetti of pipes. They are beautiful and weird. The yellow house sitting in the middle of them is bizarre (CD, 299).

The material space of the island has contracted, for the marsh and sea have been paved over by a ‘*huge chemical city*’. Gardam’s sentences clearly demarcate the different parts of the environment – the traffic, the roundabout, the yellow house – creating concentric geospatial enclosures of power, which appear to reinforce the powerlessness of the disappearing island. This is compounded by the fact that the description of the industrial city dominates textual space. The erasure of the marshland is an allegory for how the discourses of the present can eclipse those of the past. However, in its contraction the island also emerges as a dynamic construction, a space which has transformed to represent the aims of different literary project: the environmental concerns of industrialisation. Furthermore, the industrial city is depicted according to both to metaphors of authorship (‘*chimneys like silver pencils*’) and domestic consumption (‘*vast Christmas puddings directed with a spaghetti of pipes*’), meaning it has become a space Gardam infuses with experiences and images of femininity and female authorship. This image of the island represents what Polly, as an English teacher, tells her students; ‘every serious novel must in some degree and *unnoticeably* carry the form further. Novel must be ‘novel’ (CD, 257). Whilst the revisionary text looks back it must also look forward to progress and develop. This is the function of this final section of *Crusoe’s Daughter*.

The placing of characters from different narratives in the same fictional space shows that this section of the novel is more overtly metafictional than the rest of *Crusoe’s Daughter*. Polly and Crusoe discuss their position in relation to each other and to the discourse of English Literature. Polly informs Crusoe of his influence in popular culture: ‘oh yes, you’re still here. They put you in films and song-and-dance acts. They’ve had you on ice’ (CD, 308). She describes Crusoe as ‘ageless,’ and in a tongue-in-cheek comment, disparages the ‘canonically boring’ fiction of the present day, including revisionary texts about Crusoe and Friday (CD, 306-307). However, the narrative description of Crusoe with a ‘*shaggy beard, tattered garments, great hairy-mushroom umbrella*’ (CD, 308), presents him as a ridiculous anachronism. Within the pages of this revisionary text, his self-sufficient masculinity seems dated. However, Polly seems to have undergone the same treatment. Her adopted daughter refers to her dismissively as ‘an old virgin,’ (CD, 83) reducing an entire

narrative about Polly's struggle to understand her desires and her decision to close herself off from marriage to a mere three words. Through the anachronistic representation of these characters Gardam is reinforcing her idea that the novel must change to progress. Indeed, in his penultimate lines, Crusoe remembers his daughter – 'We don't hear about the daughter. What became of her?' (CD, 309) – thereby paving the way for a feminist revisionary discourse of *Robinson Crusoe*. Gardam's *Crusoe's Daughter* is part of this legacy. This self-referential circle could be read as a Derridean 'fold' in which an ending singles a beginning, in which the concept of 'genre' no longer emerges as confining.

I wish to conclude this essay by coming full circle, by returning to the two questions I asked at the beginning of the novel. The first of these was whether the island 'matters' differently when inhabited by a female, rather than a male castaway. The second question was whether *Crusoe's Daughter* and *Foe* exhibit literary strategies that offer a representation of the island that differs from its passive, feminised figuration within the western cultural imaginary. The two questions are interconnected, for the islands in *Foe* and *Crusoe's Daughter* are shaped by the authors' revisionary politics and the desires of their woman protagonists. *Foe* displays a specular, feminised narrative poetics – comparable to Derrida's invagination – which positions the island as a labyrinthian space comprising a series of distorted reflections of *Robinson Crusoe*. As Bongie says; 'Coetzee makes a case for postcolonial literature as the site, not of a radical break with old and discredited stories, but of an incessant reflecting back on colonialism, in both a temporal and spatial sense.'⁸⁴ Reading the island in *Foe* through the lenses of specularity and invagination evokes it as a feminised space, but this doesn't mean it is a passive *tabula rasa*. Here, the association of 'island' with the body of woman is not a marginalising one – instead it highlights the complexity and multiplicity of the island. Meanwhile, in *Crusoe's Daughter*, Polly's connection with the island highlights it as a liminal space; its interstitial spaces reflect Polly's negotiation of her own marginal, yet embodied, subjectivity. Gardam also establishes a matrilineal relation with Woolf, and in doing so draws upon a feminised intertextual poetics to open out the space of the island. The island emerges as a palimpsest, interwoven with multiple texts. The metaphor of the palimpsest can also be applied to the island in *Foe*. Both islands are spaces of relational complexity which contradict the male novelist Foe's notion of the island as a homogenous space, a 'loaf of bread' (*F*, 117) brought to life only by the stories imposed upon them.

⁸⁴ Chris Bongie, p. 262

However, despite challenging the colonial concept of the island as *tabula rasa*, these islands do not emerge as utopian colonies. The terrain of the island in *Crusoe's Daughter* is unmarked by the presence of Friday, an act of silencing that seems to replicate colonial narratives of suppression. Furthermore, the island emerges from a specifically British context, as it is shaped by its intertextual relationship to British texts. It therefore fails to take into account representations of islands, and women, in texts by authors from different backgrounds. Meanwhile, Coetzee's treatment of Susan is also problematic, as he uses her narrative as a gesture of postcolonial recuperation whilst simultaneously problematizing her desires for space and agency. None of these problems can simply be swept aside. What they do illustrate is the difficulty of reading the island alongside the body, in all its configurations and desires. As Lauren Berlant states, 'racism, colonialism, heteronormativity, class entitlement, and other forms of hierarchy interfere with the fantasy that sexual difference has a universal meaning.'⁸⁵ This hierarchy of bodies has always been present on the Crusoean island, in the figure of the white sovereign subject and the colonial 'other'. But it is through the presence of a woman castaway that we are able to more clearly see, and therefore negotiate or deconstruct these hierarchies. Indeed, in the next chapter of this thesis, 'Reading the Archipelago of Desire in Julieta Campos' *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*', I explore the fact that although desire may erect barriers, it also destabilises them. I do so by showing how Campos draws upon a discourse of romantic desire to delegitimise colonial and utopian narratives of island possession.

⁸⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), p.63

CHAPTER THREE | READING THE ARCHIPELAGO OF DESIRE IN JULIETA CAMPOS' *THE FEAR OF LOSING EURYDICE*¹

What is utopia but the rationalized discourse of desire, a metalanguage of love?

– Julieta Campos, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*

EMERGENCE

*The Fear of Losing Eurydice*² (1993) is a novel about the desire for the island. To Julieta Campos, this desire is universal: 'who has never dreamed of a deserted island? We are all shipwreck survivors dreaming of islands,³' the narrator of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* asks. Indeed, images of islands surge, shift and repeat through the novel, produced by dynamic movements of desire. To Campos, these islands are all part of a 'single imaginary archipelago – the archipelago of desire' (*E*, 102), a motif which she draws upon to remap insular cartographies for her own personal and political purposes. This chapter explores the emancipatory potential of the archipelago motif and the 'surges' of desire that produce it. It shows how Campos draws upon a romantic discourse of desire to delegitimise colonial island possession and remap the island. In *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* the island figures neither as *tabula rasa* nor as an end goal in a utopian quest. Rather, the text portrays the island as a space that evades capture and definition; a space of symbolic multiplicity and permeable borders. Meanwhile, utopia is portrayed as a call uttered by multiple voices across different times and spaces – a gesture not of encompassment but of deferral. The archipelago of desire therefore emerges as an emancipatory cartography, one which remaps western geographies of centre and periphery, instead stressing the connections between the Caribbean, Asia, Europe, and Africa. This chapter explores the significance of these transformative movements, and in doing so deepens understanding of what it means to think with the archipelago in a literary context.⁴

Campos is a Cuban writer who has a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Havana, studied contemporary French literature at the Sorbonne and lived much of her life

¹ An abridged version of this chapter appeared in the 'Island fictions and metaphors in contemporary literature' thematic section of *Island Studies Journal*, 12(2), November 2017

² Initially published in Spanish in 1979 as *El miedo de perder a Eurídice*

³ Julieta Campos, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, trans. by Leland Chambers (Champaign, Dalkey Archive Press, 1993), p.33

⁴ English translations of sources have been used when available, including the primary source text. Those texts only available in Spanish have been quoted in the original and accompanied by my own translation.

in Mexico. Her experimental literary style therefore draws inspiration from both the Americas and from Europe – a transnationalism that is also reflected in text’s geographies, for it contains island references from multiple cultural contexts. Her work also blurs discursive boundaries. According to Cynthia Tompkins, ‘Campos’ deep knowledge of the *nouveau roman*, the neobaroque, and surrealism, as well as the pleasure she derives from the Boom’s stylistic and metafictional experimentation, allow her to pioneer a hybrid Latin American literary postmodernism.’⁵ The *nouveau roman* is a style of writing that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in France and is associated with writers such as Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute, and Alain-Robbe Grillet. It rejects linear plot and characterisation in favour of ‘precise physical descriptions, a heightened sense of ambiguity with regards to point of view, radical disjunctions of time and space, and self-reflexive commentary on the processes of literary composition,’⁶ all characteristics exhibited by *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*. Meanwhile, Tompkins places Campos alongside Latin American female writers such as Clarice Lispector, Helena Parente Cunha and Luisa Valenzuela, whom she believes ‘produce ludic, experimental, deconstructive, and self-reflexive texts [that] question the status quo from a woman centred position.’⁷ Campos’ engagement with these literary movements shows her interest in subverting and revising conventional narrative poetics. This chapter engages with Campos’ subversion of western narratives of island possession (both the utopian quest and the Robinsonade) on a structural and thematic level, showing she has deeply personal motives for this destabilisation.

ARCHIPELAGRAPHY: A LITERARY METHODOLOGY

This chapter draws upon theories from both sides of the Atlantic to inform an analysis of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*. The work of Hélène Cixous and Roland Barthes – both of whom Campos was familiar with – deepen an understanding of the text, as do Lauren Berlant’s contemporary psychoanalytic theories of desire. Meanwhile, the theories of Kamau Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant and Antonio Bénitez-Rojo underpin the archipelagic literary methodology I have developed to analyse *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*; a

⁵ Cynthia Tompkins, *Latin American Postmodernisms: Women Writers and Experimentation*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006) p.19

⁶ Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin and Robin Parmar, ‘The new novel’ *The Electronic Labyrinth*, 1993-2000, <<http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/elab/hfl0260.html>> [Accessed 14th October, 2017]

⁷ Tompkins, *Latin American postmodernisms*, p.1

methodology I contextualise and explain in this section of the chapter. Archipelagraphy is a term first used by Elizabeth Deloughrey as a form of rehistoricising the Caribbean and Pacific. She argues:

No island is an isolated isle and [that] a system of archipelagraphy – that is, a historiography that considers chains of islands in fluctuating relationship to their surrounding seas, islands and continents – provides a more appropriate metaphor for reading island cultures.⁸

Deloughrey believes there is a need to write back against marginalising western cultural narratives that consider islands as isolated and distant from the surrounding continents. An archipelagraphic historiography contains the potential to unsettle such marginalising cartographies, enabling us to view islands as part of a larger system or assemblage. Indeed, in the agenda-setting island studies essay, ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, Elizabeth Stratford et al. stress the importance of the archipelago to island studies discourse, since it contains the potential to unsettle ‘two somewhat overworked topological relations⁹’ in contemporary island scholarship – that of land and sea, continent and mainland – which designate the island as isolated and peripheral. Instead they suggest that the archipelago embodies ‘an experience of disjuncture, connection and entanglement *between* and *among* islands.’¹⁰ The islands of the Caribbean, for example, are connected through trade and cultural exchange – they bear traces of multiple cultures, from the slaves who were exported from Africa to work in the plantation economies, to European influences from colonising populations.

Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* offers a way of (re)conceptualizing the Caribbean archipelago based upon Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the rhizome, which he defines as:

An enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently. The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation.¹¹

⁸ Elizabeth Deloughrey, “‘The litany of islands, the rosary of Archipelagoes’”, Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagraphy’, *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, Vol 32, January 2001, p.23

⁹ Elaine Stratford et al. ‘Envisioning the Archipelago’, *Island studies Journal*, 6.1 (2011) 113-130, p.14

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114

¹¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p.11

Glissant is using the rhizome to discuss creolization, which he believes is the best example of the ‘Poetics of Relation’ that characterise the Caribbean archipelago. He challenges the concept of ‘the totalitarian root’ – that any languages derived from the original are bastardised or ‘impure’. Glissant moves away from creolization as a form of appropriation or mimicry. He shows that creolization is the product of multiple languages carried across the sea from Europe, Asia, and Africa, meaning each island has its own distinct phrases, speech-patterns, and vocal rhythms, thereby stressing it as a movement of creative fusion. The islands of the Caribbean are therefore sites of relation, spaces embodying multiple linguistic and colonial encounters: ‘each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea.’¹² He is therefore reconceptualising the binary of land and sea established in western thought where the sea is designated as *aqua nullius*, a space which encircles and isolates the island. Instead, Glissant perceives the islands of the Caribbean archipelago as being transformed by a network of ocean journeys: of ‘traditional races of yoles and gommiers,’ ‘glorious regattas,’ and the trauma of the Middle Passage, ‘a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green.’¹³ Glissant’s Poetics of Relation therefore evokes not only the novelty of creation, but also emphasises the trauma of history.

Glissant is only one of numerous writers and theorists who stress the importance of the ocean in the identity-formation of the Caribbean archipelago. Brathwaite’s ‘tidaletics’ depict the Caribbean cultural consciousness as a series of dynamic movements ‘coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding,’¹⁴ thereby foregrounding Caribbean culture in the rhythmic movements of the tides. This transformative, cyclical model functions as an alternative to linear models of history and the voyages from ‘centre’ to ‘periphery’ made by colonial settlers. Meanwhile, Benítez-Rojo agrees that the culture of the Caribbean ‘is not terrestrial but aquatic [...] the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, folds and double-folds, of fluidity and sinuosity.’¹⁵ Benítez-Rojo’s description of the ocean is based upon chaos theory; a theory which he believes best evokes the ‘historiographic turbulence’ and ‘ethnological and linguistic clamor’¹⁶ of the

¹² Édouard Glissant, ‘Cross-Cultural Poetics’, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), p.139

¹³ Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p.6

¹⁴ Kamau Brathwaite, *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey* (Staten Island, NY: We Press and Minneapolis: Xcp, 1999), p. 34

¹⁵ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p.11

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3

Caribbean. He believes that the Caribbean is ‘a cultural meta-archipelago without centre and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one.’¹⁷ The apparent contradiction in the last clause is deliberate. Not only does Benítez-Rojo suggest the archipelago comprises a series of repeating discursive enclosures – ‘sugar islands, runaway slave settlements, air and naval bases’¹⁸ – he also evokes difference, suggesting each island of the archipelago has its own distinct linguistic and cultural identity.

The theories briefly outlined above have enabled me to begin developing archipelagraphy from a historiography into a methodology for reading literary texts. Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, for example, highlights the necessity of exploring how islands in a text might be structurally or thematically connected to each other. I use his work to explore the linguistic, cultural and structural connections between the islands in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*. Meanwhile, the ‘tidalectics’ of a text could be applied to representations of fluidity: to repeating poetic rhythms, recurring motifs, or a non-linear structure – all qualities *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* exhibits. I also draw upon Benítez-Rojo’s assertion that the archipelago is a site of both repetition and difference in this analysis. However, my point of departure for developing archipelagraphy into a literary methodology comes from Stratford et al.’s positioning of it as a form of counter-mapping:

A re-presentation of identity, interaction, space and place that comes across in different combinations of affect, materiality, performance, things. Such counter-mapping requires a double-destabilisation: dislocating and de-territorializing the objects of study—the fixity of island difference and particularity—and constituting in their place a site or viewing platform by which they are perceived and analysed afresh and anew.¹⁹

Archipelagraphy is a form of counter-mapping that affects a ‘double-destabilisation’, for not only does it sweep aside western notions of the island but also provides a new perspective on the way in which islands are perceived: it both disassembles and reassembles. Therefore, the most fundamental aspect of an archipelagraphic literary analysis should be to explore how the text destabilises existing island stereotypes and the new island cartographies it establishes in their place. In this chapter, my archipelagraphic analysis traces the connections between and among *The Fear of Eurydice*’s islands and oceanic spaces to uncover the

¹⁷ Ibid., p.9

¹⁸ Ibid., p.6

¹⁹ Stratford et al., p.114

implications of its ‘double-destabilisation’: the challenge to the island as *tabula rasa* and the alternative (pen)insular cartographies that emerge to take its place.

UNDONE BY DESIRE: DESTABILISING UTOPIAN CARTOGRAPHIES

In *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, Campos draws upon the universal desire for the island to create a utopian narrative comprised of multiple textual sources. The novel has a tripartite structure, which Tompkins initially likens to a Möbius strip. It narrates the story of an ‘ideal couple, an archetypal couple,’ (*E*, 3) whose passionate encounters and separations are laid out in narrow columns of text. The wide margins that surround these columns are populated by quotations drawn from literary sources ranging from Hesiod’s *Theogony* to the poetry of Pablo Neruda. According to Tompkins, these quotations ‘iconically represent their content, since they tend to be very short texts referring to ‘real’ or fictitious islands.’²⁰ The third thread of this tripartite narrative, the main body of the text, follows Monsieur N., a French teacher ‘playing at being Robinson Crusoe’ (*E*, 2) on an unnamed Caribbean island. He becomes obsessed with cataloguing as many references to islands as possible in a travel diary – a literary search to discover and depict utopia. Monsieur N. can therefore be linked to Defoe’s Crusoe in this desire to order and contain the island.

Both the couple and Monsieur N. have a symbolic function within the text. In an interview, Campos states that the lovers represent a romantic discourse and Monsieur N. ‘a reflexive discourse on utopias. That Western idea of paradise which has been imagined by Thomas More and other philosophers and poets.’²¹ But the two stories are not as separate as the structure first indicates. Within the lovers’ narrative tenses are often jumbled and place names are deployed with a rapidity that sweeps away any notion of geographical fixity, creating a spatial and temporal uncertainty over whether the lovers really are encountering each other or are simply projections of Monsieur N.’s desires. This is further obfuscated by the oscillation between first and third person perspective in the main body of the text, as the reader is left wondering whether ‘I’ refers to Monsieur N. or an omniscient narrator. The entanglements between Monsieur N.’s narrative and the lovers’ passionate discourse are deliberate. In this section, I show how Monsieur N.’s quest for order is frustrated both by

²⁰ Tompkins, *Latin American postmodernisms: women writers and experimentation*, p.26

²¹ Evelyn Picon Garfield, ‘Julieta Campos,’ *Women’s Voices from Latin America: interviews with six contemporary authors* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1985) p.91-2

the lovers' passionate discourse and by the multiplicity of voices that emerge from the islanded quotations in the island, which collectively expose islands as unstable, ephemeral constructions of desire and complicate linear cartographies of island possession.

The Fear of Losing Eurydice therefore functions as an explicit challenge to island narratives of conquest and inscription. Campos herself is aware of the desiring gaze that has been levelled at her birthplace, Cuba: 'America was always the goal, the Mecca of all nostalgias for remote places, of all dreams of islands' (*E*, 86). However, Campos believes the utopian gaze has also been internalised by Cubans themselves. In an interview, she states that since the 19th century, many Cubans entertained a fantasy, that of 'being the Island of Utopia, that privileged space for a transcendent vision. There, they would construct a democratic republic that would be an example for the rest of Latin America.'²² To Campos, Fidel Castro was one such Cuban; his visions of utopia led to 'a perilous adventure that would end in a great wreck.'²³ Campos therefore indicates the potential danger of imposing utopian narratives onto a geographical space and provides a personal motivation for desiring to destabilise them.

Campos' critique of rationalist island narratives is established from the beginning of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, through its treatment of Jules Verne's Robinsonade, *Deux Années des Vacances*, one of the novel's many intertexts. Campos' narrator describes how in Verne's novel the schoolboys 'will immediately trace out a map, imposing British names on the features of the island [...] order is re-established. Life will be governed by norms. Authority will be just and it will be engendered by consensus and reflection' (*E*, 18). Here the island is positioned as a *tabula rasa*, a desert island that is inscribed with 'British names.' The process of encompassment is legitimised by the words 'order' and 'authority' which designates the quest for the island as a rational, necessary one. Yet according to the narrator in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, these schoolboys are 'simply dreaming, urged on by an unquenchable confidence in the resources of human reason to be able to construct paradise' (*E*, 13). This shows that for Campos, utopian discourse is not based upon logic and reason but on dreaming and desire. *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* embodies this entanglement of rationalization and desire, evoking utopia not as a linear quest with a goal but as a transnational 'Poetics of Relation' in which the island proliferates and repeats, evading capture and definition.

²² Danubio Torres Fiero, 'Julieta Campos by Danubio Torres Fiero,' *BOMB Magazine* Vol 94, Winter 2006, <www.bombmagazine.org/article/2795/julieta-campos> [Accessed 14th July 2016]

²³ *Ibid.*

We first encounter Monsieur N. in the Palace of Minos, a café on an unnamed Caribbean island, reading Jules Verne's Robinsonade, *Deux Années des Vacances*. He pauses frequently to observe the couple at the adjacent table. Soon, he has distractedly drawn the outline of a napkin on a white napkin, an important hermeneutic gesture that the novel frequently returns to. Following this, he begins to collect references to islands in a travel diary, his 'islandiary' (E, 41). Both gestures initially emerge as a way of ordering and encompassing the island. Looking down upon his drawing of the island from a panoptic position, N. encodes it with his romantic fantasies; he 'fondles the little island he had sketched on the napkin as he would be delighted to do with the girl at the table facing him' (E, 95). The island here signifies a substitute female body, a permissive space that enables him to enact his passionate fantasies. Meanwhile, the 'islandiary' has undeniable connotations with colonialism. Ironically, this is a link that is partially obfuscated in the translation of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, for Campos' original name for Monsieur N.'s travel diary was 'islario',²⁴ a reference to the encyclopaedic compendiums compiled in the Age of Discovery 'of all the islands that are known and have been discovered to date.'²⁵ To Ann-Marie Fallon, Monsieur N.'s *islario* represents the hegemonic perspective of colonialism. She depicts it as a linear taxonomy that is ultimately frustrated by a poetic that emerges from the margins of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*; 'a surreal, alternative aesthetic practice which suspends the colonizing French and English languages [...] displacing his colonial claims to a New World.'²⁶ However, I believe that the *islario* reflects a reconfiguration rather than a failure of the utopian quest, highlighting it as a chaotic series of desiring movements and repetitions instead of one linear thrust towards a goal.

Although the *islario* is a signifier of colonialism, it is also a representation of Campos' own writing practice. This is established through a reading of 'Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro' / 'Fragments of a Diary in the Margin of a Book,' in which Campos discusses the compositional process for *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*. Here she compares Monsieur N. to Zeus, 'que introduce orden y cultura en un universo caótico' / 'who introduces order and culture into a chaotic universe.'²⁷ The imposition of order onto chaos is, she believes, one of the functions of all writing, including her own. For Campos, literary

²⁴ Julieta Campos, *El miedo de perder a Eurídice*, 1st ed. (Mexico D.F: Joaquin Mortiz, 1979), p.79

²⁵ María Portonudo, *Secret Science: Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) p.73

²⁶ Ann Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: comparative literature, postcolonial theory and transnational aesthetics*, (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2011), p.143

²⁷ Julieta Campos, 'Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro', *Un Heroísmo Secreto* (México, D.F: Vuelta, 1988), p.67

creation is the result of both reason and passion: she states, ‘I have spent my life trying to reconcile the one with the other.’²⁸ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, as it moves between Monsieur N. and the lover’s discourse, is a novel that represents Campos’ own writing process, her creative oscillation between reason and passion. Indeed, she refers to writing *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* as an attempt to structure ‘esa profusión de fragmentos incoherentes que me asaltan’/ ‘that profusion of incoherent fragments which assail me.’²⁹ These fragments refer to representations of islands she has encountered in music, myth, and literature, as well as on her own travels. Meanwhile, in the *islario*, Monsieur N. also details a profusion of island references:

Island: the place of utopia; a safe place on the world’s fringe. *Island*: time without limits [...] *Island*: a place everywhere open and everywhere closed off. *Island*: petit coin ou les enfants vont jouer. *Island*: phalanstery. *Island*: every labyrinth is one, but not all islands enclose a labyrinth (*E*, 20).

This entry lists some of the symbolic significations associated with the word ‘island’. The first two representations emerge from a western continental perspective, which has historically designated the island as an atemporal utopia located ‘on the world’s fringe.’ The phalanstery is a reference to the enclosed utopian communities dreamed up by the Frenchman Charles Fourier. However, the concept of the island as a place ‘everywhere open and everywhere closed off’ can be situated within a Caribbean context, an earlier echo of Glissant’s assertion that ‘each island embodies openness.’³⁰ Meanwhile, Benítez-Rojo also refers to the Caribbean as a ‘vast hermetic labyrinth,’³¹ a reference to its composition from various ‘codes’: languages, myths, and cultural rites from Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia (an idea I will return to in the next section of this chapter). The *islario* also has a labyrinthian quality, and details representations of islands emerging from multiple cultural contexts.

For this reason, the island soon emerges as a signifier of multiplicity within the text. This is reflected in the island drawn on the white napkin. Initially a signifier for N.’s romantic urges, it soon begins to proliferate images and associations:

The maps surging out of the imaginary drawing of one association that leads to another, and so on in succession, are unsuspected; this map, which begins to constitute itself around a castle surrounded by a moat and the enclosed park of a

²⁸ Torres Fiero, ‘Julieta Campos by Danubio Torres Fiero’

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.58

³⁰ Glissant, ‘Cross-Cultural Poetics,’ p.139

³¹ Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, p.123

Romantic cloister, shifts without transition into the map of the island of Crete, into the outline of a Venice still medieval, sanguineous and warm (*E*, 42).

The islands mentioned in this quotation, Crete and Venice, are both European. The reality of the Caribbean island on which N. lives has proved incompatible with his fantasies – ‘Monsieur N. detests the tropics and would give anything to manage a transfer to a more sheltered spot with a kindlier climate’ (*E*, 43) – and consequently his imaginary is saturated with longing for the islands he has left behind; islands not just distant in space but distant in time, for the Romantic and the medieval periods are alluded to. The quotation also reflects the representation of the island as a space ‘everywhere open and everywhere closed off’ mentioned in the previous paragraph. Whilst the words ‘surrounded’, ‘enclosed’, and ‘outline’ are both demarcations of boundedness and indicative of the rationalist discourse of thought Monsieur N. embodies, phrases such as ‘surging out’ and ‘shifts without transition’ are representative of the fluidity with which the figure of the island unlocks phrases and associations. The flowing syntax of the sentence compounds this impression, ultimately destabilising notions of boundedness. Therefore, islands are not only signifiers of multiplicity, but they are also produced by dynamic movements. These dynamic movements are a manifestation of the discourse of desire.

In *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, islands are often associated with the word ‘surged’; a word that signifies desire. In fact, Campos makes an explicit connection between the island, writing and desire:

In the beginning was desire. Desire begot the Word, which begot the couple, which begot the Island. The Island was paradise. The Island was inhabited by the couple, not Robinson Crusoe and Friday but Adam and Eve [...] It surged up out of chaos like a miracle, as language emerges from silence (*E*, 1).

These sentences parallel those of Genesis in the Old Testament, in which God invented the world by naming it and in doing so called it into being. Meanwhile, desire is the catalyst connecting the Word (writing) to the couple and to the island. The passage is, in fact, a metaphor for literary creation. To Fallon, Campos’ novels work to ‘recreate that single instance of transformation, the moment art “surges” from the objective world artists are simultaneously immersed in and detached from.’³² The island’s surging movement therefore represents the ‘surges’ of inspiration that characterise the artistic process. But in this passage Campos is not describing the emergence of all and every imagined island – instead she states

³² Ann Marie Fallon, ‘Julieta Campos and the Repeating island’, p.37

explicitly that she is referring not to a male-dominated, Crusoean space, but an island inhabited by ‘the couple’. What, then, characterises the lovers’ island, this shared space of mutual passion?

The work of Lauren Berlant provides an insight into how movements of desire enable the production of enclosed, utopian spaces:

Desire describes a state of attachment to something or someone, and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object’s specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it [...] Love is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self, the normative version of which is the two-as-one intimacy of the couple form. In the idealized image of their relation, desire will lead to love, which will make a world for desire’s endurance.³³

Desire is the libidinous impulse that leads a subject to seek out objects to love. Desire is also the clouded space in between what an object *is* and what the subject wants it to *be*. Berlant’s theoretical language spatializes desire: it becomes a ‘cloud’, something that is neither completely solid nor completely insubstantial; a liminal space, like the shorelines of an island. This process is exemplified in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* through the character of Monsieur N., who projects his needs for both a passionate relationship and an adventure in the style of Jules Verne onto the island, and in doing so transforms it into the place of his fantasies. It is also a process apparent in *Robinson Crusoe*, when Crusoe gazes upon the island into a ‘barren’ yet uncultivated space, a space which needs his custodianship. According to Berlant, if desire is one subject’s attachment to an object, then love is ‘the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated’³⁴: it is a relation between two desiring subjects, a shared dream in which two lovers encounter each other. This occurs in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* through the lovers’ mutual imagining of an island:

The island surged up in the imaginations of
both figures at once and at that moment,
without giving it any thought, they decided
to turn it into the site of their love (E,4)

In this quotation, the island emerges as the result of a simultaneous impulse, a movement from inner to outer. Mutual desire, represented by the word ‘surged’, leads to the creation of

³³ Lauren Berlant, *Desire/Love* (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), p.7

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7

the island. Love, then, is a shared dream that creates a ‘world for desire’s endurance’³⁵ – in other words, love is the *utopian space* where reciprocal desire unfolds.

To use the island as a motif for love suggests that love can be considered a process of enislement. Indeed, the couple appear to cut themselves off from the outside world by establishing a shared utopia, which only they are able to access. This idea is expressed through the character of Monsieur N. as he observes the couple at the adjacent table in the café. The noise in the café prevents him from being able to hear anything that the couple are saying: ‘their lips move but their words are inaudible’ (E, 8). N. feels cut off from the couple. This leads him to write in his *islario* that ‘the island is not always a geographic setting’ but is a distinct space ‘that through enchantment everything that surrounds it becomes obliterated’ (E, 55). The island therefore appears to N. as an enchanted space created and inhabited by the couple: a space he perceives himself to be outside of. Paradises, after all, have always had walls, as the etymology of the word shows: the word comes from the Old Iranian “pairidaēza”, enclosure (pari “around” + daiz- “to heap up, build”).³⁶ Furthermore, Berlant reminds us of the semantics of desire, of ‘erogenous *zones*, red light *districts*, master bedrooms, private *parts*,’³⁷ suggesting that love and desire are comprised of a series of encounters in separate, islanded sites. There is, then, a similarity to be drawn between the lovers’ island and the I-land of the castaway-colonist described in chapter one: both rely on boundaries to maintain themselves.

However, the boundaries of desire are precarious. Since the islands in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* are constructions of desire, this means that their boundaries are not fixed or stable either. For if love is the meeting of two desires – and if desire is a process of imposing a fantasy image upon the Other – how can we be sure of its mutuality? In *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, Campos uses a photographic metaphor to express this disjunct between one love and another: ‘just as in those flawed snapshots when, because of a mechanical problem, a double exposure occurs’ (E, 20). The phrase indicates that our fantasies of one another may overlap but they do not always unify. The same is true of the island – when gazed upon by numerous desiring individuals, it too emerges as a space of double, even multiple exposures. It cannot be fixed into position by desire. Campos therefore provides an alternative to the desiring colonial gaze I discussed using the work of Weaver-Hightower in my analysis of *Robinson Crusoe*; a gaze that seeks to encompass, incorporate and possess.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 7

³⁶ ‘Paradise’ *The Oxford Online Dictionary Database*, [Accessed 19th July, 2017]

³⁷ Berlant, p.15

Highlighted as a ‘double exposure’, the romantic islands that populate *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* are inevitably replaced by images of distance and alienation. Sitting at their table in the café, the couple experience ‘the intrusive memory of an anniversary that falls between them like a meteorite, turning the slight rip in the tablecloth to a slash’ (E, 74) – what once symbolised their utopian enislement now signifies mutual isolation. As Monsieur N. writes in his *islario*: ‘The Island, like the couple, is a transitory reality. The island ends by disappearing when one day the walls of water that have served as their protection topple over on them. The couple disappears when one of them begins to dream of another island’ (E, 76). In associating the figure of the island with a romantic discourse Campos designates islands as ‘transitory’ spaces. However, desire is not a destructive force in *Fear of Losing Eurydice*, for as I mentioned previously, it is integral to artistic creation. Indeed, for every island which disappears, another is created. The narrator observes ‘the options in a love story are infinite; one can always start from zero and begin again’ (E, 40). Therefore, since the island and the couple are interchangeable referents within the novel, the island too becomes a space of infinite proliferation, continually surging from one signification to another.

It is therefore unsurprising that Monsieur N. struggles to capture and control these islands in his *islario*, which becomes increasingly abstract. The narrator describes it as an ‘intelligible calligraphy’, a ‘gush of words jostling each other’ and ‘a kind of shorthand that immediately becomes illegible because it corresponds to no previous code’ (E, 39-40). These descriptions are reminiscent of Roland Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*; a structural portrait of desire which has a fragmentary layout similar to the *Fear of Losing Eurydice*. Barthes calls his fragments of text ‘figures’. This is a word he uses both to represent an utterance and to convey a sense of movement, for to him the lover’s discourse exists only in ‘outbursts of language,’ as he ‘struggles in a kind of lunatic sport’³⁸ to make his meanings understood. According to Barthes ‘no logic links the figures [...] they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitos.’³⁹ Barthes refers to each of his figures as a *topos*, or a site: he believes ‘each of us can fill in this code according to his own history.’⁴⁰ In comparing the *islario* to Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, I am suggesting it resembles a portrait of desire for this island. Therefore, the fragmentary entries of N.’s *islario* do not figure as a compendium or colonial taxonomy,

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1984) p.2, p.4

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5

fixing the island in position (as the *islario*'s written in the Age of Discovery would have done). Rather, each island represents a half-coded *topos*, embodying the potential for hundreds of rewritings.

The island created by desire is therefore not just an ephemeral space, but a signifier of multiplicity. In *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* it is depicted as a multi-layered site comprised of various textual references. In the *islario*, for example, Monsieur N. writes 'one must read Verne like a palimpsest: behind the discipline of Progress there is another, or perhaps several, invisible readings' (E, 74). A palimpsest refers to a piece of parchment which has been scraped clean and reused multiple times – a metaphor I also used to describe the islands in *Foe* and *Crusoe's Daughter*. Within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* the text is synonymous with the island: 'every text is an island' (E, 102). The island is therefore a palimpsest inhabited by multiple texts. Paul Rodaway stresses this intertextual dimension to geographical space: 'the text no longer comes before the virgin land and uncharted seas: the text comes before a text, which in turn comes before another text, and so on in an endless chain.'⁴¹ This endless geographical (inter)textuality is reflected in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, for the desire for utopia is not just articulated by Monsieur N. but by the quotations from other sources inhabiting the margins of the text. It becomes a call uttered by multiple voices across different time periods and geographical spaces.

The multiplicity in the text serves a function. According to Reina Barreto, 'Monsieur N. finds his search for paradise deferred as it spins out of his control.'⁴² Indeed, Monsieur N. is unable to encompass the island in his *islario* as each island reference leads him to another, and he soon realises the impossibility of his task: 'there are 500,000 islands, not recorded on the world maps of course, but islands whose existence is attested to by the letters of navigators [...] I have proposed an unrealizable goal' (E, 101). On the last page of his notebook Monsieur N. writes 'THE FEAR OF LOSING EURYDICE' (E, 120). Rather than coming to an end, his project is deferred, for it becomes imbricated in endless meta-textual cycles of repetition. Ultimately, Monsieur N. does not succeed in reaching utopia. However, this deferral in regard to an ultimate meaning does not necessarily constitute a failure. An alternative interpretation can be found by returning to the concept of Verne as palimpsest; in decoding the 'invisible reading' behind the narrative of progress that *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* later provides:

⁴¹ Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous geographies: body, sense and place* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.155

⁴² Barreto, 'Utopia Deferred,' p.43

All of Verne is the story of a story of love postponed to infinity, never told, as if that prolonging of expectation, that deferment of the tension of desire over an infinite span would generate the most incisive of all enjoyments [...] the desire that was spent in search, in the journey to the island (*E*, 51).

Campos's reading of Verne, which she describes elsewhere as the '*fait générateur*'⁴³ of her novel, shows that the pleasure of the utopian narrative is to be found in the journey towards the island, rather than in reaching it. *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* therefore uses the discourse of desire to remap the utopian narrative. Desire no longer inhabits the possessive, inscribing gaze. Instead it exists as a form of deferral. The pleasure of this deferral replaces the act of inscription. To Campos, inscription has had damaging consequences for her birthplace, Cuba. She describes how Castro entered power 'in an apotheosis of enthusiasm'⁴⁴ which gave way to a life of daily restrictions, to 'an overwhelming sensation of confinement, of being trapped between walls of water that would keep me there forever.'⁴⁵ The promised utopia never materialised. Within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, then, deferral is a politically motivated textual strategy which allows for the creation, not destruction, of island spaces.

THE ARCHIPELAGO OF DESIRE: A TRANSNATIONAL CARTOGRAPHY

Island: the sum of all improbabilities; intoxicating improbability of fiction. *Island*: image of desire. *Archipelago*: proliferation of desire. All the islands formulated by human beings and all islands appearing on the maps comprise a single imaginary archipelago – the archipelago of desire. It is always in the process of infinite expansion (*E*, 102).

Within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, the island's proliferation leads inevitably to the introduction of an archipelagographic motif, which suggests that all islands real and imagined are constructions of desire, and can therefore be connected into a 'single imaginary archipelago'. However, the 'archipelago of desire' is more complex than it initially appears. For a start, it is a self-referential metaphor, an allusion to *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* itself; a novel which thematically connects islands real and imagined to each other through the unstable surges of desire. Therefore, an analysis of the archipelagographic relations between

⁴³ Campos, 'Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro', p.68

⁴⁴ Torres Fiero, 'Julieta Campos by Danubio Torres Fiero'

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and among the text's islands leads to a deeper understanding of the 'archipelago of desire' motif.

The structure of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* contributes understanding to the archipelagic relations of desire within the text. As Campos informs us, 'La estructura del libro es su propia metáfora' / 'the structure of the book is its own metaphor.'⁴⁶ In the previous section I mentioned *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* has a tripartite structure. I also stated that this structure soon breaks down – according to Tompkins, it is subject to 'thematic contamination.'⁴⁷ This occurs for several reasons. The first is that Monsieur N.'s search for utopia and the lovers' desire for paradise become conflated, when the rational discourse he embodies becomes synonymous with the lovers' amorous discourse. The second is that the motifs and descriptions of islands in the quotations begin to repeat within the main body of the text. My intention, in providing these examples, is to show that the discrete paragraphs in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* are, in their own way, porous; open to a flow of metaphors and associations. According to Lesley Feracho, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* fits Umberto Eco's definition of an 'open work':

There exist works which, although organically completed, are "open" to a continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli.⁴⁸

An open work necessitates the reader as an active presence, uncovering and selecting references from the 'continuous generation of internal relations'. Despite their bounded appearance, the paragraphs within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* are 'open' in their relation to one another: the 'internal relations' Eco refers to can here be defined as the island metaphors that proliferate and move through the text. It is only by tracing individual connections that a 'totality' can be perceived – in this case, the archipelago of desire and the rhizomatic 'Poetics of Relation' it represents.

How, aside from the surges of desire, are the islands within the text connected to one another? Fallon suggests 'they are connected only by free association. Free association as an ordering principle creates a freedom of movement between geographic and textual spaces.'⁴⁹ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* does indeed exhibit free associative movements, especially within the couple's perspective, which links islands to other geographical referents that then

⁴⁶ Campos, 'Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro', p.67

⁴⁷ Tompkins, *Latin American postmodernisms*, p.29

⁴⁸ Umberto Eco, *The open work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.37-8

⁴⁹ Ann-Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe*, p.144

blend seamlessly into references of myths, music, carnivals, and oceanic descriptions, ‘the iridescent and tremulous luminosity of a seashell’ (*E*, 64). Campos herself likens this fluid aspect of her writing to ‘una música iridescente, acuática, que desvanece los límites’/‘an iridescent, aquatic music which dissolves limits.’⁵⁰ This description deliberately evokes comparisons with Hélène Cixous’ *l’écriture féminine*. Cixous draws upon oceanic metaphors – ‘luminous torrents’, ‘these waves, these floods, these outbursts’⁵¹ – to depict feminine language as a libidinal, fluid poetics which can sweep away male ‘marked writing’, a culturally repressive system constituted through reason. Therefore, linking Campos’s writing to *l’écriture féminine* suggests her intent to destabilise established symbolic referents and value systems. Here, the limits Campos wishes to dissolve are the boundaries of the island. In summary, the lyrical free association has a subversive purpose within the text: to collapse geography, connecting the Americas to Europe, and real places to imagined ones.

To Baretto, the ‘images of Venice and Tenochtitlán and the Mediterranean and the Caribbean seas with their numerous islands merge into one.’⁵² Many island descriptions within the text reflect this locational confusion:

Anyone could place it on the map, at the intersection between the Atlantic and the Caribbean, an island with gentle English meadows and bridges and the sort of canals which some voyagers, taken by surprise, associate with Venice. An island of the Lesser Antilles, extravagant with green and red birds, giant ferns, palm trees (*E*, 75).

In this quotation, the island is at once a ‘gentle English’ island in the Atlantic, yet it is also associated with Venice in the Mediterranean, and is an island ‘of the Lesser Antilles’, meaning it represents three cultural contexts simultaneously. Campos’s depiction of the island here mirrors that of the symbolic formation of the Caribbean. According to Deloughrey, Columbus gave two names to the archipelago, both of which reflect a confusion of geography. The first of these, the Antilles, comes from the eighth century legend of a Christian utopia, Antillia, which was reputed to lie in the Atlantic. This is a legend Campos refers to within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*: ‘Antilia, invented in 1367 so that Christopher Columbus would dream of it’ (*E*, 103). The other name, the West Indies, comes because

⁵⁰ Campos, ‘Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro,’ p. 67

⁵¹ Hélène Cixous, ‘The laugh of the Medusa’, trans. Keith Cohen & Paula Cohen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 1.4 (Summer, 1976), 875-893, p.876

⁵² Baretto, ‘Utopia Deferred,’ p.43

Columbus believed he was following Marco Polo's journey towards the East Indies as he travelled in the opposite direction towards the Americas. Upon arrival, 'he thought he had reached parts of Asia previously unknown to Europeans and certainly unknown to Marco Polo [...] the farthest westward extension of Asia.'⁵³ These two examples show that the Caribbean is constituted from a series of 'discursively repeating islands' and 'a collapse of time-space'⁵⁴, as well as being symbolically linked to both Europe and Asia. *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* reflects these symbolic geographies; it collapses time-space and many of the island metaphors it uses repeat through the text.

The Palace of Minos is one such recurring motif. To María Ramos de Hoyos, it 'conlleva una yuxtaposición de referentes geográficos, históricos y culturales claramente orientados a nivel simbólico e ideológico' / 'implies a juxtaposition of geographic, historic and cultural referents clearly oriented at an ideological and symbolic level.'⁵⁵ On the one hand, it refers to the Minoan civilization, and has symbolic connotations with the labyrinth – a symbol that figures prominently in Campos's oeuvre – and has mythic connotations with the story of the minotaur, of Theseus and Ariadne. Yet it is also the name given to the café on an unnamed Caribbean island where Monsieur N. spends most of his time. To rebuild a European monument in the Caribbean symbolizes 'el conjunto de mitos y esperanzas que los europeos proyectaron hacia el Nuevo Mundo' / 'the set of myths and hopes that the Europeans projected towards the New World.'⁵⁶ Therefore, the Palace of Minos, as it repeats throughout the text, not only collapses time-space but highlights the mythical and symbolic entanglements that occur through these discursive repetitions.

In this manner, *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* exemplifies the mythopoetical dimension of the Caribbean that is also found in both the theories of Glissant and Benítez-Rojo. The latter describes the Caribbean archipelago as:

A network of subcodes holding together cosmogonies, mythic bestiaries, remote pharmacopoeias, oracles [...] one of these subcodes may lead us into the labyrinth of Minos, another to the tower of Babel, another to the Arawak version of the Flood, another to the secrets of Eleusis, another to the garden of the unicorn, others to the sacred books of India and China and to the divining *cauris* of West Africa.⁵⁷

⁵³ William Philips, 'Africa and the Atlantic islands meet the Garden of Eden: Christopher Columbus's view of America', *Journal of World History*, 3.2, 1992, 149-164 p.150

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Deloughrey, *Routes and roots: navigating Caribbean and Pacific island literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007) pp. 10-11

⁵⁵ María Ramos de Hoyos, *El viaje a la isla: representaciones de la isla y la insularidad en tres novelas de Julieta Campos* (México, D.F: El Colegio de México, 2016), p.141

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.141

⁵⁷ Benítez-Rojo, p.17

Not only does Benítez-Rojo stress the transnational dimension of the Caribbean archipelago – for it (re)draws connections between the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe – but he also designates it as a symbol comprised of multiple textual codes. He highlights the necessity not only for a remapping but also a re-reading of the Caribbean, ‘the kind of reading in which every text begins to reveal its own textuality.’⁵⁸ *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* has some similarities with Benítez-Rojo’s depiction of the Caribbean. Some of the symbolic referents described above are listed within its pages: ‘Island: the garden of the tapestry of the Virgin and the Unicorn’ (*E*, 41); ‘minotaurs in aquatic labyrinths’ (*E*, 15). Most importantly, however, the islands within the text are connected through a network of intertextual relations, through a series of repetitions.

Gérard Genette believes it is reductive to consider a text in isolation. Instead one must engage in a ‘relational reading’⁵⁹, tracing the various literary presences that inhabit each text. *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* has multiple intertexts. The quotations in the margin, all from different cultural sources, influence the content of the main body of the text. According to Tompkins, the relationship between the quotations and the main text reflect the fact that *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* ‘stages intertextuality as *différance*.’⁶⁰ In the previous chapter I explained that *différance* is a Derridean term referring to ‘the movement according to which language, or any code, or any system of referral in general, is constituted ‘historically’ as a weave of differences.’⁶¹ Within this movement, any final meaning is deferred. To Michael Worton and Judith Still, the use of quotations within a text links intertextuality to *différance*: ‘inevitably a fragment and displacement, every quotation distorts and redefines the ‘primary’ utterance by locating it within another linguistic and cultural context.’⁶² The primary utterance within *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* is the island. Each quotation redefines and displaces the concept of the island by relocating it within a different context, which leads to an infinite deferral of meaning. In other words, the structure

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.2

⁵⁹ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree*, trans. by C. Newman & C. Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p.399

⁶⁰ Cynthia Tompkins, ‘Intertextuality as *différance* in Julieta Campos El Miedo de Perder a Eurídice: a symptomatic case of Latin American postmodernism’ in *The postmodern in Latin and Latina American cultural narratives: collected essays and interviews*, ed. by Claudia Fernan (New York: Garland, 1996), p.176

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, ‘*Différance*’, *The margins of philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.10

⁶² Michael Worton & Judith Still, *Intertextuality: theories and practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.11

of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* reflects its thematic content; that of Monseieur N's inability to reach the island and the deferral of the utopian quest.

Exploring the intertextual relations in *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* is vital to an understanding of the text's archipelagographic geographies:

The wind shook the crowns of the mango trees, made their oilskins rattle, and whistled through the crests of the palm trees with some ferocity. The cypresses and acanthuses sprang up in unison and the islet turned into an islet in the Aegean Sea, although the Aegean Islands are austere and stripped down, almost inhospitable. From a distance it was like a ship at anchor, or a gigantic fish, half above water and half below (*E*, 5).

...there where the Aegean sighs and moans lies a dainty, mild little island...

Petrarch

...what looks to you like an island is not what it seems but a great fish that has spread itself out to sleep in the middle of the sea...

A Thousand and One Nights

In this excerpt of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, the quotations from Petrarch and *A Thousand and One Nights* inform the content of the narrative on the left, which is part of the lovers' discourse. The Petrarch quotation depicts the island in the Aegean as dainty and mild. Opposite, the main body of the text describes an island that contrasts starkly with this; a tropical island beset with winds of 'some ferocity'. However, the tropical island soon metamorphosises into an Aegean islet, a connection which evokes the mythopoetical relationship between the Caribbean and the Aegean civilizations of Crete and Greece. Yet Campos's description of the Aegean Islands as 'austere and stripped down, almost inhospitable', contradicts Petrarch's view of them as 'dainty'. Instead it more closely mirrors their designation by travellers such as Strabo and Juvenal as *scopuli*, or rocks in the ocean, which is, according to Christy Constantakopoulou, a misleading depiction emanating from the Roman Empire that established the 'topos of the 'weak' islander: poverty, isolation, political weakness.'⁶³ Indeed, the once powerful Aegean islands were eventually annexed by the Roman Republic. Campos is therefore indicating a relationship where the Aegean islands are marginalised by a source of continental power. Her description of the

⁶³ Christy Constantakopoulou, *The dance of the islands: insularity, networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.23

metamorphosing island then draws inspiration from the *A Thousand and One Nights* quotation – the metaphor of the island as a ‘great fish’ re-emerges as ‘a gigantic fish’ within the main body of the text – indicating that Campos is drawing upon a Middle-Eastern imaginary to call the reality of the island into question. In suggesting the island is not all that it seems, the power relationship established in the previous sentence – that of the island as subordinate to the continent – is subverted. Furthermore, the act of looking at the quotations in the margins to understand what is written in the main body of the text replicates this subversion. Meaning is decentred, for an archipelagic understanding of the novel can only be achieved by making connections between the main body of the text and the islands in the margins.

In summary, my archipelagic analysis shows that the intertextual relations in the text perform two functions. First, they complicate continental geographies in which the island emerges as peripheral to the mainland. This is something Hoyos also alludes to when she informs us that ‘más que una jerarquía o una derivación, se instaura un paralelismo, en que coexisten en un mismo plano diferentes elementos heterogéneos’/ ‘rather than a hierarchy or derivation, a parallelism is established, in which different heterogeneous elements coexist in the same plane.’⁶⁴ Second, an intertextual reading highlights the island’s repetitions and transformations across geographical, historical and cultural boundaries. The intertextual archipelago that emerges in a reading of *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* is synonymous with the archipelago of desire motif, in which all islands, real and imagined, are connected into a ‘a single imaginary archipelago’ (E, 102). According to the conclusions drawn above, the archipelago of desire emerges as a way of establishing an ‘equal plane’ between and among islands, rather than being a geocentric model in which the European continent emerges as the centre of power. It therefore functions as a contrast to the intertextual ‘map’ established by Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter*, a western cartography which draws solely upon British intertexts to shape the contours of the island in the novel.

The archipelago of desire is a symbol of both repetition and *différance*, meaning it corresponds to Benítez-Rojo’s depiction of the Caribbean as ‘a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one.’⁶⁵ Benítez-Rojo describes how:

⁶⁴ Ramos de Hoyos, *El viaje a la isla: representaciones de la isla y la insularidad en tres novelas de Julieta Campos* p.140

⁶⁵ Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, p.9

Within this series that original, that island at the center, is as impossible to reach as the hypothetical Antillas that reappeared time and time again, always fleetingly, in the cosmographers' charts. This is again because the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago [...] and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary or a center.⁶⁶

Just like Benítez-Rojo's meta-archipelago, the archipelago of desire has 'neither a boundary or a center', meaning that the 'original' island can never be reached. Within the archipelago each island proliferates endlessly, it's meaning constantly deferred, evading capture and inscription. The archipelago of desire therefore emerges as a decolonizing gesture because it remaps western cartographies, abolishing notions of centre and periphery and instead stressing the palimpsestous connectivity between the Caribbean, Asia, Europe and Africa. It is, furthermore, an example of a woman writer remapping the island for her own creative and political purposes; providing an alternative to masculine narratives of possession and control.

CONCLUSION: CARTOGRAPHIES OF DESIRE

My critical thesis constitutes an archipelago of desire, for it maps the way the island emerges as a desired figure in the work of multiple writers and theorists. I began by showing that in the western world it was the desire of men such as Columbus that inscribed islands, designating them as prizes, as property. I suggested that the bounded geographical appearance of the island serves only to intensify desire, be it for a utopian colony or a sexually licentious paradise: as James Hamilton-Paterson writes, 'this unit of land which fits within the retina of the approaching eye is a token of desire.'⁶⁷ In my analysis of *Robinson Crusoe*, I showed that as Crusoe gazes down upon the island, he projects his own desires for sovereignty and possession onto it. I drew upon critical theories that suggested Crusoe identifies with the bounded body of the island, that he disciplines and encloses the island space as he does his own body as a way of sublimating his own sexual desires. However, I also argued that the possessive gaze and will-to-order in *Robinson Crusoe* is undermined by currents of violent queer orality, a desire that 'is appetitive but not acquisitive [...] seeks textures and surfaces, thus exploding the subject-object paradigm that motors Crusoe's

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.111

⁶⁷ James Hamilton-Paterson, *Seven-Tenths: The Sea and its Thresholds* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), pp.66-7

island economy.’⁶⁸ My work on *Robinson Crusoe* concluded by suggesting that desire does not inscribe or possess the island – instead it challenges such cartographies of control. It is, within the text, a destructive force.

Both J M Coetzee’s *Foe* and Jane Gardam’s *Crusoe’s Daughter* introduce a woman to the masculine space of the Crusoean island. Each text has a woman protagonist who insists upon the importance of her body and of her desires; specifically, a desire to find a place for herself on an island that is always already inhabited. *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* are therefore narratives in which woman’s desire is in danger of being curtailed, circumscribed, by the strictures imposed by genre and genre. My work on these texts explored how such limits are navigated and negotiated. I showed how Gardam uses intertextuality as a strategy to form connections with other bodies and islands. Meanwhile, in *Foe*, a specular poetics of invagination – a poetics rooted in woman’s desire – undermines the masculine narratological perspective that seeks to dominate and inscribe the body of the ‘other,’ although the way in which woman is being used as ‘body-matter’ by a male author must be problematised. Ultimately, however, these feminised poetics open out the textual space of the revisionary island.

However, it is *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* which really allows me to probe the links between writing, desire and the island – the themes that I have traced through every chapter of this thesis. To Campos, both desire and the creative process is represented as a series of ‘surges’ that lead to the continual creation of multiple, transitory island spaces. This results in the creation of the archipelago of desire motif, which comprises ‘all the islands formulated by human beings and all islands appearing on the maps’ (E, 102), and therefore positions the islands in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter* as constructions of desire. But *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* reveals that desire does not inscribe or fix islands into position. Rather, it is through reading islands as constructions of desire that they *evade* inscription, emerging as paradoxical spaces of both fluidity and symbolic density. It is therefore through desire that *The Fear of Losing Eurydice* affects a double-destabilisation of the island. It disentangles the signifier ‘island’ from the associations of boundedness, isolation and marginality. Instead, within the text’s archipelagographic cartographies, the island emerges as a shifting, fluid, proliferating space.

⁶⁸ Joseph Campana, ‘Cruising Crusoe: Diving into the Wreck of Sexuality’ in *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800* ed. Chris Mounsey & Caroline Gonda (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2007) p.173

I wish to conclude, then, by returning to a question that I asked in my introduction: ‘How do we write the island without marginalising it?’ In this thesis, restricted to the analysis of four novels, I have only skated across the surface of this question. But perhaps that is only what we can ever do in literary criticism, view the text as a surface or a skin ‘where one touches and is touched by others,’⁶⁹ to detail how its ideas and the texture of its language affects us. I mention the skin in order to bring the body into the discussion, for one way of writing the island without marginalising it is through the body. Throughout this thesis, I have drawn upon discourses of embodiment as a way of reading islands. For example, in Chapter One, I discussed Crusoe’s bodily identification with the island, designating the enclosures he builds around himself as a sort of second skin. But I did not equate skin with boundaries – instead I drew upon Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey’s suggestion that ‘skin opens our bodies to other bodies.’⁷⁰ I treated the island in *Robinson Crusoe* as an embodied space with a ‘skin,’ mapping its physical transformations and how it ‘touched’ Crusoe; exploring its ability to form connections with other bodies and objects. My reading of the island as a body did not reinforce the representation of it as a bounded space; instead it stressed its affective and relational qualities. Meanwhile, the second chapter of this thesis drew upon the concept of woman’s body as a site of multiple inscriptions, ‘social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary [...] creating out of the body text a palimpsest.’⁷¹ I suggested that the islands in *Foe* and *Crusoe’s Daughter*, marked by the traces of multiple bodies and texts, could be also be considered as palimpsests – sites of multiplicity, relationality and symbolic density. Furthermore, the designation of the island as a palimpsest, comprised of multiple discursive threads, suggests its suitability for further interdisciplinary analyses between feminism, ecocriticism and spatial studies. Finally, in *The Fear of Eurydice*, I explored how the libidinal, feminised poetics of a woman author has the capacity to ‘desvanece los límites’/ ‘to dissolve the limits’⁷² of geographical borders and destabilise masculine cartographies of control. In other words, the metaphorical link between woman and island, a link that initially seems to marginalise the island by designating it as docile and permissive, could be seen as the thing which liberates it.

⁶⁹ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey eds. ‘Introduction: Dermographies’, *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.1

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁷¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) p.117

⁷² Campos, ‘Fragmentos de un diario al margen de un libro,’ p.67

The three revisionary texts I explore in this thesis employ completely different strategies to rewrite the colonial island. However, they are connected in their insistence that woman's body, and her desires, should be central to an understanding of island spaces. There is, furthermore, one more connection between them: all three emphasise the importance of the reader as an active presence in the process of interpreting each text's meanings, in decoding the intertextual relations that shape these island-palimpsests. Within the pages of *Foe*, *Crusoe's Daughter* and *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*, the authors do not provide one fixed image of the island. The reader makes her own island map according to her desires, facilitating the construction of multiple, inter-connected islands – an archipelago of desire.

PART TWO | BODEG

Chapter One to Thirty

Have you never been struck of a sudden by
the living, breathing quality of this island, as
if it were some great Beast from before the
Flood that has slept through the centuries
insensible of the insects scurrying on its
back, scratching an existence for themselves?

– J. M Coetzee, *Foe*

1 | REBECCA

There it was, a faint suggestion of something suspended on the horizon. Rebecca couldn't tell, just by looking, how long it would take to arrive. Perhaps she was simply imagining things; maybe it was a trick of the light, or a mirage. People saw the strangest things at sea and in the Arctic. Boats levitating above the ocean glim. Distant cities looming through the snow. The scientist in her knew these illusions occurred when light rays travelling across a temperature boundary were refracted towards the colder, denser air. Another part of her realised it was wish fulfilment; the mind filled those desolate spaces with the things it wanted to see. And oh, how she wanted to get to the island. She'd been longing to visit it for years, and now she was finally on her way. She must curb her impatience, concentrate on the feeling of the engine throbbing through the soles of her feet as the small passenger ferry carried them to Bodeg.

But soon the cold became almost too bitter to bear. Ice-sharp wind lacerated her exposed cheeks. The clouds hung heavy with rain in a sunless, slate coloured sky. She shivered, remembering the photographs of azure seas and white sandy beaches in the travel brochures that her daughter Anna had brought over in handfuls, trying to change her mind. Despite the glossy allure of the photographs her mind was already sailing across the grey-green waters of the North Atlantic. She had originally conceived of the trip as a solitary one. But it wasn't to be.

'You're going to the Arctic? I want to come,' Daniel had said.

'Are you sure? It'll be expensive,' she'd replied.

'I could borrow off you, right? Besides, who will look after me if you aren't here?'

'Anna.'

But Daniel's twin sister hadn't been as compliant as usual. She'd wanted to come as well, even though she hated boat trips and being out in the cold.

'I think we should go together. For Dad's sake,' she'd said.

Of course, after that Rebecca had to agree. But she understood her daughter's sentiment. William had been the one to remember birthdays and anniversaries, insisted on cooking a family dinner every weekend. Without him she felt unmoored. A month or so after his death the electricity had been cut off. She'd enjoyed the couple of days she'd had without it, lighting candles and the log fire in the evening, listening to her battery powered radio as the April rains lashed the windows, until Anna had come over and caught her out. It had

made her feel like a caricature – the incompetent widow. *Widow*. What a horrible word it was. She'd looked up its etymology. Originally it meant 'to be empty,' which seemed contradictory, because surely most women whose husbands had died were full of memories? It was true that these days she spent more time dwelling on the past than concentrating on the present. But perhaps that was merely a symptom of aging. One stopped looking forward and started looking back.

'Mum?'

She recoiled. As she did so she felt a sharp twinge of pain in her shoulder. It took a lot of effort not to cry out.

'Sorry, didn't mean to make you jump.'

Daniel leant against the railing next to her, holding a cigarette, his hand trembling.

'I didn't hear you come out,' she said.

'Are you alright?' he asked.

'I'm fine.'

'I saw you wince. Want me to get you anything?'

'You sound like Anna,' she replied crossly.

Her daughter was in league with her rheumatologist. The two of them fussed over her as if she were a sickly child, discussing medication, diet and the best type of exercises. Since she no longer drove it was with Anna that the rheumatologist arranged dates and times. At the last appointment she'd even handed the prescription to her daughter. They'd both said cold weather was bad for arthritic joints.

'Everything is bad for my joints,' she'd snapped back.

She felt bad for doing so, afterwards. It was wrong to be so ungrateful when Anna was just trying to be supportive. But she'd never realised that being looked after could be so, well, embarrassing; especially having to recite the most recent litany of complaints in front of her daughter. Sjogren's syndrome, a complication of rheumatoid arthritis. Her symptoms: dry mouth, dry eyes, and vaginal dryness. Anna had flushed and looked away.

'It's so loud out here. Fucking wind,' Daniel said, trying to light his cigarette. His hands were shaking more violently now.

'Here, let me help you.'

He handed her the lighter. She cupped one of her hands around it to form a windbreak and pressed down on the button with her thumb, which sent a jolt of pain down her wrist. The lighter flame flared, briefly illuminating the sharp angles of his cheekbones and the curve of his lips. People said he looked like her but she thought it was miraculous that she

had managed to produce someone so attractive. His, she thought proudly and for the umpteenth time, was an almost ethereal handsomeness. He had her once-black hair and William's pale skin. But she had no idea where the violet-blue band that ringed his grey irises had come from.

A curl of smoke rose from her cupped hands. Daniel straightened up.

'Thanks.'

'I shouldn't be helping you smoke,' she replied.

He shrugged. 'Every time you make me a bacon sandwich you could be facilitating a heart attack.'

She looked at him. Weight gain was supposed to be one of the side effects of his medication, but he'd never suffered from that; she was sure the only time he ate a square meal was when she or Anna cooked for him. He needed to take better care of himself.

'Perhaps I'll stop feeding you then,' she said.

That would never happen. There was no fun in eating dinner by herself. Especially when she could see him through the kitchen window, sitting in his caravan, also alone.

'There are people that never eat. They just live off air. Breatharians, they're called.'

'I'm sure they've all got guarana balls and muesli stashed away somewhere,' she replied briskly. She didn't want him getting ideas.

'You're such a sceptic, Mum. Sunlight gives you loads of minerals. Plants can live off it, so why can't we?'

'Please don't be ridiculous.'

'I'm a fagarian. All I need is men and nicotine,' he said, taking a final drag and flicking the butt into the sea.

'Daniel!'

'What?'

'Don't...never mind.'

She was becoming increasingly half-hearted when it came to telling him off. At what age was one supposed to stop restraining and reminding and chastising one's children? It was hard to believe the twins were in their late twenties, Daniel especially. William had thought so, at least. She remembered him, a few months before his death, eyeing the basketful of their son's washing she was pegging on the line.

'You need to turf him out of the caravan and make him get his own place. Put his name down for a council flat at least,' he'd said.

Rebecca, who did not like to be told by anyone what she needed to do, resisted. It wasn't Daniel's fault: it was his Condition.

'That boy's main condition is his laziness,' William had replied. 'If he can afford to go out drinking and god knows what else every night then he can afford his own flat. I don't find him these jobs to fund his habit, you know.'

'I'm sure he will soon enough – he's been talking about it. Any week now,' she said.

But it had been almost a year since William's death and Daniel was still living in her back garden.

'I will pay you back, you know.'

'Pardon?'

Daniel seemed to have an uncanny ability to tell what she was thinking. But he could also be infuriatingly, deliberately obtuse.

'For the plane ticket. And the ferry crossing. And my share of the cottage.'

She laid a hand tenderly on his arm. 'There's no hurry. Now, how was your sister when you left her?'

'Green.'

'I'd better go and find her. Perhaps I can persuade her up on deck for some fresh air. Are you coming?'

Daniel pulled another cigarette out of the box in his coat pocket. 'No. I'll stay out here.'

Before she turned to go back inside she took one last look at the island. The smudge of land was beginning to acquire definition. But it still seemed very far away. As she looked out across the dark ocean, empty aside from the island in the distance, she felt her breath suddenly catch in her throat and her chest constrict. She had been dreaming about the island for weeks, but she still had no idea what to expect when they landed on Bodeg. She wasn't sure if she was chasing answers, or a ghost.

2 | ANNA

Anna watched the sea through the salt-smearred portholes in the small lounge area. The horizon tipped and tilted and her stomach mimicked the movement. If only she hadn't eaten so much this morning. The two breakfasts at the hotel on the mainland had been slightly over the top. She had gone down early so her mum and Daniel wouldn't see how much she was eating and had found herself breakfasting again with them later, whilst being silently judged by the skinny waitress. Now it was all churning uneasily in her stomach. To distract herself she looked around at the other passengers. There weren't many of them. A middle-aged woman travelling alone with a lot of shopping bags. An old couple with tired lined faces. Opposite her was a family with white-blonde hair – a young couple and their two small children, a girl and a boy who were miniature copies of their parents. The girl was running in-between the seats holding a plastic doll. When she noticed Anna watching she thrust the doll towards her. It had lurid, sightless blue eyes and was wearing a tattered white dress. She tried not to shudder. Although she'd loved dolls as a child, in adulthood she found them uncanny. The girl hid it quickly behind her back and turned away.

Anna felt a stab of disappointment. The opinion of children she didn't know shouldn't matter, but it did. She needed to learn how to identify with them, work out how to make them love her. After all it wouldn't be long until she had one of her own.

'Will I be hearing the patter of tiny feet soon?' her dad had asked last year.

It was such a shame he wouldn't be around to be a grandfather. Tommy wasn't as keen as she was. He said they had all the time in the world, which wasn't true. Either one of them could get knocked over by a speeding car or trip down the stairs and break their necks. Her mum had RA and her dad had died after suffering his second heart attack in six months. She was a time bomb in more ways than one. Ovaries had a sell-by date.

'My biological clock is ticking,' one of her single friends was fond of saying.

Although the metaphor sort of made sense, it did nothing to describe how she felt about wanting a baby – more like an ache than a sense of urgency. It wasn't an accurate description of how she felt every month when the blood came either. Raw. That was the first word that sprang to mind. Disappointed, too, when a few years ago she'd felt relieved. She was sure that the widening of her stomach and thickening of her hips had to be occurring for a reason too. These were not feelings she had explained to Tommy. He wouldn't understand.

She bent down and unzipped her rucksack. The insides flashed yellow. A ball of wool, the colour and shape of a cartoon sun. She reached down and stroked it gently. How soft it was. Perfect for a new-born. When Tommy had caught her knitting the jumper a couple of weeks ago she'd pretended it was a present for Carol-next-door, who was expecting. Whilst on the island she'd have time to work on it. Then, when she got home she'd try to convince him it was time they made a little being to fill the dinky clothes she'd made.

She looked over at the two children again. The young father was tickling his son and they were both laughing. The girl sat quietly at her mother's feet with her doll cradled in her arms, crooning into its empty plastic face. It seemed that men wanted to stay being boys for as long as possible, whilst girls were desperate to turn into women.

The boat gave a sudden lurch and so did her stomach. Her mouth filled with sharp-tasting liquid. Any minute now, she thought, looking frantically around for the toilet. There wasn't a little stick-woman sign anywhere. She stood up and made her way across the lounge. There was a small unmarked door in the narrow corridor. Tentatively, she opened it. Miracle of miracles – a chipped sink and a small commode. No sooner had she locked the door than she felt the bile rise in her throat. She dropped to her knees and vomited the contents of her stomach into the toilet bowl. Her eyes and nostrils burned.

Afterwards she washed her face and looked in the mirror. A plump mousy-haired woman with red-rimmed eyes and a fleck of regurgitated tomato on her cheek stared back at her. Repulsed, she dabbed it away with some toilet tissue and then tried to comb her hair with her hands. Despite her best efforts, she still looked awful. No wonder she and Tommy didn't...but that was more to do with her lack of interest. She'd told him it was to do with grief but that wasn't it. They'd been together so long that his body had ceased to surprise her.

Although scientifically speaking it didn't make sense (as her mum had told her so many times), she felt that she and Daniel had been in competition for the nine months that they'd shared a womb – first for genetic traits and later for resources. She must have taken the lion's share of the food, considering how much fatter she was. He'd come off a lot better. How handsome he was in comparison to her. And people found him so much more interesting – she was sure most of his friends thought she was really boring. Neither of them had her mother's brains, though. Intelligence had been bruised and discarded in the fight for everything else.

She thought regretfully of her friends Jenna and Olivia. They'd be in Mallorca by now, lying by the pool and trying to coax the last rays of the summer sun onto their skin. But she knew she'd made the right decision. She couldn't let her mum go off somewhere like this with only Daniel for company. Her brother would probably spend the whole time getting drunk and her mum would over-exert herself. They would both forget to eat. But not with her around. Both of them needed her, they really did. Especially without Dad. He'd be feeling as queasy as her right now if he were here. Then again, he'd probably have insisted they flew or drove somewhere instead. The best holidays she could remember were the ones he, rather than her mum, had chosen.

She took one last look in the mirror and made her way back to the cabin. Her mum had returned from deck. She was sitting in one of the plastic chairs, eyes wet.

'What's wrong?' she asked.

'It's windy outside – I just put some eye drops in. What about you? You're as white as a sheet. Are you feeling nauseous?'

'I just threw up. I feel a lot better now.' It was a lie. Her stomach was tender, throbbing; her throat was scratched and her breath bitter. 'Have you got any chewing gum?'

Her mum handed her some.

'Although it sounds counterintuitive, you're less likely to get seasick on a full stomach. You should have eaten more for breakfast. Anyway, don't worry, we'll be back on dry land soon.'

'How soon is soon?'

'About forty minutes.'

Anna gulped. Her mum had told her it was a short journey. They had already been travelling for an hour. But she should have known. Her mum was infamous for distorting times and distances. It's a just a quick stroll, she'd say. They'd still be walking hours later. How many miles of ocean were there between Bodeg and the mainland? It was a long way home. Her stomach clenched into a tight knot at the thought.

3 | DANIEL

The sea was nothing like water in a glass, colourless liquid reflecting the light. Daniel watched the waves ripple, like wind-ruffled fur on an animal's back. He looked down at the dark green shadows in the water and wondered what lay below the surface. Shipwrecks that turned brown as they rusted on the ocean floor. Sea monsters and submerged cities. Once his dad – who hadn't been able to keep his balance for shit on a boat – had dropped his glasses overboard and now they were on the seabed somewhere off the coast of Cornwall, their lenses misted with slime. There were other things down there that had been lost for so long that they'd been forgotten, like the pale bones of drowned men picked clean by the fish, flashing like signals for help in the darkness. Was something down there calling to him? It was hard to hear anything apart from the wind.

He finished his second cigarette and flicked the butt into the sea. The sky was the colour of old fag ash and there was a thin band of nicotine-coloured light just above the horizon. Good weather for smoking. He reached for another. The packet was already empty. Then he remembered how many he'd had last night, one after the other until his heart had gotten overexcited by all the nicotine and started pumping desperately. They had stayed in a hotel on the mainland with small, white bedrooms and beds with metal frames. It had reminded him of a hospital, or the unit. Whilst the other two had slept in single beds either side of him – Anna heavy and inert as a tree felled by a storm, his mum twitching and softly moaning – he had squinted up at the ceiling until his vision blurred and he could see all the atoms in the air around him. The curtains were ajar. He'd watched the sky through a gap in the curtains as it turned from the colour of skim-milk to an old bruise. His mum said they were travelling so far north that during midsummer Bodeg had twenty-four-hour daylight. In December there was no light at all. It was a shame they were travelling in September, when it got dark in the evenings and light in the mornings, because he wouldn't have minded visiting a world shrouded by darkness. Night was the best time of all, when the sky was sprayed with stars and there were plenty of shadows to hide in. Night-time was normally when the fun started.

That party last weekend. He'd met someone there, a slender boy of around eighteen, with soft blonde hair and a snub-nosed angel face just screaming out for defilement. They had kissed in a shadowed corner of the back garden. Daniel had tasted his caramel sweetness under the beer and felt the boy's cock swelling against his own. After a couple of minutes

the boy had broken away and said he wanted to go back inside. But in the well-lit house it was possible to see the confused hunger in his eyes. Daniel had marked him out as a potential conquest. Inevitably, the chase would be more fun than what came after. Sex was fun in the moment, but afterwards, more often than not, he simply wanted to disappear, to float alone and ethereal like a jellyfish drifting through a dark ocean. Sometimes the men he was with seemed to want to fill the silence, to wrap their sweaty arms around him and push their clammy bodies closer to his. Even when they got up and left, or kicked him out, they made everything feel heavy and dirty. But maybe the blonde boy would be different.

He put his hand in his pocket to get out a cigarette. Fuck, he'd forgotten the packet was empty. He hadn't bothered to change his money to the local currency (whatever that was) before he'd left because he had no money to exchange. None of his friends would lend him any until he paid back what he already owed them. He'd reached the limit on his overdraft and had even emptied his jar of loose change the other day to buy a six-pack. Hopefully Anna or his mum would help him out, even though they thought he smoked too much and liked to tell him that he was going to get cancer, or emphysema – one of the few things they agreed upon. But death wasn't something that could be planned and it wasn't like you'd live forever if you stayed healthy, so there didn't seem any point in not doing things that might or might not speed the process up.

If he ever contracted something terminal he would just kill himself, because dying quickly was much better than dying slowly. He'd take an overdose or slash his wrists or jump off something very high. Unfortunately Norfolk was eye-achingly flat. He'd have to hitch down to Bristol and jump off the Clifton Suspension Bridge into the river below. Out of everyone that had jumped off it only one woman had survived, in the Victorian times. Her skirt had filled with wind and acted like a parachute so that she'd floated down into the muddy waters of the Avon as gently as a dandelion seed. Several Bristolians had told him that story when he'd been squatting down there a few years ago. TJ had added that the woman had jumped off the bridge because she'd been jilted at the altar. But then she'd fallen in love with one of the sailors who'd fished her out of the muddy water and married him instead. It was a sweet story but TJ talked a lot of bullshit. Once he'd been convinced that he saw Jesus outside one of the chicken shops on Stapleton Road, a half-eaten drumstick in one hand and a halo glowing above his head.

Anyway, none of that mattered. He was on his way to the Arctic. There wouldn't be any raves or squat parties on the island but there would be all sorts of other crazy shit going on. Like the Northern Lights. Icebergs larger than cities thundering past. Polar bears, their

muzzles stained with blood. Or did they live in Antarctica? He couldn't quite remember. His memory was patchy, strip-mined by chemicals which had scorched holes in the delicate tissues of his brain. Most of it was self-inflicted, but the meds he was on at the moment felt as if they were doing just as much – if not more – damage than the stuff he picked up from his mate Joe down the pub. They made his hands shake. The other day he had cut himself and bled onto a pine bookshelf he was making and had had to start all over again. And they made him feel sick.

He leant over the railings and looked at the churning waves below. It was like magic, the way the sea never filled up. The way it moved restlessly backwards and forwards, vast and empty, always hungry, always waiting. Now he had something to give it too. Pulling his newest meds out of his pocket, he held the strip of pills out over the side and began popping each one from the foil, watching as the little white circles were carried away by the wind and dropped silently into the sea. Once they were all gone he felt a lot lighter, but kind of guilty too. Mum would be cross. He'd been so good with his meds over the past couple of years. But he'd started to get sick of them. The pills were supposed to make him feel normal but they made him twitchy in the morning and like a zombie every night. Perhaps that was what normal felt like. If that was the case, he wasn't interested. He was sick of not feeling truly alive or even just truly awake. Something told him that Bodeg was a place where he'd want to feel both. He'd felt the magic in its name as soon as his mum said it. Bow, like a curve, an arrow flying free. Deg, like digging, roots thrusting deep down into the ground, fingers dark with soil.

Christ, he wanted a fag. Wanted it so much he could smell it. Looking around he saw a lone figure in the wheelhouse. He moved closer. A man, older than him. Broad shouldered. Curly black hair and rough, handsome features. One of his hands lay loosely on the steering wheel and his other was propped lazily against the open window, a cigarette dangling from two fingers. I'm a fagarian, Daniel said to himself, and made his way across the deck and up the narrow flight of stairs towards the stranger, who was staring fixedly at the liquid horizon in front of him.

'Hi, got a spare one of those?' he asked through the window.

The man turned. Daniel saw ghostly fish swim across the liquid curve of his retina and disappear into the corners of his eyes.

'What?'

'A cigarette.'

‘You should have brought some with you. They are twice the price on the island,’ the man said, handing him one.

‘I got some in my bag.’

‘You wish to come in?’

‘Sure.’

Inside the cabin there was just enough room to stand beside the ferryman. Daniel looked around. It was a very manly space. Faded maps were tacked to the metal walls alongside several printed charts of numbers and figures. A narrow window ledge held an overflowing ashtray and some crumpled beer cans. Directly in front of them was a dashboard with a steering wheel, a key dangling from an ignition and a few buttons illuminated yellow and red, the sort he longed to press. To the right of the wheel was a photograph of the ferryman dressed in a dorky waterproof suit and holding a massive fish. Daniel smirked. Those photos always amused him: a dead fish was a grotesquely appropriate penis extension.

There was an expectant pause. He realised the ferryman had been talking and was now waiting for him to answer.

‘What was that?’

‘I said – you are on holiday?’

‘Kind of. Yeah. Yes.’

‘Alone?’

‘With my family. My mum and my sister.’

‘Please tell them they are very welcome here.’

Daniel wondered if women were in short supply on the island. Perhaps even his mum would get some attention. He thought she was still quite pretty, even though she called herself an old woman – she was thin and so nothing had really sagged. Now his dad was dead she couldn’t spend the rest of her life alone. Some romance would be good for her. Perhaps the ferryman had an uncle; a little bit older, a little bit craggier, but still as darkly attractive.

Both the cigarettes had been stubbed out by now. Even with the window open the air inside the cabin was thick, acrid. Underneath that he smelt something else. A tang of salt and ocean sediment mixed in with something ferrous, animal. He realised it was coming from the man next to him. Most men smelt faintly medicinal or lightly flowered, like the Christmas-tree-shaped air fresheners that they hung in their cars, as if they viewed themselves as bad smells that needed to be hidden. They smelled completely different after

sex, sweat rinsing away all that false stuff. The ferryman smelled like someone who'd just been fucking. Something inside him stirred at the thought.

'That is your family?' the ferryman asked, pointing a large, nicotine-stained finger.

He nodded. From here, bundled up in their outdoor clothes, Anna and his mum looked like swaddled dolls or scarecrows. He did not need to see his sister's hands to know how tightly they were gripping the handrail, skin whitening and tightening over her knuckles.

Anna began spewing over the side of the boat. His mother rubbed her back.

'She is seasick?'

He nodded.

The ferryman bent down and picked up a metal flask from below his feet. He handed it to Daniel. 'You take this and give it to her. A good tea for travel sickness.'

So he had been dismissed. Trust Anna to cock-block. He thanked the ferryman and took the flask back onto deck.

'Here,' he thrust it at his sister.

She straightened up and wiped her mouth with a scrap of tissue.

'What's this?'

'Tea for seasickness. The ferryman gave it to me.'

Anna sighed, as if he'd done something terribly disappointing, and then unscrewed the flask. She took a sip and pulled a face. 'This tea's really bitter.'

'Have some more. It might make you feel better,' his mum urged.

He turned away from them, looking towards the island. Soon the shape on the horizon began to acquire more definition. He could see it was flat near the water's edge, sloping gently upwards. They drew a little closer and he could see the mist-smudged silhouette of a peaked mountain. Was it a volcano? The boat continued onward over the waves. He could see the dark rock of the shoreline and a cluster of blue, yellow and red houses. They were almost there.

4 | REBECCA

Rebecca glanced around the small harbour in search of a redeeming feature. It really was dismal: a concrete anti-climax. The ferry had moored up against a jetty covered in car tyres. A cluster of fishing boats were tethered to the opposite wall. At the back of the harbour were three corrugated iron sheds. Pale blue paint peeled from their rusted walls. There were several overflowing bins in front. A biting wind seemed to be the most alive thing about the place. She watched as a young blonde family struggled over to a battered black car, crammed in and drove away. An old couple zipped up their coats and shuffled off in the same direction. They were alone.

‘Huh. I thought it would be snowing. What a dump,’ Daniel said.

‘Give it a chance,’ she replied, more sharply than she’d intended.

‘Yes, I’m sure the rest of the island is gorgeous,’ Anna said.

‘Well, let’s find the cottage and then we can explore.’

Even imbuing her voice with enthusiasm was tiring. All she wanted to do was sleep.

‘Let me text Tommy and tell him we arrived safely,’ Anna said, pulling her phone out. ‘Oh, no signal. There is Wi-Fi in the cottage, right?’

She’d forgotten to check.

‘As far as I know,’ she said.

Daniel shouldered his rucksack. ‘Come on.’

He strode off towards the track leading out of the harbour. She followed more slowly. Anna, struggling with a garish pink suitcase, quickly fell behind.

Behind the boats were a couple of fishermen dressed in bloodstained oilskins, preparing their catch on the jetty. She watched one of them slice into the silver belly of a fish and extract its guts with two bent fingers. He added the waxy, purplish intestines to a small pile on the concrete and threw the fish into a bucket. Then he looked up at her without smiling. She continued walking, feeling oddly shamed.

The track sloped upwards until it joined a wider road. She looked to the left. The road curved around the sloped hillside and disappeared. To their right, however, was a cluster of yellow, red and white buildings with coloured roofs, nestled against a rough grassy slope. A red church steeple rose slightly higher than the rest, bright against the leaden sky.

‘Wait a sec!’ Anna called.

She turned to see her daughter, flushed with exertion as she dragged her suitcase up the track.

‘Just let me get my breath,’ she said, catching up.

A break was welcome, and it was always nice not to be the one to suggest it. Rebecca took in the view whilst she waited. The harbour just below them was, like most things, more appealing when seen from a distance. Of greater interest was the stark outline of the island against the grey sea, indented in places as if a monstrous creature had taken bites out of the land. Beyond that the water stretched all the way back to the horizon and the mainland was nowhere in sight. She experienced a sudden fluttering of panic. Since she was young she’d devoured stories about the Arctic, of delirious ships and icebergs gliding like swans through clear blue waters. She’d read somewhere that they smelt like cucumbers. What had she been thinking? She wasn’t an Arctic explorer but a tourist who’d read a few too many books, a woman with aching joints who tired after walking only a couple of hundred yards.

Daniel had stopped a little further down the road and was gazing inland.

‘Mum, turn around. Look, it’s erupting!’ he said excitedly.

She looked. Beyond the cluster of houses loomed the volcano, smudged with cloud as if it were smoking.

‘That’s just the clouds. The volcano has been dormant for years,’ she said.

Not so long, in fact. The last eruption had occurred fourteen years ago. Jake, who was a volcanologist, had told her that. Or was it “had been” a volcanologist? She knew nothing about his present, only his past. Given that she had an eidetic memory, she must recall it all far better than he did. She was always surprised when people couldn’t remember incidents that happened years, months, or even days ago. Sometimes she thought they must be doing it on purpose. It must be nice, to forget. Perhaps Jake had all but forgotten her by now. The thought was decidedly unpleasant.

‘Alright, I’m ready to carry on,’ Anna said.

They turned right down the wider road, which sloped gently towards the island’s only village. Rebecca glanced at the small houses and bungalows spaced out along the smaller roads leading off the main street. Each had a small square lawn enclosed by a low wooden fence. The manicured green grass contrasted starkly with the rough yellowing tussocks of vetch growing in the spaces between the buildings. She imagined that when the sun shone the village would be a welcoming riot of colour. Today it was not. The windows of the buildings were dark. The wind echoed down the empty street. She saw only a couple

of cars. One had a roof stippled with guano. Another's windscreen wipers were frozen in the upright position.

'Is that it?' Anna asked.

Rebecca saw a tall white house with a black roof. There was a metal sign sticking out from it which read "Hotel".

'Actually I booked a place outside of the village. The instructions on the email said to pick up the key from the post office,' she replied.

Anna gave her a pained smile.

'Oh, ok.'

There had been only two accommodation options on the island's web page – the hotel and a self-catering cottage. She'd chosen the latter; a red house with a grey roof, right by the sea. It had geothermal heating but there was a wood-burning stove too, and she'd imagined reading by the fire and then falling asleep listening to the sound of the waves. This could have been where Jake had stayed. Perhaps she would even be sleeping in the bed that he had once slept in.

As they drew closer to the hotel she could see that the white paint had peeled away to reveal orange patches of rust. The view would be of the street or the harbour, of the fishing boats departing and returning from the grey sea beyond. If they'd stayed here she'd have been woken each morning by the harsh screeching of birds fighting over the scraps of fish offal left in small piles on the jetty.

'You are staying in the hotel?' asked a deep male voice behind her.

She turned and saw a tall, dark-haired man. The captain of the ferry.

'No, we booked self-catered accommodation. The house by the sea. Is that where the volcanologists and scientists stayed?'

He narrowed his eyes at her. 'Yes. Why?'

'Mum's a scientist,' Daniel said.

'Just a retired biology teacher, I'm afraid. But I'm interested in the volcano. Are there volcanologists still resident?'

'No. They left a while ago. But they still have equipment here, to monitor the activity. And the hut where they did their research is still standing. You can walk there. It's behind the village, close to the lava.'

'That sounds interesting,' she said.

'It sounds dull as shit.'

‘Daniel, please.’ She turned to the ferry captain. ‘Where’s the post office? It said on the website that we need to pick up the key from there.’

‘I will take you.’

They followed him in silence past an empty dark-panelled restaurant and a shop with crates of tired-looking vegetables in the window. The rest of the buildings were shuttered; whether they were closed permanently, or just for lunch, she did not know.

‘Post office,’ their guide said, opening the door of the last building on the street.

They trailed in his wake past racks of brown envelopes and gaudy greetings cards to the shop counter. He struck up a conversation with the man standing behind it. Rebecca realised she didn’t know what language they were speaking. Icelandic, presumably. But it was somehow more appealing to imagine that Bodeg had its own language, a mixture of blends and dialects from all the people who’d settled there over the years, the words they left behind the most pervasive traces of their presence.

‘Mum?’ Anna’s voice interrupted her thoughts.

‘Hi, we booked a stay with you online,’ she said to the postmaster, an elderly man with watery, bulbous eyes half-hidden under thick grey brows.

‘Wait me,’ the postmaster grunted.

He left the counter and walked through a door at the back of the shop.

The captain looked at her. ‘He goes to get the key.’

‘Ah.’

‘You can reach the house if you walk back along the road you have come. It is maybe ten minutes’ walk from the village. On the left, by the sea. Now, I must return to the ferry.’

‘Will we see you again?’ Daniel asked.

‘It is a very small island.’

He turned to leave. She noticed how Daniel’s eyes lingered. So her son had already found someone to chase. Hopefully he wouldn’t get himself into trouble here. It was, as the ferry captain said, a very small island.

The postmaster returned with the key and handed it to her. They went out into the cold. She tried to ignore the pain in her knees as they walked back up the shuttered street. Nobody said anything. She was sure Anna and Daniel were both wondering what had possessed her to bring them to this dump. She was beginning to wonder that too. Jake had written to her about the uniqueness of the landscape; the wild, twisting lava formations and the black sand beaches. Why couldn’t she see what he had seen? Her chest felt hollow. She told herself that no two people perceive a place in the same way. That travellers were

frequently disappointed when they arrived in a place and found that the reality of it differed from the picture of it they'd constructed in their mind, drawn from films and magazines. In the 1980s a man named Hiroaki Ota had come up with the name 'Paris Syndrome' to refer to the acute culture shock some tourists experienced when they found the so-called City of Love contrary to their expectations. It could, apparently, cause some severe, albeit transient symptoms: dizziness, tachycardia, even persecution mania. However, someone had suggested later that the symptoms emerged as a result of the intense excitement engendered by the voyage itself. Maybe it was a bit of both; a combination of culture shock and homesickness. Who knew? Paris was a long way from these dark rocks and the churning grey sea that encircled them. She was beginning to realise that Jake was too. It had been foolish to expect the island would appear to her as it had to him, or even that it would bear traces of his presence. She would have to seek him out, or make her own memories here instead.

Anna inserted the key into the lock. It turned ninety degrees and jammed. She tried again. Nothing. There was an unwritten rule that nowhere they stayed had a key that turned smoothly. She couldn't remember a holiday that hadn't begun with the frustrating moment of standing by the door, unable to get inside.

'Lefty loosey, righty tighty,' she muttered to herself, and tried turning it anti-clockwise instead. Again, it jammed.

'Here, let me try,' Daniel said.

She gave up without argument and sat on the steps hugging her knees. The cottage was perched on the edge of the island, worryingly close to the sea. There was no front garden. Instead the house was surrounded by black boulders. A narrow path, hewn into the rocky ground, led from the main track past a wooden shed towards the front door. She had noticed Daniel, in front of her, peering through the grimy window to see what was inside it. Why did he always seek out the dirtiest things? Beyond the house, opposite the track, was a rough grassy slope littered with dark boulders. The village was to the right. It looked cuter from far away, with the brightly coloured houses clustered around the harbour. If the grass was greener and the sea was bluer and the sun was shining it would all look quite quaint. There was even a beach close by, but in this clouded light the sand was the colour and consistency of charcoal and the thought of sitting there with a picnic was not a pleasant one. Who'd want to live here, surrounded by rocks and wind? She'd done some research and discovered that in January and February there was twenty-four-hour darkness and the temperatures got as low as -20°C. And that volcano – it couldn't be more than a mile from the village.

She pulled her coat more tightly round herself. It was freezing. Right now in England she'd have just got back from her reception shift at the gym, and be in the kitchen making cakes for her weekly market stall. The air would be impregnated with the scent of lemons and chocolate, and she'd be singing along to Heart FM. She told herself not to be silly; she'd be home before she knew it and then she would wish she was back on holiday.

There was a scraping sound as the key turned in the lock. Behind her the door creaked open. She followed Daniel inside. The house was dark and warm. Her fingers groped along the wall for a light-switch, which she found quickly. It worked. She opened the first door on her right to find a small blue-and-white-tiled bathroom with a toilet, sink and a shower. She

tested the flush and then the shower. The water smelt faintly of egg, but at least it was hot. All this was very reassuring.

There was only one other room downstairs. On its left-hand side was a small kitchen area. On the right a sofa and a couple of armchairs covered in patchwork quilts had been placed around a wood-burning stove – luckily, there was also a radiator. In the middle of the room was a rough wooden table and behind it were shelves holding a few battered books and some nautical ornaments. Binoculars, a brass telescope and a small burnished anchor. A china shepherdess with puffy porcelain skirts, looking very out of place.

She breathed a sigh of relief. ‘It’s cute.’

Daniel turned to her. ‘I knew you’d say that.’

‘There’s no need...’ she began, then stopped abruptly as Mum came inside, dumped her rucksack on the floor and sank down onto the sofa.

‘Mum? Do you need anything?’ Daniel asked.

‘You could pass me my painkillers. They’re in the top pocket of my rucksack.’

‘Sure. You need water?’

‘Yes please. My throat’s so dry.’

She looked away as her mum swallowed the pills. There was a canvas covered in blue, white and green brushstrokes on the wall. It was supposed to represent the ocean but the water she could see through the window was an ugly grey colour. Perhaps she should cover the window with the painting and then they could pretend they were somewhere else.

Daniel left the room and clattered upstairs. She followed. He appeared at the top of the steps, clutching a single mattress.

‘What are you doing?’ she asked.

‘I’m going to sleep in the shed tonight.’

‘But it might not belong to the house.’

‘Course it does.’

There was no point in arguing. She stepped back as he struggled past her with the mattress and out the front door.

Upstairs she discovered a sleeping loft. There was just enough space to stand upright in the middle of the room but the ceiling, following the line of the roof, sloped dramatically downwards. Four low single beds had been placed against the walls, one in each corner. At the foot of each was a chest of drawers. It was a big room and the beds looked cosy covered in brightly coloured quilts. For Daniel privacy was more important than comfort. She wondered if he wanted to sleep alone in case he met someone. He’d be lucky.

She sat on all the beds, claimed the most comfortable, and went back downstairs. Her mother was lying on the sofa, still in her outdoor gear.

‘Mum? Do you want to stay here with Daniel and nap whilst I go into town and get some provisions?’ she asked, checking her watch. It was three o’clock, long past lunch, and now her stomach had settled she was starting to feel hungry.

‘I don’t need to nap, I’m not a baby. I might stay here and get some reading done, though.’

‘Alright. What would you like me to get?’

‘Whatever you want. You’re the chef.’

‘I want to come,’ Daniel said, appearing in the doorway.

‘There’s some money in the backpack,’ her mum said.

Daniel swiftly located her wallet and tucked it in his pocket.

‘Maybe I should look after it,’ she suggested.

‘Don’t be stupid. I bet there’s nothing much to buy here anyway.’

‘Even so, why don’t you give it to Anna?’ her mum said.

Daniel scowled, but did it anyway. She managed to suppress a smile; it was rare her mother was on her side.

They left the house and began walking back across the rocks to the track.

‘I don’t know why I couldn’t hold it. There’s nothing to buy here,’ Daniel said.

That was one good thing about the island, she thought: the lack of opportunity for reckless spending. Daniel had awful money management and his so-called friends weren’t any use, helping him blow it all on drink and drugs every time he got paid. When he ran out of money they all seemed to disappear and her mother had to bail him out. There was no point arguing about it now, though. She must restrain herself.

‘I want to buy a birthday present for Tommy whilst I’m here,’ she said instead.

‘Socks? A fishing rod?’

As was so often the case, she couldn’t tell if he was taking the piss out of her or trying to be helpful. She decided to opt for the latter.

‘Well, he doesn’t like fishing. And socks are a little dull.’

Daniel snorted. ‘Tommy’s dull.’

‘Hey, that’s mean,’ she said angrily. ‘Tommy’s very nice.’

‘You can be nice *and* dull. Besides, we’ll be back home before his birthday. Only two weeks of walking and fishing and sailing. Your favourite things.’

His words had the effect he intended. But she wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of reacting. They continued walking in silence. As they rounded a corner she saw what lay beyond the village – an area of rough ground falling like a shadow next to the houses. She'd heard enough of her mum's potted lectures to realise it was a lava field.

'I can tell you don't like it here,' Daniel said.

'That's not true. I've barely seen any of the island. I'm sure there're some nicer parts. Why else would mum have been so adamant on coming here for a fortnight?' she asked, looking out to sea. The water was dark grey, almost black, and storm clouds were stacking up above the horizon. They'd be soaked within minutes; she was sure of it.

'Because of Jake.'

'Who the hell is Jake?'

'Mum's boyfriend.'

'What are you on, Daniel? Mum doesn't have a boyfriend.'

'She did once. Years ago. He used to write her letters. Don't you remember? They sometimes came before we left for school. The only ones she wouldn't let me open.'

'They were from her cousin Gail.'

'That's what Mum says. But it isn't true. Why haven't we seen one in years? Gail's still alive and she's got bugger all else to do.'

'Maybe she got bored writing. It's hard to stay in touch. Or perhaps she started emailing, like normal people,' she said.

'Why don't you ever believe me?'

'Because you're a liar.'

On April Fool's Day, a few years ago, he'd rung her with the news that their dad had been in a car accident. She'd gone all the way to the hospital before realising it was a twisted joke. Once he'd even convinced them he had HIV. Her mum had slapped him for that.

'I'm not this time.'

But he was smiling.

'I know you are,' she said.

'Seriously, I'm not.'

He sounded very much in earnest. But then again, he always did.

'Bullshit.'

'Anna...'

'Let's go and find this shop, then,' she said, tight-lipped.

Above her the sky rumbled. Then it started to rain.

6 | DANIEL

A low rumbling sound was just audible under the wind and the waves. Daniel was sure someone or something was outside, prowling the darkness. He looked round the table at the others to see if they'd heard anything. But Anna was busy shovelling up the post-apocalyptic slop she'd made from those rusty old tins in the cupboard and his mother was looking down at her bowl, spoon dangling limply from her hand. Both were completely oblivious, as always. It made it hard to tell whether he was hearing things that weren't there or if they simply just weren't listening. There it was again. It wasn't deep enough to be thunder. More like growling. There was definitely something outside. He wanted to ask the other two if they could hear it, but he couldn't. When he heard things nobody else did it was taken very seriously. According to them his Condition was something to be both pitied and eradicated. They thought everything he experienced was just in his mind, but they were wrong. Sometimes he felt sorry for them, not being able to see as clearly or hear as well as he did. They had no idea how beautiful and intense it could be to fly as high as he could. But just as often he was jealous of their ability to blot it all out. They had no idea how chaotic and overwhelming the world could be, as if the radio, the television, and the laptop were all blaring out different songs at once. Hundreds of signals, their meanings lost but intensified in the cacophony.

Anna's spoon clattered into her empty bowl. 'Aren't either of you two hungry?' she asked.

'No,' he said.

Eating was a necessity, not a pleasure. Too much food made him feel dull and bloated. He hated it when scraps of meat got stuck in his teeth and came out with the floss a couple of hours later stinking of decay; a reminder of how he'd smell one day. Anna was always going on about his smoker's breath, but he preferred the smell of fags to rot.

'Mum? You aren't going to finish it either? Don't you like it?'

His mum looked down at the gelatinous brown mess in her bowl and composed her face into a lie. 'It's delicious, really. I'm just a bit tired, that's all.'

'I don't know why I bother to cook for you two.'

'You hardly did anything. Just mixed a couple of old tins together,' he told her.

Anna rounded on him. 'That's all the thanks I get, is it?'

She'd been in a shitty mood all afternoon. The rain had stopped them going into town for supplies. It was a good thing his mum had brought a couple of packets of cereal bars with her or Anna would have torn chunks out of them both. Then, horror of horrors, they had discovered that there was no Wi-Fi, which meant that she hadn't been able to talk to her precious Tommy.

'I can cook for myself. You just got there first because you were hungriest,' he said.

'You think I'm fat, don't you?'

'I didn't say that.'

'You implied it.'

'I did *not*.'

'Come on, you two. You're behaving like children. Can't we just sit down together and have a meal?' his mum asked.

She must have said that hundreds, perhaps thousands of times. When he was with them he felt as if he was stuck watching the same rubbish film on repeat. For years they had lacked the capacity to surprise him.

'Well, that's what I'm asking. The food's right there in front of you,' Anna replied stiffly.

'It's hardly food – more like slop. I thought you were supposed to be a chef,' he said.

His sister's expression darkened but she said nothing. One of these days she was going to explode and words were going to come exploding out of her, burning everything in their path. She'd feel so much better after that, although anyone caught in the crossfire would be fucked. Still, he wanted to be there to watch.

In the silence that followed the outburst that did not happen, he heard the noise again. This time it reminded him of dry leaves skittering over concrete, but with a structure and an intent – something to communicate. He got up from the table, walked over to the window and drew back the faded blue curtains. Forehead pressed against the glass, he peered outside. It was too dark to see anything. The air in the room was beginning to feel close and heavy. He was sure that something was coiling itself round the house, trying to push its way through the cracks in the walls and under the door.

'What do you want?' he whispered to it, listening hard for a response.

'What did you say?' Anna asked.

'Nothing,' he replied, without turning around.

'I heard you talking. Muttering about the food, I bet.'

'I'm not the one who's obsessed with food.'

‘Fine. I’ll eat yours then, since I’m so *obsessed*.’

He heard the clatter of her spoon against china.

‘Why are you looking at me like that?’ she asked his mum.

‘How?’

‘As if you’re disgusted with me.’

‘I wasn’t. I’m not.’

The abrupt scrape of a chair.

He turned. Anna was standing up, her cheeks flushed.

‘I’m going to bed.’

He watched her stalk out of the room. The stairs creaked under her weight. Then the light fixture on the ceiling above him rattled.

‘I don’t understand why she’s so upset,’ his mum said, looking at him helplessly.

He shrugged. ‘Maybe she’s on her period.’

‘I’ve told you it’s insensitive to say things like that.’

‘Maybe she needs a good fuck. I saw Tommy’s dick at the swimming pool once. I hope he’s a grower, not a show-er, cause otherwise she’s in for a lifetime of disappointment. He’s getting a beer belly too.’

‘Daniel! There’s no need to be so coarse.’

‘I’m just trying to help.’

His mum picked up the two half-eaten bowls of stew and scraped them into the bin, her shoulders hunched in disapproval.

‘No you’re not. You’ve been goading her all evening. Why do you do that?’

‘She’s so tightly wound. I’m giving her the opportunity to vent.’

As soon as he said it he realised it might actually be true, but his mum gave him a look that said *I call bullshit*. She put the dirty bowls in the sink and sat down on the sofa, pulling a patchwork quilt round her shoulders. Her expression indicated she’d forgiven him. It never took very long. He took a seat on the faded maroon armchair next to her. There was a hole in the arm. The yellow stuffing oozing from it reminded him of pus and the seat cushion was lumpy and uncomfortable. Instead he knelt by the stove. He opened the door, placed a couple of peat blocks on the embers and blew steadily until they caught. Here he remained, watching the flames dance.

‘Anna never liked the idea that something could be any less than perfect. Even when she was younger she used to arrange her dolls in groups of four. And then you used to steal them and bite their feet clean off,’ she said, from behind him.

He shut the door of the stove and straightened up. Sometimes she spoke so obliquely he couldn't work out what response she wanted, if any. And people said *he* was the mad one. She closed her eyes and settled back amongst the cushions. Too restless to sit down, he resumed his position by the window. He could hear the noise quite clearly under the soft, even sounds of his mum's breathing. It had changed again. Now it was rustling, hissing with urgency.

'Can you hear anything?' he asked.

'The wind,' she replied, without opening her eyes.

'Anything else?'

'The waves?'

Gripped with a sudden, restless desire to investigate, he picked up his fleece from the back of the chair.

'Where are you going?'

'Outside.'

'Are you alright?'

'Yeah, why?'

'You don't seem to be able to sit still.'

There was a question implicit in the statement: should I be getting concerned? He'd read the leaflets they gave her, the ones written for relatives of people who had the Condition. Be Alert To Any Changes. Intervene Swiftly. She was only trying to help, but he didn't like to be so constantly, closely scrutinised.

He avoided her eye by bending to put on his shoes. 'I just need a walk, that's all. We've been cooped up in here all day. The rain's finally stopped.'

'I should have chosen a place with more to do. Somewhere hotter,' she said.

He finished tying his laces and stood up, noticing how pale she looked. Her skin was paper thin and her delicate, thread-like veins were clearly visible. They were the same deep blue as the underside of an iceberg. In the past year she'd aged a decade. Pain did that to people. He wasn't sure if it was because of her arthritis, or because Dad had died. She never wanted to talk about either. That was where Anna got it from, he realised suddenly.

'We're going to have a great time here, I can tell,' he said, kissing her gently on the forehead.

He shut the door softly behind him. Outside, the darkness howled.

7 | REBECCA

Rebecca pushed herself back against the sofa cushions and stretched out her legs. She could hear the internal creak of her joints as she did so. It was her own fault for not doing her exercises earlier in the day, but she hadn't wanted Daniel and Anna to see how stiff she had become. When they were growing up she'd run half-marathons and gone rock climbing, and the thought of them making the comparison between then and now was almost unbearable. She shuffled forward to the edge of the sofa and took a deep breath. As she exhaled, she slowly leaned forward. A little further, a little further. But she could no longer touch the floor. Defeated, she straightened up. Some days she stopped the exercises here. It felt so futile. But she knew if she didn't do them tonight she'd be as stiff as a board tomorrow, and who wanted that when there was a whole island to explore? She wanted to walk to the volcanologists' research hut. It was a shame none of the researchers were here now. She had hoped she might be able to talk to someone about Jake. But then again, they were unlikely to know why he'd stopped writing.

She pulled herself up off the sofa and began turning her neck slowly from side to side. Three years ago, that's when the pains in her knees and shoulders had first begun. A sharp ache, as if there were rocks growing in her bones. Doctor Greene had been the one to see her. Over the years he'd examined her for all sorts of sprains, strains and fractures. There couldn't be many parts of her body that he hadn't palpated with his warm, firm fingers, quietly assessing for damage. She'd winced as he'd prodded her knees with his thumbs and told her she should have come in sooner, that he was referring her to a specialist. Whilst she'd waited for the phone call she'd read up on the symptoms. Seen the black-and-white photographs that accompanied the descriptions: the oversized bones, the under-sized bodies and limbs; everything curved and angled wrongly. But the names were incantations that tripped off her tongue – osteomalacia, osteomyelitis, osteochondritis. Rheumatoid arthritis did not have such a ring to it. When the specialist told her, the consonants hit her ears as harsh as hammer blows.

Afterwards she'd driven to Ranworth Broad and sat on her favourite bench. The clouds were yellowed underneath and dark red on top. The fading light had darkened the reeds into stiff tufts, like hair. She'd inhaled the dank smell of rot and mud that came off the marshes and thought, at least it's not cancer. A gull curved through the air, flapping its wings

to stay upright. It hit a thermal and rose, circling slowly, its body turning blue then orange as it moved through different patches of light.

Now for the shoulders. She had to shrug them in circles, first one way, then the other. This exercise hurt. Her neck was one of her more troublesome areas. William hadn't believed her at first, when she'd told him how much it was hurting her to make love. He must have thought she'd lost interest in him again, as she had done all those years ago when she'd begun her affair with Jake. It sounded ridiculous, but when she'd had sex with her husband she had felt as if she were being unfaithful to her lover.

Even now, fourteen years after he'd broken off contact, memories of Jake still emerged with a clarity that surprised her. She remembered a cold rain-battered walk along the North Norfolk coast and soggy fish and chips in a windy, desolate seaside town. Stripping off wet clothes and fucking on his living room couch. Showering together afterwards. She closed her eyes, almost able to feel the warm water blurring the contours of her body, Jake squeezing shower gel onto his hand and lathering her breasts and back. He'd even washed behind her ears.

'They remind me of seashells', he'd said, his soapy finger tracing the curve from helix to concha to antitragus to lobe.

Would anyone ever touch her like that again? She moved onto her arms, slowly stretching them above her head, and then back to her sides. As she repeated the exercise, she felt the stiffness recede slightly. Moments like this gave her hope that she still had a few more independent years in her. Tommy and Anna were mentioning the word 'help' with increasing frequency. Daniel, on the other hand, kept going on at her about putting an advert in the Guardian to, in his words, 'sniff out a classy fuck'. His friend's parents had recently got divorced, and he had suggested that he set her up. So far, she'd resisted these attempts. It had been a long time since she'd felt herself sexually attracted to anyone. These days, she was so dry. The last few times with William had been painful. But the thought of a life without intimacy was a chilling one. She wasn't quite ready to give up on all that just yet. Perhaps she should let Daniel help her find a date.

She let her arms fall to her sides and balled her hands into fists. Clench, unclench. How stiff they were. If only there was a way of making her son's life easier too. His world was full of prophetic nightmares, guiding voices and invisible threats. One of the most terrifying moments of her life was encountering him in the bathroom, standing over a scarlet sink with a kitchen knife trembling over his blood-soaked wrist. 'They told me to do it', he'd

said, and in the heartrending brutality of that moment it could not have seemed less of a cliché.

She lay down on the floor, with her knees bent, and began to straighten each leg in turn. Had she always known about the Condition, even before it reared its ugly head, marring her son's adolescence? When had she realised the extent and cadences of his sensitivity? She remembered taking him sailing on the boating lake near Lowestoft when he was five years old. They'd seen a dead fish floating on top of the flat, silver expanse of water. Its spine was curved, mouth slightly agape. Daniel had cried bitterly because it didn't look like a fish anymore. He'd realised that in death things can no longer be recognised as themselves. But no, there was a moment a year or so before that. They'd been walking along the beach after a storm, picking up driftwood. He hadn't liked how light the sticks were, had let the ones he was holding clatter to the ground and curled up on the sand in front of her.

'Do we get that light when we die? Do we get light when we die?' he'd asked over and over, until he started to hyperventilate and his body went rigid.

The waves crashed on the shore inches away from him. She'd scooped him away from the encroaching tide and walked up the beach to the concrete breakers. Sat holding him on her lap until he recovered enough to tell her one of the tangential stories he used to mystify her with as a child. Whilst she listened she'd picked grains of sand out of his hair. When he'd realised what she was doing he curled his small hand in hers and gently tugged it away, without pausing in his story.

She let her knees fall out to the sides, stretching her hips. Did these memories form a pattern? Even if she'd uncovered one she wouldn't have been able to do a thing about it. It was impossible to fight genetics. She wondered why some people didn't believe in destiny, when how they behaved and how they looked and some of the many ways they would suffer was part of their DNA – fate encoded at a cellular level, a code that nobody had succeeded in deciphering completely. To her, that was a relief. She would not have wanted to know about her RA or Daniel's Condition any earlier than was necessary.

All that was left to do was her feet and ankles. She got to her feet and sat back down in her chair. The exercises had tired her out, or perhaps that was more to do with the travelling. As she slowly rotated her ankles, she felt her eyes begin to close. But then the fire shifted and the dull sound of a peat block striking metal made her jump. She opened her eyes again. It wouldn't do for Anna or Daniel to find her asleep on the sofa like an old woman. Where were they both anyway? Anna must still be sulking upstairs. Honestly, she would have thought the two of them would have grown out of such stupid bickering by now.

Perhaps she was being naïve. They had been fighting since they had been able to tell each other apart. When she'd first found out that she was going to have twins she'd imagined two identical, dark-haired boys wearing matching outfits and finishing each other's sentences. But Anna and Daniel were dizygotic – two separate eggs fertilised by two separate sperm – and they couldn't be more different. That had been apparent minutes after she'd first been handed them, too sweaty and exhausted to feel the warm rush of maternal love she had been told to expect. Anna's mouth had immediately fastened to her nipple and she'd sucked until she fell into a blissful sleep, whereas Daniel had peered at her with dark clouded eyes and then burst into a high-pitched wail, disturbed even then by things nobody else could see or hear.

What had he heard earlier? Please let it just be the waves, or the wind rattling the windows in rhythms free of any dark undertones. She hoped that he hadn't gone off in search of something that wasn't there. Perhaps she should go and take a quick look outside just in case. She eased herself to her feet and put on a thick jumper. It did not shield her from the blast of icy air that rushed in when she opened the front door. Shivering, fingers already numb, she took a step back. But to close the door and go back to her warm seat by the fire would have been an admission of defeat. She remained standing in the doorway, hands jammed in her pockets and body braced against the cold. The rain had stopped but swathes of dark cloud still covered the sky, obscuring the stars and smudging the moon. It was not possible to see the lights of the village from here. There was no way of knowing where the land ended and the sea began. Her eyes searched out the darkness for her son, but she saw nothing. There was no light on in the shed. She would just have to trust him – hopefully he hadn't gone far.

Above her came a sudden sharp cry. She stiffened in shock and slammed the door. It was just a bird, she told herself, but a deep, irrational instinct prevented her from opening it again. She placed her palms against the door, aware that only a couple of inches of inert wood lay between her and the outside world. It was still possible to hear the waves and she began to pick out strange, predatory notes underneath the crash and suck of the tide. She wondered – and not for the first time – if her son could hear the world more clearly than everyone else. As quickly as she could she made her way back to the sofa, and wrapped herself in the blanket, breathing heavily, her chest tight. If only there was someone here to laugh it off with. But she was alone. She reached for her rucksack, unzipped the pocket hidden inside the opening flap, and pulled out the bundle of letters that she'd brought with her.

There had been many times, in her relationship with Jake, that they were apart. His fieldwork had taken him to the most out-of-the-way places, sometimes for months on end. Because there was never any Wi-Fi, he'd written letters to her during these absences. Every time one arrived it had brightened up her day. They were surprisingly eloquent. She liked the physicality of them too; the feel of the paper, the smudges here and there of ink or coffee. So much more personal than an email. *Burn this after you've read it*, the first one had said. But she'd hidden them in the lining of her jewellery box instead. William had always been out at work when the letters arrived. Since her husband's death, she'd brought her ex-lover's letters out from their hiding place. They were all that was left of her relationship with Jake. Ink slowly fading on crumpled paper. Letters which she'd read and reread. Words which had led her here to Bodeg, the island he'd been staying at when he penned his final lines to her.

8 | DANIEL

As he was standing on the darkened porch of the shed, listening, he saw the front door open. His mum appeared, a mosquito trapped within an amber rectangle of light. Back in Norfolk he saw her standing in the open doorway of her house most evenings, as if looking for something in the darkness. He never left his caravan and went over there because it didn't seem, from where he stood, that he was what she wanted to find. He wasn't sure if she knew herself. Perhaps she was searching for one of the lives she could have lived if a day or a month or a decision had unfolded differently, one that had slid away from her like butter curling under the blade of a knife. He knew all about that. Every now and then he was visited by one of his other selves. Sometimes they had more money, sometimes they were straight and most of the time they were happier. But they all still had the Condition. It was strange that although it allowed him to see things everyone else said weren't there, it was the most solid thing about him.

His mum shut the door, folding the cottage back into shadow. The noise, which had quietened in her presence, grew louder once again: notes of purple melancholy, bruised longings, ashen chords of bitterness. He lit a cigarette, mainly for the illusion of warmth, and tried to work out where the noise was coming from. Sometimes he saw what someone religious might call angels: winged humanoids with bodies made of light. But they had never spoken to him before. Sometimes the devil spoke to him too. But he could hear that voice inside his head, like it had taken root inside his skull and was growing in there. This was different. The sounds he could hear were rising up from the darkness all around him, and were moving towards him in all directions, tangling together in a hissed symphony. He couldn't quite work out if he was hearing one Thing or many. The sounds became clearer the longer he listened, as if he were tuning a radio. Then they began to dissolve into one voice, speaking unfamiliar words in a different language. But as he continued to listen the odd syllable began to detach itself from the noise: 'wyt', 'heet', 'brestin'.

Perhaps the Thing was talking in the language they spoke on the island. He'd have to remember the words and ask the ferryman to translate. But he must remember to say it was something he'd heard from one of the islanders. Admitting you could hear a disembodied voice never helped you get laid. On the other hand, maybe he should just try and communicate with the Thing.

'Can you speak English?'

‘A furless...like Unna...,’ the voice said slowly, as if struggling with unfamiliar syllables.

‘Who’s Unna?’

‘Come,’ it ordered. Each time, it spoke a little more clearly. But the edges of its words were still blurred with white noise.

‘Are you the devil?’

‘What is the defyl?’

‘An evil man. The most evil man in the whole world.’

‘I am not a man,’ the Thing said, spitting out the final syllable with distaste.

Come to think of it, was the devil a man? Wasn’t he an angel that had been kicked out of heaven for wanting to rebel against God?

‘Are you an angel?’

‘What is an angel?’

Daniel sighed. ‘It doesn’t matter.’

‘Come with me.’

‘Fine.’

He stepped out from the porch into the Arctic night. He couldn’t find the path that led back to the road. It wasn’t until he’d smacked his shins a couple of times that he realised he could navigate by bending down and running his hands along the rock. As his gloved hands brushed their rough edges he was sure he could feel faint vibrations, and wondered if that was anything to do with the voice he’d heard.

‘Where are you?’ he called, once he reached the main road.

‘Here...’ the Thing said.

Daniel sighed. ‘I can’t see anyone.’

The Thing made a sound like two pieces of rock scraping together.

‘Are you laughing at me?’

‘This way...come!’

A sudden gust of wind buffeted him to the right. He stumbled, caught off guard.

‘For fucks sake, why not just give me directions?’ he asked.

A sharp whistling sound reverberated in his ears. That was it laughing. It was teasing him, he realised, a bit like a giant cat with a mouse. He’d play along, for now. More exciting than sitting inside doing fuck all.

He began walking slowly down the track towards the village. It was becoming slightly easier now his eyes had adjusted to the night. He could make out the sinuous curves

of the path and the grass undulating in the wind, pockmarked with black boulders. The sea was an ink-black absence, but as he walked the clouds slowly parted to reveal a cold blue moon and a sky punctured with long dead points of light. The sound impelled him down the hill and into the village. The lights were off in all the houses but wisps of smoke rose from a few chimneys and were dissipated by the wind. Inside people lay sleeping, dreaming of warmer places. A few streetlamps lined the high street, spilling yellow pools of light onto the road. He could pick out the cracks between each brick, his own dark reflection moving across the glass shopfronts. What time was it? If you stood in front of a mirror and said bloodymarybloodymarybloodymary on the stroke of midnight, an angry headless woman would appear behind you and cut your head off. If you stepped on a crack it would widen and when you slipped through it you would fall forever.

He averted his eyes and continued walking. On the left a flight of steps led to the church. There was no graveyard as far as he could see, just a manicured lawn surrounded by a low picket fence, and he found himself hurrying past. It was not long before he reached the last building in the village. The asphalt road became a dirt track once again.

Away from the houses he could hear it again, a noise that swelled and pulsated with increasing urgency.

‘I hope we’re close,’ he said.

‘Close,’ it repeated. ‘Come closer.’

The voice now seemed to be located a couple of metres away from his left ear. He took a step towards the sound. The toe of his boot struck rock. Caught off balance he stumbled and fell forward with arms outstretched, smacking his hands. The pain of it made him cry out, but he recovered and continued onwards, groping his way across the rocks on hands and knees. In some places they were smooth as oiled bone, but there were jagged edges too, cutting his palms and bruising his knees. It was so cold his eyes were streaming. His hands and feet were stiff as claws. Only the certainty that he was on the brink of some important discovery prevented him from giving up and going home.

He reached out for the next boulder and his hand clutched at empty space. He fell forward, hitting both knees.

‘Shit. Ouch.’

Once he’d recovered from the shock of the fall he began to feel his way forward with his hands. He was surprised when his fingers brushed against something soft and moist. Moss. He leaned forward, moving his hands in slow, sweeping circles. Once again there was that odd pulsating energy at his fingertips, and the air hissed and sighed around him.

‘Unnnaunnnnaunnnnaunnnna.’

The land around him sloped gently upwards, and he realised he was in a moss-covered crater with a narrow gravel path zig-zagging up its sides. Then his hands knocked against a smooth object, about the size of his face. It was perfectly round, a stone worn smooth by the tide. Perhaps it had come from the beach. Who had placed it here? He scabbled in the grit and finally succeeded in dislodging it. As he ran his fingertips across the stone’s surface he encountered a scratched pattern. He lifted it close to his face. A static hum rose into the air alongside it. But it was too dark to see. He took off his gloves, traced curves and angles with his fingers, but they were too numbed by the cold to feel anything.

‘Who the fuck are you? What the fuck is this?’ he shouted into the darkness.

A soft glow spilled out onto the lava-field. He cast around in search of its source. A square of golden light had materialised. It was a window, the curtains pulled back. It was so dark he hadn’t realised that there was a house nearby. At least now he could see a little better. He looked down at the boulder and saw a crude etching of a woman’s face.

‘So Unna was a woman?’ he whispered.

The window opened and a man leant out, his features obscured.

‘HAVOOTSUAGERA!’ the man shouted, or something similar, which probably meant *what the fuck are you doing in my garden?*

Daniel dropped the stone and scrambled hastily out of the crater. He did not stop to look behind him. The others would kill him if he got in trouble on his first night here. As quickly as he could, he scrambled away, the light from the window enabling him to find his way more easily than before. His feet skidded on the loose scree as he tried his best to disappear.

She awoke suddenly. Her nightie was slick with sweat and her heart was hammering as if she'd just done fifteen minutes on the running machine. In the nightmare she'd been naked, standing against a concrete post with her arms tied above her head and her body exposed. Someone had been sitting on a chair in a shadowed corner of the room, watching her struggle in silence. He'd stood up and walked slowly towards her with a hungry look in his eyes. But she'd woken before he'd even touched her.

She threw off the covers to let herself cool down. Surprisingly, the dream hadn't left her feeling scared. Instead she felt a nagging sense of frustration, as if it had ended too soon. It really had been extraordinarily vivid. It was rare for her to remember a dream in its entirety – normally she recalled only hazy scenes, which were always very like real life. Missing an appointment she had the next day, some of the skinny bitches at the gym where she worked laughing behind their hands at how fat she was. Sometimes she argued with Tommy in her dreams, and then woke up pissed off with him in the morning.

The sweat on her body was beginning to cool. She pulled the blankets up again and snuggled down into them, willing herself back to sleep. No use. Her mouth was dry and her bladder was full. Whether she wanted to or not, she was going to have to get up.

The wooden floor was cold on the soles of her feet and the floorboards creaked as she walked across the bedroom. Her mother had left the light on in the hall, making it easy for her to see her way downstairs to the bathroom. Afterwards she caught sight of herself in the mirror and grimaced. Her hair could do with a wash and she really did need to lose some weight. There were always so many cakes leftover from the market. She must start giving them to her friends instead of scarfing them down herself. As she looked at the pale flesh spilling over the waistband of her trousers she promised herself she'd eat as little as possible here and exercise every day. Then when she got home the first thing Tommy would want to do is take her upstairs and shag her without asking whether she was sure that she'd remembered to take the pill today. He must be missing her. She'd have to find a phone tomorrow and call him.

The light was still on in the lounge. Neither her brother nor her mother had bothered to wipe the table or do the washing up. She put the plates and cups into the sink. China clattered loudly against porcelain. A startled moan made her jump. She picked up a butter knife, the closest thing to hand.

‘Who’s that?’ she asked.

There was the sound of something sliding to the floor and her mum sat up.

‘Jesus Mum, you scared me. I thought you were upstairs,’ she said crossly.

‘Sorry. I must have fallen asleep on the sofa.’

‘Shall we go upstairs?’ she asked.

‘Hang on, just let me...’

Her mum picked up some pieces of paper and rapidly stuffed them into an envelope.

‘What’s that?’ she asked, going closer.

‘Nothing. Just a letter.’

‘Who from?’

‘Oh, nobody you know,’ her mum said, putting the envelope hurriedly into the top pocket of her rucksack. Anna remembered what Daniel had said earlier. Occasionally his lies had a grain of truth in them – perhaps her mother was corresponding with someone she’d met recently. It had to be someone she was interested in. There’d be no reason to bring letters on holiday unless they were romantic ones.

‘New boyfriend?’ she asked.

‘Don’t be silly. Who on earth would be interested in an old woman like me?’

‘You’re only sixty-four.’

‘That’s old enough. Let’s go upstairs.’

Her mum hobbled slowly towards the door. She looked far too frail to be having sex with anyone. Surely Daniel couldn’t be telling the truth about a boyfriend? Even if he was, it didn’t make sense that she’d brought the letters here. Her mum was the least sentimental person she knew, and had an amazing memory, good enough to memorise a letter. She was suddenly possessed by a desire to read them, even if just to prove Daniel wrong. She dismissed the thought immediately. It was wrong to snoop through other people’s things.

‘Are you coming?’ her mum asked from the doorway.

‘Just getting water. Would you like some?’

‘Please.’

Anna filled two glasses. Now the room was quiet she could hear the waves crashing outside, perilously close to the house. It would be awful if the tides rose and the house flooded. She pictured a torrent of water bursting through the living room and dragging them both out to sea. How defenceless they’d be, pale dolls with useless limbs, lungs filling with water until their heavy, bloated bodies sank into liquid darkness. The picture in her mind

startled her. She was not prone to violent imaginings. Shaking her head to dislodge it, she shut the door of the living room and headed upstairs to higher ground.

10 | REBECCA

Rebecca looked out of the window at a different island to the one they'd landed on yesterday. The sun was low in the sky, bathing the landscape with clear pale light, and the sea was a deep inky blue. As she took in the view she felt yesterday's melancholia ebb away. It was a day with the capacity to completely erase the one before. She began to look upon the island with something akin to tenderness, scanning its ridges and swells for places nearby that could be explored. There was a wooden scaffold halfway up the hill beyond the track. Then, mere metres from the house and half-hidden by an outcrop of rock, she saw a narrow expanse of black sand. She was surprised she hadn't registered it yesterday, but it was hard to notice everything in a place upon arrival, especially one half rubbed out by the rain.

It would be at least an hour before the others awoke. Quickly, quietly, she left the house. On family holidays, when the twins were young, solitude had felt like something that must be snatched. William had made her feel guilty for wanting to be alone.

'But we came here together,' he'd tell her mournfully.

Eventually she'd discovered that the way to get time to herself was to package it as a selfless gesture.

'Someone has to get the milk,' she'd say, as it started to rain. Or, 'I'll walk down to the harbour and see about a boat trip tomorrow. Why don't you rest, William? You said you were tired.'

She'd return to find her husband and daughter playing a game together. Free from any parental scrutiny Daniel would be happily engaged in one of his own projects outside. Making mud pies or obstacle courses for woodlice, licking every stone in the garden. Upon her return, William would remember he had a son and chastise Daniel for whatever he happened to be doing. Then Anna would get upset at having her game interrupted. Her presence inevitably ruptured the harmony established in her absence. She'd wondered on more than one occasion if it might have been better if she'd stayed away.

She clambered across the rocks and down onto the beach. It was larger than it appeared from the house, although nothing like the ones in Norfolk, which stretched on for miles. But it gave her the same end-of-the-world feeling. She stared out at the black volcanic sand in front of her, at a wide sky beginning to be smudged with cloud. Chalk, soft blue and charcoal hues. All she could hear was the squalling of birds, the crash of the waves and the wind blowing in from the north. Last night's disquiet began to feel irrational. The sea was

not a malevolent predator and neither were the birds riding the thermals above her. There had been a dream too, one she had woken from with her hands clenched tightly, painfully, around the blankets, but the only memory that remained from it was the sensation of someone else's body moving over hers.

She began to make her way across the beach, fascinated by what she could see on the ground in front of her. Bleached bones. The delicate skeletons of fish. Small green and white nuggets of frosted sea glass. The tide had gone out, leaving a covering of seaweed. Vibrant green fronds encrusted with tiny white barnacles. Brown strands like gelatinous leather, whorled all over with the traces of fingerprints. Some were the colour of parchment and old blood, strips of cured skin preserving wounds that would never heal. She wondered if any of it were edible. She'd read stories of islanders who, during hard times, had little to eat but seaweed and the cockles they managed to pry off the rocks. These days, seaweed was more a foodstuff of the middle-class foragers. She'd read an article that said dulse, a flat-ribbed red seaweed, was the new bacon. Anna wouldn't be too impressed if she picked some and brought it home for breakfast, though. It was unlikely she'd be impressed with anything the island had to offer. Which was what, exactly? Peace? Seclusion? None of them led particularly stressful lives. There wasn't a tourist agency on the island but there must be someone who'd be able to take them on a sightseeing trip, or maybe rent them fishing rods and tackle. She knew how to handle a small motorboat too, but Anna wouldn't be interested in doing that. What on earth were the three of them going to do for the next twelve days? If only she'd come here by herself.

She'd always wanted to know what had happened to Jake here. Before he'd departed for Bodeg he'd suggested they move to New Zealand, his birthplace, together.

'You'd love it there. I know you'd miss the twins, but they could come and stay with us. Think about it,' he said.

How hard it had seemed back then, the idea of turning her back on one life and walking straight into another. Women weren't supposed to leave their children and pursue their lovers to the other side of the world. Of course, women weren't supposed to do a lot of things, but that had never stopped them. Perhaps it wouldn't have stopped her either. But she'd never had the chance to make the decision. After her initial attempts to contact him she hadn't tried again. He obviously didn't want to see her. Only once, late at night, after drinking a bottle of wine, did she ever stoop to asking why. That last-ditch attempt – her embarrassingly effusive, poorly constructed email – had gone unanswered.

And so she'd tried to forget him. She'd turned her attention back to her family, to William. A new job as a biology lecturer at the local college had consumed a lot of spare time. Even so, she'd been there for Daniel when he'd gotten sick. Family holidays, birthdays and anniversaries passed in succession. Memories of Jake resurfaced only in odd moments of solitude. The trouble was, since she'd retired and since William had died, there were a whole lot more of these. As hours, days, weeks stretched into one another it was not her husband she mourned, but Jake. And the vague yearning to visit Bodeg had crystallised into something of an obsession. She began to dream about islands of black rock suspended in a dark blue ocean, about drifting icebergs and a salty wind tangling her hair.

She'd first met Jake on the train from London to Norwich. Even though she had a reservation somewhere else she sat down opposite him, attracted both by his outdoorsy appearance and the quiet absorption in the book he was reading.

'What's it about?' she'd asked.

'Snow. I like reading books about the cold in summer – helps keep the temperature down,' he said. Then he returned his attention to the book.

It had occurred to her then that no man had ever looked at her with the fascinated tenderness that he was bestowing upon these lines of print. That he would probably continue to read in this manner for minutes, even hours, whereas men's desiring glances had skimmed her body for mere seconds. And then she had to laugh, because she was jealous of a book.

He looked up. 'May I know what's so funny?'

Rebecca froze. She couldn't tell him the truth and she had never been one for making up jokes, or, for that matter, laughing when everyone else did.

'That,' she said, gesturing wildly out of the window.

'What?'

They both turned. She sought frantically for humour on the concrete platform amongst pale legs and sunburnt shoulders, amongst hastily smoked cigarettes and cumbersome suitcases. Her eyes alighted upon an obese lady with a quivering, near-skeletal whippet.

'There – that woman looks nothing like her dog,' she said triumphantly.

He looked out of the window, and then back at her. Much later he told her that he'd been compelled by the transparency of her lie. He wanted to know what she had really been thinking and why she had felt the necessity to hide it. But of course he'd said nothing at the time. Instead he put the book down and reached into his bag.

‘I have another way of keeping cool, if you’d like one,’ he said, placing a couple of beers on the table.

They talked until the journey’s end. He told her he was a volcanologist. Even the news that he was coming to Norwich to take up a lecturing post didn’t stop her imagining him in Indiana Jones garb, climbing the burnt slopes of a volcano, oblivious to the smoke and fire gushing from its crater. She felt frumpy, prosaic, in comparison, especially when he indicated the band on her finger and asked her if she had a family. She told him she had a husband, and twins. What she didn’t say was that after four years of no sleep, dirty nappies and baby-sick she wanted some excitement. He soon figured that out by himself.

In those early days, it had been easy to find time to see him. William worked long hours and the twins were away at school all day. She had often been able to spend entire mornings or afternoons at his rented flat. After only a few encounters she was surprised to realise she’d been fucking him with her eyes open. This was unusual. She’d always found an orgasm to be a solitary act, even during sex. To climax she had to shut her eyes to block out her lover’s features. Men’s faces were off-putting when they were contorted with lust. Their eyes often went curiously blank too, as if her body wasn’t flesh and bone but transparent like glass, something to be looked through. But she couldn’t tear her eyes away from Jake during sex. She watched him until the contours of his face blurred and his face seemed to shine with a peach coloured light. For the first time in her life she made eye contact as she came.

She continued walking slowly along the beach, feeling the stiffness in her body gradually begin to recede. Today was a good day, she could feel it. Always worth capitalising. She’d send Anna and Daniel to buy food from the village and in their absence she’d go to the research station. Even if she found nothing there it would be interesting to see where he’d worked.

The smell of putrefaction wafted across to her on the breeze. Seconds later she encountered its source. A seal carcass, the flesh rotted away. She stared at the glutinous mass of skin and dark, matted fur. It was only when she looked closer that she saw the green vertebrae and the purple ribs arching upwards like wings. A misnomer, that bones didn’t decay. Unless they became frozen in ice or were preserved in certain types of soils, they would slowly turn to dust. Schopenhauer had written that the fundamental difference between humans and animals is the knowledge that we are one day going to die. She’d read him as a teenager and cried in the shower afterwards, heavy with the knowledge that sooner or later she’d cease to exist, that maggots would burrow their way into her flesh and devour

the very same body she longed for someone to touch, hold, caress. Even today she still wasn't fully reconciled to the fact that one day she'd be a putrefied mess, like the seal on the beach. But the knowledge of her own finitude had not led her to live her life with any urgency. The bigger a decision the longer she agonised over it. With Jake she'd spent the entirety of their affair deciding: should she break it off with him or with William?

Last night she had re-read the two letters Jake had sent to her whilst here. The first had been posted shortly after he arrived. It was full of enthusiasm, full of descriptions of the house and the research station.

This morning I woke up and saw something on the beach by the house. I thought it was a seal colony, but when I got closer I saw that the shores were speckled with icebergs, he'd written. They were so beautiful, like mirrored glass.

Now she was standing on the same beach he had walked along, but seeing nothing of the sort. And what of the other letter? It had only been a page long. Noticeably less enthusiastic in tone, almost terse. This one mentioned the stresses of the project – cold weather, long hours, a lack of welcome from the community. It was not the first letter like it. Being a volcanologist was a precarious job in more ways than one. To come into a small community as both outsider and expert often caused tensions.

The only good thing about today was my lunch. Unna, the local girl employed to feed us, got hold of a lobster. She brought a bisque alongside our usual sandwiches.

Perhaps, if she could find this girl, she might be able to get a little more insight into Jake's frame of mind when he'd been here. It shouldn't be hard on an island this size. The ferry captain spoke English. Perhaps she could ask him.

The smell of the seal carcass had become unbearable. She turned and began walking towards the ocean. The tide was coming in. She stood and watched the waves roll towards her and break on the shore, wondering if Jake had ever done the same. The wet sand at the tideline shone like oil in the sun. A plastic bottle bobbed in a rock pool close by. Perhaps it had been cast into the ocean thousands of miles away, by an explorer huddled on the icy shores of an island even further north. She picked it up but there was no message. All it contained was brackish salt water. What had she expected – that she was suddenly no longer alone? There was nobody trying to communicate with her, no hand on her shoulder and no warm breath tickling her ear, whispering secrets. If things had been different, if she'd been different, perhaps she and Jake...but no. There was no point yearning for the lives she could have lived. Perhaps whatever choices she made would have led her back here anyway, a solitary figure standing on the water's edge.

11 | ANNA

Anna was in the kitchen, stomach grumbling, when she heard a soft knock on the door.

‘It’s unlocked, Daniel. Just come in!’ she called.

But the door remained firmly closed. Upon opening it she found a brown paper bag on the doorstep. Inside was a loaf of bread, six eggs, a stick of butter wrapped in cling film and a plastic bottle of milk. At first she thought her mum must have woken up early and gone to the village, but then she saw a tall dark-haired man walking rapidly away from the house.

‘Hello? Hey!’ she called.

The man turned to face her. It was the ferry captain from yesterday.

‘Thanks!’ she shouted.

He nodded and then walked away. It was a generous gesture. Or perhaps it was included in the cost of renting the house. Either way, she was glad of the food.

A few minutes later, as she was scrambling the eggs and the bread was toasting under the grill, the door opened and she heard her mum and Daniel in the hallway.

‘Have you been walking together?’ she asked when they came in, slightly hurt they’d gone without her.

‘I have. This lazy-bones has been sleeping. Something smells good. Well done for getting supplies so early,’ her mum said, as she came into the room.

‘I didn’t. The ferry captain dropped them off,’ she replied, taking the pan off the hob.

‘Oh. That was nice of him.’

‘Unless it’s poisoned,’ Daniel said.

His voice sounded pained. She looked round and saw he was wearing the same clothes he’d gone to bed in, although now his trousers were ripped, exposing bloodied knees.

‘What happened to you?’ she asked.

‘I fell over.’

‘Outside the shed?’

‘Yeah. Where else would I go?’

‘There’s no need to get defensive. Let me put some cream on that.’

‘You sound like Mum,’ Daniel grumbled, but he sat down at the kitchen table with his legs outstretched.

‘Can you watch the toast?’

Her mum nodded.

She took the eggs off the heat and went to fetch the antiseptic and some cotton wool pads. By the time she returned Daniel had placed his hands on the table, palms upward. They were just as lacerated as his knees. She asked no questions. Instead she fetched a bowl of warm water and slowly began to clean the grit out of his grazes. Although she felt his body tense every now and then, he made no complaints.

‘Thanks,’ he said, when she’d finished.

He looked exhausted. She fought the urge to hug him. Why did she feel most affectionate towards him when he was hurt?

‘Shall we have breakfast now?’ she asked.

As soon as she said it she became conscious of the smell of burning. She looked over at the kitchen. Her mum was standing next to the grill, staring into space, completely oblivious of the curl of black smoke that was rising from it. Since Dad’s death she’d been so distracted.

‘Mum!’

Her mum started and looked round helplessly. ‘What’s wrong?’

‘Nothing. Why don’t you sit down with Daniel and I’ll finish up,’ she said, walking back into the kitchen and tipping the charred toast into the bin. She’d been right – what would the two of them do without her?

After breakfast, Anna walked into to the village to get some more supplies, leaving Daniel on the sofa watching a film on her iPad and her mum curled up on a chair reading. The weather was much better today. It was still a lot colder than England, but the sun was out. Even so, there was nobody around in the village. The place was still, as if someone had pointed a TV remote at each house in turn and pressed pause, freezing people where they sat on the sofa or at the kitchen table, spoons suspended in mid-air and mouths open. All the curtains were drawn. Perhaps the island’s inhabitants were allergic to sunlight and so when it was nice out they hid inside, like moles. Their houses were all very bedraggled, the paint and plaster peeling from the walls and timbers. Weirdly, though, their tiny front gardens were very well kept, all bordered with fences painted a brilliant white.

She passed several shops before she found one that was open, and pushed open the door. The bell clanged, but the woman at the counter – who was stout, had a flesh-coloured mole on her chin and was sporting an awful perm – was too busy chatting to a similarly shaped- man to pay any attention to her. She picked up a basket. There wasn’t much food on the shelves. So much for eating healthily, she thought, picking up some wilted lettuce and a bag of onions with bright green shoots curling from their plump brown bodies. She found

some chunks of unidentifiable meat in the freezer, and a cellophane bag of something that could be cream.

As she walked up to the counter she noticed that the man and woman were kissing each other with tongues. They must have got together in later life. Couples that had been together for ages never behaved like horny teenagers. The heat rose in her cheeks whilst they continued kissing, completely oblivious to her. It really was very impolite. But maybe it was normal behaviour on the island. Tommy wouldn't like that, if he were here – he hated PDAs. She turned away and resumed wandering the aisles, adding a bag of muddy potatoes, some tinned tomatoes, pasta, cheese and ingredients for a chocolate cake to her basket. Eventually the couple broke apart. The woman watched misty-eyed as her partner lumbered across the room and out the door. Anna seized her chance and went back over to the counter.

'Hi,' she said awkwardly, handing over her items.

'Hi,' the woman replied brusquely, her eyes slowly refocusing into hard black points, like volcanic stone, as she slowly tapped the prices into an ancient till. Anna decided she was not the person to ask about internet cafes or international phones. She paid the over-the-top price the woman charged and left the shop. The man was outside, puffing on a cigarette and staring longingly through the window. He could obviously see something she couldn't. They were going to shag each other at the first opportunity, unless they ate too much for dinner and then were too full. That happened to her and Tommy all the time. The night before she left she'd cooked him salmon and steamed vegetables. He'd got the hint. But when they were doing it all she'd been able to think about was the crack on the bedroom ceiling, and how she'd have to get him to repaint it. Several minutes later, it was over.

'Did you?' he asked, after he'd rolled off her and they were lying side by side.

'Almost. Not quite.'

'We can sort that out.'

He'd turned towards her, placed his hand between her legs and started playing about down there. But the desire she'd felt before sex had completely disappeared and all she'd experienced was a tickling sensation. She'd tried to will herself into orgasm but the top of his head had proven too distracting. The pink crown of his scalp was visible through his thinning hair, and she got caught up in wondering how long it would be before he went completely bald on top, like his father. In the end she'd thrown back her head and faked it. She didn't like lying to Tommy about that, but she didn't want to hurt his feelings either. The sad thing was that he couldn't tell the difference.

The man in the post office was unable to understand her queries about Wi-Fi. She found herself back out on the street, slightly demoralised, holding a dog-eared postcard of a man (who looked suspiciously like the post master) holding a large fish. Now that would be nice. She decided to go down to the harbour and see if any of the fishermen would sell her today's catch.

The concrete on the track was fissured. Straggly weeds pushed up through the cracks. She passed a house encased in wooden scaffolding, which gave the impression that it was being propped upright. It was as if she was walking through the set of a Wild West movie – all that was missing was the tumbleweed. She half expected someone to jump out onto the track and start shooting at her. Nobody did. She arrived at the harbour without incident. It was far colder here, all in shadow, exposed to the wind blowing in from the ocean. She looked around. The fishermen were standing in the same place as they had been yesterday. All of them staring at her and not a fish in sight. They'd think she was a right idiot if she turned around and walked away. So she squared her shoulders and made her way towards them.

As she drew closer she saw that two of the three men had the same dark slanting eyes and black curly hair as the ferry captain. The other had blue eyes and pale hair. She wondered how old he was. It was hard to tell whether his skin was roughened by the wind or by age.

'Hello, I was wondering if you sold your fish,' she began timidly.

'Yes, to the nursing home,' the blonde man replied.

'But to other people. To me?'

'You must go to Ráðbarðurjörð if you want to buy fish.'

'Who's Ra...Ra?' she asked, stumbling over the unfamiliar syllables.

'Ráðbarðurjörð,' he repeated, more slowly.

She tried and failed. His eyes crinkled in the corners as he smiled at her. 'The man who drives the ferry. You have met him yesterday, when you arrived.'

'And, where do I find him?'

'He lives in the last house before the lava field, back the way you came and then right, instead of left back into the village. It is white, with a black roof. You can't miss it. I expect he will be out the front, in his garden,' the fisherman replied.

'I have another question. Is there an internet café here?'

'We have no café. There is Wi-Fi in the restaurant, though. It is open Friday and Saturday evenings.'

It was Sunday. She had to speak to Tommy before then. If only she hadn't taken the crappy spare phone that cost a tenner from Tesco's, then she could have switched her data on.

'Well, is there a phone? One that makes international calls?'

He jerked his thumb. 'Over there. Opposite the ferry.'

'It works?' she asked dubiously.

'I used it to call friends in Norway before.'

'That's where you're from?'

'I was born in Norway, in Tromsø, but I am citizen of the sea,' he said proudly. 'I joined the merchant navy when I was eighteen. Now I am a fisherman. My name is Lief.'

'Anna.'

He looked at her, as if inviting her to confide in him.

'I'm on holiday. With my mum. And my brother. We're twins.'

'You do not appear much alike.'

She'd lost count of the amount of times she'd been told that, but it surprised her that he'd looked at them that closely yesterday. Perhaps their arrival was something of an event on this small island. Not *their* arrival, *her* arrival, she realised suddenly. The other two fishermen were looking at her as if they'd never seen a woman before. Even though she was wearing baggy walking trousers and an anorak their eyes roved across her body, trying to penetrate the thick layers of clothing. She was reminded of her dream, and felt herself flush.

'Well, I'd better go. I need to make this call,' she said.

'If you need anything, then we are here almost every day,' Lief told her.

'I'll bear it in mind,' she replied, as their eyes met. She hoped he didn't think she was flirting. It had come out a bit like that. Quickly she turned away, feeling three sets of eyes lingering on her. It was good it was cold and she was wrapped up, otherwise they'd all be terribly disappointed.

The payphone was easy to find. Its bright orange casing stuck out against the greyness of the harbour. The instructions were written in a language she couldn't understand, but there was a slot for coins. She slipped in a few krona and lifted the receiver. Surprisingly there was a dial tone. She had a sudden urge to hear her dad's voice. If only it was possible. He'd be so sympathetic when he heard about last night's terrible supper and her seasickness on the ferry.

'At least you're there to look after them, love,' he'd say. 'When you get home I'll take you out for dinner.'

How she missed those evenings out with him. And those long lazy Sunday afternoons, chatting away as she helped him cook a roast dinner for the family. The weekends seemed a whole lot longer without him.

She dialled Tommy's number. The phone started ringing.

Hello? Tommy's voice, roughened at the edges by white noise.

'It's me. I just wanted to let you know I arrived safely yesterday. I was sick on the ferry over, though. I wanted to message you last night but there was no Wi-Fi,' she said.

Anna? I can hardly hear you. You arrived?

She cupped her hand over the receiver, pressed her mouth right up against it.

'Is that better?'

A little.

'I'm at the harbour.'

Oh. What's the weather like?

'Sunny. But really cold. What have you been doing today?'

I mowed the lawn. George and I are going to play badminton later. Then we're going to the pub.

'Badminton?'

Thought I'd give it a go. Try something new. Might help me lose the gut.

Why did he always have to think on such a small scale? If he wanted to do something different then why couldn't he book them in on an evening class at the local college, in pottery or stained glass painting or even kayaking? Why couldn't he read the karma sutra and find a new sex position to try? Sign-up to do a charity skydive? Walk across hot coals? Anything at all apart from spend his evenings at the pub or watching TV. She bit back her irritation.

'Well I'm going to go for a walk today. I want to lose some weight whilst I'm here too,' she told him.

That's a good idea.

'Thanks.'

What? I can't hear you.

The wind had picked up. His voice crackled. She wanted to tell him he should say that she was beautiful just the way she was. But there was no point picking an argument now anyway, when they could barely hear each other.

'I miss you,' she said instead.

I think the connection's going.

He was barely audible.

'I miss you!' she shouted.

Still can't hear you.

'Never mind.'

What?

So this was it now. Hundreds of miles apart, shouting into an abyss of static; trying but not quite able to hear each other.

12 | REBECCA

Soon after Anna had gone into town Daniel lay down on the sofa and fell soundly asleep. Rebecca decided to seize the opportunity to visit the research station. Outside, she paused. The ferry captain had said it was near the lava field, behind the village. She could either climb up the hill on the other side of the track, where the elevated vantage point might allow her to locate it, or she could go via the village and ask someone. The former was the immediately more attractive option – she hated asking for directions. This was something William had often joked about. He had said she was the man in the relationship, not him, citing the following as evidence: her aptitude at tabulating data and the fact that she loved playing pool, especially the geometrical precision of lining up the shots, an activity her arthritis was making increasingly difficult. That he'd only seen her cry a couple of times; when her mother died, and when Daniel was first hospitalised. Finally, that she rarely became emotional during arguments, preferring instead to express herself rationally. He had even gone so far as to suggest that she might be on the spectrum: a high-functioning Asperger's sufferer. The comment still stung.

The hill was steeper than it looked. Before she'd even got halfway up she was breathing heavily with exertion. Seconds later, she was forced to stop. Despite the cold weather, she was sweating. She knew she was pushing her body to its limits. A decade ago I would have run up this, she thought. Even the sheer sides of the volcano, which lay just beyond the hill in the middle of the island, wouldn't have daunted her – she'd climbed Kilimanjaro with a university boyfriend. These days, however, what her body could do was rapidly shrinking. But there was no point dwelling on it. Better to thank her blessings that she still had the capacity to get out and about. Some arthritis sufferers were barely able to walk at all. Soon she might number among them.

How bright the ocean looked from where she stood. Yet deep below the surface lay the abyssopelagic zone, a place where no light penetrated. William, like Anna, had been scared of the sea. Jake loved it. In the summertime he had often driven down to Kent and sailed across the channel for a long weekend in Europe. He'd invited her to accompany him, but it had never happened. It would have proved too hard to deceive her family for that length of time. Even inventing a weekly evening class so she could have dinner with Jake had been precarious.

'Why do you smell of garlic?' Daniel had asked once, on her return home.

She'd had to make-up a couple of girl-friends who had invited her out for food after the class (her few real ones would have given the game away). William never said anything about her erratic hours. Perhaps he hadn't cared what she was doing, just so long as she came back.

It was time to continue walking. She told herself she wouldn't stop until she reached the top. Hands on her hips, her breath coming in gasps, she looked at the island laid out below her. The village was to her right, the houses clustered around the harbour and extending out along a couple of streets. Two houses stood in isolation. The first was a large blue building, slightly further inland. The second was a small white house, perched on the island's shoreline beyond the village. On her left-hand side was the volcano. Between the village and the volcano lay the lava field, a tangible reminder of the recent eruption. Her mind calculated angles and distances. She could see that the magma had flowed in a north easterly direction, just missing the village and passing mere metres from the small white house. The islanders had been lucky. She wondered if any outlying houses had been buried under the ash and lava, as they had in Pompeii. Had anybody died? The news reports she'd found varied. One had said no casualties, another said there had been one fatality. A slightly more dubious source had evoked scenes of utter devastation, entire houses and families destroyed. Jake hadn't told her whether there were casualties before he left. The human impact of an eruption interested him less than the volcano itself; the velocity of its pyroclastic flows, the chemical composition of the gases it emitted and the force of the earthquakes that accompanied it. She had never thought that this made him cruel. Once he had told her that she was the only person he loved more than volcanoes. Until that moment, the word 'love' had conjured up for her the image of a feather, white and soft. But Jake transformed its meaning for her, evoking something darker, more intense; four letters that crackled with fire.

Her eyes traced the edges of the lava field, seeking out the scientist's camp. She couldn't see any other buildings, but the ferry captain had told her there was a hut somewhere behind the village. What was that? A patch of green, sticking out amongst the black rock of the lava. Slowly, carefully, she descended the hill towards it. As she drew closer she realised she was looking at a turf roof, so overgrown it was barely recognisable. The walls of the hut were made of dark volcanic stone, indistinguishable in colour from the lava, which was why she hadn't seen it from the top of the hill. The windows were opaque with grime. She walked forward, stood up on tiptoe and peered through the closest one. The interior was dark. All she could see was a rough wooden table holding a stack of files, a chipped white mug and

what looked like an old GIS handset. A thick layer of dust lay over all of it. It hadn't been disturbed in years.

She walked around the outside of the hut, passing a tiltmeter, until she found the front door. Upon trying the handle, she found it was locked. This should not have surprised her. No researcher would be stupid enough to leave it open, allowing anyone and everyone to walk right in and rifle through their work. But she was disappointed, nonetheless. She told herself that even if she had gone inside, there wouldn't have been anything there. Not all answers could be found within numbers and sets of data. It was unlikely that anyone with a modicum of intelligence would write in a private journal and leave it in a public space either. To find out what had happened to him, she'd have to ask people.

Still, she felt closer to him here than she had anywhere else on the island. It was easy to imagine him leaning against the wall of the shed, as she was now, looking out at the lava. He'd said it had an unearthly beauty. That it made him feel as if he was on the moon. But as she gazed out at the dark disfigured lumps of rock she found she was not travelling through space but back in time. The ossified contours of the island felt antediluvian to her, as if she was standing on the back of a prehistoric beast. She half-smiled at her whimsy. But what she'd thought about the lava contained an element of truth. It had once been magma, formed millions of years ago, trapped until recently inside the earth. Her own body felt suddenly so fragile, so heartbreakingly young compared to this visual manifestation of geological time.

After a few minutes, Rebecca decided it was time to return home. She'd have liked to explore the lava field, but knew she should save her energy for climbing back up the hill. As she stood up to go, a sudden movement caught her eye. Someone was walking towards her, coming from the direction of the village, picking their way through the lava field towards her. Rebecca felt her pulse quicken. Could it be someone who knew about the eruption? A caretaker with the key to the shed? Perhaps Jake had hidden something under the floorboards. But it soon became apparent that the person coming towards her was not a scientist. It was an old woman, with rheumy and sunken eyes, her long white hair blowing in the wind. She was wearing a thick woollen jumper, a long flowery skirt and stout mustard-coloured gumboots. Her legs were stick-thin but she moved across the boulders with a deftness that Rebecca admired, even envied.

The woman did not see Rebecca until she was a couple of metres away. When she did she cried out in shock and her skeletal hand clutched at her jumper. Oh God, I've given her a heart attack, Rebecca thought. Luckily, the woman quickly seemed to recover her demeanour and began talking to her in Icelandic.

‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand,’ she said.

‘Inglis?’

She nodded.

‘A... fisit?’

‘That’s right. I’m on holiday with my children. The island is an intriguing place. I’d love to know more about its history, especially the eruption.’

The woman frowned.

‘Sorry. Maybe I should...speak...more...slowly. Do...you...understand?’

The woman tilted her head back and pointed at the sky. A bird circled above them. From the shape of its silhouette, Rebecca thought it might be a gull.

‘I see it,’ she said. ‘Do you know what species it is?’

‘Once, he stilled a woman. Put her in his hreiður.’

‘He killed a woman with his feather? With his wing?’

The woman frowned.

‘Nesht.’

Did ‘nesht’ mean ‘no’ or did it mean ‘nest’? Perhaps it didn’t mean anything at all.

‘Have you lived here your whole life?’

The woman pointed a finger at herself.

‘Bodeg.’

Presumably, that meant yes.

‘So, you remember the eruption?’

The woman looked at her blankly. Feeling stupid, Rebecca pointed at the volcano and tried to mime an eruption, raising her hands in the air as she exhaled loudly and made what she hoped approximated for a thunderous sound.

‘A worshipper...’ the woman said.

‘No, no I’m not. I just wanted to ask about the eruption.’

‘You came to eat it?’

‘What do you mean?’

Nothing, most likely. The woman was obviously wandering in her wits. She should be taking her home, not trying to question her. She must be freezing in that dress. No gloves either, not even tights.

‘What’s your name?’ she asked, as gently as she could.

The woman opened her mouth to reply, and then paused.

‘I do not know,’ she said, her eyes glistening.

It was ironic that the woman was at her most articulate when expressing her own confusion. How awful it would be, to forget something as fundamental as one's own name. She wondered which it was worse to lose control of, the body or the mind. Was it more important to stay sane or stay healthy? Having watched William's mum succumb to dementia she had discovered that it wasn't the descent into the twilight underworld of old memories that was traumatic, but the return to the present and the knowledge that one was only able to live in it in snatches.

'Do you remember where your home is?' she asked.

The woman swept her arm around, indicating the lava all around them.

'This my heima.'

'Heima,' Rebecca repeated softly, enjoying the feeling of the word on her lips. It would make a nice name for a girl. But of course, that wasn't the point.

'Don't you have somewhere to be? Somewhere I can take you?'

The woman turned and abruptly began walking away.

'Hey! Wait! I can help you get back!'

But the woman had reached the lava field. Rebecca began to follow. She had only taken a couple of steps when the woman stopped in her tracks, wheeled around and shrieked. A high, shrill call, like a bird's, issued from her mouth. It made the hairs on the back of Rebecca's neck prickle. She raised her hands in apology. The woman turned and continued walking away, her body rapidly becoming a dark silhouette, eventually blending into the lava.

13 | DANIEL

His skin had become transparent and when he looked down he saw that there was an ocean inside him, vast and calm, light refracting and scattering in its depths. The organs and tributaries of his body had transformed into other things. His lungs were two sponges. A pulsating jellyfish had replaced his heart and there was a seahorse where his cock should have been. Everything was connected by delicate red strands of coral. When he walked he felt the movement of the tides rise and fall, as natural as breathing. But there was someone standing in front of him. A naked man, tall and dark-haired, the pinkness of his skin curiously shadowed in places. The man took a step closer. The world shuddered as his feet struck the ground. Daniel noticed the shadows lengthening and darkening across the man's skin, heard the footfalls getting louder and louder as he approached and realised that the man was slowly turning to stone. Now the man was only a step away. Now the man was throwing dark basalt arms around his watery torso and squeezing tight. He was going to burst in this man's arms, he was going to drain away and dissolve into the ground...

Daniel awoke with a thud. There was a burst of pain in his knees. After it subsided he realised that he had rolled off the sofa and onto the floor. He struggled to his feet and stuck his hand down his trousers. That was a relief. A seahorse would be too busy blowing bubbles and trying to catch plankton to function well as a cock. But it had felt wonderful to be made of water, at least until the rock man had caught him, feeling the rhythm of the tides and the rippling play of light inside him. Better than the dull weight of flesh and bone and all the aches they held. He sat back down on the sofa and closed his eyes, but he couldn't get back to sleep. Was there a word for the desire to return to a dream you'd once had? If there was then Mum would know it.

'Mum? Mum!' he called.

There was no response.

'Anna?'

The house was silent. They were probably out walking or napping upstairs. He sat up, wondering what to do in their absence, and noticed his mum's purse on the kitchen table. Booze. He'd get some booze. Fags too. Smoke and drink on the beach. And then he'd go swimming, try and recapture the feeling of weightlessness he'd just found and lost again. Quickly he pilfered a few notes, experiencing as he did the familiar combination of guilt and exhilaration. If she didn't want to be robbed she shouldn't leave her purse lying around like

that. For someone so observant she never seemed to notice when money went missing. She never said anything about it, at any rate.

He took the only dry towel from the bathroom and set off. As he walked he was struck by the silence. He could still hear the waves striking the hard edges of the island and some birds squalling above him, but there was nothing beyond that. No secret messages. No intensity and no pain. Perhaps all he had heard last night was the Condition, projecting messages off the rocks so they bounced back at him. The others would say it was just his mind playing tricks on him. But then again, how would he have known where to find that grave? It was more likely that he had been talking to a ghost. A face scratched onto stone, ashes to ashes, flesh to bone.

At Dad's funeral, his mum had given a calm, measured sort of speech about his warmth and friendliness. Anna had gone after, blotchy-faced and watery eyed. She'd burst into tears halfway through and had to stop and everyone had gone on about how moving it was after. Then one of Dad's oldest friends had spoken. Not him. Just in case.

'Please. You just don't know what he'll say,' he'd heard Anna pleading to his mum.

She hadn't stuck up for him, which was surprising. He said things that came into his mind but he wasn't such a dick that he would ruin the funeral on purpose. Whatever. He hadn't made a fuss. The night after the funeral he had come back to the graveyard, smoked a spliff next to his dad's headstone and said everything he needed to. The wake had been a fiasco, he remembered. His cousin Gina had brought a boyfriend with her. The boyfriend had gotten way too drunk, cackhandedly groped him in the garden and remorsefully thrown up in the petunias. The memory made him smile. He doubted Dad would have found any of it funny, if he'd somehow been able to watch. Just like Anna, he got embarrassed when people didn't behave 'properly'.

He passed the beach and continued to the town. Everything was closed again, apart from one shop. It didn't sell alcohol, but he bought a packet of fags from the woman at the counter, who looked like Tubbs from the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, and left. There was a small beach between the village and their house, but he decided to go exploring in the other direction in search of somewhere better. Once he'd walked through the village, he caught sight of a white house standing by itself near the lava field, and realised he was retracing his route from last night. Despite being curious to see the grave in daylight, he didn't want to be caught by the man who had shouted at him. Instead he left the path and began walking along the island's shoreline. It was not long before the rocks gave way to a small cove of black sand. He would swim here.

Daniel removed his shoes and socks. His pale feet burrowed into the coarse black sand. There was no warmth to be had underneath the surface. Cold wind gusted in off the ocean. The waves broke violently against the shore, scattering droplets of white spume and rasping hungrily as they receded. He walked across the sand to the tideline and dipped a toe in the water, only to withdraw it with a yelp. It was fucking freezing. He sat down on a rock to summon up the balls to take off his clothes and go back in.

‘I nearly went swimming in the Arctic but then I pussied out’ – that was not the sort of story he wanted to tell his mates. And then he heard it. Hissing, scratching sounds, audible only in the brief silences between the waves breaking.

‘Is that you again?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Are you real?’

‘Yes,’ the Thing replied, even more emphatically. It was a stupid question. All the voices said yes when he asked them that. He would have to test it. If the voice knew his name then perhaps it came from inside him.

‘What’s my name?’ he asked.

‘Name?’

‘What am I called?’

‘I call to you.’

‘But why? Why did you call to me?’ he asked. ‘Why did you lead me to the grave last night?’

‘To Unna...’

‘Who’s Unna?’

‘A furless, justa like you.’

‘Alright, well why did you lead me there? What did you want me to find out?’ he asked impatiently.

‘She could hear me too.’

So he wasn’t the only one. Or hadn’t been, rather. That meant it was *definitely* nothing to do with the Condition.

‘Did you speak to Unna in English too?’

‘Can speak all languages. I am made of stars that once hung in the sky-space and lissened to everything. The Oceanus brings me informissives from warmer places too.’

‘All languages, hey? Well lucky for you – I can barely speak one. So, who are you anyway?’

‘You cannot tell?’

‘No.’

Again, that creaking scraping sound. The Thing was laughing at him.

He stood up.

‘Well whatever. If you won’t tell me I’m going swimming.’

Different noises emerged from all around him. The sand hissed. The rocks at the shoreline set up a concerto of howls. There was a sharp sound like ice cracking from somewhere behind him.

‘What?’ he asked impatiently.

‘Don’t disappear into the brim of Oceanus.’

‘Why not?’

He took off his jumper and the merino base layer his mum had forced him to wear. Goosebumps sprung up on every inch of his torso.

‘Kald,’ the Thing said.

‘Yeah, right. It’s fucking freezing.’

‘Too kald for you in Oceanus. Stay ruted here, with me.’

‘Only if you tell me who you are.’

‘Who you are...’ the Thing echoed.

‘Fine, I’ll guess. Are you human?’

‘I’m not a furless like you, not a creature of flesh and bone.’

‘Alright, are you male or female? I can’t tell.’

‘What is this meaning?’

Daniel’s puzzlement finally overcame his impatience. ‘Well with humans, sorry, furlesses, you get two types. Men and Women. I take that back. Sometimes you have people who are both, or are born one way but end up transitioning into another. Actually, scratch that, this is too complicated. Let’s just start with the basics. Most women have softer, curvier bodies than men. On average they tend to be a bit smaller than men too. And they have spaces inside them to fit babies in, although some of them don’t want to or can’t. Men have harder bodies, unless they go to the pub all the time. And they have a thing that can stick into a woman, so long as it works alright.’

‘Ah. The mating pair. I have seen this with the wingedwuns and the fisk,’ the Thing affirmed.

But he continued, as he wasn’t satisfied with his explanation.

‘It doesn’t make sense to say that there are only two types of body, really. You can get tall strong women and short fat men. Thousands of different types of bodies. Besides, men don’t always just fancy women and women don’t always just fancy men. I’m like that.’

‘You are a man-furless?’

‘Yup. So, what are you? Are you a male or female of your species?’

There was a long pause. But he knew the Thing was still there, thinking, because he could feel it, somehow; an electric buzz against his bare skin, insulating him from the worst of the cold.

‘I have my columns, I have my empty spaesis, I have my lumps and flatlands,’ the Thing said eventually.

‘Hmm. Maybe you’re both, or neither. Maybe it’s irrelevant,’ he said to the Thing. ‘So, if you aren’t a human or a ghost, you aren’t an animal or a devil or the angel, then...’

‘I’m a bodeg floating solitair in the kald Oceanus. The bodeg beneath your feet.’

Realisation slowly dawned.

‘You’re the island?’

‘Yessssss.’

A talking island. He was standing on a *talking island*. It didn’t know about men and women, but it must know a whole host of other things. All the islanders’ secrets, for a start. Like who was cheating on their wives or robbing people. If anyone had been murdered, it would know who the killer was. In a way, it was kind of like a God. He wouldn’t tell it that though; he didn’t want to give it a complex.

‘I want to know something about someone who lives here. The ferryman, the one who drives the boat backwards and forwards to the mainland.’

‘I know this furless, back and forwards from my shores furless.’

‘OK good. Is he single? I mean...solitair?’

‘He is the loneliest man on my bodeg.’

Daniel smiled. This could be a very useful friendship indeed. He shivered, suddenly aware of the cold, and remembered what he was here to do. He should get in the water before he wimped out again.

‘What are you doing?’ the island asked, as he unbuttoned his trousers. ‘Do not shed your second skin.’

‘I’m going swimming, remember?’

‘Do not go, you belong here with me,’ Bodeg said.

‘I don’t belong anywhere.’

He hated being pushed around, even by an island.

‘The curse of moefment. Try being stuckstill like me,’ the island replied.

Daniel was sure he detected some jealousy in its tone. He wondered how long it had been here – hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. Nowhere to go and nobody to talk to. For the first time he felt stirrings of sympathy for it. He reached down and stroked the wet sand softly, as if it were a cat.

‘I’m just going to get in quickly – less than a minute – and then I promise to come back and have a chat with you,’ he said.

But maybe promises meant very little to islands. It hissed and howled in protest as he made his way down to the ocean.

The call with Tommy left Anna with a strange, hollow feeling in the base of her stomach. She told herself it was just to do with the poor connection. Either way, she was determined to forget about it and have a nice day. The sun was still shining. She began walking through the town towards the ferry captain's house in the hope of getting some fresh fish. It was not long before the street tapered off to a dirt track and she caught sight of the white house, only a metre or so from the lava, a dark bubbling mass speckled with wet green moss. How ugly it was. She'd hate to live so close to something like that.

One of the boulders was moving. She realised she was looking at the back of a man's head. As she drew closer she saw the ferry captain kneeling in a shallow depression in the lava field. This must be his garden. It was carpeted in moss, studded with sticks of driftwood and rounded stones from the sea. A small gravel path zig-zagged across the slope. The whole area was enclosed by a white picket fence a few inches high. The captain was on his knees, patting down the gravelly mud around one of the stones with movements of surprising delicacy. The stone was round and the reddish-brown colour of a scab. Something was etched on it. A woman's face. Realising she might be intruding on a private moment she took a hasty step backwards, her shoes scraping against the gravel. He looked up. She watched his expression change quickly from startled wariness into something approaching friendliness.

'Hi. I came to buy some fish. Sorry to disturb you. I can come back later if you want.'

'No, no. I have time.'

He straightened up and wiped his hands on his trousers. As he came up out of the crater she noticed that he was at least a head taller than her. A lot broader too, of course, but his frame was pure muscle – a giant of a man. She had to tilt her face upwards to look at him.

'I like the garden,' she said. 'Did you build it?'

'Yes.'

She was surprised. It was delicate, almost minimal in design.

'It's very beautiful.'

He inclined his head as if to accept the compliment, and then looked at her sharply.

'Someone come here last night and disturb it.'

Remembering her brother's bloodied knees, she wondered if he was the culprit. Trust Daniel. He was like a tsunami, leaving destruction in his wake. She'd have to have a word with him when she got back.

'I hope nothing was broken or stolen,' she said.

He shook his head.

'Thanks for bringing us breakfast. We were starving when we woke up.'

'Kaari said you did not buy food from the shop yesterday. I did not want you to go hungry.'

Once again, the uneasy awareness that their activities were not going unnoticed.

'That's very generous of you. The bread was delicious.'

He shrugged. 'What is your name?'

'Anna. They told me yours, but I couldn't pronounce it.'

'Ráðbarðurjörn.'

His eyes were so dark. Deep and dark and sorrowful.

'Rath...ba..j..' she broke off, embarrassed. When he said his name it sounded like a phrase from an old magic spell, but she had managed to massacre it. Surprisingly, he smiled. It made him look a lot younger.

'Just call me Rath,' he said.

'Ok...Rath.'

'So you would like some fish?'

'Yes please.'

'It is inside. Come.'

She followed him towards the house. He opened the front door and she noticed he hadn't bothered to lock it. Thieves were probably a negligible concern to a man who lived in the shadow of a volcano. She hesitated in the doorway, looking behind her at its burnt red silhouette.

'Don't you worry about it erupting?'

'No, because it already happened. Fourteen years ago. Before that nothing for hundreds of years.'

'That's where the lava field behind your house came from?'

'Yes. The lava flow just missed the village and the harbour.'

'That's terrible.'

'Why? We were lucky. Come in, please.'

She wondered how old Rath was to have been a homeowner fourteen years ago. At least his early forties, but perhaps older. Not that it mattered. And who was ‘we’? Perhaps he had a wife and kids.

She stepped into a small hallway. It smelled of wet dog and leather. A row of coats and oilskins hung from wooden pegs. There were a few pairs of boots lined up underneath, all of them too large to belong to a woman. She walked quickly past them into the living room. Rath’s house was laid out identically to theirs. The walls were made of silvered, sea-worn planks and rough white plaster and the floor was lined with dark stone tiles, perhaps hewn from the lava outside. There were two rugs: one sheepskin and the other made of coarse wool, striped navy and white.

‘Sit,’ he said, pulling out a chair at the kitchen table.

She sat. He opened the fridge and began examining the contents inside. Whilst his back was turned she continued looking about her. There were no books on the shelves, just a few old magazines and what looked like instruction manuals. He had a radio and a small old-fashioned television. The only sign of a feminine presence was a photo of a young woman on one of the walls – a slender, dark-eyed, dark-haired beauty, who strangely enough bore some resemblance to her brother. Something about the eyes, she thought.

‘Is that your wife?’ she asked.

He looked over.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh.’

Why did she feel disappointed? She shouldn’t begrudge anyone who lived in a horrible place like this their happiness. There must be a big age difference between them, judging from the photo.

‘She is no longer with me.’

‘I’m so sorry,’ she said instead.

‘It was not your fault.’

She felt herself blush. There were so many words in the world and she’d just chosen a stupid platitude. Classic Anna, never saying the right thing. How awful for him, living here alone. How long had it been since he’d done it? Hard to imagine he’d been completely celibate. Although he didn’t appear to live with anyone else there might be a girlfriend in the village. Slim pickings, if not. Just the odd tourist here and there. She wondered if he viewed her as a potential conquest. If she was single she wouldn’t have been averse to it. She liked the fine fan of crow’s feet spreading from the corner of each eye, his grey-flecked

stubble and his head of dark curls. In another life she would have liked to run her hands through them. He was such a large man too. Any women he held in his arms must feel so delightfully delicate in comparison.

Rath came over carrying a chopping board, a knife and a large paper-wrapped bundle. He laid it on the table and took a seat opposite her.

‘What fish do you have there?’ she asked.

‘Cod.’

He unwrapped the bundle to reveal a fish roughly half a metre in length. It made a wet slapping sound as he placed it on the chopping board.

‘How much does it cost?’ she asked.

‘Four hundred krona a portion.’

‘I’ll take six portions, please.’

Rath nodded. She watched as he severed the head with one stroke. He slowly slid his knife along its spine, cutting into the flesh as easily as if it were butter. The aroma of saltwater flooded into the room. He portioned the fish, so intent on his task that she wondered if he’d heard her. She wondered if he’d be fixated upon a woman’s body like that when he was doing it. Perhaps not. After so long without a shag he’d probably be rough and half-blinded by lust, fumbling and desperate. That would be sexy, though; it was good to feel as if someone really wanted you.

‘Want me to remove the skin?’ he asked.

She said yes, just so she could watch him.

‘This is good?’ he asked, once he had cut the first fillet into three portions. They were generous and neatly trimmed, reflecting the skill she’d seen in his garden.

‘Great,’ she said, blushing as their eyes met.

He deftly flipped the fish over and repeated the action. His fingertips were moist. She wondered what he would do if she bent over and sucked them clean. Or if she leant forward and stroked his thigh under the table. She hadn’t yet mentioned a husband. She should. Any disappointment on his part would be temporary. Another, prettier tourist would arrive on the island eventually.

Rath stood up. ‘I get you a bag,’ he said, crossing over to the sink and washing his hands.

The fish-head was still on the chopping board. Its mouth was frozen open in a gasp, and its eyes were bright and glazed. As it stared balefully up at her she couldn’t help but feel judged. She averted her gaze and looked out of the nearest window. She could see a

beach. Black sand and grey water and something white moving around at the tideline. What was it? She stood up and went over for a closer look. The object had arms and legs. The object was a person: a skinny, pale man wearing only his underwear, slowly walking into the ocean.

‘Daniel?’ she said out loud, pressing her nose against the glass.

‘Your brother is outside?’

‘I can see him from here. I think he’s about to go swimming.’

Rath joined her by the window.

‘Shit.’

‘What’s wrong?’ she asked.

‘He can’t do that. The water is far too cold. Come on. Quickly.’

She followed him out of the house and onto the beach. Daniel was already waist deep in the water. Waves crashed around him, nearly knocking him off his feet. His arms were outstretched and she could tell he was bracing himself to go all the way in.

‘Daniel! Daniel!’ she shouted.

Her brother looked over at her and then waved.

‘What are you doing?’ she yelled.

‘I’m going swimming!’

‘You can’t. The water’s too cold.’

‘Anna, don’t tell me what to do! I’m not a kid!’

She looked helplessly at Rath.

‘Your sister is right. Come back in!’

Rath jumped down off the rocks onto the sand and began running across the beach to the water’s edge. She clambered after him.

‘If you want to go swimming I take you swimming. There is a hot spring with a pool.’

For the first time, her brother hesitated. He was shivering.

‘We can go tomorrow, if you want.’

‘Alright.’

Daniel walked slowly back onto the beach.

‘That was fucking freezing,’ he said to them both through chattering teeth.

Rath took off his jumper. ‘Here. Put this on.’

Daniel complied. The jumper dwarfed him; its navy sleeves dangled comically.

‘We go back to my house and you can have a hot shower before you get dressed.’

‘Is that it over there?’ her brother asked, casting an uneasy look at it.

‘Yes.’

‘Oh. Well I came for a walk last night. I might have crashed into your garden.’

‘Nothing was broken.’

‘Ok, great.’

‘He’s sorry,’ she said.

Daniel glared at her. ‘I was getting to that. Sorry, uh...’

‘Rath.’

‘Sorry Rath. What did I mess up anyway?’

‘It is a memorial garden. For my wife who I lost.’

‘How did you lose her?’

‘Daniel!’ she said, secretly glad he’d asked.

He glared at her. ‘What?’

‘Come on,’ Rath said. ‘Let us go inside and you can get warmed.’

‘Good idea. I’m fucking freezing!’

Rath began to stride back across the beach and Daniel followed, the arms of the jumper flapping. She gathered up the clothes her brother had left behind and trailed moodily behind them. A week or so ago, when she was sitting in the garden, she had watched an ant crawl into her glass of water. It hadn’t drowned. Instead, when it was only a few centimetres from the surface of the water it had paused, waving its antennae to sense what lay ahead. Then it had scurried back the way it came. It occurred to her that the ant was more aware of the dangers of vast bodies of water than her brother. And yet simply by acting like a complete idiot he’d got the chance to spend the day with Rath at a hot spring. If she hadn’t been looking out of the window, then Daniel would have swum out into the ocean unnoticed, perhaps even drowned.

‘Anna?’

She looked up. Rath was waiting for her, leaning against the wall of his house.

‘Oh, hi. I’m sorry about Daniel,’ she said.

‘His directness is not a problem. Is actually how we talk on the island.’

Of course it was. Without even trying her brother had got it right.

‘I was just thinking about what would have happened if, you know, we hadn’t seen him through the window,’ she said.

‘You would like to come to the hot springs tomorrow as well? And your mother too?’

She had never been picked first for a team in P.E. back at school. Until Tommy, nobody had asked her to dance at the school discos (although they'd been more than happy feeling her up in a shadowed corner, just so long as she promised not to tell). So this was what it felt like to be chosen.

'I'd love to. We'd love to,' she said.

Maybe this wasn't going to be a crappy holiday after all.

15 | REBECCA

It was late but Rebecca couldn't sleep. She had been lying in bed for what seemed like hours, trying to get comfortable. Her back and legs ached from her walk up to the research hut, even though she'd spent all afternoon resting on the sofa. Even the blanket was proving intolerable. It was too thick; her skin prickled with heat. She threw it off. But then she started to shiver. A low-level fever. The symptoms that accompanied it were familiar. Night sweats and strange dreams. Waking with a sore head and a dry mouth. Just what she needed before a big daytrip. She decided to take a sleeping pill. When she'd asked her GP for them he'd said he'd prefer that she go and see her consultant to discuss changing her pain relief medication instead. It was only when she lied and told him that her grief over her husband was keeping her awake at nights that he'd written her a prescription, warning her not to take them more than three nights out of ten. How awful it was, to use William like that. But even more awful was the fact that her husband of thirty years was rarely even on her mind in the evenings. Her few close friends treated her as if she was still grief-stricken. 'You must be absolutely torn apart,' one of them had told her. Of course she'd agreed with them. She wasn't entirely sure how to articulate how she felt after the initial sadness had passed; a curious mixture of restlessness coupled with relief.

The sleeping pills were in the drawer of her bedside table, but it was too dark to differentiate them from the rest of her medicine, all of which was stuffed into a chemist's paper bag. She got out of bed and took the bag downstairs. In the living room, she tipped the foil packets onto the coffee table. Pills to reduce pain, to reduce inflammation and to boost her immune system. If the saying was true, if indeed you are what you eat, then she was pure chemicals. Even with a glass of water, the sleeping pill caught in the back of her throat when she swallowed. The chalky bitter taste that filled her mouth made her feel calmer than before. But she was not ready to go upstairs until her eyes were heavily, forcibly, closing.

She got up and put another block of peat onto the fire inside the stove, leaving the door open so she could watch the flames. Her eyes were caught by the few battered books on the shelves opposite. They were more interesting to her than the usual rubbish left on bookshelves in holiday cottages, perhaps because this house had once housed the scientists. A book on geology, the pages yellowed with age. A hardback with a volcano on the front, written in German. A book about birds, written in Icelandic; since it had photographs, it would still be useful. She put it aside to take out on the trip tomorrow. Ah, this looked more interesting: *The Culture and Myths of Nordic Countries*. Rebecca sat down near the log

burner and opened the book. The first thing she noticed was the inscription scrawled on the title page. Whoever had written it had handwriting almost as illegible as Daniel's. She concentrated hard on deciphering the sentence.

Jake, enjoy your stay in the frozen North. All best, Aunt Vernon.

It had to be the Jake she knew. She had thought he was joking when he'd said his favourite aunt was called Vernon, for the name held such masculine connotations to her. She wondered why Jake had left the book behind. It wasn't like him to forget things. But as she flicked through the pages she began to see why. The author had adopted a hushed, reverent tone that seemed to indicate his whole-hearted belief in shamanic rites in the myths and cultures he was describing; a tone which soon began to grate upon her. He hadn't included any historical or archaeological sources either – for all she knew his research could have been fabricated out of thin air.

Discouraged, she closed the book. Then she realised that the corner of one of the pages had been folded over. Perhaps Jake had found a nugget of interesting information. She opened the book on the relevant page, and eagerly scanned the lines of print. The author was discussing female shamans, collectively known as *vǫlur* (*vǫlva* in the singular form) who practiced various forms of magic and divination, such as *seiðr*, *spá* and *galdr*. *Seiðr* was an Old Norse term meaning cord or snare. It involved chanting, a ceremonial staff and even sexual fluids or menstrual blood, which were used in something called 'binding magic'. There was also the possibility, the author said, that the rites had a sexual content, where the staff took on an undeniably phallic function. The *vǫlva* would use *seiðr* rituals to induce a trance that allowed her spirit to leave her body so she could find something that had been lost, divine the future or conduct a healing. But the *vǫlur* were not purely benevolent. *Seiðr* could be used to blight the land, to curse a person by inducing illness or death. There were also several accounts that these women had conducted human sacrifices, although it happened rarely – only in times of crisis, or war.

Rebecca sighed. It sounded like the author really believed in magic. She didn't. What had always interested her more was *why* and *how* people managed to convince themselves of the truth of the supernatural: in ghosts and Gods, in levitation and astral projection. Daniel believed in all or most of these things. He believed his Condition gave him access to a world beyond that which could be apprehended by the senses. But of course his Condition *created* this world. She recalled an article she'd read which suggested that shamans and wise-women might have suffered from Conditions of their own; their communities had mistaken their

convulsions and personality shifts for signs of magical powers rather than symptoms of mental illness. There was nothing in this book about that, though.

Why had Jake bookmarked this page? She knew that he was interested in religious rituals and rites surrounding volcanoes, but nothing like this. But then, as she reached the end of the page, she caught sight of a lightly pencilled word in what looked like Jake's handwriting. *Unna*. That was the woman who had been employed to bring food to Jake and the rest of the volcanologists. Why had he doodled her name in the margin of a book? Perhaps he was simply making a note to himself, a reminder to ask her something about the catering. Even as she thought it, she dismissed it as unlikely. No, her name had come to mind as he sat here reading about sexy black magic. She felt her heart beat faster, sickeningly fast. For a minute or so the words on the page blurred into nonsense, and she saw only the light of the flames flickering over the book.

Finally, she pulled herself together. I am catastrophising, she thought. I am a scientist, and must look at the situation rationally. This doesn't mean anything; it's nothing more than a word on a page. *Unna*. She said it out loud. The name was like a stone or a piece of wood, something she turned over in her mind, looking for the life that teemed underneath. What did it mean? Her thoughts were muddled. The sleeping pill was beginning to take effect. She closed the book and stared at the fire. The outline of the flames had begun to blur and the smoke that rose from the blocks of peat was thick and grey. She felt heavy with the disappointment of almost, but not quite, discovering something. An answer was there, as distant and alluring as the flash of a gold coin at the bottom of a murky lake, but once again it had eluded her.

16 | ANNA

They were going out for the whole day and Anna was the only one who'd given a thought to food. She had sliced tomatoes and lettuce for salad and was boiling eggs for sandwiches. There was a chocolate cake baking in the oven. As she moved around the kitchen she was surprised at the light, fluttering feeling in her stomach. Nervous anticipation. She told herself she was just excited to be getting out for the day. The cottage was already beginning to feel claustrophobic.

She took the cake out of the oven and upended it onto a wire rack.

'Need any help?' her mum asked, from her now habitual position on the sofa.

'I'm fine,' she replied, fishing the eggs out of the boiling water and putting them on the side to cool.

The front door opened. Daniel came into the living room rubbing his eyes, his hair tufted with sleep.

'Any coffee?' he asked.

'Me and Mum had tea. There's still some in the pot.'

'Fine, that'll do,' he said, picking up a mug from the drying rack. He poured himself a cup, black, and slurped from it noisily.

She felt her body tense at the sound and knew it was one of those days where every little thing was guaranteed to irritate her. Daniel mustn't find out or he'd capitalise. She picked up an egg and cradled its warm, smooth weight against her palm. Last night she'd had the strangest dream. She had been kneeling in front of a naked man. She had gently cupped his balls and taken him into her mouth. Although she hadn't seen his face she'd known it wasn't Tommy. It was someone with broad shoulders and dark wavy hair. At home she rarely dreamed, and if she did they were never as graphic as last night's. Normally the urges were both vague and fleeting, not these vivid images of herself with other men.

She rapped the egg sharply against the table and rolled it backwards and forwards. Once its surface was criss-crossed with cracks she began the task of deshelling it. The smooth white underneath scorched her fingers.

'Shit. Ouch.'

'Wash it under cold water,' her mum said.

'Why are you all red?' Daniel asked.

'I just burnt myself.'

‘Yeah, but your face.’

‘I’m cooking. It’s hot by the oven.’

‘I bet you’re red because you’re excited,’ her brother said.

‘About what?’

‘Seeing the ferryman.’

‘I’m looking forward to the trip to the hot springs. And his name’s Rath.’ Her fingertips throbbed.

‘Well *I’m* excited,’ Daniel said.

He drained his cup of tea and picked up the book she’d left lying on the kitchen table.

‘See you in a minute or ten – I’m going for a shit.’

‘Not with my book!’ she yelled after him.

‘He’s just trying to provoke you,’ her mum said.

‘I know. But why?’

‘No idea. Presumably because he finds it amusing.’

‘He’s twenty-seven and he still enjoys winding me up.’

‘I’m sure he’ll calm down a bit once we go out and do some exploring.’

Anna wasn’t. She cracked another egg against the table top, pretending it was her brother’s head. Tap. Deshell. Slice. Repeat. Add mayonnaise, salt and pepper. Mix. Spread across thick slices of granary. The simple rhythms of food preparation were her most effective means of calming down.

Ten minutes later, as she was icing her chocolate cake, the doorbell rang. Daniel got up from the kitchen table, but she was quicker. When she opened the door Rath was standing at the bottom of the steps. He was wearing a red woollen jumper and his face glowed as if freshly scrubbed. Even his hair looked more tamed than yesterday.

‘Good morning,’ he said gravely.

‘Hi. Come in, come in.’

He hesitated. ‘You would like that I take off my shoes?’

‘Oh. Sure.’

She watched as he unlaced thick leather boots and placed them neatly under the coats. They dwarfed the rest of the shoes, even Daniel’s. Rath was wearing red socks that matched his jumper. There was a hole in the right one. His little toe poked out. It reminded her of a new-born mouse, hairless and blind. She fought the urge to stroke it.

‘I don’t know if the others are quite ready. Would you like a cup of tea?’ she asked.

‘Please.’

Rath followed her into the lounge.

‘Milk? Sugar?’ she asked.

‘Just milk,’ he said, sitting down at the table.

‘Anna, is there any breakfast?’ Daniel asked.

‘Toast? Muesli?’

‘I’ll take the muesli.’

She realised Daniel was trying to wind her up in front of Rath. He knew she hated it when Tommy invited his friends over and they just sat there waiting, expecting to be fed (‘Anna *loves* cooking’). Now he was doing the same. But instead of telling him to get his own breakfast she put some cereal into a bowl for him and poured some milk into a chipped blue jug.

‘Here you are,’ she said sweetly. ‘The tea’s just coming.’

Daniel poured some milk onto the dusty muesli and took a bite.

‘Ugh. I think it’s off.’

‘I only bought it yesterday. It tastes fine to me,’ she replied.

‘It’s really gross. It tastes like piss and cheese.’

‘It comes from a goat. All the fresh milk on the island does. If you want cow milk, you have to buy UHT,’ Rath said.

Daniel grimaced. ‘Ugh. Will you buy UHT next time, Anna?’

‘If you want,’ she said.

Rath caught her eye and smiled at her sympathetically.

Her brother pushed his muesli bowl aside. ‘Perhaps I’ll have toast.’

‘Would you like me to make it for you?’ she asked.

‘It’s ok. I’ll do it,’ he replied, getting up.

The kettle boiled and she made Rath a cup of tea.

Their fingertips brushed as he took it from her. He poured a generous splash of goat’s milk into it, smiling up at her whilst Daniel scowled behind his back. The light fluttering feeling returned. It was victory, obviously.

17 | DANIEL

Daniel leant against the window of the jeep, cheek knocking against the glass as they bumped down the track. They were passing an abandoned house. Empty rooms and dereliction – the sort of place his mum would be fascinated by. He'd lived in similar spots, a week here and there, broken shells of places where people pissed and shat in the corners, fucked or got fucked up, waking dew-drenched and melancholy in the mornings. Even just looking at it through the window gave him an empty sort of feeling.

'There are bilberries on these slopes to our right,' Rath said, turning slightly to address Anna, who was sitting next to him on the back seat.

'Ooh, that's wonderful. I must pick some,' she replied.

'Me too,' Rath replied. Daniel saw him smile at her in the rear-view mirror.

'I absolutely looove picking bilberries,' he gushed, turning to Anna.

Anna scowled at him. He grimaced back and then turned to look out of the window.

The jeep hit a bump in the road. He hoped the jolting movement of the car wasn't too painful for his mum. There was something about the light here that made it possible to see everything more clearly. Outside earlier she'd seemed so small, her bones thin and birdlike, almost protruding through the paper-white skin of her face. But whilst his mum seemed to be fading away, Anna was looking even more solid than usual. When he glanced over he saw her cheeks were pink. Her whole being was suffused with a rosy animal warmth. She licked her lips, leaving a film of moisture behind. Since they'd arrived on the island they'd both started to change. He pressed his face up against the window. *Why?* he whispered. The word left a cloudy imprint on the glass, as if by asking the question everything had become less clear. He wiped it away with his sleeve and looked out of the window.

They were driving over the island's body, across rippling muscles coated in pale brown fur. Large jagged teeth, black with rot, pushed their way upwards through the earth. On second thoughts, were they teeth? Perhaps they were scales or spikes. The island's teeth would be in its mouth. Where was that? The harbour, perhaps. But that didn't seem right – the harbour was just a small opening with things drifting slowly in and out of it and no teeth at all. Instead he imagined a hole with huge black fangs on either side, spittle foaming around the rocky lips. Standing in the entrance, he'd be able to feel the heat of the island's breath. If he took a step inside he'd feel it's rough tongue snaking round his legs, attempting to clasp

him tight and draw him deeper down its throat. Then again, just because humans were arranged in a certain order, one thing inside another, neat as Russian dolls, didn't mean islands had to be. There was no reason why it shouldn't have teeth erupting all over its body.

He wondered if the jeep was hurting the island. Hopefully not. Otherwise Bodeg would be in a fuck-load of pain. Not just from the cars but the houses too, foundations sticking into its body like splinters that it couldn't remove. If Bodeg was alive then maybe there were other islands like it. Maybe every continent and every island was a living breathing suffering thing. Maybe even the ocean was alive and every boat that charted a course across its waters left a deep, painful cut. He thought about that little dinghy his dad had accidentally embedded in a mud bank years ago – that must have stung. And all those times when his younger self had dug holes on the beach, ones in which he secretly hoped to bury his sister...

He closed his eyes and the memories washed over him, each of a worse mutilation than the last.

'Rath, would you mind stopping for us to take a photo?' he heard his mum ask.

The car slowed to a halt. Maybe I should quit moving, he thought, and then I won't be hurting anything. Maybe I should stop talking too. There's enough noise in the world as it is.

'Daniel? Are you asleep? Wake up and come outside,' he heard Anna say.

He remained where he was. Breathe in one two three four. Hold one two three four, exhale one two three four...

'Come on, I know you're pretending...'

A very well-meaning therapist lady had told him to visualise a relaxing place when he was anxious. He imagined a cave. A snug, warm, quiet cave with no teeth or tongues in sight. A fire flickering in front of him. Soft, musky animal skins to cushion his body from the rocky ground. Shadows dancing on the curved walls of rock and sheets of rain sluicing down across the entrance, so nobody else could get in...

'Don't be stupid – haven't you seen where we are?' Anna said, shaking his shoulder until he opened his eyes.

His first thought was that he preferred the cave. They had driven down a slope into a large crater. All around the car were twisted formations of black rock, as if the island had taken acid and started shifting and rearranging itself. If only he had some. This would be a fun place to do it. Maybe fun wasn't quite the right word. Intense. Beautifully, heart-wrenchingly intense. Perhaps the sky would open and the other world would pour in and

he'd see echoes of it for years to come. He opened the door, picked up his backpack and placed his feet tentatively on the ground. It did not shift beneath his feet or split apart to swallow him whole, but even so, he wasn't entirely convinced it was solid. He took one small step for man and then another. Still safe. Keep walking. Still safe. Keep walking. Exhale in relief. Maybe the island was sleeping.

Anna and his mum were already busy taking pictures. He had brought a camera too, a clunky SLR. It had been a gift for his twenty-fourth birthday; one of a few possessions he hadn't lost or broken, probably because he'd forgotten he had it until a recent clear-out. A few weeks ago, one of his girlfriends had asked him if he'd be able to take some pictures of her naked, as a present for her boyfriend. She'd opened her legs so he could see in between them; it was the first time he'd seen a cunt up close, apart from when he'd watched hetero porn years ago. Although he was happy to remain at a distance it's ugliness was strangely compelling, reminiscent of a clam or one of those orange-pink cave systems in Arizona.

'It looks like a city, sort of. Chimneys and houses,' Anna said.

Why did she have to make everything so domestic? The columns looked like charred limbs. Perhaps they didn't belong to the island at all, but to the monsters that lived inside it, rock monsters which were pushing their way through the earth and at any minute would break free and come lumbering towards them. They would look like the stone man in his dreams, would have the same hard look in their eyes. His chest felt cold and horribly hollow, as if icy fingers were clutching his heart.

'You are correct, Anna. They call this place Dimjuborgir. It means the Dark City.'

His sister flushed with the joy of being right.

'There is a myth on the island that blood sacrifices were conducted here,' Rath said.

'What a coincidence. I found a really interesting book at the holiday cottage, *The Culture and Myths of Nordic Countries*, which discussed the use of blood magic used by early Nordic shamans, women known as *vqlur*...'

'But why did they do it?' he interrupted. Whatever his mum was about to tell them would be nowhere near as fascinating to him as it was for her.

'They say it was done to keep peace with the God that lives inside the volcano, so he wouldn't get too hungry and swallow them up.'

'Is there any factual evidence to support this?' his mum asked.

'Once some people came and did a dig here. They found a dagger made from the volcanic rock. Obsidian. It was still sharp. That is supposed to be what they used,' Rath said.

'Do they still conduct sacrifices?' his mum asked.

‘No. Very old pagan custom.’

‘Where did they cut them?’ he asked.

Rath shrugged.

‘Oh Daniel...’ his sister said. She turned to Rath. ‘How do you pronounce the name of this place?’

‘Dimjuborgir.’

‘Dim...’ his sister faltered.

He fought the childish urge to push her over. Instead he wandered away from them and pulled his camera from his backpack. Pretending he was taking a picture of the lava stack behind her head, which had a similar shape to an anthill or a giant pile of ossified sheep shit, he zoomed in on her cheek and snapped soft-peach pink against jagged black edges. Then he zoomed out again and took a picture of Anna talking to Rath, staring up at him with rapt attention. So she did have a crush. He’d only been teasing her earlier to test the waters. Still, she’d never cheat on the precious Tommy. They’d been together since they were sixteen. But it was a pain in the arse that Rath seemed far more interested in talking to his sister than to him. She already had someone – she should give him a chance.

As he was walking back over to the two of them, his mum gestured to him.

‘Come here. Look at this!’

She was staring at the mosses and lichens growing on the lava in fascination. He wasn’t particularly interested, but it was the first time she’d seemed happy since they’d arrived on the island. Probably because she was doing something active. It was a shame she’d had to retire because of the arthritis. Rattling around in the house in Norfolk all alone hadn’t been good for her. Her eyes had taken on a clouded look. Even though she was at home all the time, the house was dirtier than when his dad had been alive, and there were never any good leftovers in the fridge. All she did there was sit in the garden and read, or if it was raining, sit inside and look out of the window. He needed to come over and hang out with her more often, instead of going off with his mates, or smoking up in the caravan.

‘Lovely colours,’ he said.

‘The rocks are colourful too, see.’

He looked more closely. She was right. Some parts of the rock were greyish-blue, others were a burnt brown colour. There were splashes of dark red too.

‘Why’s that?’ he asked, knowing she’d have a boring sciencey explanation for it.

‘It’s because the lava flows cool at different temperatures, and some parts of it have different chemical compositions to others.’

‘Ah, I see.’

To him, the reddish stains were the colour of dried blood. The grey-blue was the colour of a bruise. These were the island’s wounds. He wondered what had happened to hurt it. After hundreds of years he was sure it would be easy to accumulate a few scars.

He stepped away from his mum and hid himself from view behind a large trunk of lava. There was a small hollow in the rough surface, at the same height as his mouth. Perhaps he could use it like a telephone.

‘Hello? Bodeg?’ he whispered into it.

‘Furless...’

‘That’s not my name. I’m Daniel.’

‘Dan-yull.’

‘Why are you talking to me? What do you want?’

There was no reply. He pressed his ear deeper into the hollow of rock. No words came out of it, just the faintest roaring sound, as if he had a conch shell pressed up against his ear and could hear the sounds of the ocean.

‘Hello?’

But there was no response. Bodeg was obviously playing the selectively deaf game; one he knew well as he often did so himself. He would have to move on, ask it about something else instead.

‘Is it true, what Rath said, about those sacrifices?’ he asked.

‘It was long ago, furless, when I was young and thirsty.’

‘So you aren’t thirsty now? You don’t miss the sacrifices?’

‘The Oceanus surrounding me is full of salt, furless – I’m always thirsty.’

‘Here. Have this.’

There was a bottle of water in his backpack. He took it out, unscrewed the top, and poured a little out onto the ground. It ran across the surface and disappeared into the clefts and crannies of the rock.

The island hissed in satisfaction.

‘More.’

Again he upended the bottle.

‘MORE.’

‘I’ve got to save some for myself,’ he said, screwing the lid back on and putting it away.

‘Don’t you care about me, furless?’

‘Of course I do. But what about the rain? Can’t you drink that?’

‘It isn’t raining now.’

‘But it did yesterday.’

‘How often do you drink furless? Besides, the rain tastes like the grey cities from the south.’

‘I’m sorry,’ Daniel said, but he didn’t get out the bottle again. It was less than half full and he was going to be out here for the rest of the day. Anna had probably brought extra but he didn’t want to ask her and get a lecture about his lack of preparation, as if she was some survival expert and not a chubby housewife who’d barely ventured outside of Norwich.

‘So, why don’t you tell me about yourself. How you were born and stuff,’ he said.

But the island didn’t respond. The air around him vibrated with animosity. Bodeg was quite a volatile being, he realised. He’d have to make sure it didn’t get angry with him. His body was a fragile sack of meat; easily crushed by a falling boulder or a fall down a steep cliff into the churning grey water below. His new acquaintance could easily make that happen, of that he was sure.

‘Later when I get home I’ll chuck a whole river of water onto you,’ he said, trying to placate it. ‘There’s some goat’s milk too if you want it. It’s delicious.’

‘Liar.’

There was a sharp cracking sound from the ground beneath him. Daniel glanced over at the rest of them. His mum was still staring at the lava in fascination and Anna was taking photos. Rath was smoking a cigarette and checking out her ass. None of them had heard or felt a thing.

‘Have I done something to upset you? I didn’t mean to. I just want to help.’

Bodeg didn’t reply. He heard the cracking again, and then felt a distinct vibration through the soles of his feet. The island was splitting apart. He imagined the malevolent rock-demons of Dimjuborgir uncoiling, thrusting their horrible limbs upwards to grab him and drag him back down with them so the island could suck the flesh from his bones. His breath caught in his chest. He wasn’t safe here. None of them were.

Rebecca could have examined the misshapen columns of lava for hours. Each fragment contained a world: dusty grey moss, blooms of thin-eared, fibrous mushrooms, and lime-green fungi shaped like small trumpets. If Jake was here they would have pored over every last one. He would have told her all about the chemical composition of the rocks and how they were formed, illuminating this fascinating place for her in a way nobody else could. She knew that the rest of them would be completely uninterested at looking at their surroundings in this level of detail. It was strange that people found knowledge so boring.

There was a sudden prickling between her shoulder blades, and with it the uneasiness of being watched. She turned. Rath was standing behind her. Anna was a few feet away, busy taking photos, and Daniel was behind a nearby lava column doing god knows what.

‘You like looking at the lava?’ he asked.

‘I do,’ she replied.

‘Your son said you were a scientist.’

‘I did a PhD in human biology, but I never took it further. I got pregnant with the twins and afterwards I went into teaching instead.’

‘This is an honourable life,’ he said, surprising her. He must have chosen the wrong word.

‘Honourable? Which part? Being a mother or a teacher?’

‘You do not think they are more or less the same thing?’

She shrugged. Not really, she wanted to say. She didn’t feel as if she’d taught the twins very much. Since they were young she’d tried to get Anna to stick up for herself more, to open herself to new opportunities; to get Daniel to try and focus his scattered energies into something, anything at all. But neither of them had been remotely receptive to her efforts. Perhaps if she’d left them alone...

‘So, you like the island so far?’ he asked.

‘I do, it’s very beautiful,’ she said dutifully.

‘Try saying that after it has been snowing for three weeks solid, and it is dark all the time,’ he said. ‘But it has its beautiful moments. When the sunlight returns after the long night and we see the first dawn. And in the sunshine, like today. Maybe you will see the northern lights. Is that why you came here on holiday? Many people do not know you see them so well on Bodeg. They go to more touristic places, like Tromsø.’

‘It would be lovely to see the northern lights,’ she said. Then, seizing the opportunity of being alone with him; ‘can I ask you something?’

‘You can. Of course I will not guarantee an answer.’

‘I met the strangest woman yesterday. She was very old. Do you know who she might be?’

‘That will be Sera. Oh, or maybe Renka. Short hair or long hair?’

‘Long hair and gumboots. Very thin.’

‘Yes, Sera. My late wife’s great aunt. She lives in the retirement home. She has, I forget how you say it...the forgetting sickness that old people get.’

‘Alzheimer’s.’

He frowned.

‘Dementia,’ she clarified.

‘Ah, ok. Dementia. Did you talk to her?’

‘Sort of. I found it hard to understand her. She was trying to tell me something about a gull. She said, ‘once, he stilled a woman. Put her in his hreiður.’”

‘Hreiður means nest. I think she tell you the myth of the gull who stole a woman to be his wife. She knows a lot of myths and stories about the island, but now she gets confused and thinks they are real. She thinks she has been alive for thousands of years.’

‘Do you think she knows anything about the history of the island? About the eruption?’

Rath looked at her sharply. ‘Why do you want to know?’

She paused. Of course, she couldn’t tell him the real reason. But if Rath had lived his whole life on the island then he might have met Jake, and maybe this Unna too. She needed a way of asking questions without being suspicious.

‘Well, I’m actually writing an article. A history, in fact. About the last eruption...’

‘I thought you were retired?’

‘There was no time to write when I was working,’ she said. ‘I’ve always been interested in pursuing it, and now I can.’

How easily, how quickly, the ability to lie had returned.

‘But there is no museum here.’

‘No archive of data? There must be material about the island?’

‘It is not here. It is in Reykjavik. Maybe you should go there.’

His dark eyes flashed. Was that a statement, or a warning? At any rate, she persisted.

‘But there are people. I will ask them.’

‘You will not get much sense out of Sera.’

‘No. But perhaps I could ask you a couple of questions?’

‘Mum!’ Anna called.

She turned, irritated at the interruption.

‘What’s wrong? I was talking.’

Anna pointed. Daniel, who’d been standing nearby, had started walking rapidly away.

‘Daniel! Where are you going?’ she called

But her son carried on through the columns of rock, his back rigid with tension.

‘What’s wrong?’ she called after him, feeling a shiver race up her spine.

He didn’t reply. She watched as he broke into a run. When he reached the car, he opened the door and leapt inside. She glanced across at Anna, who was looking uneasy.

‘Do you think...’ her daughter began.

‘I don’t know. We’ll talk about it later,’ she said.

She was always wary about mentioning the Condition in public. People judged Daniel differently once they knew about it.

‘He is alright?’ Rath asked.

‘I think he’s desperate to get to the hot springs,’ she replied, trying to smile at him.

‘I should have mentioned it before,’ Anna said. ‘He has a Condition. It means he...sees the world differently to the rest of us. Most of the time it’s under control – he takes medication for it – but sometimes it makes him very manic and hyperactive, other times paranoid and depressed. If it gets really bad he starts to hallucinate.’

Rebecca glared at her daughter, surprised and a little angry. They had a tacit agreement that Daniel’s mental health shouldn’t be discussed unless absolutely necessary. Anna avoided her eyes.

‘So he is having one of these episodes now?’ Rath asked.

‘No. But sometimes he has slightly different reactions to a situation than one might expect,’ she replied, remembering the lake and the fish with the curved spine. ‘I’ll go and check on him.’

Rath and Anna followed. She was surprised that they didn’t overtake her, but then, taking a clandestine look behind her, she realised they were deliberately hanging back in order to talk. The wind carried their voices away. No doubt they were discussing Daniel. She hoped Anna wouldn’t mention too much of his past – that wasn’t fair on him.

She reached the car and opened the door. Daniel was slumped against the other side, kneading his temples with his fists.

He looked up at her, his eyes watering slightly. In this light they looked a lot darker than usual; almost black, in fact. Had he taken something? Surely he wouldn't have had the chance to? But maybe that's what he'd been doing behind that column.

'What happened? Everything alright?' she asked.

'Jesus, mum, how often are you going to ask me that?'

'As often as I think I need to. At least eight times a day.'

Daniel got out the other side of the car and lit a cigarette, his hands trembling slightly.

'Great. And yeah, I'm fine.'

'Have you taken something?'

'Mum! It's like, ten in the morning. Give me some credit. Where the hell would I get drugs here anyway?'

'Sorry.'

Rath and Anna were just behind.

'Did something scare you? Out on the lava field?' she persisted.

'I thought I felt the ground shaking,' he said, affecting nonchalance as he puffed on his cigarette, an act that was presumably for Rath's benefit.

'This area is very volcanically active,' Rath replied. 'It is very possible you could feel an earthquake.'

'Oh god. Should we be worried?' Anna asked, looking stricken.

'No, these minor earthquakes happen quite often. It was so small only your brother could feel it. One or two on the Richter scale.'

Daniel smiled wanly. 'My hidden talent. I knew I had one.'

Rath clapped him on the shoulder. 'Discoverer of earthquakes.'

At this her son beamed. He offered Rath a cigarette, and lit another for himself.

'Two in a row? Really?' Anna asked, looking at her for support.

But she refused to be drawn in. She was simply glad that Daniel's upset could be attributed to a rational cause.

'How far are we from the hot springs?' she asked Rath.

'Only a few minutes' drive. Then we walk for maybe twenty to thirty minutes. You can manage this?'

She nodded, hoping she could.

‘You know, they say the water has healing properties. It is rich in minerals. Very good for you.’

‘Salus per aquae,’ she said.

‘What?’ Rath said.

‘Salus per aquae. Latin for “health through water.” It’s where the acronym for “spa” came from. Sodium, in particular, is supposed to be good for arthritis, which I suffer from,’ she told him.

‘I see you’ve done your research.’

‘Mum always does her research,’ Anna said, in a tone which implied that wasn’t a particularly good thing.

Once the cigarettes were extinguished they drove out of the crater and on up the track. Daniel and Anna exchanged muffled words in the back and then fell silent. She could see twin glares in the rear-view mirror. It occurred to her that they looked most similar when they were angry.

Clouds scudded rapidly across the sky and ribbons of light and shadow flickered across the grassland. The sea gleamed mirror bright where the sun hit it and grey where it did not. But then the track curved inland and the sea fell away, to be replaced by the looming silhouette of the volcano. She was beginning to see the island’s stark, strange beauty and why it had so fascinated Jake. It felt as if there were secrets hidden amongst the rocks all around her. So many things must have happened here – Bodeg was a silent witness to them all. Perhaps Rath was as well. He hadn’t looked too keen when she’d asked him if he’d help with her ‘research’. Hopefully she’d manage to persuade him.

Rath slowed the car and then stopped. For a moment she was transported back twenty years or so, when William would pull off the road on family daytrips.

‘If you can’t get on with each other I’m going to have to leave you behind.’

Such moments had wound her up at the time, but now she had fond memories of the noisy familial closeness, possibly because she knew they’d never be repeated.

‘Are we stopping for photos?’ Anna asked.

‘If you would like. But this is where the road stops.’

They got out the car. The track had come to an abrupt halt, its end demarcated by a large pile of stones. It was as if whoever had made it had suddenly lost impetus. Perhaps there was nothing beyond this point that the islanders wanted to reach. In front of her the earth was bare, fissured and grey; no houses or boulders or trees in sight. The island’s

unmarked spaces. She wondered where the hot springs were, because there was no river either.

‘From here we walk,’ Rath said, indicating a barely discernible path. It snaked across the uneven ground, back towards the volcano in the middle of the island and then disappeared. She realised they must be standing on a ridge.

‘Are we going to climb the volcano?’ Daniel asked.

‘No. We cannot. It is too dangerous.’

‘You shouldn’t have told him that. You’ll just encourage him,’ Anna said.

Rath smiled at her daughter. She was surprised when Anna turned pink and smiled shyly at him in return, a flower unfurling its petals towards the light. It occurred to her that her daughter hadn’t mentioned Tommy since the first day of the trip. She wondered if they were going through a bad patch. Perhaps she was simply enjoying the unexpected attention. Harmless, maybe. But as Rebecca looked at the two of them, she had the sudden urge to scream, to shock them into stopping it in its tracks, whatever it was.

Anna smelt rotten egg. She quickly discovered the source of the smell. They had reached the edge of a small cliff. About ten feet below them was a stretch of orange mud with putrid jets of steam rising from it. It was encircled by large slabs of rock piled against one another like dominoes. Beyond that rose the steep slopes of the volcano.

‘Where are the hot springs? I can’t see a river anywhere,’ she said.

‘Very close, just over there,’ Rath replied, indicating the rocks to her right.

‘Sorry, where?’

‘Underground. Inside the caves. Entrance is between the rocks.’

She’d gone caving once, on an adventure sports holiday. All the other girls had slipped through the narrow openings just fine, apart from her. She’d had to pull and scrape and grit her teeth all the way through. As they went deeper underground the darkness became more oppressive, the air heavier and mustier. The spaces they were crawling through seemed narrower too; either that or she’d been swelling up from the sheer terror of the situation. She’d practically had a panic attack in the dark and nobody had noticed.

‘Stop breathing so heavily, you’re going to take all the air,’ that bitch Ellie had said, jabbing fingers into her back.

How glad she’d been to get out into the daylight again.

‘Is it very far underground?’ she asked.

‘Shallow cave. No equipment needed,’ Rath reassured her.

‘Great!’ Daniel said. He set off hastily, his feet skidding on loose scree.

‘Don’t walk on the mud. You will get stuck!’ Rath shouted.

She followed them down the path. Although it was steep there were several large stones which formed natural steps, so she was able to descend without too much embarrassment. It was warmer down here because of the steam. Soon the condensation had plastered her hair against her forehead. Droplets of moisture trickled down the back of her neck. When she turned to check on her mother all she could see was a smudged shape in the mist. She stopped and waited.

‘Don’t worry about me. Feel free to catch up with the other two,’ her mother said.

‘I’m in no hurry.’

‘Of course, the caves. I’m sorry, I didn’t know. If you want to wait outside then I’ll stay with you. I’m sure Daniel won’t want long in there.’

‘No, I’ll go. I don’t want Rath to have gone to all this effort for nothing,’ she replied.

She didn’t want him to see her cowering outside the caves either. If only she’d woken up earlier and spent more time on the picnic. That’s how she’d snagged Tommy at high school, by making extra sandwiches for him. Roast beef and horseradish in a homemade roll. How she’d loved watching him eat them. It had practically made her feel full, the way he devoured them with such relish. He’d told her she should be a chef. It was ironic that when she had finished catering college he’d told her that he didn’t want her to get work in a restaurant.

‘Evenings and weekends? We’ll literally never see each other.’

The Tommy she’d met when she was fifteen was very different to the Tommy who had put his foot down, who in turn was very different to the man whose arse was superglued to the sofa for hours every night. How stupid she’d been to equate marriage with permanence. It fixed nothing and nobody in place. If only Dad was still here to talk to about it. He’d always given great advice. After all, he’d made it work with Mum for years, even though they were both so different.

Another step and the sulphurous mist cleared. She could see the sun again and Rath leaning against the rocks.

‘I wanted to show you the entrance,’ he said, indicating the opening next to him.

She peered inside. To her relief, the cave was more or less at ground level. Daniel was already in his swimming shorts. He was standing on a flat rock near the pool. Weak light reflected off the steaming water. It rippled across the algae-encrusted ceiling and gave his pale body a greenish tint. Despite the shallowness of the cave, she had to steel herself to take the first step inside and to clamber across the rocks towards him.

‘It looks boiling,’ she said dubiously.

‘Don’t be such a pu...ow!’ Daniel yelled, withdrawing the leg he’d dipped into the water. ‘It’s gone bright red,’ he said, staring down at his steaming limb.

‘I told you.’

Rath bent down and dipped his fingers into the water.

‘It is not normally this hot.’

‘So we won’t be able to swim?’ she asked. The thought was not altogether disappointing. The bikini she had with her was saggy, faded and far too revealing. She’d bought it years ago.

‘We will go to the next cave. The water is always cooler there,’ Rath said, beginning to walk away.

‘Sick,’ Daniel said.

He gathered up his clothes and hurried back over the rocks towards Rath. The two of them left the cave. She picked up Daniel’s discarded shoes and followed slowly. Outside she paused, watching the others continue along the track. Her mum had caught up and limped along behind Rath and Daniel. They disappeared through the entrance of the next cave. She hesitated. She was reluctant to strip in front of Rath and reveal the flesh that sagged over the waistband of her trousers, the thighs that she knew had become a lot thicker recently. Would Rath think her boring if she only dangled her feet into the water? At any rate, she couldn’t stay out here for the rest of the morning.

When she reached the next cave, she saw her mum sitting on a rock in the middle of the pool, wearing a swimming costume and an oversized pair of men’s shorts. Years of mountain climbing and running meant Mum still looked in better shape than her. Her slender legs dangled, half in and half out of the water. It was hard to believe this was a body racked with arthritis. But as Anna drew closer she saw her mum’s feet, distorted under the water into gnarled noduled claws. Would her own feet look like that one day? Daniel was already in the pool. His face was a steaming oval, his body a pale smear under the surface. His mouth was opening and closing as if he was singing under his breath or whispering. She glanced over at Rath to see if he’d noticed. But he was standing at the water’s edge, the roof of the cave inches from his head, concentrating on the act of dipping one of his bare feet in the water. She joined him.

‘Aren’t you coming in?’ she asked, her voice echoing around the curved walls.

‘The water is hotter here too,’ he replied, frowning.

‘Too hot for you to swim in?’ she asked.

‘No. Never mind,’ he said, pulling his jumper off and beginning to unbutton his shirt.

She managed to avert her eyes. But this made her even more aware of him taking off his clothes next to her. She slowly unzipped her fleece, wondering if he was listening to the sound of her undressing too. But then she heard his footsteps on the damp rock and a splash as his body made contact with the water. She was alone.

‘Aren’t you coming in, Anna? It’s lovely,’ her mum said, sliding off the rock and immersing herself in the water with a sigh of pleasure.

Rath swam over and pulled himself up onto the rock her mother had been sitting on. She stole a glance. His broad chest was covered in dark hair. His stomach was smooth and well-muscled. Her eyes flicked downwards to his thighs and crotch. The wet fabric of his swimming shorts clung to him, leaving nothing to the imagination. Even from here she could

tell he was better-hung than Tommy. God, she shouldn't be thinking about this sort of thing. She thanked her lucky stars that people couldn't read minds.

'Anna?' her mother said.

'I'm coming,' she managed to reply, shedding her fleece.

Her fingers trembled as she undid her blouse. Daniel was busy scrutinising the reflections of the ripples on the roof and reaching up to touch the moist curved dome of rock, but the other two were looking at her, waiting for her to come in. She undid the top button of her trousers, taking in the smooth white rolls of fat around her stomach and her large breasts, barely contained by the flimsy fabric of her bikini. It was chilly in the cave and she could feel her nipples pressing against the cups. Goose-pimples broke out on her arms as she slipped out of her trousers. She'd shaved her bikini line quickly in the shower but her skin was already irritated from the razor – if only she'd waxed before she left.

She risked another glance at Rath. He was looking at her intently. She detected no repulsion in his glance. In fact, the bulge between his legs looked larger than before. He slid back down into the water so only his neck and shoulders were exposed. But he couldn't hide his expression. The first time she'd stood naked in front of Tommy the hunger in his eyes had been clouded by fear, for he'd been little more than a child. Her body, back then, had been both a promise and a threat. But Rath was staring at her, unafraid, eyes dark as holes in the snow. When she knelt to put her clothes away she could feel his gaze burning into her skin. She stood up. Under the guise of the family swim, this semi-nakedness was permissible; the slow, teasing dance of two bodies underwater. Slowly she lowered herself into the pool and swam towards him.

Rath stopped the jeep outside the holiday cottage. Anna got out and shut her door behind her, but Daniel hesitated. He didn't want to spend yet another night indoors. Excitement, that was what he wanted. Someone to get fucked up with, a hit of bitter chemicals shooting through the bloodstream, bodies swaying twisting flying jumping falling, someone to share the euphoria of the sunset with, to listen with him to the voice of the island as it swelled to a crescendo, as it throbbed, pulsated in the night. Tonight he didn't need any drugs to leave his body behind, for his soul was already beginning to push through his skin, filling the car with black and gold vapour as it searched for cracks in the window or the door to filter through and escape. Suddenly, he was terrified by the thought. What would happen to his body if his soul left it?

He curled his hands into fists and dug his nails into the palms of his hands, a way of bringing himself back down to earth. It was then he noticed that his mum was still sitting in the car too, talking to Rath. Their voices were warped and far away. 'Interview,' 'article', his mum was saying, but the words were like fish, flashes of silver in a dark ocean, darting away as soon as you got too close. Everything was changing. The fabric of the world was wearing thin. Or maybe it wasn't, maybe he was losing his fucking mind. Think of the cave think of the cave. Press nails deeper into palms if you draw blood you know you're still alive. Look out of the window. Look at the fields, the rough grasses delicately gilded by the setting sun, rustling in the wind, waves of gold and amber. It was so beautiful tears sprang to his eyes. I'm alive, he thought. I'm alive and so is the island.

A sharp rap on the window made him jump. He turned. It was Anna, glaring at him. Even though the rest of the landscape was bathed in golden light, she was still the same solid white and pink, still flesh and bone and muscle whilst everything around her shifted and transformed. This unmistakable Anna-ness never failed to calm him, even though she was mouthing angrily at him through the window. He wound it down. As he did part of his soul escaped; a golden vapour drifting out to combine with the halcyon light.

'Aren't you getting out?' she said.

'I'm going into town. I need a drink.'

'You don't *need* a drink; you *want* a drink.'

'Well I can *have* a drink if I *want*.'

Talking to her was like walking along the same well-trodden path. The rest of his soul was sucked back into his body as he became aware, once again, of its confines. He was a person with arms and legs, with lips and a heart and a brain; a man sitting in a car, talking to his sister. She would never know how comforting he found their little spats.

He turned to Rath, who was rolling a cigarette and pretending not to hear them argue.

‘Is there a bar in town?’

‘Yes. I’m going there now.’

‘Great. I’ll come.’

‘But what about dinner? You can walk in by yourself after we’ve eaten. There’s no need to put Rath out,’ Anna said.

He could tell she was pissed off because she hadn’t thought of it first. But she’d been monopolising Rath all day – after seeing her tits flopping about in that bikini he hadn’t been able to get enough of her – and now it was his turn.

‘It is no problem,’ Rath said.

Daniel climbed forward into the passenger seat.

‘Don’t wait up,’ he told her, and slammed the door.

‘Your sister doesn’t want to go?’ Rath asked, looking out of the window.

‘She doesn’t like bars.’

‘And you are sure of that?’

Daniel nodded.

They drove off. He looked in the rear-view mirror and saw Anna standing on the road, watching the jeep. She looked miserable as fuck and he half-wished he’d invited her. Then he remembered all those school break times when she would gather in a tight knot with her friends and refuse to rescue him from the weird kid’s purgatory of wandering the concrete yard alone, kicking puddles and imagining how he’d kill everyone who wouldn’t talk to him. Back then he’d been jealous of her ability to blend in. Maybe he still was.

The sun flamed at the horizon, transforming the rocks at the island’s edge into burning coals. The grass was a rippling mirror that reflected the orange and purple colours of the sky. He smiled. Bodeg was showing him that even small cold islands had their colourful sides to display.

‘Beautiful...’ he said, half to himself.

‘Yes, I agree. These sunsets are rare. It is more often raining, or snowing, or dark. So they must be appreciated when they come,’ Rath said, slowing the jeep down. ‘You want to take a picture?’

Daniel did not. Photos of sunsets were such pallid copies of the real thing. Some cultures believed that to take a person's photo was to steal their soul, and he had no intention of taking Bodeg's.

Rath drove on. The heating was turned up high. Daniel started to sweat under his thick coat and jumper. The musky, iron-rich smell of Rath's body began to fill the cab. Daniel glanced over at his companion, who was looking through the windscreen at the glowing sky, and experienced a sudden ache to be touched, in any way at all, by the man beside him. Was there a chance? Not of intimacy – there was rarely chance of that – but something darker, dirtier? Some so-called straight guys would fuck anything if they got desperate or drunk enough. Back when he was fourteen his best friend Jamie had stayed over and they'd smuggled some of his dad's whiskey up to his bedroom where they'd watched *Basic Instinct* together. When they watched the scene in the club Jamie started shifting in his seat. Then Michael Douglas and Sharon Stone started going at each other like piranhas and Jamie pulled a pillow onto his lap.

'We might have to fast forward. Otherwise I'm gonna get blue balls.'

'I'll wank you off if you wank me off,' he'd replied.

'What?'

'It's dark, we're pissed. Just pretend I'm Sharon Stone.'

'Yeah right. You got no idea how to do what she does,' Jamie said, but even so he put the pillow aside and pulled his tracksuit and boxers down over his thighs.

It couldn't have lasted more than thirty seconds – it took longer to find some tissues and clean themselves up afterwards – but it was the first time anyone had touched him there. How upsetting it had been when Jamie pretended he was too drunk to remember it. After that his friend stopped coming over, and took extra care to flirt with Anna at school.

A few years later there was that suit he'd met propping up a bar, the one so far back in the closet that he might as well have been in Narnia, who got all stropy afterwards and acted as if he'd been coerced into sex even though he was the one who'd paid for the hotel and initiated the whole thing in the first place. Then there was the Faceless Man. Back when he was a teenager he had been wandering home through the park one grey dawn, still messed up after a party. A shadow lingered by the side of the path. His memory of that night was in fragments as clear and sharp as broken glass, each glinting in a void of amnesiac darkness. His cheek pressed up against the splintered wooden wall of the doughnut stand. Clutching the Faceless Man's large hand and feeling the smooth skin-warmed contours of a wedding ring. The unforgettable, tearing pain that eclipsed any pleasure he'd been feeling. In the

morning he had found a red stain in the crotch of his boxers. He'd looked at it blearily, trying to decide if it looked more like a rabbit or a thumbs-up, and then he'd wrapped the boxers in a carrier bag and buried them at the bottom of the bin so his mum didn't find them. He and Mum had watched Schindler's List later that day, and he'd cried when he saw the little girl with the red coat, a shocking flash of colour amidst black and white. How long had it been since he'd been anything more than a body to someone? Then again, it was years since anyone had been any more than a body to him.

'Did you like it?' Rath asked.

'Huh?'

'The hot springs?'

'Sure, it was great. Perhaps we can do it again sometime,' he said mechanically, his thoughts struggling to navigate the dark limbo between this conversation and the moment in the park.

'I will also go fishing sometime this week if you and the others would like to come?'

'Yeah, that'd be great.'

He wondered if they'd do it off the rocks or take a boat out to sea. Anna would probably end up staying at home if it was the latter. He'd push for that. Otherwise he'd barely get a look-in with Rath.

They reached the village. As always, the streets were completely empty. Perhaps the people that lived here were allergic to sunlight and so their houses were connected to one another by a series of underground tunnels. He imagined them, pale and myopic, the iron-dark smell of the earth impregnated in their skin. Except, of course, for Rath and the fishermen, who were tasked with going out and getting supplies for them.

Rath turned off the main street and parked in front of a small white bungalow stained orange by the dying sun.

'Here it is.'

Daniel looked at it in disappointment. The blinds were drawn and he couldn't hear any music. Since there was nothing to do here he'd figured people would go mad for the booze. The bar he'd envisaged was a lot crazier than this, like the one in Star Wars where all the rough aliens drank and shot each other and those musicians with the huge black eyes and faces that looked like arses who played that awesome jazz. But this looked like the sort of place where old people waited to die.

They went inside. He stepped into a room with a few wooden tables and plastic chairs; a sagging blue sofa in one corner and a kitchen area in the other. The air was thick

with blue-grey smoke. An old couple occupied one table and a group of fishermen another – the same ones that had been at the harbour when he arrived. All of them stopped their muted conversations to turn and stare at him.

‘Hi,’ he said to the room in general.

One of the fishermen smiled at him and lifted his hand in greeting, but the rest of the islanders stayed silent. As he followed Rath up to the kitchen counter he could feel their eyes boring into his back, trying to pierce the skin. A woman with a face like a pug was lining up shot glasses next to plastic coke bottles full of clear liquid. He realised it was her house – most of the people in the pictures lining the walls had similarly squashed-in features.

‘I’ll have a beer,’ he said, suddenly realising his pockets were empty.

‘Beer is not the best thing to drink here. Very expensive and also very weak. Instead you must drink monascínan. We make it here on the island,’ Rath informed him.

‘Alright. Moonie scoonie it is.’

Rath exchanged a few words with the woman. He picked up a bottle and two glasses.

‘Do we pay now or later?’ Daniel asked.

‘No payment. I get her a couple of things she needs from the mainland in exchange.’

They sat down with the fishermen.

‘These are my cousins. They do not speak English,’ Rath told him, indicating the dark-haired men.

‘I’m Lief,’ the blonde man said, regarding him with frank, blue-eyed curiosity.

‘Daniel.’

Rath poured two shots and handed one to him. He knocked it back. It tasted like paint stripper, which he’d swallowed once for a dare.

‘It’s strong,’ he gasped, eyes watering. A tingling warmth flooded his system.

‘Another?’

‘Sure, why not?’

Four glasses were filled and drained. He lit a cigarette and smoked it contentedly, leaning back in his chair.

‘You are enjoying your visit to the island?’ Leif asked.

‘So far.’

‘You are here with family. I met your sister yesterday. These two think she is pretty. They want to know if she is single.’

He shook his head. ‘No, she’s married to someone called Tommy.’

A muscle twitched in Rath's jaw. So he hadn't known. He was impressed that Anna had managed to go a whole day without mentioning her husband. Come to think of it, she'd only phoned him once since they'd left England. It had never occurred to him to ask how she and Tommy were getting on because they always seemed to be ticking along just fine. But perhaps there was trouble in suburbia. He really had seen Tommy naked at the swimming pool, as he'd told his mum the other day – Anna was in for a lifetime of disappointment.

One of the fishermen shouted something to the woman at the counter. She bought over two bowls, one filled with salted crackers and the other with bits of oily fish. Daniel took a piece of the fish. It was rank. Worse than spunk, he thought, lighting another fag to hide the taste.

'Where are you from?' Lief asked.

'England. A flat place called Norfolk. What about you?'

'Tromsø. A city in Norway. My wife was born here. We came back so she can look after her father, who is very sick. When he passes away we will go back there. I expect within the year.'

'Don't count on it. That man will live to be a hundred,' Rath said.

'Tromsø is far more beautiful than this island. When it is winter time we go skiing. We ice skate on the lake. When the sun returns we have a special celebration, with cupcakes. Here, nothing. There is an excellent pancake place near my place. There is one waitress there with the longest, most beautiful pair of legs. I miss her legs,' Lief said, his hand trembling slightly as he poured some shots and handed them round to everyone on the table.

It was not long before the ashtray was overflowing with butts. The men at his table were smoking and drinking mechanically, as if under a spell or half asleep. He wondered if they felt as pissed as he did. His hands, still clasped around the shot glass, no longer seemed to belong to him, and his feet felt as if they were hovering a few inches from the floor even though the soles of his boots were pressed firmly against the carpet. The ocean had infiltrated his brain. He could feel the waves rising and falling, breaking against the curved dome of his skull. There were fish nibbling softly on his thoughts, on the words he kept inside his head, so that they were beginning to come out in funny shapes. How could the rest of them manage to sit here in almost silence, night after night, with the spirit fire of the monascínan coursing through their veins and no music to dance to? Didn't they wish there were more people here, people to talk to or fight with or fuck? Honestly, he'd had a better conversation

with the island earlier, even though it had been tinged with fear. At least it had made him feel something.

‘Where the hell is everyone?’ he asked, leaning forward.

‘What do you mean?’ Leif replied.

He shrugged. ‘Nobody’s outside, walking round. There are hardly any women here.’

‘A lot of the houses here are empty. The people who live here are almost all old. They stay inside a lot. Most of the young people grow up and leave.’

‘Why?’

‘The usual. They want to go to university, meet with other young people, go to parties, fall in love. Be warm. They want to be fucking warm,’ Leif said.

‘They say they feel trapped here,’ Rath added.

‘Do you guys?’

Rath shook his head. ‘The island is my home. Besides, I travel twice a week all the way across the sea. And I am used to the cold. Anything over seventeen degrees is too warm for me.’

Lief knocked back another shot. ‘This is a strange place to choose for a holiday. I could tell you better places to visit in the Arctic. Tromsø, to start.’

‘Shut up about fucking Tromsø,’ Rath said.

‘I like Bodeg,’ Daniel told them both.

‘If you had grown up on the island you would want to leave. There aren’t so many women your age here,’ Lief said.

Daniel shrugged and lit another cigarette. ‘That’s not a problem. I’m a fagarian.’

21 | Anna

Anna remained standing outside until long after the jeep disappeared. There was a deep, hollow ache in the base of her stomach. She felt like crying, as she always did whenever Daniel treated her as if she was negligible. But we're twins. That had been her childhood refrain. So what, her brother would reply. He hadn't felt the need to include her in his solitary games then and he didn't now. She never had been able to shake the feeling that he would have preferred a different sister, one who was less of a square. Her mother would have liked a daughter who was smarter and more outdoorsy too. And Tommy undoubtedly wouldn't say no to a wife who was slimmer and more attractive.

She went back into the house. Downstairs was empty. Her mum had already gone up to bed, exhausted by the day's excursion. She was alone for the evening.

'Are you hungry?' she called.

'Not really,' came her mum's muffled response.

'Well I'm cooking dinner. I can bring you up some if you want.'

'Just a small portion. If there's any salad...?'

She had left the meat out to defrost on a white plate. Now it was swimming in a lake of watery blood. She picked it up, held it close to her nose and sniffed. Lamb. It would be delicious fried with some rosemary and garlic, charred brown on the outside and pink in the middle. She'd do it with a simple pan jus, sauté potatoes and a green salad. Hardly haute cuisine but simple and satisfying.

After putting on the potatoes to parboil, she moved on to preparing the meat. As her knife slid into the bloody flesh she found herself remembering the dexterity with which Rath had prepared that piece of fish. She had found watching him more erotic than anything she and Tommy had done in months. Earlier, in the pool, they had brushed against each other several times under the water. His skin had been slick, his body hard and warm. She had fought the urge to wrap her legs and arms around him and cling on like a limpet. Imagine what would have happened if the other two hadn't been there. If Rath had stripped off her clothes and pressed her against one of the damp walls of the cave she wouldn't have been able to resist. She stabbed the knife violently into the meat. *Stop*, she told herself. But it was too late. A fantasy of such vivid proportions that she could practically feel his body moving over hers was already taking over her mind, and inside she was boiling, boiling, just like the pan of water on the stove which suddenly bubbled over with a hiss.

Once the potatoes were drained and the mess cleared up she slumped down against the kitchen counter. If only she'd never met Rath. She told herself that he was probably crap in bed, that the pillow talk afterwards would be non-existent. She told herself he could be a disappointment naked, not nearly as well hung as his size suggested. None of this worked. Perhaps she was a disappointment to him. After all, if he was interested then he would have invited her to the pub. But he'd driven off without a second glance. He might not have been eyeing her up at the pool either. In fact, he'd probably been looking right through her.

She struggled to her feet. Her limbs felt heavy and useless as she prepared a salad and heated up a frying pan. But once she added the lamb and potatoes the smell of the meat woke her up. An intense hunger began to gnaw at her. Her insides felt hollow, as if she hadn't eaten in days. As she seasoned and stirred the food, willing it to cook as quickly as possible, her desperation increased. Here, at least, was a craving she could satisfy.

She ate it straight from the pan, standing against the counter, wincing as the hot slices of potato burnt her mouth. But she couldn't stop, couldn't wait for it to cool down. She picked up a chunk of lamb with her hands and tore at it with her teeth. Meat juices trickled down her throat. Grease stained her fingers and dribbled down her chin. As soon as she swallowed the first mouthful she crammed another one in, then another and another until finally she felt satiated. The hole inside her had been filled. But without meaning to she had eaten her mum's dinner as well, and any leftovers Daniel might have had. The entire pan had been scraped clean. So much for losing weight, she thought, looking down at her now distended stomach. Rath would never fancy her like this. Neither would Tommy. Nobody would. She was grotesque. Disgusting. If anyone had come in and seen her they would be absolutely sickened. Hell, she was sickened too.

The food was churning inside her gut. She'd eaten too fast and now she felt awful – flushed and sweaty and sick. There was only one thing for it. She went into the bathroom and knelt next to the toilet. She didn't even need to stick her fingers down her throat for it to come flooding back up. Tears in her eyes and bile stinging her throat, she looked down at the mess. There were some large chunks in there; she'd swallowed whole mouthfuls without chewing. Why did food look and smell so nice when it went in and so awful when it came out? The human body must be a nightmarish place to affect such a transformation. She looked down at her stomach. It was still pudgy. Even so she felt much lighter. Was this how the women she saw at the gym felt most of the time? Even their muscles were skinny. They walked so lightly and gracefully on their feet, the way she imagined cats did. In comparison, she was a lumbering elephant.

She lay down on the bathroom floor, arms outstretched, and tried to imagine she was a tree stripped of all its leaves, bending in the winter wind. It didn't work: she just felt like a teenager at a dance class. Back then she'd been practically encased in puppy fat. She'd expanded so fast that her breasts and hips and stomach had been marked by livid red stretchmarks. But once she'd started purging it had begun to melt away. She'd stopped once she'd started dating Tommy, though. Being fancied was such a boost. Back then he hadn't been able to get enough. He'd slowly, patiently persuaded her to let him do it with the lights on, and he'd kissed her all over and told her she was beautiful. These days they did it in the dark. He said he found it more exciting that way.

Her eyes followed a crack that meandered from one corner of the ceiling to another. Now the food was all gone she'd have to make something else for her mum. She rolled onto her side and pulled herself up. Back in the kitchen she buttered some bread and put some salad on a plate with a few slices of hardboiled egg leftover from earlier, her movements mechanical and her head fogged. Then she took it upstairs. As she entered the sleeping loft she heard a rustling sound. Her mother was sitting up in bed, looking guilty. A white corner of paper stuck out from underneath her pillow. Those letters, again. For her mother to be so attached to them they had to contain *something* of significance to her. Compliments, she imagined. Love. Those were the things she treasured most, and she imagined most women felt the same. If only there was a chance to read them.

'Here,' she said.

'Thank you.'

She hesitated, wishing her mother would ask her why her eyes were red, or, having detected the sharp tang of bile, ask her if she'd thrown up. But instead she bent her head to her plate and began to slowly eat a piece of bread. The hollow feeling began to gnaw at her again. Nothing could keep it away for long. Except perhaps the sun-coloured ball of wool, which was in the bottom of the chest of drawers by her bed. She pulled it out and the knitting needles too. The half-finished jumper was attached. Her mother glanced over but didn't seem to register her. Once again she was being looked through. God knows what memories were flickering like ghosts across the wall behind her head.

Downstairs, she unfolded the knitting and sat down on the sofa. Slowly and methodically she began to count stitches. She let the rhythm of the knitting needles sooth her. What would she call the baby? Jamie if it was a boy, the same name as her first crush. If it was a girl, Hope. She imagined it looking up at her, gurgling in delight. It would stretch out its hand and curl its tiny fingers round one of hers.

22 | DANIEL

He and Rath were the last men standing. Pug-lady had given up on serving them. She was lying on the sofa reading a magazine, wads of tissue paper jammed between her toes so they stuck up at odd angles like wonky gophers, each with a shiny blue cap on. Rath shouted something over to her. She replied without turning her attention away from the magazine.

‘Did you tell her to get more mooniscooni?’ he asked. ‘I want more mooniscooni.’

‘No. I ask if she have food for us.’

‘Waddid she say?’

‘She say go home and eat.’

‘Miserable bitch.’

Rath got to his feet. ‘Come on. I am getting hungry.’

Daniel stood up too, gripping the table for support. A couple of glasses went flying. Then he knocked over his chair. It wasn’t his fault. His legs were useless as rubber bands and the ocean inside his head was churning.

‘Let’s go,’ Rath said, taking his arm and dragging him out of the room, down the corridor and out the front door.

Outside it had gotten dark. The air was like hundreds of steel blades. He took a step forwards, tripped over something and suddenly he was falling falling through the air. Thud. Something hard had appeared. He yelped in pain.

‘Can you get up?’

Which way was up? The world was shifting and tilting like a ship at sea. He was caught in the storm, unable to move.

‘You fucking bitch, Gravity.’

A strong grip on his arm and he felt himself rising through the air.

‘I do not think you can walk home,’ a deep voice said.

‘I can. I’m a fucking superman.’

‘We will go to my house, superman. I can give you something to eat. That will help you.’

‘Booze? You got booze?’

‘Just coffee.’

‘Crap.’

‘Alright. Off we go.’

His arm was lifted and put down on something hard. Rath's shoulders. He had his arm round Rath's shoulders and Rath had his arm round his waist, a lovely spaghetti tangle of bodies and limbs moving slowly through the deserted town, past the empty houses and the shut-down shops. Everything was dead apart from the man beside him. Rath was so solid, so warm, and he was just a shadow slipping through the cracks in the pavement.

'Try and walk, you are falling.'

Rath's voice was close to his ears, like a lover's. His lips ached to be kissed. If only he had the courage to turn towards the voice, seek out Rath's mouth in the darkness.

'Go on furless, he's as lonely as you.'

The island's voice curled around him, languorous as a cat.

'You really think so?'

'Think what?' Rath asked.

'Nothing.'

He must ignore Bodeg. Concentrate on walking in a straight line. Concentrate on the pressure of Rath's fingers around his waist. Concentrate, concentrate. But the island was in a talkative mood.

'Go on furless why not furless your body ent made of stone. No point in waiting furless. Your life is short like a fire-spark – hundreds of you have lived and mated and died since my last lonely release.'

For the first time Daniel wished he was alone. He wanted to ask the island if it ever felt desire too, and how it managed to deal with it. There were no other islands for miles around. Maybe it had something going on with the sea around it – Oceanus, Bodeg called it. Tomorrow. Not now. You must only talk to things nobody else can hear when alone. Only when alone. Nobody had told the island that, though. As they walked out of the village its voice swelled and thickened, until he could feel the rhythms of its words beating softly against his face.

'You're not like me furless, not an island floating solitair in an ice kald sea. You have tentacles furless, to reach out and hold on tight. The ferryman wants what you want furless, I read his dreams every night.'

Soon the air around him was impregnated with the sound of the island's voice. The noise enveloped him as he walked. It permeated his clothes and caressed his skin softly, insistently. His body began to hum with sensation. His mum had told him he had about a hundred billion neurones in his body. She had said if they were stretched out in a line they

would be as long as the distance between Norwich and Ipswich. Now, every single mile of him was tingling, frantic for contact with the man next to him.

‘Just think how good it would feel, his warmth against your warmth, his hard column in your empty space.’

Daniel imagined lying naked in front of the log-burner, with his arms outstretched and eyes closed. He imagined Rath on top of him, kissing and sucking and licking and biting and scratching, making marks on the naked canvas of his skin. The thought was almost too much to bear. He clenched his fists to prevent himself reaching out for Rath.

‘I can’t,’ he muttered under his breath. ‘I can’t I can’t I can’t...’

‘We’re here,’ Rath said, letting go of him.

He swayed in the darkness.

The sound of a door creaking open. A rectangular slab of golden light appearing like a mirage. A hand on his shoulder. He was steered inside to the claustrophobic launch of the living room. The scrape of a chair being pulled out for him.

‘Here.’

Daniel sat down at the kitchen table. His heart was thudding painfully in his ribs and the crotch of his trousers was tight. Small wonder. He pulled his chair in a bit, hiding his hard-on from view. It felt like the type that wouldn’t disappear for a while, unless he thought about something desperately unsexy. When he was a little kid he had had to go in the ladies’ changing room at the pool. A steamy, chlorinated nightmare of a place, filled with low-hanging tits and rolls of wet, blubbery flesh, caesarean scars and sparse, fluffy pubic hair. There, that helped.

Rath placed a glass of water in front of him. He drank it slowly, watching as Rath went back to the kitchen, began taking things out of the fridge and cupboards, as he began to grate potatoes so quickly his hand was almost a blur. Someone’s used to jerking off, he thought.

‘What are you making?’

‘Rosti. Meatballs. Brown Sauce.’

‘Smells good.’

As he watched Rath moving confidently around the kitchen, he felt the heat rise in his body again. He pressed his hands flat against the table. Even that was pulsating under his fingertips as if alive.

‘The ferryman wants you and you want him. I read his dreams and saw his loneliness,’ the island said, so loudly that he looked over to see if Rath had heard.

But his host was turning the rosti over in the pan, completely oblivious. Was Bodeg telling the truth? Had it seen the ferryman's body rising from the bed like a solitary mountain, a body that reached out in search of another's warmth but clasped only empty air. Had it watched him sleeping too? Perhaps it could read them both like maps and see the veins and tributaries of desire pulsating underneath their skin. There was no sense in it. Why shouldn't two people come together and ease the burden of their solitude, even if only for a night? He stood up without thinking.

'Go on,' the island urged. 'Go on.'

When Daniel removed his hands from the table the sweaty marks of his fingertips remained. Christ he was hot; burning, burning for the ferryman. He moved a little closer to the kitchen. The need to be touched was almost unbearable.

Rath looked up at him.

'More water?' he asked. 'Coffee?'

Daniel stepped into the kitchen. Every atom in his body was ablaze.

'I guess it must get lonely here,' he said.

His words were made of fire, but Rath didn't seem to notice.

'No. I have many friends on the island.'

'But you have nobody to keep you warm.'

Rath frowned.

'What do you mean?'

'Tell him you can keep him warm,' the island whispered in his ear. 'He's so cold. Ferryman furless got a frozen heart.'

Daniel moved closer. He was only a few inches away from the ferryman, close enough to smell cigarette smoke and alcohol on his breath.

'I can keep you warm,' he said. 'I want to.'

Rath's eyes narrowed into shards of obsidian.

Unable to stop himself, Daniel reached out. Rath batted his hand away.

'Daniel. You are drunk. I think you should go.'

'Why be alone when you could be together?' the island asked.

'Why be alone when we could be together?' he repeated.

'I am not interested in men.'

'How do you know?'

'Trust me. I know.'

'But the island told me how lonely you were,' he replied.

Then he leaned forward and grabbed Rath's cock through his jeans with a hand that no longer seemed to belong to him. Rath snarled and launched forward, knocking him over. His hip smacked against the floor with a painful thud. A fist struck the side of his face. Pain spread outwards like tender fire and the taste of iron flooded his mouth.

'See, this is animal,' he managed to get out.

He wondered why he'd said it. But in the storm of blows that followed there was no space for reflection. He lay still, surrendering to the fists that pummelled his torso and his face. Half of him rose into the air and looked down at what was leftover, watching as it twisted and convulsed, as the smoke drifted from his open mouth. The fire was leaving his body. Sex, fighting, they were both the same; both ways of trying to disappear. Someone was laughing and he wasn't sure if it was Rath or the island or even himself. An acrid smell stung his nostrils. The smoke was getting thicker. It was going to choke them both. Did death smell like smoke? His mum would be interested in knowing that, but he wouldn't be around to tell her.

Abruptly, the blows stopped. A weight lifted from his chest. Was this the afterlife? A cold kitchen floor? He heard Rath swearing and the clatter of pans. The acidity of the smoke stung his nostrils. This wasn't death, not yet. When he sat up he could see the source of the smoke – the food on the stove had burnt. He was still, painfully, alive.

'Rath?'

No response. He struggled to his feet and limped from the room, back out into the cold. The moon was out. It cast an eerie blue light, just enough so he could see which way to go. Still, the world was full of shadows and at every moment he expected Rath to emerge from one of them, ready to finish what he'd started. But nobody pursued him. As he walked, he barely registered the pain or the cold. In fact, he felt strangely euphoric. His body practically hummed as he made his way back down the hill and into the village. That was what happened when you were touched by fire.

It didn't last. Once he'd gone back through the village and was beginning up the track to the cottage, the feeling drained away. Suddenly he could feel the impact of every single blow. Cold, aching, he sat down abruptly in the middle of the track. His nose was bleeding. Dark droplets fell to the dirt.

'Ahhhh. Iron rich red heat...tastes so good,' the island sighed.

He lifted his head, wiped his nose on the back of his hand. It hurt to breathe – a splintery feeling. He wondered if he'd broken a rib. It was all the island's fault.

'I shouldn't have listened to you,' he said.

The night was devoid of voices. The island was cold and quiet under his feet, as unresponsive as a corpse.

‘Seriously? I’m in pain here and you don’t give a shit.’

Still nothing. Slowly, painfully, he got to his feet, and staggered back to the cottage. The living room light was on and the curtains were open. He peered through the window. Nobody was there. They must have gone to sleep. He debated going inside and waking up his mum or Anna, getting them to clean him up and make him a hot chocolate to drink by the fire. But it was late, and he knew how many questions there would be. No, he was better off alone. Heavy with fatigue, he limped onwards to the shed. He pissed near the wall, and then staggered inside. Fuck, it was freezing in here, even under the blankets. His whole body ached. It was a long time until he slept, and when he did his dreams were full of violence, of fists against flesh and hands closing over his mouth, his throat, his nose.

Anna strode determinedly down the track into the cold, grey morning. A walk before she'd even had breakfast, before Mum and Daniel were even awake; this was how to lose weight. She was going to pick some bilberries and make a healthy compote to go with porridge. No more chocolate cakes. What a large slab she'd had at the picnic yesterday, especially in comparison to that paper-thin slice her mum had nibbled on ('just a taste, please; it's so rich'). Maybe if she'd had a smaller piece Rath would have invited her to the pub. Don't be ridiculous, she told herself. He was probably glad she hadn't tagged along, like Daniel.

There were the bilberry bushes on her right-hand side, hugging the rough contours of the slopes. She bent down and parted the leaves of a nearby bush, searching for flashes of blue amongst the red-tipped leaves, plucking the berries and placing them as gently as she could in the large Tupperware container she'd taken from the house. It was not long before she removed her gloves, despite the cold; she was crushing too many of the berries by accident. Her hands rapidly became numb. Even so, she became absorbed in her task, so much so that it took her a few minutes to notice that she had company. Someone else was picking berries, higher up the slope. She looked more closely. It was impossible to make out who it was from this distance, but from the size and shape of the silhouette, she thought it might be Rath. He had said he was planning to come picking as well. Heart pounding with excitement, she stood up.

'Rath! Rath!' she shouted, as loud as she could.

The figure looked around, searching for the source of the sound. It *was* him.

'Down here!' she yelled, waving frantically.

He stood up. But much to her surprise, instead of coming down the slopes towards her, he turned away and began walking in the opposite direction, soon disappearing over the crest of the hill. He had known it was her, she was sure of it. Why had he run away? Daniel had probably been bad-mouthing her all night. Either that, or he'd told Rath about Tommy, a topic she'd deliberately shied away from. He probably thought she was a right bitch now. She tugged at a cluster of bilberries. Her hands were so numb that she accidentally crushed the berries, staining her fingertips were purple. Irritably, she tried to suck them clean, which just left a sour taste in her mouth.

She continued picking for a few minutes longer, but all the fun had gone out of it since she'd seen Rath. As she walked dejectedly home, she found herself wishing she'd been

brave enough to get back in the car and go with them last night, even if Daniel hadn't wanted her to. There had been something between her and Rath yesterday, she was sure of it. Something that could have been built upon over the course of a long, drunken evening. But instead this thing between them had popped like a soap bubble. She told herself it didn't matter. It wasn't as if she was alone. In a week and a half, she'd be back home. Back with Tommy. Back to easy, comfortable evenings and lazy weekends. Back to knowing the exact shapes of weeks, years, holidays and conversations. Back to that strange feeling of having swallowed something very heavy, but being empty at the same time.

As soon as she got to the cottage she locked herself in the bathroom, unbuttoned her trousers and sat down on the toilet, where she found herself once again bursting into tears. She wasn't even thirty, for god's sake, and her body was already widening and sagging, her hair going grey. Her marriage had already flatlined; it had only been six years. But Tommy was the only guy who'd ever shown her any interest. If she broke up with him nobody would want her. She looked down at her gigantic thighs, and prodded them miserably. Her bilberry-stained fingers left purple marks like bruises across her skin. This was flesh that deserved to be struck, mutilated, pulverised. The container of bilberries was on the floor in front of her. She picked one up and crushed it against her skin. Slowly, she traced the outline of a letter, F. And then another one; A. Finally, a T. F-A-T. She bent forward and picked up another bilberry, began tracing letters on her other thigh. L-O-S-E...

There was a sudden sharp knock on the door. Anna jumped, biting her tongue hard in the process.

'Anna? Is that you?'

'Mmm hmm,' she replied, frantically dabbing at her legs with tissue paper, trying to remove the letters.

'Please come out here quickly, and bring the first aid kit. It's Daniel.'

The panic in her mum's voice was undeniable.

'Coming now,' she said, pulling up her trousers and hiding the letters, and her colossal thighs from view. She quickly splashed her face with water – not that anyone would notice anyway – grabbed the first aid kit and left the bathroom.

Her mum and brother were sitting on the sofa in the living room. She gasped in shock when she saw Daniel. His face was a mess, covered in clotted blood and dirt. There was a huge reddish purple bruise around his left eye.

'Jesus, what happened?' she asked.

‘Nothing,’ he muttered, shrinking back against the cushions, trying to get away from Mum, who was ineffectually dabbing at his face with a damp tissue.

‘Yeah right, nothing,’ she replied. ‘Mum, you know the drill. A bowl of warm water and a flannel, please. I have antiseptic cream here.’

Her mum got up with obvious relief. She’d never been a particularly good nurse. That was probably because the scientist in her liked to think of bodies as mechanisms, and didn’t like being reminded of their inefficiency, Anna thought. She sat down next to her brother.

‘Fun night last night?’ she asked.

‘Shut up,’ he muttered, eyes half closed.

She leaned in to take a closer look at his cuts, and half-recoiled at the smell of raw alcohol on his breath.

‘How much did you drink? You smell like a brewery. Worse than a brewery. A still.’

‘Kick a man whilst he’s down...’

‘Sorry.’

Her mum placed the bowl of warm water on the coffee table next to her.

‘The flannel’s in the washing machine.’

‘There’s another one upstairs in my suitcase,’ she said.

‘I’ll go and get it,’ her mum said.

She limped slowly from the room.

‘I bet you’re secretly pleased,’ Daniel said, as soon as she was gone.

‘What do you mean?’

‘After we drove off without you. I bet you spend the night wishing something bad will befall me, and now it has. Things always work out your way in the end.’

Daniel normally knew exactly how to hurt her. But today his words had little impact. She looked closely, curiously, at the marks on his face.

‘Did you get hurt anywhere else?’ she asked.

He pulled up his shirt, revealing a livid purplish mark, the same colour as a bilberry stain, on his ribs. Without thinking, she reached out and touched it.

‘Ouch, what did you do that for?’ he asked her, pushing her hand away and lowering his shirt.

‘What did it feel like?’ she asked. ‘When you got hit, I mean.’

‘Like catching on fire. Burning up and disappearing at the same time.’

Their eyes met. She understood the darkness she saw in them, without being able to explain what it was or why it was there. She wondered if he saw it in her too, if he knew that deep down they were both just as twisted up as each other.

‘You’ve been crying,’ he said. ‘Did you read the letters?’

‘What letters?’

‘Mum’s letters, remember. I told you about them.’

‘You did. But it’s wrong to go through people’s possessions,’ she said, remembering her mum pushing them hastily under the pillow, and thinking how much she wanted to do just that.

‘God, you can be such a priss,’ he said. ‘If you want something, Anna, just take it.’

‘Even if you hurt other people?’

‘Even if you get hurt yourself. You gotta try. How else will you ever know?’

She looked at him curiously. ‘And what were you trying to take last night?’

‘Nothing,’ he said immediately.

Their mum came hobbling back into the room, holding the flannel in her hands. Anna proceeded to clean his grazes in silence, whilst Daniel parried Mum’s questions, and finally stopped answering altogether, keeping them both at arm’s length, as usual.

24 | Rebecca

What a day it had been. Rebecca was still reeling from the extent of Daniel's injuries. They didn't look like the result of a drunken scuffle – someone had really gone for him. It hurt that he wouldn't tell her who, or why. They'd all been cooped up in here for the afternoon, because it had rained, and he hadn't said a word. She had been trying to distract herself by reading Jake's Nordic mythology book for the past couple of hours. Although she now knew more about Nordic mythology, she had no new insights concerning Jake, which had been her real motive for reading it. There had only been one more annotation in the book. The phrase 'time moves in circles, not lines' had been underlined. Rebecca couldn't make head or tail of that one. Maybe Jake had just liked the sound of the words. She put the book down. Her eyes ached and it felt as if her thoughts were displaying themselves as lines of print. Still, it was sensible to have spent the day resting up.

Much as she hated to admit it, the trip to the hot springs yesterday had tired her out. Obviously, the minerals in the water hadn't helped. A little bit of sulphur, some potassium, even less sodium – none of that was going to alleviate or reduce the symptoms of an autoimmune disorder. Neither were any of the alternative therapies: Ayurveda, homeopathy, acupuncture. All of them were a load of crap. The best to hope for were scientifically proven biological therapies – which targeted specific parts of the immune system – and strong painkillers. She even knew a couple of people who had decided to try and treat their arthritis 'naturally', which had left them requiring multiple operations, full of regret. But people were always suggesting she try eating more oily fish, or taking up yoga. They underestimated the pain of arthritis. This morning had been horrendous, lying in bed feeling as if there were shards of broken glass inside her joints and almost vomiting from the agony. It was only now, after dinner, that the pain was finally beginning to recede. A shame, really. Rath had said he'd answer a few questions for her 'article', and she'd wanted to go and see him.

A human-interest piece about the eruption, she'd tell him. First she'd start off with a few innocuous questions to gain his trust, establish some sort of legitimacy. When did the eruption start? How long did it last? Were there any warning signs? Where were you at the time? Then she could ask what happened afterwards – was the island evacuated? Did anyone come to the island to assess the volcano? I don't suppose you could tell me a little more about those volcanologists? How many of them were there? How long did they stay? There was a woman, Unna, who brought them food – could you tell me about her? Oh, and one of

the volcanologists happens to be my ex-lover who disappeared under mysterious circumstances... I don't suppose you know where he went, do you?

She got up from the sofa.

'I'm going to make some cocoa. Does anyone want some?'

'No thanks Mum,' Anna said.

Daniel shook his head. He looked awful. His face was bruised and his left eye was bloodshot and swollen.

'I wish you'd tell me what happened,' she said to him, for the third time that day.

'I told you. A fight with a couple of the locals,' he said testily.

'Yes, but why?' she asked, putting a pan of milk onto the hob.

'I don't know. Nothing else to do here. Nobody to fuck – they're all backed up.'

'Daniel, there's no need to be coarse. I don't know if I want you going out drinking again with Rath if it's going to end like this.'

'Don't worry Mum, I'm in no hurry to.'

'You're only saying that because you're hungover,' Anna told him.

'And this,' her son replied, indicating the bruises on his face. 'Vicious bastards.'

'What did you do, anyway? Did you say something offensive?' Anna asked.

'Why do you always think it's my fault?'

Rebecca tuned out their quarrel. After years of practice it was easy to do so. She walked over to the window and drew back the curtains. The sky in the distance was green and smudged, as if reflecting the light pollution from a nearby city. But there weren't any cities for miles around.

'Come here! Look!' she said.

Neither of the twins moved.

'What is it?' Anna asked.

'I think I can see the Northern Lights.'

At this they both got up and joined her by the window, all of them squinting through the glass.

'I can't see anything,' Anna complained.

'It looks sort of green over there,' Daniel said.

'That's just a cloud covering the moon. Sorry Mum,' her daughter said, sitting back down. She was always so quick to dismiss things, Rebecca thought.

'I'm going out to have a look. Will you come too?' she asked Daniel.

'Sure.'

‘Anna?’

‘No. I’ll stay here. Remember to turn the milk off, it’s bubbling. Is there a flask? You could take the cocoa with you.’

‘There isn’t. I’ll have it later, thanks.’

In the face of this larger excitement she couldn’t care less about cocoa.

She and Daniel put on their warmest clothes and went outside. The night was clear and the sky was sprinkled with stars. But the sound of the wind howling and the waves crashing on the rocks near the house put paid to any atmosphere of serenity. She turned on the torch. The darkness beyond its beam felt menacing, as if it wanted to encroach upon the circle of illumination and fold them into the night. She found herself thinking of the early settlers here. There would have been no electricity then. Only fires and pitch-torches to combat the darkness. Small wonder they invented so many gods and monsters. She was glad she hadn’t brought the family here in the dark season – it was hard to imagine whole months like this.

The shed loomed out of the darkness on her right, making her jump. The torch-beam glanced off a window with cracked, cobwebbed panes.

‘I don’t know how you can sleep there in this weather,’ she said.

‘Ah, it’s not so bad.’

‘It’ll take your body far longer to heal if it’s expending all its energy on keeping you warm,’ she informed him, even though a night or two out here wouldn’t make much difference. Eating and sleeping poorly had far more of an effect on the body’s healing processes than the cold, but she couldn’t tackle everything at once.

Daniel didn’t say anything. When they reached the track he turned left and began walking away from the village.

‘Does your face hurt? Do you want to see a doctor? Why don’t you ask Rath if there’s someone on the island who can take a look at you?’ she asked, hurrying after him.

‘I don’t think so,’ he said abruptly.

‘Why not? He’s been so kind to us since we arrived.’

‘Has he?’

His tone of voice told her all she needed to know. Finally, she realised why he had been so reticent.

‘Was it Rath who hurt you?’

‘Yeah.’

‘How awful of him to do that, after spending a whole day with us all. What happened?’

‘We got pissed. I asked him if he was up for it. Apparently not,’ her son said bitterly.

‘Not *again*. You really need to stop and think before you act sometimes,’ she said.

It was only once she’d spoken she realised how horribly cruel it sounded. Why, after years of motherhood, had she not learnt to adopt a more understanding tone towards her children?

‘Thanks a bunch, Mum. He was the one who punched me.’

‘I shouldn’t have said that, I’m sorry.’

She laid a hand gently on his arm as she spoke, but Daniel shrugged her off angrily and stalked away down the track.

‘Come back! You’ll fall over!’

But he’d already walked from the torch’s pale illumination into the abyss of the night beyond. Always running, always disappearing, as if something or someone was constantly pursuing him.

‘Please wait!’ she called, hobbling after him as quickly as she could.

He shouldn’t be off on his own in the dark. The ground was uneven. There were unseen hollows and fissures. What if he veered off the track and tumbled down the side of the island into the sea? Where was he? She couldn’t see him anywhere. All she could hear was her own strained breathing, her feet thudding against the tarmac.

‘Daniel!’

The beam of the torch picked out a silhouette in the middle of the road. She sped up, worried he’d disappear before she reached him. Every metre ached. By the time she reached him she was sweating despite the cold. She doubled over, panting, her hands clasping her knees.

‘What the hell, mum? I was waiting – there was no need to bust a gut.’

‘I’m fine,’ she managed.

‘We can go home if you want. I don’t mind.’

Summoning all her energy, she forced herself upright.

‘No, let’s stay out. I’ve been inside all day. I could do with some fresh air.’

‘We don’t need to walk any further. We can watch the Northern Lights from here. I can see the green light over there.’

When Rebecca looked up she saw nothing. Perhaps she'd imagined it in the first place. She wasn't bothered. Her interest in the aurora had been eclipsed by more pressing concerns.

'Sorry. I should have waited to hear your side of the story,' she said.

'You shouldn't have run. It's bad for you,' he said.

'Don't worry about me. Just tell me what happened between you and Rath.'

'I touched his face. Asked if he wanted someone to keep him warm.'

'That's it?'

Daniel nodded. She wasn't sure whether to believe him.

'It sounds like he's homophobic. That's his problem, not yours,' she said, hoping it wouldn't become *their* problem.

'He's a bastard,' Daniel said bitterly.

'It's a shame you didn't realise that before you tried to seduce him.'

'Christ, Mum, what a burn. Well it wasn't exactly my decision anyway.'

'Whose decision was it, then?' she asked.

'Nobody's,' he said immediately.

'Well it had to be somebody's if it wasn't yours. So, who?'

'It was mine.'

'But you said—'

'Fuck sake, it was just a joke!'

He was standing mere metres away but the distance between them seemed suddenly to increase. The wind tugged at the scarf around her throat. It was not hard to imagine herself being blown out to sea, for the ground under her feet no longer felt solid. Was he hearing something that wasn't there? She hadn't noticed any of the usual warning signs. He'd been keeping odd hours but he always did. There was none of the crazy high-octane chatter that characterised his manic episodes, and he hadn't run off, which he often did, for days on end, when the Condition descended. But then she remembered how he'd run to the jeep in terror yesterday, and how on the first night he'd asked her if she'd heard something outside.

'There's no judgement, Daniel. Just tell me what you've been hearing,' she said softly.

'I already told you – nothing!'

His shout rang out in the silence. Once it faded she could hear him breathing heavily. In the torch-light she could see his eyes glinting with tears. It occurred to her that she'd never worked out how to comfort him. She'd never been able to work out the rhythms of his

emotions. He never cried when she expected him to, had remained stoic through the merciless bullying he'd been subjected to at school, his diagnosis, the news of his father's death. Yet certain misty grey autumn mornings made him so melancholy he couldn't get out of bed. Tears sprang to his eyes whenever her cat, Darwin, brought a dead mouse into the house. He was so sensitive. If only he was more artistically inclined. Then he could pour all this emotional energy into making music or art. She was sure such cathartic self-expression would help his Condition. But apart from a brief flirtation with photography he was uninterested in anything creative. If only there was a way to help him. But he shut down all discussions about his delusions, because he believed they weren't delusions at all, and talking about them reduced everything he understood as real to a series of symptoms. The only thing she could do was watch, monitor his behaviour for any signs that his mental health was deteriorating, and then take him to the doctor, or even worse, get him sectioned.

Please let it be nothing more than a slip of the tongue. He'd been so stable, this year and last. The medication he was on had been working well. Until the involuntary eye twitches had started, and then the insomnia. They were trying him on some new pills now. Maybe they weren't as effective as the old ones, or the dosage needed to be tweaked. And then she realised – she hadn't actually seen him take a pill since he'd been on the island.

'Daniel, have you been taking your medication every day?' she asked.

'Yeah. Course,' he replied testily.

He was lying, she could tell. It wasn't the first time. He had thrown his pills away on several occasions. For this reason, back in Norfolk, his meds were kept in her bathroom cabinet. She'd only given him as many pills as he needed for the holiday, and she'd brought extra with her, just in case.

'Please take them in front of me tomorrow, just to be sure,' she said.

'Fine.'

'How are you finding the new pills? Are they helping?'

'Yup.'

He lit a cigarette.

'You know, if they aren't agreeing with you, or if you think you need the dosage changed, you just have to tell me. I'll schedule a check-up for you when we get back.'

'Okay, Mum. Now can we just turn off the torch and watch?'

Conversation over. If only William was here. He'd been excellent in getting their son the help that he needed. Better than her. Sometimes Daniel was so certain what he was hearing and seeing was real it almost made her doubt herself. Especially here, on this island,

where one was constantly pursued by the restless rhythms of wind and waves, by the high strange cries of birds.

She switched off the head-torch and looked upwards. The stars emerged again, unadulterated by city lights or clouds; cold blue orbs winking in a black sky. And there, to the right, was that greenish smudge. She was certain that it was brighter than before.

‘Can you see it?’ she asked.

‘No. It’s just your mind playing tricks on you.’

‘Daniel, please don’t be silly. I was just trying to help.’

He sighed loudly. ‘Fine, yeah, it’s getting brighter.’

‘It’s definitely the Northern Lights.’

‘Is that it? I thought they were loads of different colours. I thought they danced.’

‘They might if we wait. It’s a clear night. We should have good visibility. Let’s walk a little further along the path. It’s a bit darker there,’ she said.

Really there was no difference, but she didn’t like to stay in the same place after an argument. The atmosphere seemed so thick. It was best to move on and start over somewhere else. She’d read a scientific study that corroborated this. It explained that the reason people often walk into a room only to forget why they entered it in the first place was because memories were composed of segments, and the simple act of passing through a doorway – an event boundary, they called it – imposed a mental divider upon the mind that effectively severed connections between memories. By that rationale if you argued in one room it was best to go somewhere else to reconcile.

‘Mum? I thought you wanted to go? Come on, then.’

She followed him further down the track. The green light in the sky was much brighter now. She could see it even through the beam of the torch. Perhaps it was an event boundary too, and would effectively rewrite Daniel’s memory of the quarrel.

‘You have to look upwards! It’s coming!’ he cried, in childish excitement.

His reaction gladdened her. It was a good reminder that some things were best thought of simply. She was just a mother on holiday with her son. Watching the Northern Lights, just the two of them together. She reached for his hand, and tilted her face up to the sky.

25 | Anna

Anna had planned to finish reading her book, but since the others had left all she had been able to think about was the letters. It was wrong to go through her mum's stuff, but just because something was wrong didn't mean you didn't want to do it. What was it that Daniel had said? You don't get what you want unless you take it. Or something. She wasn't going to take anything, anyway. All she was going to do was borrow the letters, read them and put them back. Nobody would know. She found herself getting up out of the armchair and making her way across the room. The lights were off in the hallway. As she crept up the stairs she experienced a frisson of excitement, as if she were a kid about to get up to some mischief. The first place she looked was in the chest of drawers by her mum's bed. All she found was a few pairs of socks, some underwear, and a paper bag from the chemist's, stuffed with various pills and ointments. They weren't under the pillow either. She pulled out her mum's backpack and began searching the pockets. It was not long before she found them. She laid the letters out on the bed. Fifteen in all. Each envelope was covered in unrecognisable stamps and smudged postmarks – messages that had winged their way to her mum from all four corners of the globe. On some envelopes the inked addresses were fading. She picked one at random and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. It was soft as fabric, worn thin by her mum's fingers. She opened it up and began to read.

5th January, 1998

Dear Rebecca,

I'm still in Iceland, staying in a bleak little hotel where I'm the only guest. Next week I shall be travelling from Heathrow to my brother's house in Devon. I wish you'd had a chance to meet him. He's a taxidermist, but he also writes poetry. A very gentle soul, although he and his wife are currently on the rocks, as they say. The last time I went to see them she pulled off her wedding ring and threw it down on the table and drove off, and then he punched the wall so hard his knuckles bled. But when I went upstairs to get something from my attic room I could see her car parked at the end of their driveway. She waited there for around half an hour, and then turned around and drove back home. Seeing this upset me, but not in the way you'd think. It saddened me because I wish this would happen to us. Getting married. Being

so tangled up it hurts to be together but it's unimaginable to be apart. You and I live such separate lives.

Forgive me my melancholy. It's the cold. It makes me miss you more. After long days monitoring the lava flow out on the slopes I return to the hotel. I sit by the heater but I never really warm up. I called you once on the hotel's payphone, but the shock of your voice in that dismal hallway almost made me drop the phone. Hello? you said, sounding harassed. I wanted to ask if William had upset you. I wanted to tell you that if you were with me, not him, you'd be sounding much happier. Instead, I hung up.

Yours, always,

Jake

There was a faint rustling sound. The paper was trembling in her hands. All her excitement at the discovery of the letters had faded. It was very well-written, she thought miserably. But because it was addressed to her mum the eloquence just made it a greater betrayal. This Jake guy seemed to think the most wonderful woman in the world had slipped through his fingers. Yet there was no proof here that her mum felt the same way as him. *If you were with me, not him.* The faintest dash of hope in a cocktail of bitterness. She picked up another letter.

23rd March 2000

Dear Rebecca,

I'm at a conference in the Azores. They couldn't have chosen a nicer island, although I can't help but wish we were spending less time on São Miguel, the main port town, and more time on some of the more remote islands. I guess we all like feeling lost sometimes. Adrift. Castaway. Marooned. Such poetic words for loneliness. But I feel less lonely when I write – the path of the letter is like a pale thread that links the two of us together.

So this is something I never told you before. On one of the many times you had to leave my bed to pick up the twins from school, I didn't want to let you out of my sight. After you left I followed your little blue Ford on my motorbike (you were far too distracted to notice). I

watched from a distance as you walked into the playground and came back holding hands with two small, red-cheeked beings, your face shining with such naked happiness that I turned around and drove away. You had a world already; you were just a visitor to mine.

*Yours, always,
Jake.*

This was it, then. Proof. For once in his life Daniel hadn't been lying. She threw the letter down and slumped down on the bed. *When you had to leave my house.* How could her mum have done this to them? Her poor, poor dad, working such long hours to support them all whilst her mum shagged about with this Jake. She tried to remember back to her primary school days. Had she ever seen a man on a motorcycle? It was horrible to imagine someone lurking by the school gates staring at her accusingly, as if she'd stolen something from him. But it was the other way around.

How long had the affair been going on for? He'd sounded so lovey-dovey in his messages but where was he now her mum was available? Long gone, of course. The dates on the letters were so old. Or had her mum dragged them to Bodeg to meet him? This was supposed to be a family holiday, something to help them all get over her dad's death by spending some time together. Her poor dad. Had he ever known?

There was a muffled thump from downstairs. Great. The others were back already. She sat up and rubbed her hands across her face, trying to remove any traces of tears. She knew without looking it was no use. Her eyes felt puffy, as if she'd spent too long searching through boxes in a dusty attic, and whenever she cried her face turned the unfortunate colour of boiled ham. The thumping sound came again. Why were those idiots knocking? The door wasn't locked. She put the letters away and hurried downstairs.

'Why can't you just let yourselves in?' she yelled, as she crossed the hallway and angrily yanked open the door. But it wasn't her family standing there. It was Rath. What perfect timing.

'Oh. Hi,' she said.

Fuck fuck fuck. Why did he have to be here now? Luckily the hall light was off so her face was in shadow. It was a bit weird not to turn it on, but she didn't want him to see she'd been crying.

'I am sorry to disturb you. I came to talk to your brother.'

'He's not here. He went out for a walk with my mum.'

‘Oh, they went to find the aurora. What about you? Why did you not go?’

‘Because I didn’t think they’d be able to see anything.’

‘It’s a clear night. You can see it from here, I think, if you come outside. Would you like to?’

‘I’ll just get my shoes,’ she replied.

‘Turn off the lights in the house and you can see better.’

She did what he asked, and then stepped out of the front door.

‘I’m over here,’ he said, shining a torch on the steps so she could walk down them without tripping. Once she’d reached him he turned it off.

‘Look over there.’

‘I can’t see what direction you’re pointing in.’

His hand found hers and lifted it upwards so her arm was raised.

‘Point your finger out. Can you see?’

‘No,’ she replied miserably. She had never been very good at this. On family walks her mum and Daniel always spotted everything first – the otter swimming in the river near Thetford, the deer standing in the dappled light of the woods, the shooting stars they saw on those horribly uncomfortable summer camping trips – and she was always left scanning the landscape in vain, long after whatever it was had disappeared.

‘I think you need to turn a little way to the left. Do you mind if I...?’

‘No, go ahead.’

He moved behind her. His right hand was still clasping hers. He placed his other hand gently on her hip and guided her to the left. And there it was, a greenish patch of light in the sky, slowly beginning to brighten.

‘I see it!’ she shouted in excitement.

‘Now we wait.’

He let go of her but remained standing close. She could have stayed there all night, encircled by his warmth, breathing in the faint smell of the fireside coming off his clothes and underneath that the salty, not altogether unpleasant tang of his sweat, but why torture herself?

She forced herself to step away. ‘So you came to see my brother?’

‘That’s right. To apologise.’

‘For what?’

‘He did not tell you? I hurt him.’

‘Oh.’

Rath had hidden his darkness well. She'd thought he was a decent guy. Yet another person she'd misjudged.

'I'm sorry. I was drunk. He was trying to, how you say it, put the moves on.'

'You were pissed? That's it? That's your only excuse? After everything I told you about how vulnerable my brother is. I bet you plied him with drinks – he shouldn't even be having alcohol with his Condition, on the medication he takes. No wonder he behaved so inappropriately,' she replied angrily.

'It was not my responsibility to look after him.'

'Well you didn't need to beat the shit out of him.'

The sky glowed. The green light began to throb. She knew the right thing to do would be to send him packing, tell him to leave her and her family alone. And yet, this time, no words came.

'I know. I am sorry. He upset me.'

'How?'

'He said the island told him I was lonely...'

'Oh, he always says freaky stuff like that to wind people up. That's no excuse,' she replied, hoping this was the case and not the start of one of Daniel's episodes. He hadn't been on his current medication for long. Maybe it wasn't working. She'd have to talk to her mum about this.

'It reminded me of my wife. Unna.'

'Why?' she asked.

'She suffered from a Condition too. She told me she heard the island talking to her.'

'So she didn't die in the eruption?' Anna asked. Wasn't that what he'd told her in the memorial garden? Or maybe that's what she'd assumed.

'No,' he said.

There was a silence. She wanted to ask more, but he'd already brushed aside Daniel's questions about Unna. He might tell her, eventually, if she was kind and sympathetic enough to him.

'That doesn't justify anything,' she said.

'No, it does not,' he agreed gravely.

But perhaps it did. Whatever had happened was probably really traumatic, because he was still obviously affected by it. Maybe because there hadn't been anyone around for him to talk to. Well, she was here now. She could help.

‘We can talk about Unna, if you want,’ she said. ‘What did she think she could hear the island saying?’ Her anger was quickly fading. It occurred to her that she wanted to forgive him.

There was no reply. Perhaps he was too emotional to speak. Let him gather himself. She would wait. She tilted her head back and stared up at the sky. The smudge of green light was becoming ever more distinct. She began to pick out elongated ribbons of light. They started to flicker backwards and forwards, becoming rapidly brighter and brighter.

‘Wow, look!’ she said, turning to Rath.

Too late she realised how insensitive that was. Rather than focussing on him she’d got completely caught up in the spectacle unfolding in the sky above. But she hadn’t offended him in the slightest, for there was nobody there. He hadn’t wanted her sympathy. She was alone in the darkness, the knowledge of her mother’s affair and her brother’s latest delusion leaden in her chest. The lights danced above her. There was something gently mocking in their movements.

26 | DANIEL

It had begun. Daniel looked skywards, feeling the same tingling anticipation as when he was at a club listening to the music slowly build and waiting for the beat to drop. The fabric of the sky rippled. Glimmering waves of light rose upwards, spilling a green glow into the night. Then the display really burst into action. Green and purple ribbons of light began to undulate across the sky like notes on a musical scale. As he watched them the anger he'd been feeling drained away and was replaced with bright bubbles of euphoria.

'Isn't it wonderful?' his mum said.

'Yeah. I wonder why it happens.'

'It's caused by solar flares. Charged particles from the sun collide with particles in the atmosphere. The different colours come from collisions with different types of gases at various heights in the earth's atmosphere. Green, I believe, is when solar particles collide with oxygen at a low altitude.'

'Oh, right. I shouldn't have asked. Science is so boring.'

'I've been reading lots of interesting stories about the Northern Lights. In old Norse legends they thought the aurora was the light glinting off the spears and helmets and armour of warriors making their way to Valhalla,' she continued.

'What's Valhalla?'

'It's where anyone who dies in combat goes for the afterlife. A great hall where all the men drink mead and eat wild boar and practice fighting.'

'Sounds great.'

But then he imagined a hoard of crude, violent men and suddenly he wasn't so sure. He was tired of his body being a target for macho displays of aggression. He'd had far too many painful fucks. Rath would have beaten him to a pulp if that pan hadn't started smoking. Now he wanted something different. Not a woman, of course. They were too soft, too slick inside – something he knew from one truncated, eyes-closed-mortifying experience.

'I'd like something more peaceful than Valhalla. A field with a river running through it, perhaps, or a cloud to lie on and watch the birds fly past,' his mum said.

'You'd get bored doing that for an eternity.'

'Perhaps you're right. But soon it will be all I'm good for.'

'Don't be stupid.' He didn't like it when she talked like that.

They lapsed into silence. The sky was still ablaze. As he looked upwards he tried to imagine what it would be like to be up there, to swim through the ribbons of light and come out the other side crystalline and perfect, the aurora pulsing within him like a heartbeat. But however high he jumped gravity would pull him back down. The science his mum loved so much prevented him from flying. It bound him firmly to the ground.

He closed his eyes and listened. The wind had dropped and now he could hear the aurora. It made a tinkling sound, as if glass raindrops were falling and shattering all around him. Arms outstretched, palms facing upwards, he turned in a slow circle.

‘I suppose we do,’ she said.

He stopped, let his hands fall to his sides. ‘What are you talking about?’

‘You didn’t realise you were talking?’

‘I wasn’t saying anything.’

‘Yes you were. You were saying, “we become light when we die. We become light when we die”.’

‘No I wasn’t. Why would I say that?’

‘Perhaps you were answering a question that you asked years ago. On the beach at Sea Palling. We were picking up driftwood. You kept on saying “do we get that light when we die?” Do you remember?’

‘No.’

‘Well, you were only four.’

The way she could narrate parts of his life that he had forgotten was unnerving. Her house was full of photographs of them all and she could tell him exactly what he was saying or doing before any given one. But when he looked at them he recalled nothing from these frozen moments. He had not always occupied this body. It had been inhabited by changing selves. Pant Crapping Daniel had stumbled through those early years. Then Puberty Daniel had taken over for a while, until Slightly More Mature but Still Fucking Deranged Daniel had his turn at the helm. At some point he’d slough off Going Nowhere Daniel and a new and hopefully better version would assume command. With each transformation he lost memories, which was reassuring, not frightening – amnesia was a type of freedom.

‘The lights are disappearing,’ his mum said.

She was right. They were dimming and their movements were becoming sluggish. It was not long before the sky was dark once again. How disappointing. Everything had been building up and then it had just ebbed away. He felt frustrated, edgy. Something more needed to happen.

‘I suppose we’d better go home. Do you mind if I turn on the torch?’ his mum asked.

‘One minute.’

He took one last look up at the sky above him. A star curved through the sky, a spark scorching a trail across velvet cloth, and disappeared.

‘Quick, make a wish,’ his mum said.

Suddenly he was hurtling through the universe alongside the stars. His body was a geometric structure made of mirrored glass, each piece fused together by hot threads of lava. But he was too fragile to bear the forces pushing down upon him. The pressure built and built until he could take it no more and he burst into millions of tiny pieces all glowing like fireflies and they fell through the sky and as they cooled they landed as gently as ash upon the earth, arranging themselves into thousands of different configurations, trees and statues and delicate veins of coral and the salt-stiffened sails of creaking wooden ships and a man who was going nowhere looking up at the sky one cold night on a lonely island trying to think of what to wish for.

‘Well? Did you make one?’ she asked.

‘Yeah. But if I tell you what it was then it won’t come true.’

‘Shall we go? I’m freezing,’ she said.

‘You go ahead. I want to stay out for longer.’

‘But we only have one torch. I can’t leave you in the dark.’

He pulled a small torch from his pocket and showed it to her.

‘I thought that one needed new batteries?’ she said.

‘It works fine.’

‘So you’ll come straight back? You aren’t going to go into town to the bar or to see Rath, are you?’

‘What, and get punched again? No thanks,’ he said irritably.

Her concern was suffocating. Why did she persist in treating him like a child when she was the one who needed looking after? Couldn’t she see that he wanted to be alone?

Just when he thought his mum was going to take his hand and steer him home she took the hint and pushed off. Thank fuck for that, he thought, watching the torchlight bob away. He sat down on the ground and twined his fingers through tussocks of rough grass, listening. Ever since he’d woken up this morning he’d been thinking about the island. It made his heartbeat quicken and the hairs on his arms stand on end. It was so vast and powerful you wouldn’t want to get on the wrong side of it. Any sensible person that had heard it speak would probably be hiding inside now, but he was by no means a sensible

person. He had never quite grown out of the habit of watching horror movies alone in the dark and giving himself nightmares. He could imagine one being filmed on an island like this, but the island itself was more than just a creepy place that would send vacuous blondes screaming off the edges of cliffs. It also had depth, a sense of humour. He was sure that it had a lot of great stories to tell too, having been around for so long.

But the island didn't seem to be in a chatty mood tonight; he could hear no words in the noises it was making, just the same pulsating vibrations from last night but with a stronger undercurrent of urgency.

'What do you want?' he asked.

The island hissed at him in response. He could feel it's fierce energy, the heat that pulsed underneath its cold crust of stone. What had it been saying the other day? That it had been years and years since its last lonely release. The poor island. He started to get a bit jittery after a few days of not cumming. When was the last time for him? The day before he'd caught the flight to Iceland. Three nights? Four? It was hard to remember. Time stayed the same here. Either way, he suddenly realised why he'd been feeling so edgy.

'I should go,' he said.

'Why?' the island asked.

'I have plans.'

'Have plans with me.'

'But I need to do something in private,' he said, beginning to rise to his feet.

A strong gust of wind immediately knocked him back down.

'Was that you?' he asked angrily.

'I want you...'

'Want me how?'

'I want you to stay,' the island said.

'Why?'

But the island had lapsed into its own language; incomprehensible sounds of wind and water, sounds that flowed around him, inched their way under his waterproof coat and down the waistband of his trousers, sounds that caressed him softly. His skin began to tingle. Not just from the cold, but desire. Why not here, he thought. The island obviously wanted him to stay. The idea of someone – something – watching him was enough to convince him. It was one of his fantasies, possibly because it had never happened to him. The men he'd met weren't very good at keeping their hands to themselves.

'Fine. You asked for it,' he said to Bodeg, removing his right glove.

‘Asked for what?’

Daniel unzipped his fly. The cold air stung his bare skin. What was he doing? You could get frostbite in this weather. He should go back to the shed.

‘Actually...’ he said, covering himself up.

‘No furless, don’t go.’

Warm wind from nowhere, snaking around his midriff. He was suddenly enveloped in heat. The island was breathing on him, keeping him warm. It wanted him to stay. He closed his eyes, enjoying the respite from the cold. His cock stiffened. He wrapped his hand around it. The friction warmed him further. Heat pooled from his groin and from his shoulder blades. He closed his eyes and saw the blonde boy from the party kneeling down and sucking him off in the caravan, saw them swimming together in a lake, their bodies intertwined under the water. Liquid, weightless desire. He imagined lying side by side next to a pale stranger whose skin was covered in a coating of frost. And he was licking the stranger’s midriff and ice was dissolving on his tongue and then he was biting, biting, burrowing down to the hot flesh underneath trying to crawl inside the wound he’d made so that their two bodies would fuse into one...his hand moved faster and faster and the pressure quickly built and as the grey waves broke onto a rocky shore he cried out and came, shooting salt into the abyss of night that surrounded him.

Rebecca knocked on the door of the black wooden house. No sound from inside. Dawn mists wreathed the landscape, blocking out the newly risen-sun. The ground underneath her was stiff with frost, her hands numb with cold through two layers of gloves. On reflection, 7 a.m. was slightly too early to call on someone. But then again, Rath wasn't exactly deserving of politeness after what he'd done to her son. She knocked again, harder. He *would* get up and he *would* talk to her. Sure enough, she heard a rustling sound from inside and then the door opened. Rath stood in front of her, blinking in the early morning light. His hair stood on end and he was wearing a long navy dressing gown and, if the hairy V of exposed skin below his neck was anything to go by, nothing underneath. It occurred to her that both her children would have found him attractive like this. She just felt uncomfortable. There was something far too solid about his body. These days, the only men she interacted with were ghosts.

'Can I help?' he asked.

'You appear to be doing the opposite,' she replied.

'This is about Daniel?'

She nodded.

'I don't know if he told you what happened.'

'That he tried to seduce you,' she said.

Rath nodded. 'I reacted badly. I apologise. I was drunk and the situation got out of control.'

'Alright,' she said coldly.

He looked at her.

'You are not angry?'

'Of course I am. But what good would shouting do? Besides, this isn't the first time this has happened to him. Admittedly, though, you did do a slightly heavier number on him than the past few.'

She'd woken six weeks ago to the sound of breaking china. Downstairs she'd found Daniel standing white-faced in the kitchen, his nose bloodied. A few months before William's death he'd come to the family roast with a black eye. William had joked that if he'd arrived earlier he could have had a slice of uncooked beef to put on it. Joking was one of the only ways to deal with it. If she – they – had agonised over every bruise and scrape it would have been impossible to think about anything else. It was the invisible hurts her son

experienced, the things people did to him that left no marks and which he never mentioned, that worried her more.

‘Well I am sorry. And ashamed.’

‘Good,’ she replied. ‘But it’s Daniel you need to apologise to, not me.’

‘I know. This I will endeavour to do.’

There was a pause. Rath shifted from one foot to another, obviously wishing she would leave so he could go back inside. But she hadn’t woken this early and dragged herself halfway across the island with aching joints just for an apology.

‘I also came about the article,’ she said. ‘To ask you some questions about the eruption, as we discussed.’

He blinked. How cold he must think her. But why should she let her dislike of him – and it was dislike she felt for him now, for the aggression that no doubt stemmed from some repressed, masculine part of him – get in the way of what she wanted?

‘Come in,’ he said.

She could tell he didn’t want her to. But that didn’t stop her from following him through a dingy hallway and into his living area. He did not offer her anything to drink, or invite her to sit down, so she pulled out a chair for herself at the kitchen table.

‘I’d love a glass of water,’ she informed him.

Scowling slightly, he turned on the tap, half-filled a glass, and placed it in front of her. It tasted more sulphurous than the water from their cottage. She wondered why. Perhaps it was simply because she could see the volcano and the lava field through the window in front of her, which made her feel as if the taste was more pronounced.

‘Thanks,’ she said.

Rath sat down opposite her.

‘So. Ask me.’

‘Don’t you want to know what the article’s about? Or who it’s for?’ she asked.

He shrugged. ‘Not really. I will not read it. They are all the same. About – how do you say it – how *weird* we islanders are, cut off from the world on this strange black rock. That we have strange manners and eat strange foods and have a crappy internet connection. That we used to worship Bodeg as a god. That we try and get our island missed out of the guidebooks so that people will not visit us.’

His eyes darkened as he spoke. That was the most she’d ever heard him say. She’d obviously caught him on a bad morning, one where he was likely to take offence. She must be cautious. Much as she wanted to ask him about the strange foods and any attempts to

erase Bodeg's presence in the guidebooks, it was more important to mollify him. *Mollify*. Where did that word come from? She must remember to look it up when she got back to England.

'Well my article won't be like that. It's for a literary journal. They're doing a special edition – they want human interest pieces on historic eruptions,' she said. 'I just want to establish the circumstances around the eruption – how long it lasted, whether there were any signs beforehand, the damage done to the island. That sort of thing.'

'Alright.'

'I guess we should start at the beginning...' she said.

'But you have no notebook,' he replied.

'I have a photographic memory.'

'What does that mean?'

'It means that I only need to be exposed to information briefly to remember it, that I have a vivid recall of events.'

'You must be a difficult person to argue with,' he said.

'I'm sure I am. Anyway, my first question is: did you notice anything out of the ordinary about the island before the eruption occurred?'

'There is nothing ordinary about this island,' he said. 'Or anybody who lives here.'

'What do you mean?'

'I would be a different person if I were not here. If you think about it you will realise you are a different person here than you are in England. Today, for example, there is more fire in you than there was when you arrived.'

Rebecca wanted to tell him that the island wasn't special, that everyone's personality was conditioned by the environment in which they resided. She wanted to tell him that when she arrived the weather had been bleak, and after two hours on the churning waves she had felt distinctly shaky, so of course she appeared different now. That it was not the island's fire invigorating her, but the thought that she might be about to get a little more clarity on events that had perplexed her for over a decade. And yet last night she had gone to sleep with the smell of peat-smoke in her hair and it must have permeated her dreams for she had thrown some bones into the fire and watched them glow bright, then crumble to black dust, and woken irritated at the scientific inaccuracy of her subconscious. She did not tell him that the jagged black rocks at the water's edge reminded her of teeth, or that the only time she'd been afraid of the dark in adulthood was here on this cold, strange island. She took a sip of

water. These were disquieting thoughts. Best to steer the conversation back onto safer terrain.

‘I didn’t mean that. I was referring to what are called eruption precursors. Signs that the island was building towards an eruption.’

‘There was an earthquake a few days before it happened. And as I was sailing the ferry to the mainland I saw hundreds of birds flying away from the island too. It was strange – too early in the year for it,’ Rath said.

‘Does that mean you were away when the volcano erupted?’

He nodded. ‘I came back immediately.’

‘Evacuation? Was there an evacuation?’ she asked, trying to curb her impatience. This was not a question that interested her; it was merely one link in a logical sequence that got her ever closer to asking about Jake.

‘A ship from the mainland arrived soon after I did, and took most of the people to Iceland. But they were not there for long. The volcano continued to smoke for a week or two, and when it stopped everyone returned.’ He suddenly narrowed his eyes at her. ‘But why do you want to know about this eruption? It was not like Pompeii. Nobody died.’

‘I thought everyone would write about Pompeii. Or Eyjafjallajökull. If I had chosen one of those I would have been in competition with a lot of other writers,’ she said.

He nodded.

‘Anyway, I was asking you what happened after the eruption.’

‘I told you. We got back to normal. Everything got back to normal,’ he said.

The anger in his tone was unmistakable. Her question had obviously struck a nerve. But why?

‘Oh. Well, did anyone come to the island to put any monitoring systems in place afterwards?’ she asked.

‘Some volcanologists did come, yes,’ he said, folding his arms across his chest. ‘Why do you ask me about them?’

‘Well...I actually met one of them. A long time ago. A man called Jake...’

Rath stood up so abruptly his chair fell over, clattering to the floor and making her jump. Rebecca experienced a moment of pure panic as she looked up at the thunderous face of the man towering above her. She had to stand up too, so she’d feel less vulnerable.

‘He sent you here, didn’t he?’ Rath said, his voice dangerously low.

‘What do you mean?’ she faltered. ‘I came here of my own volition. I came to write this article.’

‘You came here because he sent you. He’s still looking for her, isn’t he? That...’ and Rath switched to his own language, spitting out vowels and consonants with the vehemence of someone muttering dark and terrible curses.

Rebecca felt herself turn cold all over. Her chest felt tight, as if she’d just stepped into the freezing waters of the ocean surrounding Bodeg.

‘I’m serious. Jake’s no more than an academic acquaintance. I have no idea what woman he’s looking for – if he even is,’ she continued.

‘Fucking Jake!’ Rath spat.

She looked up at Rath. His jaw was clenched. A vein pulsed in his temple. His eyes were as sharp and dark as obsidian. If she were a more fanciful woman she might be tempted to say that every second she spent with him he looked less like a man, and more like something else...something demonic. Any sensible person would have turned and run. Once upon a time she had been a sensible woman. But since William had died, since she’d come to this island...

‘Unless you mean Unna?’ she asked.

He brought his fist down on the wooden table with a crash that made her jump.

‘Go. Please.’

What else could she do but obey? Her heart thudding so violently it felt as though it might break through her ribs, she hurried from the room and out the front door.

The front door opened. Her mum was back. Anna listened from the kitchen as she took off her coat and boots; her stomach twisted as her mum came into the room.

‘Morning. There was an excellent showing of the Northern Lights last night. Did you manage to see anything from the house?’

Anna was too angry to reply. Instead she cut some slices of bread and spread them thickly with butter and jam. She ate quickly. When was the last time she’d confronted her mum? When was the last time she’d confronted anyone?

‘Anna? Is Daniel awake?’

She shrugged, avoiding Mum’s eyes.

‘What’s wrong?’

‘You,’ she muttered, mouth full.

‘What was that? You don’t look well. Did you have trouble sleeping?’

She swallowed. ‘Yes.’

‘Something was preoccupying you, I expect.’

‘You expect right. The letters you brought with you – I read them.’

There was something horribly satisfying in watching her mum gasp in surprise. She couldn’t think of the last time she’d startled her. Or anyone, for that matter. Did Daniel say the things he did because he realised how good it felt to shock people?

‘I’m sorry you had to find out like that. Please let me explain.’

‘I don’t want to hear it.’

‘Well *I’d* like to talk about it.’

‘I don’t give a shit about what you want, Mum. You didn’t give a shit about us.’

Anna couldn’t remember being this angry. She was often irritated with people, but she rarely let them know; it wasn’t their fault if she overreacted. This time she knew she had a right to be angry. And God, did it feel good to vent. What a rush. Anger was like power. It heated the blood.

‘You’re not being fair,’ her mum said.

Her eyes were red but she wasn’t crying. These days, crocodile that she was, she needed to use artificial tears.

‘No. *You’re* not being fair. You left us at school just so you could fuck!’ she shouted. ‘And what about Dad? He was so good to you. Did he know about it?’

‘That wasn’t...it wasn’t like that. I stayed with your father. I stayed with you. It ended fourteen years ago,’ her mum continued.

‘Oh, so that makes it alright? And you were so in love, was that what you were going to say? So I should forgive you? It wasn’t love, Mum, it was just novelty. Jake was just another adventure, and we all know how much you love adventures.’

‘Please don’t patronise me.’

‘Oh, don’t be so fucking sanctimonious!’

She rushed from the room, desperate to put as much distance between herself and her mum as possible.

Once outside she ran until she was too out of breath to continue. She stopped just outside the village and tried to massage away the stitch knifing her side. What a state she must look. Not that it mattered. Nobody here gave a crap about her appearance, or any other part of her. Daniel was too lost inside his own head to think about anyone else and her mum’s absolute selfishness was indisputable. She felt a little shaky and in need of some comforting. If only she could speak to her dad, although she would never want to be the one to tell him. Perhaps he’d known already. It was so loyal of him not to mention it, but that was her dad. An absolute saint.

She would have to talk to Tommy.

Despite all the issues they were having (or perhaps she was having them on her own) he was her husband, and it was his duty to provide a sympathetic ear. She walked to the harbour. Nobody was around, not even the fishermen. The orange payphone signalled to her like a rescue beacon. She pulled some change from her pocket and dialled his mobile. Eventually he picked up.

Hello?

‘Tommy!’ she said thankfully.

Anna? Sorry, I didn’t hear the phone ring at first. I’m on the bus, you see.

‘The bus?’

The car’s being serviced so I’m taking the bus to work. We’re positively flying down the A11 – there’s a bus lane, you see. It really makes me wonder if it might be more convenient just to commute this way every day; I wouldn’t get stuck in rush hour then. Save a fortune on parking too.

The flush of happiness she’d felt at hearing his voice disappeared. She was on an island in the Arctic Circle and the first thing he wanted to talk about was the rush hour.

‘Good idea.’

There's just one problem. The bus stop is about a quarter a mile from the house. Which is fine if the weather's good – I'll be able to work off those extra pounds from all your cakes – but not if it's raining. You wouldn't mind coming to pick me up if it is, would you?

'No. Fine.'

Are you okay? You sound upset.

'I had some bad news,' she told him, and burst into tears.

Anna, what's wrong?

The connection hissed with white noise, softening his words and making them indistinct round the edges.

'It's Mum...'

Oh God! Is she sick? Is there anything I can do? Do you need me to fly out there?

'No, she had an affair,' she said, gripping the receiver tightly with one hand and wiping her eyes with the other.

Jesus Anna, why did you scare me like that? From the sound of your voice I thought she was injured or ill.

'What, you think my mother having an affair isn't bad news?'

Calm down. I think it's surprising news, not bad news. When did it happen and who with?

'Someone called Jake. Years ago, when me and Daniel were young.'

How long for?

'Why does it matter?'

I don't know. But it's not so bad, is it? I mean, it happened such a long time ago. And your mother obviously broke it off with him and stayed with your dad...

Tommy's calm voice never failed to irritate her. He was talking so slowly too, as if she were a toddler throwing a tantrum. As if her upset was something that had to be contained. It was lucky for him that there was an ocean separating them.

'What about all the times she left me and Daniel at day care, so she could go off and fuck?' she asked, remembering how often her mum was late to the after-school club, and all those long hot summer days cooped up at the childminder's.

Come on Anna, there's no need to be so melodramatic. You don't know she did that. It might only have happened a few times. There's no need to make the whole thing about you.

'Excuse me?'

Surely she hadn't heard him correctly? Surely he wasn't that unsympathetic?

You always do that. You set these impossible standards for other people, and then when they don't meet them you act as if it's personal. Not everyone's out to get you.

'You're saying it's fine for my mother to follow her feelings and neglect the rest of us? And why are you suggesting that monogamy is an impossible standard?' she asked angrily.

Oh, Anna. You're not a child anymore. Marriages don't always work out, you know.

'I'd gathered,' she said, and slammed the receiver down.

After all these years he still wasn't on her side. She took a deep shuddering breath. The grey sea and the grey sky and the grey harbour all blurred into one thick, awful mist. This fucking island. She wished she was anywhere but here. Then it occurred to her that she wasn't exactly sure where she wanted to be instead. Not at home with Tommy, that's for sure.

'Anna?'

The sound of his voice made her jump. Of course. It was Rath, appearing at the worst possible moment once again. She rubbed her eyes frantically but there was no fixing this one.

'Yes?' she said, shifting so they were face to face.

'You are upset.'

'No, it's just the wind. It always makes my eyes water. When's the next ferry to the mainland?' she asked, feeling her lip tremble as she spoke.

'Not until Friday.'

It was Wednesday now.

'The ferry goes on Saturday too. Why don't you spread out the times?' she snapped.

'In summer we go on Wednesdays as well. And whenever there is a national holiday on the mainland. But what is wrong? Why do you want to leave?'

His sympathy caused the inevitable. The tears started to fall, quickly getting thicker and faster, until she was unable to do anything apart from gulp.

'Come and have a coffee with me. You can tell me what is wrong, if you want.'

'I shouldn't,' she managed.

She was supposed to be angry with him. Supposed to be wary of him too. But the concerned man in front of her looked far too sympathetic to be inflicting violence upon anyone.

'I won't hurt you,' he said.

'It's not that. I just... I just don't want to disturb you.'

‘I am not busy. I just came down to look over the boat.’

She nodded. He took her arm and gently steered her across the harbour. How easily she’d let herself be defeated. He turned right where the track forked. They were going towards his house. Presumably this was because there weren’t any cafes in the village. Either that or he wanted to be alone with her. Yesterday the thought would have filled her with a throbbing expectation, but now she felt as flat and grey as a splodge of old chewing gum stuck to the pavement.

They walked in silence. The sky was a leaden colour, the sea a shade or two darker. A colder, gloomier version of England. An example of yet another of her mother’s bad decisions.

Rath sniffed. ‘It is going to snow soon.’

‘You can tell that just by smelling the air?’ she asked.

He glanced at her sidelong. ‘No. Weather forecast.’

‘Oh, right.’

They were nearing his house. She felt a sudden urge to run back home. But the holiday cottage hardly counted as such, and now the house in Norwich didn’t exactly feel welcoming either. She followed him inside because it felt as if there were nowhere else to go.

‘Here,’ he said, pulling out a chair for her at the kitchen table. She sat, feeling awkward and bulky in her outdoor clothes.

‘Let me put your coat away.’

She took it off and handed it to him.

‘You would like tea or coffee?’

‘Coffee please.’

He was being very polite, she thought, as he went out into the hallway. She bent to unlace her boots so she could remove her thick outdoor trousers, as she didn’t want him to see her get all sweaty and red-faced. Shit. She’d forgotten that she wasn’t wearing the black, figure-hugging-yet-shaping long-johns her mum had given her last year. No, she was wearing the fleecy grey trousers from Primark: the ones that made her ass look like a pair of misshapen potatoes; the ones with lurid pink hearts scribbled all across them. She hid her legs under the table.

Rath was in the kitchen, ladling spoonfuls of coffee into a pan of water.

‘Milk? Sugar?’ he asked.

‘Both please.’

A nutty, bitter aroma filled the room. Rath poured the coffee through a small filter into the mugs and spooned sugar into one. He carried them over to the table with a small white jug.

‘Here.’

She watched as he pulled a small silver hip flask from his pocket and added a generous splash to his mug.

‘What’s that?’

‘Brandy. You want?’

She shook her head. A clear head was necessary for self-control. Not that there was an atmosphere of seduction in the room or anything. He was simply trying to cheer her up.

‘So why do you want to leave the island?’ he asked.

‘I argued with my mum.’

‘Why?’

‘I found out that she had an affair with this guy called Jake. It was years ago so I know it doesn’t matter. I mean, my Dad’s dead now...’ she broke off, waiting for his reaction.

But he merely continued to sip his coffee in silence. If anything, he looked angry. His knuckles, gripping the mug, had turned white. How sweet of him to feel this way on her behalf.

‘I guess I’m upset because now I feel like my childhood is a lie. I thought those were happy years – that mum and dad were happy – but now I know they weren’t. And I’m also angry that she would cheat on my dad. She took a vow...’

Anna trailed off. It sounded so lame when spoken out loud. All across the world there were genocides and famines and repressive dictatorships and terminal illnesses, and here she was moaning about this. What did Rath think? He still hadn’t said anything. His silence was starting to unnerve her.

‘Actually, maybe I will have some brandy,’ she said.

He slid the hip-flask across to her.

‘Sorry for being so silly,’ she said apologetically, pouring far too much of it into her mug.

‘You are not being silly. You have learnt something difficult today.’

‘I keep wondering if I already knew. I never really saw them touch, but I just thought that’s what happened to all couples when they had kids.’

‘Kaari at the shop met her husband at school. They have six kids but they still are very physical,’ Rath said. ‘Sorry. Perhaps not a good time to mention.’

‘I keep thinking that all my happiest memories of childhood aren’t real because my mother was lying to me the whole time,’ she said.

‘The past is not a stone,’ he said.

‘Excuse me?’

‘You must think of it a different way. Past is not still and solid like stone. Is like a tree growing. Roots pushing into earth, branches spreading upwards and outwards. You must water it and the tree will provide you with fruit and shelter from storms.’

It all sounded very profound but she’d been a terrible English Lit student at school. No grasp of figurative language, her final report had read.

‘I’m sorry. You’ve lost me.’

He paused, and took a long drink of coffee, swallowing loudly.

‘I will try again,’ he said, after several moments of thought. ‘The past is not one story you tell yourself that stays the same. It changes, because it is fed always new information by the present. And that is why it grows, always, instead of disappearing. Instead the present eventually disappears into the past.’

‘Oh...I get it. The past is always changing. So *all* my memories are unreliable,’ she said, wondering why this was supposed to be comforting.

‘I think I did not explain it well enough.’

‘Never mind.’

‘Have some more brandy,’ he said.

She’d barely eaten today and was already feeling lightheaded, but she found herself upending the hipflask into her mug once again. She took a sip, leaned back in her seat and stretched her legs out, accidentally brushing against Rath’s as she did so. The shock of contact was electric. She withdrew immediately. But seconds later he shifted position. Once again their legs were touching. She glanced at him.

‘You like the coffee?’ he asked calmly.

‘Yes,’ she replied, feeling the beetroot blush stain her cheeks once again.

‘I’ll tell you what is nicer. Brandy and hot chocolate. You want one?’

This was the point at which she should politely refuse, and go home to make amends with her mother. Apologise like the good daughter she was, and cook lunch for everyone. And yet she found herself nodding in agreement. Nothing would happen between them. She could leave any time she wanted. It was only a hot chocolate.

Rebecca stood in front of the derelict house. She'd been walking without thinking, still reeling from the dual shock of her encounters with Rath and then Anna, so perhaps it was inevitable that she'd ended up at this broken place. The house was set back from the road, surrounded by thick waving grasses. Any path had long since disappeared, been reclaimed by the island. She stepped off the track and waded towards it, grass seeds slipping down her socks and scratching her ankles. The first building she reached was a corrugated metal shed. In front of it was a large anchor, also rusty, and a metal trough full of stagnant water, covered in a thin film of ice. It felt as if everything had been very deliberately arranged, but she couldn't work out the significance of the pattern.

She passed the shed and continued toward the house. The front steps were covered in moss the colour of old blood and the door was hanging open – almost, she thought with a cold thrill of fear, as if someone was expecting her. It was stuck, the hinges rusted. She used the weight of her body to push it open and stepped into a dim corridor with shadowed doorways leading off it and paint peeling from its walls. On her left-hand side was an old electric radiator. Above it was a defunct fuse-box. She stepped forwards. Shards of broken glass crunched under her feet. The rooms on either side contained chunks of old plaster and splintered planks, bookcases and cupboards, a broken toilet. At the end of the corridor was a light bulb, the glass browned with age. Someone had initialled 'E. R' on the back wall, intending it as a sign of their presence. But it was now an echoing absence, a failure at staking a claim.

The air in the house was stale. She retired outside and sat down on the front steps, brushing invisible cobwebs from her clothes. What was Anna doing right now? Was she already back at the cottage? Probably calling Tommy. She dug the toe of her boot into the moss that carpeted the step and dislodged a chunk of it, destroying in seconds something that had taken years to grow. Guiltily she remembered how relieved she'd been on those days after dropping them off at school and she was on her way over to Jake's. Elated, even. In those early months, he'd dragged her straight upstairs to bed for a passionate, ecstatic fuck, the echoes of which still reverberated through her body even now. She wondered if what Anna had said was true – she hadn't so much loved Jake but the adventure that he represented. At the time she'd thought herself torn between her children and her lover, but perhaps she really had been taking the best of both worlds. Had Jake left her for this Unna

woman because he'd known that too? Yet Rath had implied Jake was looking for her, which certainly didn't imply togetherness. She wished she could get to the bottom of it all. But each attempt at understanding seemed only to generate more confusion.

Her mind wandered to William. If he was here Anna would be crying on his shoulder. She would, of course, assume her father's complete and utter innocence in the matter. But nobody, no matter how much you love them, is ever completely innocent. Her husband had had his own adventures too. He'd told her about them a few years before he died. It was just after they'd downsized and they were standing together in the house they'd lived in since marriage, trying to work out how much work would be needed before they sold the place. Prostitutes, he'd said. It had only happened twice. Once on a business trip in Thailand and once on a rare stag night in Amsterdam. It was during one of their dry spells, he'd said. To call those periods when they didn't fuck or kiss or even touch a dry spell was putting it nicely. More like a drought. More like two broken skeletons picked clean of flesh and memories of intimacy, their bones scattered across a parched desert.

'I don't blame you,' she'd said.

He'd looked at her expectantly.

'There was someone, once.'

He laid a hand gently on her arm. They stood in silence together. She did not feel the need to ask him how he felt about it. He did not feel the need to tell her. They'd lived a thousand lives since then and all that connected them were the twins and the house they were standing in, a house bereft of furniture, the walls beginning to swell with the rising damp.

The temperature had started to drop. Rebecca got to her feet and began the slow walk home. As she drew close she saw a bright splash of colour on the beach. It was Daniel's waterproof coat. She clambered across the rocks towards him. He was sitting on the flat roof of a small concrete bunker.

'Hi,' she said, sitting down next to him.

The clouds had thickened and blocked out the sunlight, giving the water an unpleasantly viscous appearance. The tide had deposited dark, leathery strands of seaweed on the shore.

'I was waiting for you,' he said.

The bruise on his face had turned a startling array of colours: red, purple, and yellow. She needed to take him inside and clean it, give him a shave and a haircut too. She needed

to make sure he took his medication. She had to do something, anything, that would make her feel like a mother again.

‘Is Anna home?’

‘No. I heard you two shouting at each other earlier. What happened?’

‘She read some letters I brought with me here.’

‘I’ve never heard her shout like that before. I wonder what got into her,’ he said, thoughtfully.

‘Look, I need to tell you something...’

‘There’s no need. I already know. You fucked someone called Jake.’

‘Oh, so you’ve read them too? Good to know my private possessions are of such interest to you all,’ she said angrily.

‘No. Well, yes. But I guessed you were sleeping with someone ages ago.’

‘How?’ she asked.

He looked at her gravely, his blue-violet eyes glinting, and she had to suppress the entirely irrational thought that he had the ability to reach into her and pull out whatever he wanted.

‘It was obvious,’ he said. ‘You were so happy and then you got so sad. Like you’d been in love and then someone had died or left you. But it wasn’t Dad.’

He was right. There had been a couple of difficult, lonely years after Jake, whilst she was still with William. Her substitute teaching work had dwindled to nothing, and she hadn’t bothered to find anything else. Long days spent in bed. Afternoons drinking. People’s faces had seemed blurred, as if she was looking at them underwater. Days were viscous and grey. Every movement felt as difficult as swimming through a murky swamp, weeds snaking round her limbs, trying to extricate herself from the thick layer of sediment that had accreted on the bottom. It was only when Daniel had his first psychotic episode that she was dragged upwards and broke through the surface. In looking after him the self-pity that had swamped her simply drained away. As his world shrank, hers had returned.

‘I’m sorry. You probably think it’s all rather pathetic,’ she said.

Something cold and wet fell onto the end of her nose. It was starting to rain.

Daniel wrapped his arm around her shoulders in a rare demonstration of affection.

‘No. Don’t be stupid. How long were you together?’

Nobody else she knew would have approved. All her friends had been very fond of William. None of them had ever admitted to cheating on their partners. But just because they

didn't reveal their love affairs to her didn't mean they didn't wear them with secret pride, like badges of honour pinned to t-shirts and blouses, hidden underneath jumpers and jackets.

'Six years, more or less. But he was always travelling. That's when he wrote the letters. Then he stopped so suddenly. After he came here, as it happens. I haven't heard from him since.'

Her pride stopped her from mentioning Unna to him. Besides, what could she say? She was still completely ignorant in the matter.

'Is he dead?'

'I don't think so. I contacted the research organisation he worked with and they said he'd left the island fit and healthy, but had handed in his notice shortly afterwards. I mean, he could have died since then.'

'Have you googled him?'

'I just get links to his research papers, but there's nothing beyond the date he went to Bodeg. Jake Smith is a common name, you know,' she said.

'Why didn't you try finding him at the time, instead of getting all mopey about it?'

'I tried calling, emailing. Everything. I even went over to his house and knocked. Nobody ever answered. The next time I drove past it had a 'For rent' sign in front.'

'Ah. You were ghosted then,' Daniel said.

'What does that mean?'

'Someone's there and then they aren't. They stop calling, texting, everything. Don't worry Mum, it's happened to me before. A guy's into me, and then he disappears.'

'But why do people do it?'

'Because they stop liking you.'

'So why don't they just tell you? Even a short email would suffice to put you out of your misery,' she said, wondering how someone who had loved you for years could stop so abruptly.

'No idea. Perhaps because they're cunts.'

'Ghosting,' she said again.

It was an appropriate word, for she was still haunted by him, even after so long. He was surely married by now. To Unna, perhaps. She had come here hoping to untangle the mystery of his disappearance but it might be as simple as her son suggested. And yet why would his feelings change so abruptly? She leaned her head against Daniel's shoulder and closed her eyes. After a minute or two she felt wet drifting rain against her face.

'We should go back inside. It's raining,' she said eventually.

‘No mum, it’s snowing. Look!’

She opened her eyes. He was right. Snowflakes were drifting downwards, flashing bright white against the gunmetal coloured sky. She wondered if they’d settle.

‘They’re huge!’ Daniel said.

Touched by his excitement, she held out her gloved hands. Several alighted on them. Why was she letting Jake affect her so much? It wasn’t as if the present moment was so awful. She was on an island in the Arctic with her son, and it was snowing. She loved the snow, each flake a fractal pattern made from delicate shards of ice. Every individual flake was formed of quintillions of water molecules, all of which varied in design, some containing unusual oxygen atoms and others an atom of deuterium. This meant it was close to impossible that any two snowflakes were the same. She was glad that it wasn’t possible to check and prove this wrong, for she liked the idea of being surrounded by infinity.

‘I want to make a snowman,’ he said.

‘It’s falling quite fast. It might only take an hour or two before it settles. Let’s go home and wait in the warm,’ she replied.

‘Fine,’ he said, standing up and then helping her to her feet.

‘Oh and Daniel, you promised yesterday you’d take your medication in front of me.’

‘I might have mislaid it,’ he said, avoiding her eyes.

‘Don’t worry. I brought an extra packet just in case.’

He looked up at her. She steeled herself for the inevitable protests.

‘Alright,’ he said, surprising her.

She followed him back to the house, slightly heartened by her small victory and an afternoon of innocent fun. Snow had the capacity to erase any ugliness, to smooth jagged edges. Perhaps it would also have the capacity to muffle her daughter’s anger. She hoped so. The island already felt softer to her.

Anna and Rath had moved from the kitchen table to the sofa. She relaxed back against the cushions. He'd stoked the fire to a roaring blaze and she felt deliciously warm. Deliciously drunk too; fuzzy and light-headed.

'I should go,' she said, even though she had no desire to venture back out into the cold.

'You don't have to,' he replied.

His thigh was only an inch or two away from hers. She hoped he didn't think something was going to happen between them, especially now she'd explained how her mother's infidelity made her feel.

'What about the fish?'

'What fish?' he asked, shifting position so their legs were touching. Pressed up against the arm of the sofa, there was nowhere to escape. Besides, she wasn't sure if she wanted to.

'Don't you have to go to the harbour and get the catch from the fishermen to sell? Or perhaps something needs to be done on the ferry?'

'I have more important things to think about,' he said, reaching out and stroking her cheek very lightly with his finger.

The desire she'd been actively trying to repress over the past hour or so swelled to an insistent beat. She could no longer pretend she was indulging in a bit of harmless flirtation with a new acquaintance. No, she had crossed over to a more dangerous place than that. She jumped to her feet. He stood up too. They were just inches apart.

'I'm sorry Rath. I must go, I need to, to, to...'

He pressed a finger to her lips, and took a step closer.

'I'm married.'

'But your husband is not here.'

If she'd been religious she would have thought God was testing her. But nobody was watching: not God and not Tommy. She had always disliked feeling alone and ignored, but now she saw it had some benefits. I'll know, she told herself firmly. There was a sick fluttering sensation in her chest, as if she were on a rollercoaster; suspended in that horrible pause before the plummet downwards.

Rath took her hand and placed it on his crotch. 'Before you come here, I had been asleep for so many years. And now you wake me up, Anna.'

She could feel his dick through his trousers. How much bigger and thicker it was than Tommy's. Despite the anxiety of the situation she was curious – her husband was the only grown man she'd ever seen naked and erect. This was the moment at which she should tell him 'No', and leave. But saying 'No' was complicated by the fact she didn't want to. She remained where she was, decided and yet undecided, until he kissed her.

At first it felt uncanny because it wasn't Tommy. But as she relaxed she began to enjoy it. His lips were surprisingly soft and so too was his beard, which tickled her chin. His breath tasted of coffee and cigarettes. She'd never kissed a smoker before and found, to her surprise, that it was not unpleasant. In fact, there was something manly about it. But the softness was short-lived. He clasped his hands firmly around her waist and began to kiss her with a fierceness she dimly remembered from her teenage years of snogging boys on the bench under the weeping willow tree in the park or at the underage disco, drinking each other in, desperate with need but scared too, scared of being engulfed by the riptides of such unfamiliar feelings. Back then nothing had been more important than what you did or didn't do with a boy in a dim-lit room or a darkened park. Back then, sex had been alluring because it was mysterious. The confusion on Tommy's face as he'd started to explore her.

'I didn't realise it would curve back like that; I thought it would be straight all the way up,' he'd said.

His concern as he hovered above her.

'I hope this isn't too painful for you.'

The way he'd smiled after he'd given her an orgasm for the first time with his fingers. She was having troubles with him now but she felt only tenderness for the boy he'd once been.

She broke away.

'Rath, we can't. I'm married, I already said,' she managed finally.

'What you mean by can't? We already have,' he told her.

'This is just a kiss. I can't go any further. It wouldn't be fair on my husband.'

Rath let go of her waist and took a step backwards. She could see the outline of his dick pressing against his trousers and felt bad for leaving him in such a heightened state.

'I have to go,' she said.

'It is your decision,' he replied, sitting back down on the sofa, pulling a cushion onto his lap and lighting a cigarette.

‘Sorry,’ she said, pulling on her outdoor clothes.

She paused in the hallway, steeling herself for the feeling of his hand on her shoulder. She realised she was expecting him to call out and persuade her to stay. But he did not. And so she left, shutting the door softly behind her.

Outside it was snowing. The ground was dusted in it, and she wondered how long the flakes had been falling. She looked back at the house. He was standing by the window watching her. Light reflected off the glass, making it impossible to read his expression. Would he have been better at understanding her body than Tommy was? Even just kissing him had aroused her far more than sex with her husband. She’d done the right thing, but it felt awful. Tommy would never know the sacrifice she’d made and so he’d never be able to appreciate it. If she’d been able to walk away, why hadn’t her mother? She lifted her face towards the sky. Snowflakes landed on her skin and melted, trickling down her cheeks like tears.

APPENDIX | *BODEG*, CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE TO FIFTY-TWO

31 | DANIEL

An hour later the snow began to ease off. Daniel stepped out of the house into a monochrome world. A slate grey sea hurled itself against black rocks and scattered spume into the air. The dark angles of the island's body were softened by a pale blanket of snow. He felt as if he was a character in an old black-and-white movie where everything was jerky and blurred. The clouds were the shadows and scratches moving across the screen and he could hear the hiss of white noise in the falling snow. He stepped out of the house and stood waiting for his mum, who was inside putting on base layers and outer layers and waterproof layers, insulating herself from the cold. But he had the island's fire to keep him warm and if not it didn't matter, there was something ecstatic in the burn of snow against his upturned face.

'Bodeg? Are you here?' he asked.

'I'm always here,' a voice hissed close to his ear.

The sound made his body tingle in anticipation. He remembered last night. Had Bodeg understood what had passed between them? Had the island gained any pleasure from what had happened, or had it just been another game to it?

'Last night, did you...?' he began, and trailed off, unsure of how to proceed. Between himself and other men there seemed always to exist a tacit agreement that you shouldn't bring up a previous encounter. Instead it must be left in the darkness of night where it initially occurred. Perhaps the same was true of islands.

'Yes I felt your desire against my skin, and yes I tasted it too, in your liquid pearls of fish salt bones loneliness.'

'My what?'

'From your column...'

'Ah.'

Daniel felt a momentary sense of embarrassment.

'I'm sorry. I should have asked first. Are you upset with me?'

'Furless...'

The island's voice was a soft rustle, like wind through fields of grass. Waves of sound caressed his body. Daniel closed his eyes and relaxed into the sensation. Underneath his coat and jumper he could feel the sound of the island moving up and down his back, softly

stroking his skin. How good it was to be touched like this. To be held without being held, no feelings of inadequacy, nor worry of being overpowered. He'd never experienced anything of this intensity before. He felt secure and yet vulnerable. A melancholy happiness, for the moment was tinged with the anticipation of loss; anything this perfect always, inevitably, disappeared.

'Daniel! Daniel!'

The island's voice dwindled in his mother's presence. It withdrew its caresses. The feeling of being alone again, a cold blue hollowness in the chest, assailed him with such force he almost doubled over.

'Are you ready?' she asked. 'Ready to make a snowman? Although I don't know if it's settled enough – there's barely an inch.'

It seemed like such a childish thing to do, suddenly. Prosaic, almost, after the poetry of the snow and the bodiless embrace he'd just experienced. But she looked so hopeful.

'Let's walk first,' he said.

'Go down to my edges furless, there is something on my shores...'

'To the beach,' he added.

'A beach in the snow. I've never done that,' she said.

As they walked, their arms occasionally brushing together, he had the sensation that she wanted to take his hand. There was something in this need that turned him cold. Feeling impatient, he deliberately increased his pace. She sped up too. Soon she was almost running, and he could hear the uneven gasps of her breath. Why did she have to walk beside him? Couldn't she drop back and go at her own speed? Give him some peace, a moment with the island.

'Daniel, please slow down a little,' she said breathlessly.

He stopped abruptly and watched her trying to catch her breath as discreetly as possible. It wasn't working. She looked like she'd just run a marathon. No, that was a lie, because she had actually run one about a decade ago, and when she crossed the finish line she was incandescent with happiness to have completed it. Looking at her then, he'd felt a jolt of pure jealousy – he was supposed to have been training with her, one of those pity projects that was intended to inspire/help/cure him of the Condition, but he'd given up halfway through which meant standing on the sidelines, cheering her on. Yet more evidence of what happened when you didn't stick with something, anything, but he found it so hard to, his mind was like a magpie, there was always something shinier, brighter, better – but now, seeing how tired she was, he felt nothing of the sort. Impatience was replaced with

shame. He turned away from her and lit a cigarette. And then he caught sight of the beach. The black sand was covered in grey clouds.

‘It’s stopped snowing,’ his mum said from behind him.

He turned to her in excitement.

‘That’s because all the clouds fell out of the sky. Look!’

‘Oh Daniel. Those are icebergs. They look so...so dirty.’

She was right. They were a dull grey, reflecting the colours of the sky. But still, there was no need to be disappointed – it was fucking cool that the whole beach was full of icebergs.

‘Come on. Let’s go and take a look,’ he said, taking her hand to help her over the rocks.

She had wanted him to do that a couple of minutes ago, but now her hand lay limp in his. He could tell that she was somewhere else entirely, stuck in a long-ago moment; one involving Jake.

‘Why don’t you make the sun shine? Everything would look a lot better then,’ he said to the island. Even though he was talking out loud it was the sort of thing he could pretend was a wish, or a prayer, or some other whimsical bullshit. He had the excuses all lined up but she didn’t even ask him who he was talking to.

They clambered down onto the beach and began to meander through the icebergs. They were all different sizes; some reached to his waist, whilst others were taller than him. His mum was still faded and sad, but his heart was pounding with excitement. He’d never seen an iceberg before. And although some of them were grey others were stained a vibrant turquoise, the colour of myths and mermaids and underwater caverns. The ice looked somehow old, dense with Arctic memories. He glanced sidelong at his mother. She wasn’t paying any attention to him so he reached out and licked the closest iceberg. It had a bitter, refreshing taste, reminiscent of the smell of his mum’s garden after it rained. Surprisingly, it was not salty.

‘Why are they that colour?’ he asked, nudging her shoulder to get her attention.

‘Because glacial ice is very compact. When light hits, it absorbs long wavelengths like red, but it scatters blue, which has a short wavelength,’ she said dully.

‘Oh cool,’ he said, with as much enthusiasm as he could muster. That should have been her cue for a mini lecture on ice, but she said nothing more.

He looked up at the sky. The sun had emerged; a dull silver coin half-obscured by cloud.

‘Look. The sun’s going to come out.’

‘Don’t be so sure of that,’ she said. ‘Not on this island.’

And then she left his side and walked down to the water’s edge. He looked on as she watched the waves break against the shore again and again.

‘Why doesn’t she feel your fire? I do and Anna does too, even though she’s too thick to realise it,’ he said quietly to the island.

‘I am not just formed of fire, but rock and ice and plants. The heat lies deep within. If you could read her dreams you would see her heat.’

‘So how come you can read minds?’ Daniel asked.

He wondered what he would do if he was telepathic. It would be a useful skill for cheating at card games and being able to work out if someone fancied you or not. There was probably a less superficial use for it than that.

‘I don’t read minds, I read bodies. You furlesses smell different when you get angry or when you want to mate. And you express your feelings in every gesture you make, each lowering of the top-round, each clench of the mandible and each shuffle of the footpads. It seems so strange you do not comprehend each other,’ the island said.

‘Sometimes we do it on purpose. Or I do. I pretend I don’t understand people,’ he replied.

‘But why?’

‘I guess...so I don’t have to deal with their emotions. If someone is upset I can either ignore it or apologise, which also means I have to come to terms with the fact I’ve been a bit of a bastard. The first one is easiest, I guess.’

The island said nothing.

Daniel looked across the beach. The sun had almost broken through the clouds and the icebergs were beginning to cast faint shadows across the beach. He was casting one too; a pathetic, spindly thing that would disappear just as soon as the sun went in. How fragile he was. But the island had stayed where it was for hundreds of years, held firm through floods and earthquakes, blizzards and volcanoes.

‘Do you think humans are ridiculous? Sorry, I mean furlesses?’ he asked.

‘You lack the instincts of the wingedwuns and the seals,’ Bodeg replied.

‘I want to learn them,’ he said.

‘Then you must stop living inside your top-round and start using your augurs instead.’

‘My augurs?’

‘Here,’ the island said, and he experienced the sensation of being touched around the eyes; the ghost of a caress.

‘Ok so how? Teach me,’ he said.

‘You must walk to the place where I merge with the sea.’

Daniel made his way through the icebergs to the tideline.

‘Look down.’

He complied, and noticed the sand around him was covered in small dome-like protuberances.

‘I’m meant to be looking at these round things, right?’

‘Yes. That means Oceanus is rising. And you can tell when he drops back, because then you will see marks like roots in the sand.’

‘Oh wow. That’s kinda cool.’

‘And the colour of these sea-plants tells you how deep down they live in Oceanus.’

Daniel gestured at the tideline, at the pattern of dark seaweed. ‘So it’s like a map?’

‘It is a map that shows you how strong the waves are. And if you look at the waves you can tell the force of the wind. If you could read waves you would know that something is going to happen right...now.’

At that moment the clouds parted to reveal a pale golden sun. It shone upon the icebergs, illuminating the contours of every single one. The beach was full of shining fractals and mirrored curves. The shadows of the icebergs lengthened and darkened, whilst the rest of the sand shone like obsidian.

‘It’s beautiful,’ he said softly. ‘Thank you.’

He turned to find his mum. She was walking towards him along the tideline, and finally she was smiling.

‘This is it. This is how it should be. Just like in his letters,’ she told him, once she reached him.

His happiness dimmed slightly. That was all she wanted. To be trapped in a memory. He would have to pull her out of her own mind and get her to use her augers, as the island called them.

‘Come on. Let’s go and explore. We need to find one to climb,’ he said.

Together, they began walking away from Oceanus, back into a world of sunlight and ice.

Rebecca and Daniel were driven back inside by cold and hunger towards the end of the afternoon. Rebecca looked out of the window at their footprints, clearly visible against the snow: black marks on white, like words on paper. She had read somewhere that stories are written to negate the whiteness of absence. Their footprints told a story too. Someone observant could read them and discern that a man and a woman had been walking together. That the man, who had much larger feet, also took longer strides, which showed he was in more of a hurry. The woman left an uneven print; she limped slightly and favoured the left leg. Although her stride had matched his at first, it had become rapidly shorter. She hadn't been able to keep up. From now on she never would be. If only she could remove her bones, oil them, and then put them back. Either that, or replace them altogether. Daniel liked watching movies based on comic books. In one of them a mutant with the capacity to heal himself had a skeleton made of unbreakable metal. If only it was possible to make such changes to one's own body.

She turned away from the window and discovered that a saucepan half-full of pasta and tomato sauce had been left on the stove, with a cylinder of white cheese next to it. Goats' cheese. Rath had indicated that goats were indigenous to the island. But she hadn't seen any since she'd arrived. Maybe they lived on the northernmost part, beyond where the path stopped.

'Anna's cooked for us. She can't be that angry with me, then,' she said to Daniel.

'Don't bet on it. Even if the world was ending she'd still cook dinner. She's like a robot with one setting. Besides, it might not even be for us,' he replied, grabbing a handful and eating it. Limp strands of spaghetti dangled from both corners of his mouth and sauce dripped down his chin.

'Please don't say things like that about your sister. And let me heat it up before you start attacking it,' she said, shooing him out of the way.

She knew she should come down harder on him when he talked about Anna like that, but she couldn't be cross with him today. They'd had such fun in the snow. What's more, he seemed to have calmed down. He'd even taken his medication in front of her.

There was a loud creaking noise from the room above. She jumped and Daniel laughed.

‘Come on, you can’t be scared of your own daughter. What’s she going to do, shout at you? You can take it.’

‘I’m going up there to check on her. Keep an eye on the food, will you?’

Daniel took off his belt and picked up a chair. He held both out to her solemnly. ‘Here, take these. They’ll help you tame the beast.’

She mustn’t laugh.

‘You’re so cruel to her,’ she said instead.

‘I was just joking.’

She went upstairs. Anna, who was lying in bed with her hair wrapped in a towel, looked at her accusatorily.

‘What do you want?’

‘I came up to talk to you. I’m so sorry you found out like that – it must have been a shock.’

‘Huh,’ Anna said.

She picked up the trashy romance novel she was reading and opened it pointedly.

‘I think it would be good if we talked about it. At least give me a chance to explain.’

‘What is there to explain? It seems pretty simple to me. The whole while you were just playing happy families. Then you were going off fucking Jake.’

‘A word ending in “ing” tends to designate a continuous action, whereas Jake is strictly in the past.’

‘Great, a grammar lesson, just what I need,’ Anna said, getting out of bed and pulling on her outdoor trousers. The towel slid off her head.

‘I’m just trying to say that it all happened a very long time ago.’

‘That’s the worst excuse ever,’ Anna replied, pulling her empty suitcase out from under the bed. She knelt down, opened her drawers and began to stuff clothes into it.

‘What are you doing?’

‘What do you think? I’m leaving.’

‘But the ferry might not be going back to the mainland today.’

‘It doesn’t go until Friday. I already checked. I’m going to go and stay in the hotel until then. You and the psycho can find your own way home.’

‘Please don’t call your brother that.’

‘Will you ever stop defending him and take my side? Daniel this, Daniel that: always Daniel, Daniel, Daniel!’ Anna shouted.

Rebecca had never seen her this angry.

‘Calm down. Let’s just go downstairs, have some food and talk about things rationally,’ she said.

‘I am so sick of being told to calm down!’

There were footsteps on the stairs and then Daniel appeared. ‘Did you need me? I heard my name. The pasta’s hot, Mum – let’s eat.’

‘Oh great. Trust you to come sticking your nose in,’ Anna said.

‘Come on now, your brother’s done nothing wrong.’

‘Of course he hasn’t, he never does. He’s a fucking saint, just like you!’

Daniel snorted. She looked over at him and saw that he was trying his hardest not to laugh.

‘What’s so funny?’ Anna asked him, zipping her suitcase and straightening up.

‘You are,’ Daniel said.

‘Oh my God. Fuck you both. I’m going.’

‘Don’t, please stay,’ she said.

‘Try saying that with feeling next time,’ Anna replied, picking up the case and pushing past her.

‘Anna, come on.’

But her daughter left the room without looking back.

Rebecca hurried after her. Anna was at the bottom of the stairs, thrusting her legs into her ski trousers.

‘I’m sorry about the way Daniel behaved. I want you to stay, I really do. I want to work things out,’ she said.

Her daughter turned to face her, anger distorting her features in a way that made her want to turn and retreat upstairs. But she stood her ground.

‘Please?’

‘You know what, Mum? There’s only been one time you’ve punished Daniel for what he did to me. It was when he stole my diary. You were so angry with him for invading my privacy. The importance of keeping secrets – that’s all you’ve taught me!’

Her daughter’s comment had the force of a slap. Surely that wasn’t the case?

‘Anna, please calm down...’ she said, laying a hand on her daughter’s arm.

‘No! Not anymore!’

With that, her daughter shook herself free. She grabbed her coat with one hand, her suitcase with the other, and stormed out of the front door.

Rebecca remained where she was. The argument had stunned her. Anna had never been this angry. If only she hadn't brought those letters on holiday with her. She'd been so careless, leaving them lying around like that. Now her own daughter thought she was the lowest of the low.

'Mum. Let's eat,' Daniel said.

She turned. He was standing on the steps behind her. She wondered how much he had seen of the argument.

'Anna's gone. We should go after her. She's in a real state,' she said.

'No. Let her walk it off. She needs to get it out of her system.'

Rebecca massaged her temples. 'I need a drink.'

'There's a bottle of wine in the cupboard.'

There was an icy draught blowing in through the open doorway. As she went over to shut it she peered outside. The light was beautiful; the nostalgic glow of late afternoon. But she was unable to appreciate it. The stark contrast of the ugliness of her emotions compared to the beauty of the environment had a surprisingly melancholic effect. She shut the door, but it was too late. Her body felt raw with the emotions that were coursing through it; emotions she could not articulate because they registered only as a confused intensity.

'Come on, let's go and drink it,' Daniel said.

She managed to follow him into the kitchen and sat down at the table whilst he fetched out the wine; a glass bottle covered with a thick film of grey dust. They had both drained their glasses long before they'd finished their food. Rebecca pushed the now cold pasta around her plate. The argument with Anna and the hours spent outside had completely exhausted her. Daniel didn't seem to be faring much better either. Conversation between them had dwindled to nothing.

Daniel got up abruptly from the table, leaving his plate of food half-eaten. She watched him put another block of peat on the fire and then wander over to the book shelf.

'*The Culture and Myths of Nordic Countries*. Any good?'

She shrugged. 'The best out of a poor selection.'

He opened it up on the folded-out page. 'Unna,' he read out. 'That's Rath's wife.'

Rebecca felt faint. So that was why Rath had reacted so violently to her ex-lover's name. The depth of his anger suggested that Jake and Unna must have been far more than friends.

'How do you know Unna is Rath's wife?' she asked weakly.

‘Because the...because he told me and Anna. He has a memorial garden for her outside his house. It has a stone with her face scratched into it.’

‘Unna’s dead?’

‘He didn’t actually say “dead”. He said “lost”. “My wife who I lost.”’

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘Lost’ was a euphemism for death, and yet Rath had implied Jake was still looking for her. Perhaps the only person who knew what had happened was Unna herself.

‘Want me to find out what happened to her? I can ask someone,’ Daniel told her.

‘Don’t be ridiculous. There’s no need to pry,’ she said, a little too sharply.

‘I don’t get it. Why are you upset?’

‘This book belongs to Jake,’ she said.

‘Oh I see. And you don’t know why he wrote her name in the margin. Do you think they were fucking?’

‘How should I know?’

Her head was spinning. The suggestion, coming out of someone else’s mouth, suddenly felt as if it could be true. She wondered if it was. Maybe there had been other women too. Had they passed through his life like shadows or been something more substantial to him? They’d never discussed exclusivity – how could she have brought it up, married to someone else? – but she had assumed his fidelity. Had Jake loved Unna? Had she loved him? Those were the important questions, ones that only Jake and Unna would be able to answer for her. How terrible, how banal, if the reason he’d cut contact with her was because he’d met someone else. But why had he never had the guts to tell her? Her eyes stung with the effort of trying not to cry. She got up and went to the kitchen to get a glass of water. In doing so she had to turn her back to him to get a glass out of the cupboard, an action which allowed her to quickly wipe her eyes. Then she turned back to face him.

‘Sorry,’ she said to him.

‘You’re spiralling. He just scribbled down her name in a goddamned book,’ Daniel said. ‘Besides, it might not even have been him who wrote it. This book has been sitting here for years.’

She tried to laugh, but it came out like a sob. ‘It doesn’t even matter now. It was fourteen years ago.’

He looked at her. ‘It obviously does matter to you.’

To escape the scrutiny of his gaze, she turned her attention to the book once again, began flicking through the pages.

‘He underlined this too. What do you make of that?’

‘Time moves in circles, not lines,’ he read out.

She watched his eyes quickly skimming the lines of print. Daniel was better at finding the patterns between things than she was.

‘Well?’ she asked impatiently.

‘Maybe he thinks magic still exists.’

‘Magic between him and Unna?’

‘No, dummy. I meant magic on the island. This whole page is about the natural world.’

‘How ridiculous.’

He looked at her gravely.

‘Can’t you feel it?’

‘Feel what?’

‘The island’s magic.’

‘No,’ she said immediately.

‘It changes people. You don’t feel any different?’

‘You sound exactly like Rath.’

‘Well he lives here. He can probably feel it too. And I bet Jake could.’

Rebecca looked at her son. He was completely in earnest, just as Rath had been. She thought of Anna’s recent outbursts: that was definitely a change in behaviour. She thought of the feeling of irrational terror she’d experienced on the first night, and the way Daniel had run across the lava as if chased by something nobody else could see. That strange old woman she’d encountered on the lava field. That dream of peat-smoke and bones. What was happening to them all? But she shook her head to dispel the thought. There was a rational explanation for all of it. There was.

Anna stood outside the hotel, her stomach cramping with anxiety as she knocked for the third time. No response. The door was locked and the windows were all shuttered. She sat despondently on the doorstep with her suitcase next to her and wondered what to do next. It would be dark soon. To return to the holiday cottage was to admit defeat. But there was nowhere else to go.

‘You want to stay in the hotel?’

She lifted her head and saw Lief, the fisherman.

‘That’s right.’

‘It is closed. The owners are on the mainland.’

‘Well, are there any other places I can stay here? A guesthouse? Another cottage?’

‘No. Just this hotel and the house you stay in with your family,’ he said, looking at her curiously.

‘Oh.’

‘You want me to see if anyone in the village would like to rent a room? Unfortunately, perhaps not wise if you stay with my wife and I and her father. The old man walks in his sleep, gets confused if things are...irregular,’ he said, scrutinising her carefully, with no trace of the flirtatious manner he’d displayed a couple of days ago.

‘Please, don’t go out of your way. I’ll just go home.’

‘You are sure?’

‘I just had a silly argument with my mum. Don’t worry about me.’

‘Yes – go and apologise to her. You should be having fun. You are on holiday.’

She forced a smile.

‘If you ever want help with anything, our house is just around the corner. The next street on the left. Only one with the Christmas tree outside. We brought it with us over from Tromsø.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Your problems will disappear once you leave the island. They always seem to. The larger a place, the easier it is to run away. Here, there’s no escape from your feelings,’ he said.

How she wished that were true.

Lief inclined his head in farewell and left.

‘Wait, come back,’ she wanted to shout after him. ‘You’re a fisherman: take me away from this stupid island. I don’t care if it’s choppy or if it gets dark out at sea. It’s better than being stuck here anyway.’

But she kept quiet. She wasn’t the crazy one, after all. If she could get online and talk to her friends she would feel better. There was the payphone but she hadn’t got her mobile on her and the only number she had memorised was Tommy’s. She didn’t want to talk to him even though she knew she should. He was as much to blame for the argument as she was, but she’d be the one to apologise, the one who’d have to swallow her feelings and forgive. But she was sick of doing that. Sick of being the good daughter, the patient wife, and the helpful sister; sick of behaving how everyone expected her to. Nobody else seemed to be trying as hard as she was. She realised she’d gone about it all wrong. If she’d spent her life acting like a selfish bitch then the people around her would cherish the rare moments of kindness she bestowed upon them. But now everyone took her for granted. It would be dark in an hour or so. She should probably go home. If only the fucking hotel wasn’t closed, she thought, standing up and yanking her suitcase towards her. The metal handle ripped off.

‘Stupid thing, stupid, stupid, thing,’ she raged, kicking the suitcase so it fell over into a pile of snow. She felt like throwing herself onto the ground and beating it with her fists until they bled. But she didn’t. After all, there might be people watching. Instead she picked the case up by its canvas handle and began struggling with it back the way she’d come. As she walked, she found herself comparing Rath and Tommy. The phone conversation with Tommy had made her feel worse, but Rath had comforted her so easily. And that kiss. It made her hot to think about it. Even though her friends were jealous of how stable her relationship was, the brightest thing in her life was that sun-coloured ball of wool hidden under the bed.

She remembered a phrase they’d had to discuss in sixth form philosophy class. If a tree falls in the woods and there’s nobody around to see it, then does it make a sound? ‘Of course it does,’ she’d said at the time. ‘What a stupid question.’ She’d been as bad at philosophy as she was at English lit, but now she thought she might understand the point of the question. It wasn’t about trees; it was about people. Tommy was miles away. He couldn’t see or hear her, and unless she told him he wouldn’t have a clue what had happened on the island. Even when she was standing right next to him he didn’t pay much attention to her anyway. He’d grown so accustomed to who he thought she was that he never really saw her. But she knew that she had the capacity to surprise him. She had the capacity to surprise herself too. She turned and began walking in the opposite direction, towards Rath’s house.

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Daniel tucked the pill in between his gum and top lip. This was the second time today his mum had made him take his medication in front of her. A few minutes later he went to the bathroom and dropped it into the toilet whilst he was pissing so she wouldn't hear the small but unmistakable 'plop' as it hit the water. Then he flushed it away hoping it would dissolve before it got to the ocean so it didn't fuck with the mind of whatever fish happened to swallow it. Animals reacted differently to drugs than humans. Perhaps the fish would get superpowers and learn to swim at the speed of light, criss-crossing the globe to find the best food, the warmest, clearest waters and the most beautiful coral. Did fish care about beauty? If he had a superpower it would be to fly even though everyone said that, or invisibility so he could go and watch people fuck and fight and do all the weird shit they got up to when they thought nobody was watching.

'I think I might go to bed now,' his mum said when he returned to the living room.

'But it's not even eight.'

'I'm not feeling too well.'

'Alright. Well get some sleep, hopefully you'll feel better tomorrow.'

She paused in the doorway. 'Daniel...'

'Yeah?'

'Thank you for today.'

'That's alright,' he said, trying his hardest to maintain eye contact. He didn't quite understand the expression on her face, but for some reason it embarrassed him.

'Wake me up when Anna gets back?'

'Naturally.'

'Goodnight.'

'Night.'

His mum went upstairs. She was too trusting. Anna wouldn't be back any time soon. He was willing to bet his life that she was with Rath, hypocrite that she was. He wasn't jealous. The guy was a miserable cunt and besides he was probably shit in bed, so sex-deprived that he'd cum in seconds. If he was invisible he'd go over there right now: not to watch the actual boning of course, but the sorry aftermath. Their pillow talk would be so awkward because he had no social skills and she would be freaking the fuck out and trying to hide it. Would she stay the night or would he kick her out into the cold? Perhaps she'd

run off as soon as it was done, pussy still sticky with Rath's spunk, and spend the next lifetime feeling like shit for cheating on Tommy. But he had better things to do than sit about wondering what Anna was doing. Bodeg was waiting for him.

He picked up the half-empty bottle of wine and left the house with it tucked under his arm. The island was looking glorious tonight. The sunset stained the sky and the snow pink. Swathes of cloud, the purple of old bruises, hung above the horizon. He gulped some wine and began sauntering up the track, away from the village. A few hundred yards up the road he caught sight of a large flat-topped boulder. It would have been a perfect place to sit and drink if it hadn't been covered in snow. But as he drew closer he saw that the top created an overhang that had shielded the mossy ground below from the recent snowfall. The recess underneath was large enough for him to sit in. He crawled inside. Small spaces comforted him. What was the opposite of claustrophobia? Agoraphobia? But he had nothing against open spaces – they were easier to breathe in. Claustrophilia, perhaps.

He looked out to sea. It was dark red, almost black, and contrasted starkly with the edges of the island, which were covered in snow the consistency of whipped egg whites. Despite the cold, he suddenly felt a sense of warm contentment. A slender finger of wind gently stroked his cheek.

'Bodeg? Is that you?'

'Furless.'

'I thought we could talk,' he said.

The island made a soft hiss of agreement.

'Aren't you cold, in this snow?'

'Inside me is as hot as a fever-dream,' Bodeg proclaimed.

'Lucky for you.'

'I can make you fever-warm if you give me what was promised, furless.'

'Huh? What?'

'You said you would give me more to drink.'

'I remember. Well, I haven't got any water but I have this.'

Daniel cleared away some snow and upended the bottle onto the patch of bare ground.

'Decaying summer, sharp thin warmth, wobbling edges... what is it?'

'Wine,' he replied.

'More.'

Daniel wanted the drink for himself, but he didn't want to get on the wrong side of Bodeg. Despite the growing intimacy between them, he knew how quick to anger the island was, and how powerful. He tipped a little more wine out.

'Cheers,' he said, raising the bottle to his lips.

He watched the sun slowly drop into the water and extinguish with a hiss, heating up the water around it. Several of the more curious fish were probably swimming over to have a look. Perhaps they'd even had a nibble. It would taste like egg yolk, soft and gooey but not liquid, the way Anna made them for him. Now it had gone the temperature started to drop. He'd have to go back inside soon. Then he remembered the hot springs. Before he left he'd go off and camp there, floating warm and naked in the liquid darkness, listening to the island sigh and shift and subside in its sleep. He'd like to get more intimate with it. It had been very gentle and quiet all day, tucked under its blanket of snow, but now it seemed to be waking up.

He snuggled further into the recess, seeking refuge from the cold.

'Tell me a story,' he said.

'I am. Come closer.'

Daniel pressed his ear against the boulder. He heard no words but there were sounds trapped in the stone. He could hear the original fiery moment of the island's creation and the years passing one after another, identical as beads on a string, hear the wind smoothening edges and widening cracks, shaping and eroding the island's body. How lonely it must have been, floating in the ocean for hundreds of years. Sometimes, late at night in the caravan, he wrapped his arms around himself and pretended he was being held by someone else. The island couldn't even do that. Since it had been born, it had never been embraced by anyone. But perhaps you never missed something you'd never had. In which case, was he lonelier than the island?

'Has there ever been anyone for you?' he asked. 'Anyone – any island?'

'My stony roots go deep into Oceanus. All the islands in the world are connected. Some of them say we are part of the same great beast covering the planet, a chain of augurs peering out onto the world.'

Daniel thought he detected some bitterness in its tone. 'Really? What do you think?'

'They have everything I lack. Green bountiful edges, hundreds of islands within eyeshot. They see fisk swimming in crystal seas below them and the sun warms their bodegs every day. Here Oceanus is dark, and I must keep myself warm...'

‘I’m sorry. Well, you can talk to me. I don’t have soft green edges. I’m bony and hard, like you.’

The island said nothing.

‘Have some more wine.’

He gave the island a drink and took another himself. Now the sun had disappeared the temperature was dropping. It was colder than last night. He’d have to go inside soon or he’d freeze sitting here.

‘I’m going back inside soon,’ he said. ‘But I’ll still be able to hear you.’

‘Stay,’ the island urged. ‘Stay...’

‘Just for a minute.’

‘Don’t you feel it?’

‘Feel what?’

‘Pressure is building.’

‘In me or in you?’

‘Both of us. We are connected – skin to skin.’

‘Not quite,’ Daniel said. Then he took off his glove. ‘Now we are.’

He ran his fingers across the moss below him. Even through his gloves he could feel it’s slow unhurried growth, its calmness and its vibrancy. The top part was exposed to the elements but the underside was tangled in darkness, for the roots of the moss crept down into the soil, connecting like nerves under the surface. Indeed, as he stroked the moss he could feel the island starting to undulate in pleasure, moaning its approval. He stopped abruptly, teasing. Once he was sure of someone else’s desire, sex was an arena in which he felt confident.

‘Furless...’ the island said.

He didn’t know much about islands, but the note of longing in its voice was curiously, undeniably human.

‘Bodeg,’ he replied.

‘Please more please. It’s been so long and I long long long...’

Daniel ran his fingers languorously across the moss, luxuriating in the texture. A rich loamy scent was released into the air. He bent closer and inhaled sharply, smelling the earthiness of moss, the charcoal bitterness of lava and the blanched almond scent of the snow. If only people smelt more like islands. He began to rub his hands more viciously against the moss. When he raised them to his face they were impregnated with the smell.

‘Harder furless, harder. Let me keep you warm.’

He lay down, stomach pressing against the ground, and began grinding his body against the moss. It was getting dark. The air was icy. But even so, he could feel the heat buried under the island's surface slowly beginning to warm him up.

Before he'd known anything about anything he'd masturbated by grinding his body against the carpet in his bedroom, normally late at night when everyone was asleep, because back then an orgasm felt like a sin. But out here in the open anyone could see him. Perhaps some of the mole people already had their binoculars trained on him. He imagined them peering myopically down from their attic windows wondering if there was a woman lying underneath him, trying to decide whether the ground sloped down and hid her from view or if he was fucking a ghost. It felt good to imagine being watched but not understood.

More, furless. Pressure is building... ' the island urged.

He closed his eyes and began to grind more quickly against the cold rock. Bodeg was close and he was close too, he could feel his body humming with sensation, could feel the pressure starting to build, the pleasure beginning to contract into a single point, could feel the ground beneath him beginning to quiver...

Anna knocked softly on Rath's door. Then she came to her senses. What was she doing, standing outside a stranger's house holding a suitcase? She clattered back down the steps but it was too late. The door opened.

'Anna? You are moving in?'

She gripped the canvas handle of her suitcase and tried to smile at him. Her face felt stiff and unyielding, as if her skin were coated in ice.

'I went to the hotel but it was closed,' she said.

'The owners are on the mainland.'

'I know,' she replied miserably.

'So you have come to stay with me?'

A small smile played across his lips. She could tell that he was enjoying this.

'No, of course not.'

'Well then why are you here?'

'I just came to apologise about earlier,' she said.

His smile broadened. 'No you didn't. Come in.'

'Well, actually...' she began indignantly, but he'd already disappeared inside. She hesitated. It occurred to her that she hadn't cleaned her teeth. Neither had she bothered changing out of her ridiculous heart-patterned long johns, or done anything in the way of hair removal. Making a spontaneous decision to seduce someone, she realised, was not without its problems. Not that she knew how to seduce someone anyway. She'd have to leave that to him. Presuming he wanted to, of course. He might make her suffer instead.

She dragged the suitcase up the steps and inside. The sudden transition from cold to warmth made her head spin. She clumsily removed her coat, gloves and boots, fingers raw and useless from the cold, and then went into to the lounge. He was standing in the middle of the room, his head inches from the ceiling. It occurred to her that even if she changed her mind and wanted to leave he could force her to stay. He could so easily push her to the floor, pin her down with his weight; she'd be entirely at his mercy.

'Anna.'

She was unable to meet his eyes. Instead she looked at his feet. He was wearing the same red socks as he had at the hot springs, but the hole was in a different place, exposing the big toe. Someone needed to darn them for him, or buy him some new pairs.

‘You are scared of me?’ he asked, stepping towards her.

The air in the room suddenly felt a lot thicker.

‘I’m not. Of course I’m not. Why would I be?’ she replied. Her mouth was dry and it came out as a croak. She must put some toothpaste on her finger and clean her teeth, or at least get some water.

‘So come here then.’

‘I might just...’

He reached out and pulled her towards him. There was no pretence at softness this time, just hunger. A sense of unreality too. As she kissed him it was hard to believe she was still Anna. She felt neither worried nor self-conscious – her mind was completely fogged. Everything that was not sensation simply fell away. He bit her lip. The pain was throbbing, exquisite. She could taste iron. His hands slid under her clothes. He fumbled with her bra.

‘Take this off,’ he said, breaking free of the kiss.

She pulled off her top and undid her bra.

‘And you,’ she said.

He cupped her boobs with his hands, running his thumbs over her nipples.

‘You want me to take off my clothes?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

He stepped closer and bent his head to her breasts, biting each in turn and sending electric jolts up and down her body.

‘Say please.’

‘Please,’ she whispered breathlessly, struggling to undo his belt buckle.

He brushed her fingers aside and did it himself. Then he yanked off his trousers and pulled his shirt over his head. His torso was broad and hairy. He wasn’t wearing underwear and his dick was sticking straight out towards her. It was a lot bigger than Tommy’s, thick and veined and so hard it almost looked angry, but she barely had time to see before he lay on the living room rug and pulled her down next to him.

‘Let’s get rid of these, shall we?’ he said, tugging her trousers down over her legs.

She kicked them away from her ankles and turned to face him. A mist had descended and everything that was happening seemed beyond her control; everything was simply unfolding. He was kissing her again and his hand was between her thighs, his fingers seeking her out. She ground her pelvis eagerly against his palm, groaning in pleasure as he thrust one, then two, fingers inside her and soon she was no longer Anna she was nothing but her body, blood racing nerves tingling, a body that ached that cried out, desperate for, for,

for...she threw her head back and felt the heat gather, felt the pressure build, and oh there there there it was...she closed her eyes and fell...

After the orgasm came the drifting weightlessness. But Rath gave her no time to recover. He disentangled himself and moved down her body, burying his head between her legs. Her body tensed instinctively.

‘But what about you?’ she murmured.

She’d never liked it when Tommy went down on her – she worried that she might smell bad, or that her pubes might get in his mouth – but Rath seemed so hungry for her that she felt her self-consciousness disappear. A couple of minutes later, as she was finally beginning to relax and enjoy the sensations, he stopped abruptly. He shifted so they were face to face and bent to kiss her. She could taste herself on his lips, salt and iron and something else she couldn’t recognise; something feverish, a taste she missed when he broke away. Then, without warning, he thrust himself into her. An animal howl filled the room. It took a while before she realised it was she who had made the noise and was continuing to make the noise as he began to move faster and faster, making her ache in the only good way there was, more painful than her fantasies but all the better for being so. She looked up at him. His eyes were glazed over, opaque. She closed her eyes and let herself drown in the sensations too. Her hands clasped his broad back and she cried out loudly at the intensity of the release.

‘Fuck, fuck,’ he groaned a few seconds later, shuddering to a halt on top of her.

She could feel his heart thudding rapidly against her chest. Hers was beating rapidly in tandem. It had not yet returned to its regular rhythm before he withdrew and lay down next to her. Sticky liquid trickled down the inside of her thighs. Normally, once she’d had sex she liked to get into the shower and wash it all off, but she was too dazed to care about cleaning herself up. He wrapped an arm around her.

‘You want to go to the bedroom? We can lie together. It will be more comfortable,’ he said.

‘I’m fine here.’

She nuzzled against his broad chest. His body smelt of salt and it was sticky with rapidly cooling sweat. A stranger’s body. She was awfully clammy too, especially between her legs. She smelt like an animal. She’d sounded like one when they’d fucked. A dirty animal, that’s all she was. If Tommy could see her now. How surprised he’d be. The rush of satisfaction which accompanied the thought completely surprised her. God, she was a terrible person.

She wriggled away from Rath and sat up. Her clothes were scattered across the floor, tangled up with his.

‘What’s wrong?’ he asked. ‘You need something?’

‘I just need the bathroom.’

A couple of minutes to think, that was what she needed. Space to work out if she should stay or go.

‘You know where it is,’ he said, closing his eyes.

He sounded angry. Had she upset him? His cock, lying flaccid between his thighs, was a lot smaller now. It trailed slime like a slug. It was hard to believe that such violent desire had drained away so quickly. What had she expected? Intimacy? Romance? She stood up. A movement near the opposite wall made her jump. A mirror. The woman looking back at her had flushed cheeks and tangled hair. Her breasts were pendulous, obscene, and the hair between her legs was still slick with moisture. The woman in the mirror was not someone whom she recognised. She looked powerful and wild; as if she would have the guts to do anything.

Anna took a step forwards to examine herself more closely, and suddenly found herself lurching sideways. The floor was no longer solid. It began to shake. Then the tables and chairs and the china in the cabinet all began to rattle loudly. Rath’s eyes snapped open and he sat up.

‘Get under the table,’ he shouted.

‘Why?’ she asked.

‘Earthquake!’

She froze. Surely this was a joke? But the shaking only got worse. The naked woman in the mirror opposite was wide-eyed with shock, her whole body shuddering. Then there was a crash, and the woman fell to the floor and shattered into thousands of sharp pieces. Anna jumped backwards and tripped.

‘Come on! Go under! Quickly!’

She crawled under the table. He crammed himself in next to her. Beneath her the ground shook. Above her the table rattled. There were smashing sounds coming from the kitchen. She closed her eyes and listened as the world cracked open at the seams.

Rebecca was climbing up the slopes of the volcano. It was the hour before sunset, a time when the sky turns golden, when shadows elongate and turn purple. The ground below her was streaked with snow but she didn't feel cold. The opposite, in fact – she was enveloped in delicious warmth. And then Jake was beside her. She stopped and turned to look at him. He hadn't aged a day since she'd last seen him. The shaving cut he'd got on their last morning together still hadn't healed. And he was wearing the same clothes; jeans and a faded yellow t-shirt, the fabric soft and thin with age. She did not have time to say anything before he pulled her towards him. Neither of them spoke. It was gestures, not words, that were important here; the urgency of lips against lips, of fingers tracing contours and angles, the hardness of muscles and the soft warmth of hair and skin. And then she was lying on the ground, stripped of clothes, feeling the gritty earth of the volcano against her back, feeling the heat of his body as he moved over her, the kisses he dropped on her neck, her collarbone, her breasts. He was inside her, they were moving together, how easy it was, still, after so long apart, to fall back into that long-neglected rhythm. How good it felt to be desired and to desire in return. But soon his movements became rougher, more violent, and the ground beneath her began moving too. It was not long before her body was being shaken from side to side, before she was no longer clinging onto him with passion but with terror. Jake looked down at her with fire in his eyes.

'You did this,' he said.

She looked beyond him. The volcano had erupted. Bright rivers of fire leapt from the caldera and streamed down the sides towards them...

Suddenly everything went dark. At first she didn't realise she had woken up, for the world was still shaking, almost as violently as it had in her dream. An earthquake. She wrapped her hands round the blankets and squeezed tight. The light switch was near Anna's bed. Should she move and turn it on? The best thing was to stay put, or that's what she remembered anyway. It's a natural phenomenon, it's a natural phenomenon, she repeated over and over, whilst the bed shook like a boat at sea. She wondered where her children were. She tried to forget about the dream.

Earthquakes only lasted on average between 10-40 seconds. This felt far longer. But finally, she felt the tremors subside. For a couple of minutes she lay where she was, waiting for her heartbeat to return to normal and the cramp in her hands to ease off.

‘Daniel! Anna!’ she shouted, as loudly as she could.

There was no response. She got out of bed and stumbled across the room to the light switch. Click. The room was still dark. After fiddling with it a couple more times she groped her way to the stairwell. The light switch was at the bottom of the steps. She went down them in a seated position so as not to fall, and stretched her arm up to find the switch. Click. Nothing. The earthquake must have knocked out the power, perhaps for the whole village. That didn’t matter now. She had to find her children. Anna had said she would be at the hotel, so she’d start there.

Rebecca rummaged for her salopettes and coat, which she put on over her long-johns. After putting on her boots, she opened the door and took a step outside. The sky was the deep navy of nautical twilight and the snow a pale, luminescent blue. Night would descend before she got into town. How hard it would be, struggling through the snow. But she had to do it. Maybe she’d encounter Anna or Daniel on the way anyway, returning to look for her.

She took a tentative step forward. Then she heard a rattling sound coming from the shed.

‘Hello?’ she called.

To her ears it sounded human, deliberate – not a result of the wind. It must be Daniel, unable to hear her, crashing around in search of a torch or something like that.

‘Daniel!’ she shouted.

No response. She took her hands off the rail and took a couple of steps towards the noise. The wind suddenly picked up. A sudden gust almost caught her off balance. Bent over and shuffling, she took another few steps, getting gradually closer to the shed. There was that rattling again. Someone was inside. But their movements sounded light and hasty. A child-like entity. Scenes from horror films she’d watched came back to her; poltergeists and off-key nursery rhymes and ventriloquist’s dolls and fingers scraping against doors and window frames.

‘Daniel? I know it’s you!’

There was a small torch in her pocket. She gripped it tightly and brandishing it like a weapon, she pulled open the shed door. A frenzied scratching sound made her step back in alarm. Something small and furry scuttled across her feet and away. Gasping in shock, she stepped backwards. Two things happened simultaneously. She dropped the torch and caught her foot against something, which caused her to fall backwards. For a brief moment there was the terror of falling, then an intense burst of pain as her body smacked against rock. Her head buzzed with white noise and she thought of nothing but the pain, a pain which rendered

her breathless and immobile. Even once the initial shock subsided she could still feel its hot knives shooting up and down her spine. It was unwise to move too soon after an injury like this, but the Arctic night was descending and the temperatures dropping. She'd lost the torch too. It must have gotten buried in the snow or broken.

Within seconds her clothes were soaked through. The ice burned, then numbed. Her arms and legs felt heavy and useless. Never had her teeth chattered so violently; never had she shivered so uncontrollably. She must get back into the house and warm herself by the fire. But although she just about managed to roll onto her side, she found that she lacked the strength to get up. Her arms were spindly, useless, unable to support her weight. Every small movement sent a jolt of pain down her spine. Defeated, she rolled onto her back once again. With her last ounce of strength she managed to pull up her hood. Most of the body's heat was lost through the head. Perhaps this would delay things a little. But she could feel the cold already seeping into her bones.

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Daniel wrapped his arms around the boulder and clung on tight. Something was wrong. He thought he'd been pleasuring Bodeg but it felt as if the island was trying to throw him off its back, like a horse rearing up to dislodge a controlling rider. He gripped tighter.

'I'm so sorry. Please tell me what I did wrong,' he shouted, but his words were lost amongst the deep rumbling sounds under the surface and the wind shrieking angrily in his ears. He had spent hours of his life trying to guess how he would die, but even in his most delirious imaginings he had not thought it would be like this. What would they put on his gravestone? Anna would be too embarrassed for anything but a platitude.

By the time the shaking subsided he was exhausted. He unclasped himself from the boulder and stood up. It was almost dark. Were it not for the pallid moon gleaming off the snow he wouldn't have been able to see where the land ended and the sea began.

'What happened there?' he asked the island.

There was no response, but he was sure it was listening. The silence bristled with animosity.

'Oh, come on. I hate it when you refuse to talk.'

But the island remained stubbornly silent. Daniel didn't understand. It had been so warm, so intimate towards him earlier. Now something had changed and he didn't know what.

'Fine, have it your way,' he said.

He began the walk home. His torch was faint but he knew the way. Even so, he made slow progress. The wind was howling angrily. He had to brace his body against it so as not to fall over. He knew that it was the island's doing. Bodeg had the power to control everything around it – wind, ocean and sky. The only thing it didn't seem to be able to control was itself. The atmosphere was suffused with such anger that his scalp began to prickle. Despite his fatigue, he broke into a shuffling run.

Finally, he arrived at the footpath to the house. As he felt his way across the rocks he realised he couldn't see any lights on. Right on cue, the beam of his torch faded.

'Come on, come on,' he said, hitting the side of his torch to try and brighten it.

Instead, the stupid thing blinked and went out. Still, he knew roughly what direction the house was in, and the sea was so noisy he doubted he'd fall in by accident. Unless the island managed to lure him onto the rocks and push him in.

As he walked towards the front door, he was startled to hear a faint groan coming from nearby.

‘Hello? Is someone there?’ he asked.

His voice wavered. Whoever it was would know he was scared. If only the torch worked.

‘Daniel...’ said a faint voice. It was twisted with pain but instantly recognisable.

‘Mum?’

‘Yes. Over here.’

What had the island done to her? He felt his way towards where he thought she was, hands reaching blindly in front of him.

‘Say something so I can find you,’ he said.

‘He...’ the voice was close, but coming from below him. He got to his knees and felt for her. She was lying on her back. Even with his gloves on he could feel how cold she was. The island had knocked her down into the snow. It was trying to claim her.

‘I fell,’ she whispered.

A horrible knot began to twist inside his stomach.

‘It’s alright. We’ll get you inside,’ he said.

He hoped he’d be able to carry her by himself. Maybe otherwise he’d have to make a fire out here for her. Light. He needed light. The torch. He pulled it out of his pocket and removed the battery. Sometimes if you rubbed them they got a bit of extra charge. His hands were almost too cold to grip. He could hear the rasp of her breathing next to him. The knot twisted a little tighter. He rubbed the battery and put it back in. Miraculously, the torch offered a faint light. His hand shook. The beam flickered over her body. Her face was sunken in the half-light, but there were no arms or legs bending the wrong way. No dark stains on the snow.

‘Does it hurt anywhere?’

‘Nothing serious...’

‘I have to get you inside. Otherwise you’ll get hypothermia. Can you lift your arms?’

She barely had the strength to do so. He had to bend down and wrap them round his neck for her. Then it was his turn. Torch between his teeth, he managed to gather her into his arms. She was a lot heavier than she looked. He stumbled with her back to the house. The front door gaped open. The darkness inside looked unwelcoming.

‘Hello? Anna, are you back?’ he yelled, hopefully.

Nobody replied. All he could hear was a strange rattling sound.

‘Can you hear that?’ he asked his mum.

No response. Her whole body was shaking with cold. The noise, he realised suddenly, was her teeth chattering.

‘Fuck.’

He staggered into the lounge, accidentally knocking her legs against the wall and making her cry out in pain, and then deposited her onto the sofa.

‘I’m going to turn the light on.’

His fingers scrabbled for the light switch. A click, then nothing. He went out into the hallway and tried the switch there. No luck. Bodeg had taken out the power. The stone walls of the house were as fragile as egg-shells for something as powerful as the island.

‘Mum? Is there a torch anywhere?’

Again, she didn’t reply. He hurried over to the stove and opened the door. The embers were still glowing. He blew on them to make them catch and added a couple of peat logs. With the meagre light offered by the fire he looked over at his mother. Her eyes were closed and she was shivering convulsively. God, he hoped she hadn’t hurt herself too badly. If he could just stop her from shivering.

‘I’ll be back in a second.’

He went upstairs on all fours and tugged the blankets off the beds. But even once he bundled her up in them she continued to shiver.

‘Do you need some more warmth? Or some painkillers?’

She remained silent.

Now it was he who began to shake.

‘Please help me. I don’t know what to do,’ he whispered to the empty room.

The shadows in the corners were heavy with silence. She wouldn’t help him and neither would the island. He wrapped his arm around her and rubbed her back, trying to keep her warm. What else could he do? Maybe he should go and call a doctor. But he couldn’t leave her. For once he wished Anna was here.

A couple of minutes later, she began to talk indistinctly under her breath.

‘Can you speak up a bit?’ he asked, relieved some life had returned to her.

‘Pathetic.’

‘What’s pathetic?’

‘Me. Dragging you all here...can’t even keep my balance anymore...no wonder he left me.’

And then she was crying, something she hadn't done in years. His relief turned to pity as he took her into his arms, holding her as she shook against him. She had always been the strongest woman she knew – not that he'd ever told her that. All her friends and family had been in total admiration of how she'd handled his dad's death, and how tough she was being about the arthritis, which only seemed to be getting worse. But even rock crumbles eventually.

'It wasn't his fault, Mum. It was the island's. Strange things happen here,' he said, thinking of the island's rapid changes in mood. This afternoon he had felt such contentment with it, but now the thought of setting foot outside again terrified him.

At that, her crying only intensified. Daniel thought about the last time he'd seen someone cry this much. TJ, a few years ago. They'd ended up in bed together but TJ hadn't been able to get it up. TJ told him he hadn't been able to get it up in months.

'I'm not human anymore,' he said. 'When anyone touches me it feels like spiders are crawling across my skin.'

Then TJ, jeans still round his ankles, skinny legs spotted with track marks, had cried and cried. What had he done to help then? Rolled a joint, that was it. He'd hoped to knock him out so he didn't go off in search of another hit.

If only he hadn't finished the wine. His mum could probably really do with a drink right now.

The front door opened.

'Hello?' Anna called.

His insides unknotted a little at the sound of her voice.

'We're in here,' he shouted back.

She came into the room carrying an old-fashioned oil lamp, still panting with the exertion of the walk. Her cheeks glowed orange and her shadow filled the room. He could practically smell the sex on her.

'Sorry about earlier. I shouldn't have stormed out. Mum? What's wrong?'

'She fell over. Outside. I found her just lying in the snow.'

'Oh God,' Anna said, kneeling in front of their mum and looking up at her with concern.

'Anything broken? Does anywhere hurt?'

'Just...bruises,' his mum managed, face still streaked with tears.

Anna turned to him accusingly.

‘Can’t you see she’s gone into shock? Look how she’s shaking. Go into the kitchen and make her some sweet tea.’

‘How?’

‘What do you mean how?’

‘The kettle isn’t working.’

‘Come on Daniel, don’t be an idiot. Heat some water in a pan on the hob. It’s gas.’

‘Right.’

He made his way into the kitchen. What a relief it was to be told how to behave in a situation that had been threatening to overwhelm him.

‘Oh God, you’ve left her in all her wet clothes. She’s near hypothermic. Go upstairs and get her something else to wear.’

He left the water heating and went up to fetch some warmer clothes for her. By the time he got back, Anna was all action. He could do little but stand by as she stripped their mum’s clothes off, revealing stick thin arms, a bony chest and small boobs that were drooping with age. Half-disgusted, half-embarrassed, he turned away and began busying himself with the tea. By the time he was done she had been dressed in thick thermal pyjamas. Anna directed him to stoke the fire up and fetch dry blankets from the cupboard. She sat next to Mum and lifted the cup of sweet steaming tea to her lips. His mum sipped it meekly. Her face was white and drawn but at least she wasn’t crying anymore.

‘Alright, Mum. Does anything hurt? Do you think you’ve broken or sprained anything?’ Anna asked.

His mum shook her head.

‘I should walk back into town and see if I can find an emergency doctor.’

‘There’s absolutely no need. Stop trying to mollycoddle me.’

He and Anna glanced at each other. She looked as relieved as he felt.

‘Still, you’re dreadfully pale. I want to just make sure you haven’t got any bruises or scrapes anywhere,’ Anna said.

‘There’s no need.’

‘Mum. I’m going to put my foot down. There absolutely is a need. You fell over. Injuries just get worse if you leave them untended. And yes, I know I don’t have medical training, but I just completed an advanced first-aid certificate at the gym.’

‘If you insist.’

‘I do.’

Anna was calm, but firm. That placid steadiness which had slowly been leaching out of her over the years seemed to have come back, mixed in with something else. Something stronger. Getting laid obviously suited her.

‘Anything you want me to do?’ he asked.

‘Why don’t you go and get your mattress from the shed? I think it’s best if you sleep in here with us tonight. You can sleep in the lounge if you don’t want to share with us.’

The shadows in the corner of the room seemed to get thicker and darker. What if the island was still angry with him? It had pushed his mum over so easily, what if it did the same to him?

‘There’s a mattress upstairs,’ he said.

‘Get that then. But Mum’s using these blankets so you’ll need to go and get yours from the shed.’

‘I don’t need one,’ he said, looking over at his mum for help. But she was staring down at her tea.

‘Well go outside and have a fag, then. I want some privacy so I can examine mum.’

‘Oh. Right.’

‘There’s a torch hanging up on the coat pegs, by the way.’

Daniel left them to it. Through the closed door, he could hear Anna talking to his mum. The words were muffled, but they sounded soothing.

He went outside and lit a cigarette, leaving the front door ajar. The shed was only a few metres away, but the torch highlighted the dark scars in the snow where his mum had fallen over. It was beyond him why the island was so angry. The best way to know what had upset it was to ask. Perhaps it had cooled off by now. The atmosphere seemed less charged.

‘Hello? Bodeg?’ he ventured.

The wind scattered his words. He repeated himself, a little louder.

‘Furless...’ the island hissed.

‘Why don’t you tell me what’s wrong?’

‘I cannot always control these surges deep within. Nothing can stop them, furless. Nothing.’

The relief he felt was immense.

‘You really scared me. I totally forgive you, though.’

‘What is this “forgive”? A furless before you called often for it. It means you have a gift for me?’

‘No. It means that you don’t have to say sorry for scaring me.’

‘Sorry is a word for furlesses, not for islands. You should be sorry because you gave me nothing. I want your liquid pearls of fish salt bones loneliness or those iron rich drops you scattered across my skin that darkness with the ferryman. Not that wobbly water.’

Daniel wrapped his arms around his knees.

‘You’re asking for something I can’t give you now. Please. Tomorrow, I promise. I’m so tired. It’s been a really long day.’

‘When the light comes?’

‘When the light comes,’ he repeated.

‘I await your offerings with forgiveness.’

‘But there is one thing.’

‘What is it, Furless?’

‘Please don’t hurt my mum again.’

Anna stretched luxuriously. She couldn't remember the last time she'd slept so well. It felt as if she'd only closed her eyes a couple of minutes ago, but, as her bedside clock informed her, it had actually been eight-and-a-half solid hours. Strange, that. She'd have thought that the guilt would have kept her up all night. Then she realised – she felt no guilt at all for what she'd done. Instead she found herself reliving last night; the sensations of his mouth crushing down on hers, her arms wrapped around his body, the feeling as he slid it inside her. Her body responded to the memory with a pleasurable ache down there. Like a ghost of an orgasm, she thought.

But it had all been cut short by the earthquake. As soon as the tremors had stopped Rath had started pulling on his clothes, saying he had to go back into town and assess the damage. There would be an emergency council meeting, of which he was a member. He'd offered to let her stay, but so curtly that she'd declined, telling him she had to check on her family. Besides, she was totally unsure of the etiquette of a one-night stand. Would she have greeted him with a kiss when she returned? Or would they have pretended that nothing had happened? At any rate, it was probably for the best. Her mum had been in such a state by the time she got back. Any anger Anna felt towards her had completely disappeared, seeing her lying there in such pain.

She rolled over onto her side and gasped in shock as she saw her mother lying deathly still, staring upwards at the ceiling.

'Mum? Are you alright?'

'I'm fine. Just a little stiff,' her mum said, and winced.

'Do you need me to get anything?'

'If you could get me the Celecoxib from my drawer, that would be great.'

Anna got out of bed and located the pills.

'Here.'

'I need a pillow. To raise me up.'

She grabbed one from her bed and placed it gently under her mum's head. Then she picked the glass of water up off the bedside table and lifted it to her mum's lips. Her mum raised herself up, took a sip and then swallowed her pills. As soon as she had done so she collapsed back onto the bed, and closed her eyes.

'Do you want me to go into town and find you a doctor?'

‘No. I’m just bruised and stiff. Maybe I’ll see if we can find someone on the mainland, or else I’ll just talk to Doctor Greene when we leave the island.’

They weren’t supposed to be leaving for over a week. Maybe her mum had lost count of the days.

‘Shall I leave you to sleep?’

‘Yes. Please.’

‘Alright. I’ll wake you up in an hour or two with a cup of tea,’ she said.

‘That would be nice,’ her mum said faintly, already beginning to drift off.

It occurred to her it might be best to change before going downstairs. She was still in last night’s heart-patterned long johns, and she was sure they must really smell by now. But when she reached under the bed for her suitcase, her hands encountered only empty space. Of course. There had been so much going on last night, she’d left it at Rath’s house. Still, at least that meant there was a reason to go back there again.

Leaving her mum to sleep, she made her way into the living room. Daniel was asleep on a mattress on the floor, his body curled like a comma under the blankets. Books and ornaments had fallen from the shelves and were scattered around him. The china shepherdess had snapped in half and lay on her back, severed at the midriff, looking calmly up at the ceiling. Anna picked her up and put her in the bin. Then she did the same to a couple of broken cups in the kitchen. Once these visible reminders of the earthquake had been tidied away it was hard to believe it had ever really happened. The electricity had even started working again.

Anna boiled the kettle. She made a cup of tea and sat down at the kitchen table. As she sipped, her thoughts drifted back to Rath. Did he think she was good in bed? It was unlikely. She’d just kind of lain there; he’d been the one making everything happen. But at least she’d shown her appreciation, which had hopefully flattered him. She never made that much noise with Tommy. God, Tommy. How hard it would be to face him when she got home. She wondered if he’d be able to tell what she’d done when he saw her. Perhaps she’d tell him. It was important to face up to the fact that something wasn’t right between the two of them. In her opinion, at least. Tommy probably hadn’t even noticed. The worst thing would be if he then went and told her mum she’d cheated. Out of everyone, she was the one that couldn’t find out. Her mum would think her such a hypocrite. But the two situations weren’t comparable. She had committed one tiny transgression in the heat of the moment, whereas her mum had embarked upon a long-term relationship whilst she had two young children to think of. It was unlikely her mum would see it that way, though.

An hour later the three of them sat down to breakfast. Her mum said she felt much better, thank you, but her face was still pinched and bloodless. Daniel wasn't looking his best either. There were dark shadows under his eyes and the bruise on his face was yellowing, giving him a jaundiced appearance. After only a few bites he pushed his cereal aside.

'This milk tastes like shit.'

'I'll go into the village and buy some more after breakfast,' she said.

That way she could get her suitcase back too.

'Cool. I'll come with you,' Daniel said.

'Me too,' her mum said.

'There's no need. I can go alone.'

'But I want to. Anna, why don't you want our company?' Daniel asked. He was smirking. He knew something, somehow.

'I'm happy to have company. But Mum, considering the state you were in last night, you should be resting.'

'It's only a few hundred metres to the village. I need to stretch my legs or I'll stiffen up. Besides, I want to see what damage the earthquake caused.'

'You can barely walk,' she said, a little too sharply. Her mum's presence would make it so hard to slip away and get her suitcase from Rath's.

'I'll be fine once I've had a shower and some more painkillers. Anna, did you say that the ferry went on Friday?'

'Yes,' she replied.

'So, we should make enquiries about leaving tomorrow.'

She opened her mouth in protest, but her brother got there first.

'Why would we want to do that?'

'There was just an earthquake. That means the island's unstable. There might be another one. We shouldn't expose ourselves to danger.'

'Just a bit of shuddering, that's all. It's over now. Even the power's back on,' Daniel said.

'I think we should stay until the end of the holiday,' she put in quickly.

Her mum looked at them both in amazement. 'I thought you two hated it here? You've been complaining about everything under the sun since we arrived. The weather, the lack of Wi-Fi, the sleeping arrangements, even the milk. And look at us all! I can barely sit down and Daniel looks like an over-ripe banana – it's hardly been a relaxing holiday.'

‘I like it here, actually,’ she said.

‘Me too. I want to stay,’ Daniel added.

‘What changed?’ her mum asked.

She had no idea why her brother was on her side. It seemed as if a day hadn’t gone by without him getting hurt in some way; falling over near Rath’s garden, getting beaten up, and perhaps he would have even caught hypothermia if he’d stayed in the sea much longer. As for herself, she knew that she should be clamouring to get off the island, remove herself from temptation, but the thought of Rath made her stomach flutter and gave her the strangest sensation down there – a sort of inner tremble, the smallest echo of last night’s climax – and she realised that her body was in a state of craving for his.

‘Well?’ her mum said.

She glanced helplessly at her brother, who shrugged.

‘The fresh air?’ she suggested.

‘I must admit, you two, that I’m keen to get off this island fairly rapidly now. I want to go and see Doctor Greene and make sure there aren’t any long-term consequences from this fall.’

There it was. The trump card. Illness beat everything else hands down. It always had in this family. Daniel pushed back his chair and stood up abruptly.

‘Where are you going?’ his mum asked.

‘Out.’

He grabbed his jumper and stormed out of the room. A minute later, the front door slammed. Her mother looked as if she were about to cry. She trailed her spoon listlessly through her cereal.

‘I don’t understand why he’s so desperate to stay,’ she said.

Anna didn’t either. Unlike her, he didn’t have anyone to keep him here. Without Rath, the island would just be an outcropping of black rock in a dull grey ocean.

39 | DANIEL

Daniel hadn't got a destination in mind when he left the house. But he found his legs carrying him towards Dimjuborgir, and he didn't stop until he reached it. Once there, he found a small, flat-topped column to climb up and sit on. He looked around. The black rocks were dusted in snow. It had softened their stark outlines. Sitting above them, he felt as if he were on a plane, sailing through clear sunlit skies with stacked grey storm clouds below. Such a feeling was only every temporary – as soon as the plane descended and pierced the cloud cover the world became all shitty and grey again. That's how it would feel landing back in England. Doctors' appointments and job centre queues, endless evenings of spliffs and pints, and long lonely nights in the caravan. He wasn't even particularly looking forward to seeing his mates.

'Nobody will believe me if I tell them about you,' he said to the island.

'Unna would have believed you,' it replied.

'But Unna's not here anymore.'

'Unna is intermixed with me now. She's in the grass and the soil, in the rocks and in the water. Unna will never leave me.'

Daniel knew what the island was implying.

'I don't want to leave you either,' he said. 'But sometimes we have to do things we don't want to.'

'Why?'

It was a very good question.

'For our friends. And our families. To make them happy. Relationships are about compromise,' he said. This was something that Anna had told him on several occasions.

'Islands never do anything for anyone.'

'That's not true. You provide people with a home, animals with food and shelter.'

'I am not here for the fisk nor the wingedwuns. I am not here for you or your kind either, furless. You all came unbidden.'

'But you'd be lonely if we hadn't.'

'No. So few of you heed my cries. I will be solitair without *you*, furless, the only one who lissens.'

Daniel was touched.

'I wouldn't leave at all if I didn't have to,' he said.

He couldn't explain to the island how hard it would be to live here. It wouldn't be able to grasp the importance of jobs or money. In that respect, it was a little like him. But he knew that back in England he had support. Here, there was nothing, nobody, apart from the island. He would at least like to stay for the duration of the holiday, though. They still had about a week. Maybe Anna could take his mum back to the UK and he could stay here. Have the little red house to himself for a week. He could talk to the island as much as he wanted without worrying about being overheard. Nobody would be nagging him to put on more clothes when he went out for a walk; he'd be able to drink and smoke as much as he wanted. He'd even go and hike to the top of the volcano, which they'd both forbidden him from doing. All in all, it was an excellent plan. But Anna and his mum wouldn't see it that way.

'I'll see if I can stay for a little while longer,' he said.

'Furless, I'll look after you. I'll keep you safe, I'll keep you warm.'

'I would like that. I can look after you too,' he replied.

'Yessss. By keeping your promise,' the island hissed.

It lapsed into its own language. The sounds swirled around him, red-hued with longing, fire-spark bursts of excitement. But there were dark, empty pauses between the notes; spaces needing to be filled. He was ready to give something of himself to the island. But, about to unzip his trousers, he paused. You could not feed loneliness with loneliness. Instead he jumped down from the column and began scraping away the snow around its base. It was not long before he found what he was looking for. A piece of volcanic rock with a sharp, pointed tip.

He wasn't stupid – he knew to avoid his wrists. Instead he took off his gloves, rolled up his sleeves and jabbed the sharpest end of the rock deep into his forearm. It was painful but not unbearably so. Blood welled from the wound and trickled down his arm. He watched in fascination as the small red droplets fell onto the snow. A crimson bloom onto a canvas of white. The island sighed in contentment.

'This is a gift I needed, furless.'

Daniel smiled. It was rare he had a chance to look after anyone. People rarely demanded anything like that of him, presumably because they thought he was unable to look after himself. Perhaps they were right. It felt good to be wanted.

'So rich, warm, full of life.'

What was blood made of? Red blood cells and white blood cells. He'd had to make them out of plasticine for a science project before. You rolled a ball, flattened it, and then stuck your thumb into the centre to make a hollow. There must be millions and millions of

tiny cells splashing onto the ground in front of him, like invisible sweets. Did blood have memories in it? DNA? His Condition was imprinted onto his DNA. Could the island taste it?

‘Does my blood tell you anything about me?’ he asked.

‘There are memories in every drop. A twisted pattern too, one which crackles like lightening.’

‘My Condition?’

‘I have seen this pattern before, in others.’

‘Oh, really?’ Daniel said. He wanted to ask more about these people, and who they were, but he was beginning to feel lightheaded. Blood was still trickling down his arm. It was time to apply pressure to the wound, to staunch the flow. He wondered if the island had had enough to drink yet. Would it be angry if he stopped?

Rebecca walked slowly towards the village with Anna. Her back still felt bruised and tender from last night's fall, and her joints ached with every step. To distract herself from the pain, she looked around for signs of last night's earthquake. In several places the crust of iced-up snow had cracked to reveal the dark rock underneath. But the destruction was more apparent when they reached the town. The main road was buckled and uneven. Several wooden fences had splintered. A couple of windows had shattered. But despite the damage the village seemed more alive than it had in weeks. A couple of men were sawing up planks of wood in their garden and giving it out to people, presumably for repairs. A couple of teenage girls with thick brown plaits and heavy eyebrows were sitting in an open doorway, patiently trying to glue an ornament back together from fragments of china laid out on a tea tray in front of them. She watched them sift. One of them pinched a piece between thumb and index finger – a movement so easily taken for granted – and held it aloft for the other to see.

'Mum, I'm just going to run to the hotel and get my suitcase. Why don't you sit here and wait for me?' Anna said, indicating a bench on the small sloped green lawn in front of the church.

Rebecca was too exhausted by the walk to make a fuss about being mollycoddled. She needed to recuperate before attempting the trek back up to the cottage, which was harder since it was uphill. She sat down without complaint.

'I might go to the shop quickly as well. We'll run out of bread soon,' Anna said.

'Fine. And I'd really appreciate it if you could ask someone what time the ferry leaves tomorrow.'

Her daughter nodded assent and hurried away. This was what getting old felt like. Waiting. A little like being young, in that respect, but without the hope that the things you wanted might come, that there was a whole world out there, chaotic and wild, waiting to be conquered. She thought about the crop of unflattering adjectives associated with the elderly. Palsied. Withered. Shrunken. Was this all that awaited her? She told herself to snap out of it. But the aches in her body made optimism difficult. These days she was a connoisseur of pain, of dull aches and feverish throbbing, the rasp of dry skin and the stiffness that came most mornings, but this was of a type she had not experienced before. It was a pain with a palpable presence, which had taken up residence in the base of her spine. A pain that needed an appointment to be talked about.

Behind her, the church doors opened. She turned to see a large group of people coming outside, mostly men and women around her age. They stood on the steps in animated discussion. Rath was easy to pick out from the crowd because he stood head and shoulders above everyone else. He looked positively thunderous; scowling heavily and shaking his head. A couple of the men seemed to be trying to reason with him. But Rath turned away from them and spat on the ground. She felt a surge of disgust towards him. If only he was a more reasonable person. He was probably the only one who knew what had happened between Jake and Unna. But she'd never be able to ask him now.

The villagers' argument was getting louder. She saw Rath throw up his arms in a gesture of exasperation. Someone laid a hand on his shoulder. He shrugged it off and pushed his way through the group and towards her. If he saw her he didn't acknowledge her. She watched him stride past her and away down the street. Looking at his rigid, departing form, she wondered why both her children found him so attractive.

A shadow passed over her. 'Excuse me?'

She looked upwards, startled at being addressed. The blonde fisherman from the harbour was standing over her.

'I come to make your acquaintance. I have met your daughter and your son, but not you. I am Leif,' he said.

'Rebecca,' she replied.

'You were not too frightened last night?' he asked, sitting down next to her.

'A little,' she admitted.

'It was not such a big quake, but it has worried the people. The mainland says the volcano shows increasing activity.'

She should have known; earthquakes were common eruption precursors. But she'd been far too preoccupied to make the connection. Then she recalled what Rath had said about the geothermal spring being hotter than usual. Yet another warning sign she'd missed.

'Will there be an eruption?'

'Probably, but nobody knows exactly when. Some people think it will be soon, but others think we have weeks, perhaps months.'

'So, that's what everyone's talking about?' she asked, indicating the cluster of people, who were still in animated discussion.

'At the moment they are talking about Rath.'

'He walked past me looking very angry,' she said.

Lief spread his hands and sighed in theatrical exasperation, his blue eyes dancing. Rebecca realised she was talking to the village gossip.

‘Why is he so cross?’ she asked.

‘Some people think we should evacuate the island today. The mainland will only send a boat when an orange alert is issued, and they don’t want to wait. Rath has the biggest boat on the island. Not everyone will fit on it – besides, people will want to take some of their possessions. It would take three, maybe four trips. But Rath is refusing to help. He says he will only leave tomorrow as scheduled. And it will be as usual and everyone must queue and buy tickets.’

‘I’m surprised Rath is being so unhelpful,’ she said.

‘He doesn’t want to believe an eruption will happen. Fourteen years ago, there was an eruption and then he lost his wife.’

That made no sense. How would Unna have met Jake if that was the case?

‘She died in the eruption?’

‘No. It was after the volcano had stopped erupting. Rath sailed to the mainland and when he got back she had disappeared.’

‘But where did she go?’

‘Nobody knows. I did not live here then, but my wife knew her. She said Unna talked often of leaving the island. But Rath didn’t like the idea. She wasn’t well.’

How had Unna left the island without Rath knowing? Maybe it was something to do with Jake. But then again, supposedly he was still looking for her. There was no real point speculating. She’d reached a dead end. Again. Whatever had happened on this island would stay here after she left. There were years upon years of secrets trapped inside the frozen earth.

‘Speaking of the ferry, when is it supposed to depart tomorrow?’ she asked.

‘At eleven in the morning. You are thinking of going?’

She nodded. ‘Perhaps. I think it might be safer to continue our holiday on the mainland.’

‘I think that is wise. My family and I will be sailing to Norway later this afternoon, on our fishing boat. There is no need to endanger ourselves. In fact, I should probably get back and help with the packing.’

‘Well thanks for letting me know the situation,’ she said, as he stood up.

‘Good to meet you. And your daughter, you made up with her in the end?’

‘You saw her yesterday?’ she asked, surprised that Anna would have spoken to Lief about such a thing. It was not like her to confess her emotions to strangers, or even people she knew.

‘Yes, sitting outside the hotel with her suitcase. She was very miserable when I told her it was closed.’

‘Closed?’ she echoed stupidly.

So her daughter had lied to her. But if she hadn’t got a room at the hotel then where had she been? She remembered the way Anna had been looking at Rath on their day trip, and all Daniel’s pointed comments about the two of them. Surely not? But there was nowhere else that she could have gone, apart from the local bar.

‘I told her to go home and fix things with you,’ Lief said, his eyes alive with curiosity.

Rebecca made an effort to compose herself.

‘She was very apologetic when she got home. Just a silly argument, that’s all.’

Lief smiled. ‘That’s what she said. It is good to hear a mother and daughter agree on something.’

‘Oh, we’re very similar,’ she said bitterly.

Anna walked hastily up the track towards Rath's house. She had to be quick, focussed – go in, grab the suitcase, get out. Whatever happened, she couldn't stay. There wasn't time. Her mum was sitting on a bench in the cold, waiting for her.

'Anna?'

She turned. He was striding up the track behind her. Her stomach performed a strange flipping motion.

'Hi,' she said.

'You came to talk? About last night? I'm sorry, I'm not...'

He looked tired and pissed off. She wondered how long the meeting had lasted, and if he'd been relieved to come home to an empty house. If he'd even been back at all. There was a chance – he was wearing last night's clothes – that he'd been out all night.

'I just came to get my suitcase,' she said.

'Ah.'

They continued onto the house. Anna groped for something to say.

'So...how was the council?' she asked eventually.

'I would prefer that we didn't talk about it.'

'Oh. Ok then.'

Some people said that when they *did* want to talk about it. They liked knowing that there was someone out there willing to put in the effort to understand them, liked the feeling of having that person slowly chip through their defences and comfort them as they crumbled. There was something cathartic in that. She glanced sidelong at Rath. His face was grim and clouded. It would take decades; she'd be less effective than a rusty spoon trying to burrow through a brick wall.

She followed him up the front steps and into the musty corridor.

'You would like a coffee?' he asked.

'I have to get back. My mum's waiting for me.'

'Ah yes, I saw her outside the church. Well, there is your suitcase.'

It was resting right inside the entrance hall. No need to go into the living room at all. She could just grab it and leave. The front door was still open.

'Great, thanks,' she said. 'See you later, I guess?'

He didn't reply, just stood back to let her pass. She could feel his eyes upon her as she picked the accursed thing up and struggled with it down the front steps. No offer of help either, she thought bitterly. Was this it, then? She'd leave the island and the bruises he'd left on her body would fade alongside the memory of his touch.

'I...' she turned back to him, unsure of exactly what she wanted to say, but unwilling to leave on such an uncomfortable note.

'Yes? You want something?' he asked, standing directly in front of the doorway as if trying to block her from entering. So that was how he wanted it to be.

'My mum asked me to find out what time the ferry goes tomorrow.'

'Eleven in the morning.'

'She wants to leave. Scared by the earthquake, I guess.'

'Bye,' he said curtly, and made to shut the front door.

Without thinking, Anna shoved her foot in the way. Luckily, she was wearing steel-capped walking boots, or it would have been crushed. He swore under his breath and opened the door again.

'What do you want from me, Anna?'

She put the suitcase down.

'I don't know...I just thought...' she began, her tongue large and dry in her mouth. Then she gathered herself. 'I'm just surprised. I mean, last night something happened between us. And then when I tell you I might be leaving, you shut the door in my face. I deserve a little more respect than that.'

'And what respect have you given me? I will tell you what you were thinking. I am so bored with my husband. The sex is not like it once was. I will have sex with Rath. He looks like he would want to do it with me. After all, there are so few women on this island.'

The accuracy of his statement made her cheeks flame.

'How would you know what I think? It's not like you bothered to stick around afterwards.'

'I had to go. I was needed in the village. But your mind had left the room as soon as we finished. All you women are the same; you just want to fuck and you think I just want to fuck too.'

'I don't...'

'You know, there is this woman,' he interrupted. 'She used to come to the ferry port on the mainland every so often. Once, twice a year. We would go to the cabin at the port and I would fuck her and she would leave. But last time it snowed and we had time to talk. She

was Unna's friend. She told me one time, years ago, she called by and saw us through the window, lying on the rug. I was licking her down there. Unna used to love that. She said it made her feel as if she was floating in the sea. Anyway, the other woman said she was hoping I will do that to her one day.'

'And then what happened?'

'What do you think? I did it and she left. She never came back. Nobody ever does. They get their fill of me and they get bored of this fucking island and then they leave. And you know who has to take them away? Me! And if I don't take her she finds a way to disappear anyway,' he shouted.

Anna clasped the suitcase handle tightly. He obviously had a lot of emotional baggage after being abandoned by some other woman. Women, even. It wasn't fair that he was taking it out on her.

'Well, why don't you leave too?' she said.

'How can I? Who else would drive the ferry?'

'I don't know. I'm sure they could hire someone.'

'I'm sure they could hire someone,' he mimicked. 'Don't patronise me, Anna.'

It took all her resolve not to burst into tears on the spot. Her eyes stung and her chest constricted with the effort. But there was no way she was going to give him the satisfaction.

'Well, if you feel that way...' she said.

Again, she picked up her suitcase and headed to the door. Seconds later, he grabbed her arm.

'Anna, I'm sorry. It was a long night and I got made angry. I should not have taken it out on you.'

'No. You shouldn't. Anyway, I'm leaving. Just as they always do. I wonder why.'

His fingers gripped her tighter. 'Stay. We can talk. I want to make it up to you.'

She looked up at him. His eyes were bright with tears. The poor man, she thought. But no feeling of sympathy accompanied it; her sub-consciousness had just selected a stock phrase. In fact, she felt a sudden revulsion for him. He smelt strange and he didn't shave. She imagined bringing him home to Norwich to meet all her friends, imagined them all laughing at his baggy woollen jumpers and his large oafish hands and strange, antiquated phrases. In fact, she couldn't imagine him anywhere but the island. It was the only world he knew and the only world where he belonged. She shook her arm free.

'I'm sorry, Rath – I have to go. I have to get back to my mum.'

This time she left without looking behind her.

After hearing what Lief had to say, Rebecca was not inclined to wait for her daughter. But by the time she had left the village and followed the track uphill, she realised she didn't have the energy to get all the way home. She was in such pain. It was in her lower back, radiating out to her left side. She wasn't sure if it was a complication of the arthritis or a consequence of last night's fall. She sat down on a flat-topped boulder to rest. It was her own fault, she knew that. She shouldn't have gone outside so late at night. And she should have gone for a check-up before she left the UK. But she had avoided doing so in case her rheumatologist advised her against travelling. She often avoided visiting her rheumatologist in case she had more bad news for her. A couple of days ago she might have been tempted to ask Rath if there was a doctor on the island, but not anymore. She didn't trust him at all. It made her uneasy that he was somehow connected to her past, and, if Anna really had fallen for him, he would be there in her future too. She suspected, however, that her daughter's interest in Rath was purely physical. 'Jake was just another adventure.' That's what Anna had said. And then she had gone off on an adventure of her own.

Cumulonimbus clouds were suspended above the horizon. The air was charged, heavy. A storm was coming and perhaps something else too. Would it change to orange alert? Or even red alert? Either way, it was time to leave. All these years, she'd been clutching at shadows.

Her vision was starting to fog, as if the clouds were slowly inching their way inside her. But bodies in pain were not made of cloud. They were as rough and unwieldy as stone, and insisted on being noticed. Maybe if she sat here long enough she'd become part of the landscape. The volcano would erupt and the lava would pour down from the crater towards her. It would engulf her.

'Mum? Are you napping?'

She opened her eyes to see Daniel standing in front of her.

'Where have you been?'

'I went for a walk to the dark city.'

He looked paler than usual. His arm was dangling limply.

'What happened?' she asked.

'Nothing.'

'I can tell something's happened to your arm.'

‘Well, I tripped and cut myself.’

‘Let me see.’

He rolled up his sleeve. She looked at the short, deep cut on his forearm, and the trickle of dried blood that came from it. It did not look accidental. She wondered what he’d used. Had he brought that Swiss army knife of his over from England? It looked too blunt for that. Maybe he’d found a jagged edge of broken glass, or god forbid, a rusty nail. When had he last had a tetanus shot? At least he hadn’t gone too deep. But of course that wasn’t the point. Why had he hurt himself deliberately?

‘You want me believe that this was an accident?’ she asked, her worry sharpening her words.

‘It was.’

‘You didn’t do it on purpose? Nobody asked you to do it?’

‘No...body...’ Daniel said, slowly enunciating the syllables.

But there was an unfocused look in his eyes she recognised all too well.

‘We’re leaving tomorrow and I’m taking you to the doctor’s.’

‘Oh c’mon, Mum. You’re just saying that because you’re in a bad mood.’

‘No, I’m not. We need to leave.’

‘*You’re* the one who needs to leave. You’re the one who’s sick.’

‘You, Anna and I are going to be on the next ferry off this island, whether you like it or not. I don’t think you’re safe here. I don’t think any of us are.’

‘Oh for fuck’s sake. I don’t think I want to have this conversation again...’ Daniel said, starting to walk away from her.

‘Daniel!’ she yelled after him.

He wheeled around. His jaw was clenched, his eyes narrowed.

‘What? You’re always calling my name like I’m a naughty little puppy or something.’

‘I need some help,’ she said. ‘I can’t walk any further.’

At this, his face softened.

‘Oh Mum, seriously?’

‘Maybe I’m the one who needs to go home,’ she said.

She’d had such high hopes of this holiday. To find out why the most important love affair of her life had ended. To have a reinvigorating adventure. At the very least she had hoped the trip might allow her to spend some time with her children. But she hadn’t got the answers she wanted and the distance between herself and everyone else seemed vast and

white, even though Daniel was standing right next to her. He had his arm around her and was whispering something into her ear, over and over. But she could barely feel him and the words had no meaning. The cloud was inside her head now. It was inching slowly down her body, curling through her nostrils and threatening to choke her.

Dimly she sensed that his hands were touching her more insistently. They appeared to have multiplied. Anna was standing next to Daniel. They were both looking down at her. In that moment they could have not seemed more alike. Old age did not just consist of waiting. It involved being pitied by one's children. She shrugged them both off and tried to sit up straight. But pain knifed at her lower back and she gasped out loud. If only she'd brought some painkillers with her.

'I think we need to go and get some help,' she heard Anna say to Daniel.

'Please don't. Just take me back to the house,' she said.

'But you can't walk,' Anna told her.

'We're only a couple of hundred yards from the house. We can make a chair with our hands and carry her. It's mostly flat from here,' Daniel said.

'What about my suitcase?' Anna asked.

'Fuck the suitcase. I'll come back and get it for you.'

Anna and Daniel crossed their arms and held hands, making a rudimentary seat for her. It took several minutes of painful manoeuvres before they managed to hoist her upright. They began the slow, faltering walk back in a silence punctuated only by their heavy breathing and the cries of pain she gave when her body was jolted. By the time they arrived at the cottage, both Anna and Daniel were sweating profusely.

'What a holiday, eh? We should have gone to Tuscany,' she said, attempting a joke.

Neither of them laughed.

'We have to put you down on the steps so I can open the door,' Daniel said.

'How will we carry her up the stairs? They're so narrow,' Anna replied.

'I can walk,' she replied.

'Or we can put her on the sofa,' Anna said.

'I said, I can walk. Besides, I want to pack.'

'Mum, I think you need to rest first. I can do that for you. Anyway, let's put you down,' Anna said.

They lowered her onto the steps and Daniel opened the door. Leaning heavily on his shoulder, she summoned all her strength to stand up and hobble inside.

'I'm going to the toilet,' she said.

It was a relief to shut the door on their concern. She didn't particularly need to go but if her condition worsened she didn't want the indignities of having to be helped over to a bucket by her children. Afterwards, she shuffled over to the mirror. The woman looking back at her had papery, crumpled skin. She looked as if she hadn't seen the sun in months, which was strange since she'd spent most of the summer outside, reading and gardening. How quickly her tan had faded. And it felt too as if new lines and wrinkles had appeared since she last saw her reflection, etched deep by the pain. When was the last time her body had hurt like this? When she'd given birth, perhaps. But that had been visceral, all-consuming. It had had a purpose and an end. The pain she was feeling now was localised, piercing; like an icicle through the back. Even if it ebbed away it would be replaced by a different pain. Then she realised. She and the arthritis were life partners now, and there was no space for anything or anyone else.

A knock at the door.

'Mum? Are you alright in there?' Anna called.

'I'm coming.'

She limped the two steps to the door and opened it.

'Let's put you to bed,' her daughter said, eyes wide with concern.

'I'm not a baby,' she snapped.

But unable to walk up the steep stairs, she found herself crawling. Once in the loft, she had to lean on Daniel again so she could stagger to her bed. She collapsed into it. Anna pulled the covers over her and placed a cool hand on her forehead.

'You're burning up. I think we need to get you out of here.'

'I think so too. Ferry goes at eleven o'clock tomorrow,' she mumbled.

'If only we could go sooner. I'll go and see if there's another way to get to the mainland.'

'I need Oramorph.'

She closed her eyes as Anna piped the bitter drops onto her tongue. The taste calmed her slightly, gave her faint hope the pain would recede. Then maybe she could get some sleep. Everything she'd heard and felt today had completely exhausted her.

'Mum?'

With difficulty, she opened her eyes. Anna was looking down at her with concern.

'Yes?'

'Were there any early signs that you had this?' she asked.

'I've been in a lot of pain this week, but it accelerated so suddenly.'

‘No, I meant the RA in general. The diagnosis.’

‘I always had weak knees. But no, not really. Why?’

‘I’m worried I might get arthritis too one day. I just wondered if there was anything I could do in advance to stop it. I wonder if the doctors can detect it early.’

Looking down upon her broken, depleted body, all Anna had been able to think about was herself. And yet her daughter had accused her of being self-involved.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, trying to keep the anger from her voice.

‘Perhaps I’ll go to see your rheumatologist when I get home.’

‘You do that.’

‘What’s wrong? Are you cross?’

She rolled over so she was facing in the opposite direction.

‘Mum? Mum?’

‘You’re a hypocrite.’

‘What have I done? I haven’t even said anything. It’s a legitimate worry that I might get RA.’

‘I’m not talking about the RA. I know you were with Rath.’

‘How could you possibly? I don’t know what Daniel told you, but I was at the hotel.’

‘It was closed.’

‘Alright, fine, I spent an hour or two with him before the earthquake. Only because there was nowhere else to go,’ Anna said, sounding tearful.

Perhaps she had jumped to conclusions. But her head was too fogged with pain to think clearly. She was too tired to carry on arguing.

‘My mistake,’ she said.

She pulled the covers over her head, cocooning herself in the warm, sweaty almost-darkness, willing the pain to ebb away and for sleep to come. Anna’s footsteps echoed across the loft and disappeared.

Anna rushed straight into the bathroom. Her mother had been so dismissive, and she was sure it wasn't just because of the pain she was in. She sat on the toilet and cried bitterly until she was exhausted. Then she got up and washed her face. Her cheeks were red and blotchy. Despite all the walking she'd done this week, and the attempts to stay away from sugar, her face was no less round. Perhaps she needed to reinvent herself as someone self-confident and voluptuous and totally ok with who she was. Someone tasty like Nigella.

She wondered if Rath thought she was like that already. Definitely not, especially after today. Such a reinvention would never work with Tommy either. He knew her far too well, would question and perhaps even scoff at every attempted alteration to her appearance and personality. It would only work if she went somewhere nobody knew her. At the moment, it didn't sound like such a bad plan. The thought of going back home wasn't remotely appealing. Back to the new-build which she'd always thought too far out of town and completely lacking in character ('But it will insulate so well. Think of the electricity bill! And it's detached! You'd never get that much space for our budget in the city centre,' Tommy had said), back to those monotonous shifts at the gym, and worst of all, back to a husband who, after all these years, refused to help her become the person she wanted to be. It hit her like a revelation, even though she'd known, deep down, for more than a year: she was going to leave him.

Anna took a deep breath. Everything was going to change. And she was ready for that. She washed her face, wiped her eyes, and went into the living room. Daniel was stoking up the fire. He looked up at her.

'Have you been crying?'

'No. D'you want a sandwich? It's past lunchtime.'

Daniel shrugged. 'Alright.'

He sat staring at the fire, whilst she made a few rounds of cheese and tomato sandwiches.

'Here it is!' she said brightly, putting the plates on the kitchen table. Daniel got up, took his, and sat back down by the fire. He crammed the sandwich into his mouth.

'I hope Mum feels better soon,' she said.

'Uh huh.'

'We should pack after we've eaten. Make sure we're ready for the ferry.'

Daniel said nothing.

‘Why are you ignoring me? What have I done?’

‘You know exactly what you’ve done,’ her brother said, spraying crumbs.

She just about managed to refrain from telling him not to talk with his mouth full.

‘I actually don’t. Why don’t you tell me?’

‘I can’t believe I have to spell it out for you. The fact that you’ve been such an utter dick to her about Jake and you go and do exactly the same thing with Rath.’

‘It’s not the same thing! I don’t have kids!’ she said.

Daniel’s triumphant smile showed her she’d walked right into that one.

‘Besides, nothing has happened between us,’ she added.

‘Yeah. Right,’ Daniel said.

He stood up, leaving his plate on the floor, and walked out of the living room.

‘Where are you going?’ she called after him.

‘To get your suitcase.’

Anna was surprised he’d dropped it so quickly. Normally he would have called her a liar, and asked her all sorts of disgusting questions about Rath. She wondered what had inspired the change. Maybe he was lulling her into a false sense of security. He was probably going to wait until she thought he’d got away with it and then tell their mother or Tommy. Well more fool him. She was going to tell them both herself.

‘Shall I come with you?’ she asked.

‘If you want.’

Again, she was surprised by his response.

They put on their outdoor gear and left the house. It had started snowing again. The flakes were feather-soft, slowly whitening the dark boulders and rough grassland. To their right, the sea was a grey smudge. Hard to believe there was a volcano seething restlessly underneath them. It seemed far too unreal to be a threat.

‘I hope my suitcase doesn’t get too wet,’ she said.

Daniel, who was trying to catch snowflakes with his tongue, did not reply.

‘Mum won’t be able to get down to the harbour if it’s like this tomorrow,’ she said.

‘Why will she need to do that?’

‘For the ferry, of course. She’s so unwell we have to leave, whether we want to or not.’

‘Well I’m not going,’ Daniel said.

‘Of course you are. How on earth am I going to get Mum all the way back to Norwich by myself?’

Daniel shrugged. ‘Ask your boyfriend to help.’

‘He’s not my boyfriend!’

Her brother smiled at her in that irritating, lopsided way of his.

‘Didn’t last night go well? Was he shit in bed, then?’

There it was, the reaction she’d expected. She stopped abruptly and tugged on his arm.

‘What?’ he said, trying to shake her off.

‘Why do we always do this, Daniel? Why are we at each other’s throats all the time?’

He shrugged. ‘You started it.’

‘No I didn’t. But this is exactly what I mean. You’re always trying to wind me up for no reason.’

‘It’s not for no reason,’ he said, and started walking again.

‘Well what is it, then?’ she asked, hurrying after him. He could move so quickly when he wanted to. She’d never seen him out of breath. Meanwhile she flushed so easily and sweated profusely whenever she exercised. Yet another example of genetic unfairness.

Daniel stopped and turned back to her. She looked at him. His eyes were narrowed. In this dull light they were a flat, pale blue. She could see a muscle twitching above his jaw. It occurred to her that he was angry, an emotion she rarely saw in him, much less managed to invoke. But this time she felt no triumph, just confusion and a small cold thrill of fear.

‘Do you really want me to tell you?’ he asked.

‘Sure, unless this is an inappropriate moment for you,’ she said.

She hadn’t meant to sound sarcastic, but that’s how it had come out. Daniel looked at her in exasperation.

‘Do you know what it was like growing up with you? Always watching me, judging every little thing that I did. Making me feel inadequate every time I did something that didn’t conform to your standards of normality. Back when I first started getting sick, instead of sympathising you made me feel fucking guilty for getting attention!’

He stopped and took a deep breath. His eyes glittered and she wondered if he were about to cry. It was the first time in years that he’d unburdened himself to her. She almost wished he hadn’t. Everyone around her seemed to think she was a terrible person, judgemental and selfish, and he seemed to have the lowest opinion of her of all.

‘Mum and Dad left me alone in the house for hours on end all the times they went to the doctors with you,’ she said. ‘How was I supposed to feel?’

‘Oh, poor little Anna. Alone in the house watching TV, snacking on crisps and drinks, whilst lucky Daniel lies hallucinating on the bed in the psych ward, strapped down so he can’t scratch his stomach open and pull his intestines out. You’re jealous of that, are you?’

‘I’m jealous because you get to do whatever you want! I’m jealous because Mum loves you more!’ she shouted.

Daniel sighed.

‘Come on, don’t be a dumbass, Anna.’

‘I know she does,’ she replied.

How plaintive she sounded. But it was completely and utterly true, and there was nothing that he, or she, could do about it.

‘Honestly Anna, you can be a right idiot sometimes. Why the hell would you bother being jealous of me? I’m twenty-eight-years old and I live in a caravan at the bottom of my mum’s garden. I never have any money; I’ve been sectioned four times. I’ve never had a proper relationship,’ he said flatly.

‘You’re judging yourself by society’s standards to make me feel better. You’re perfectly happy, aren’t you?’

‘Yeah, right. That’s why I’m so keen to get back home.’

‘Oh.’

It came out as a cracked, harsh syllable. Her throat was dry. She coughed to clear it and realised she had no idea what to say next. Daniel was looking at his feet, hitting one boot against the other to dislodge the dirty snow encrusted around the sole. It seemed as if he didn’t have anything to say either. Small wonder. This was uncharted territory for both of them. What came next? An apology, a hug? Not the latter. It seemed somehow inappropriate, a misjudged consolation prize, like a lollipop for a kid who had behaved well during dental surgery. Besides, he’d tense up as soon as she touched him.

‘Is there anything I can do to help?’ she ventured.

He looked up at her. ‘I don’t need your pity. I just don’t want your jealousy.’

‘I’m sorry.’

They continued walking. Daniel stuck his tongue out again to catch the snowflakes, as if the conversation had never happened. In many ways he was still like a child. Perhaps that came from never sticking to anyone or anything. She’d always felt envious of that lack

of responsibility, but she was beginning to realise it was just as hard to drift as it was to stay in one place with one person. She wondered what happened to him in the months he was away, returning gaunt and hollow-eyed to the caravan, where he'd sleep for days. So much of his life was unknown to her whereas he knew everything about hers; even about Rath, who should have been her only secret.

'There's your suitcase,' Daniel said, pointing at the flash of pink.

'Great.'

They walked over to it and he picked it up for her.

'Someone's coming,' he said suddenly.

She heard the engine before she saw the headlights in the distance, carving a path through the snow.

'It's probably Rath,' Daniel said. 'I don't want to talk to him.'

She was glad of that. He was probably coming here to say something to her that she didn't want Daniel to hear. The less he knew about what had happened, the better.

'Will you check on Mum?' she asked Daniel, but he'd already gone. She turned to see a splash of pink bobbing away into the distance.

The car engine got louder, its headlights closer, until she had to shield her eyes from the beam. It stopped just in front of her. She heard the whir of a window opening. Rath leaned out.

'Anna? What are you doing?'

'My suitcase. I left it here. Daniel took it back,' she said warily, wondering if he was still angry with her.

'That goddamn suitcase. Why did you leave it in the snow?'

'Mum couldn't walk all the way home. We had to carry her,' she said.

'Why?'

'She fell over last night and she's in a lot of pain.'

'Why don't you get in for a moment? I want to tell you something,' he said.

She hesitated.

'I came to apologise.'

'Seems like you spend a lot of time doing that,' she said.

'Someone like me has to, Anna.'

She got in and shut the door. He switched on the light above their heads. The heating was on full blast. He was only wearing a thin shirt. It clung to his torso. But she wasn't going

to give him the satisfaction of her attention. Instead she stared fixedly at the dashboard. An orange light blinked below the speed dial.

‘You need oil,’ she said.

‘I know. But there is no point in filling her up now. The boat is coming.’

‘What boat?’

‘I came to tell you that the island has been put on orange alert.’

‘What the hell does that mean?’

‘It means the volcano might erupt. An evacuation ship has left the mainland. It will arrive in just under two hours. At six pm. I can come back and drive you all there, if your mother cannot walk so far.’

‘Why wait? Why can’t we just take the ferry and go now? Surely we’ll all fit? I’ve only seen about three people here,’ she said, registering how shrill and panicked she sounded, but too wound up to care.

Rath laid a hand on her arm. She didn’t shrug him off. The touch was reassuring.

‘Don’t worry. It might be months until the volcano erupts. Besides, there are eighty-three people living here. I think they would fit, but their suitcases and everything else they want to take would not. The ferry would get overloaded. These people do not want to leave the island with nothing.’

‘Oh god,’ she said. ‘Oh god oh god oh god...’

The eruption might be minutes away, or even seconds. The ship might not arrive in time. They might be burnt alive in the car. He pulled her towards him. She could feel herself shaking against his chest. He held her tightly until she started to relax. His smell was no longer off-putting. She remembered the taste of sex and iron on his lips.

A few years ago, she and Daniel and Tommy had watched a film about the end of the world. Afterwards they had got to talking about what they would do when Armageddon was close.

‘I’d go off and get laid,’ her brother had said. ‘I’d nail everyone I could.’

‘But what about us?’ she asked. ‘You wouldn’t want to say goodbye? That’s what I’d be doing; saying goodbye to all my family and friends.’

‘Me too,’ Tommy said valiantly.

‘Well you two are mugs,’ Daniel said. ‘They’d all be too busy trying to get laid to care about what you had to say to them.’

It seemed Daniel had been right. The volcano was on the verge of erupting, and instead of thinking about her friends and family she was thinking about sex. She bet Rath

would be up for it. Their argument had been eclipsed by this greater danger; it seemed like nothing worth discussing now. The air was thick with expectation. She disentangled herself and sat up. There were small wet circles on his shirt.

‘You feel better?’ he asked.

She looked at him. ‘I know I said...’ she began.

There was no need to finish the sentence. He kissed her hungrily, an end of the world kiss. She tasted mint. He’d cleaned his teeth. She wondered if he’d felt the urge to fuck after hearing about the danger they were in too, or if he’d simply anticipated her reaction. It didn’t matter either way, she thought, as she pulled off her anorak. Beside her, he was unbuttoning his trousers.

Sex in such a confined space was always going to be clumsy. He pushed his seat all the way back and she clambered on top of him. Her head was squashed sideways because there wasn’t enough room to sit up straight. There were a series of jabs and fumbles before he was inside her. But fuck, it felt good. Their movements were urgent. She thought of nothing but her own pleasure. Tommy had called her selfish but there were times when it paid to be so. And yes, she was using Rath, but he was using her too.

The car was an island of warm light in the snow and the windows were slick with condensation. She imagined someone walking past and seeing the jeep rock backwards and forwards, the blurred shadows of their bodies through the glass. They would rub their eyes and blink, wondering if they were seeing things. But her cries would follow them as they hurried away through the snow, and then they’d know.

44 | DANIEL

Daniel was sitting in the living room when Anna returned, suspiciously flushed, her eyes wild.

‘What the hell happened to you?’ he asked.

‘The volcano. It’s going to erupt. We have to leave.’

It sounded like a joke but Anna had zero sense of humour.

‘When?’

‘Rath’s coming to pick us up at six. The evacuation ship has already left.’

‘But...’

‘I’m going to tell Mum. You better start packing.’

‘I left some stuff in the shed,’ he muttered.

Anna wasn’t listening. She’d already bolted upstairs. He quickly dressed and slipped out of the house.

‘Bodeg? Are you there?’

‘Furless.’

‘What’s happening? Is an eruption coming?’

‘Soon I will release the deeper-most burnings of myself into the skies.’

‘Can’t you stop it? Can’t you keep it in?’ Daniel asked.

‘The force is too great. This fire has been building up inside me for so long.’

‘I don’t want to leave you.’

In Norfolk the ground was nothing more than the thing he trod on, the green or brown space that lay uselessly between his caravan and his mother’s house, between the bar and the bus stop into the city centre, the flat where he picked up weed and the doctor’s office where his mother made appointments for him far too often. But Bodeg had many different selves to display, and he wanted to be around to explore them. It was an island of contrasts, of texture and colour. The blaze of the sunset across the snow-stiffened ground. The hot burn of the arctic wind against exposed skin. Damp clouds of silver-green moss, the coarse yellow grass and the hard black edges of the lava rocks that led down to a deep blue ocean. If he left he’d forget these details, the cadences and harmonies of the island’s voice. He’d maintain at best a flat memory equivalent to a blurred photograph. Would the island forget him too? He hoped not.

‘Stay with me. I’ll keep you safe, I’ll keep you warm.’

‘Too warm. You’ll burn me alive.’

‘No. You must tuck yourself away inside my warm spaces; you must seek out my fluid heat.’

Daniel knew immediately what the island meant.

‘The hot springs? That’s perfect!’

‘Go furless, quickly!’

He left without a second thought. The road was almost covered over, but every now and then he caught glimpses of dark dirt under his feet, the only markers in a landscape mostly rubbed out by snow. When he turned around he saw his footsteps were quickly disappearing. There was no volcano, no sea, no sky; just flurries of white movement all around him. When he lifted his hand in front of his face even that was blurred, as if he was looking at it through a misted-up shower cubicle. He was sure that his fingers were getting thinner and more insubstantial too. The island was rubbing him out, so that the others would never find him.

It was not long before his heart was pounding and his legs were burning with the exertion. He stopped, and bent down to pick up a handful of snow. Ice cold water trickled down his gullet and cooled his dry throat. The wind had picked up and the snowflakes began to slant sideways. His resolve began to waver. After all, his mum was ill. She’d be even more upset than the island when she found out he was missing.

‘Maybe I should...’ he began.

He felt a sudden forceful push in the small of his back, and stumbled forward.

‘Was that you, Bodeg?’

‘Don’t leave me. You promised me you’d never leave me.’

The air suddenly felt heavy with sorrow. Even the snowflakes landing on his tongue were as salty as tears. Perhaps it was best to stay. His mum had Anna to look after her, but the island had nobody.

‘I’ll be so lonely,’ the island continued. ‘So lonely, so lonely, so lonely...’

Bodeg’s voice had developed a mesmeric quality. The words moved around him, supple and strong, silk ropes that jerked his arms and legs forwards.

‘But my mum...’

The wind carried his voice away and the island impelled him onwards.

His feet led him down a slope. A shadow loomed through the whiteness and he jumped back in alarm. Who was waiting for him by the side of the path? He tensed, ready to fight. But the shadow remained motionless, stiller than a man could ever be. Then he

realised it was a column of black rock. As he squinted into the distance he saw a few more finger-shaped shadows. Dimjuborgir. He remembered the photo he had taken, Anna's soft peach-pink cheek against the ridged darkness of the rock. How fragile she had looked in comparison. How easily the island could destroy her. How easily it could destroy them all. He thought about what fire did to bodies. How it charred skin and burnt flesh. How it melted fat into viscous rivers that made the flames spit and only the bones remained, glowing red in the fire. There was no evidence of such heat amongst all this snow. But he knew it was there.

'Come on furless, don't freeze furless, you'll be no good to me then,' the island said.

'Sorry,' he said numbly. 'It's just... I think I might like to go back.'

'I promise you that you will not be harmed.'

'But my mum? Will you keep her safe?'

'I will.'

It was almost impossible to carry on walking. His body felt tired, sluggish. His feet were heavy. But the island was telling him he had to keep moving. The island was leading him towards the cave; it would keep him warm and safe through the long, dangerous night.

Rebecca ripped Jake's letters apart and crammed them into her mouth. She chewed the paper until it was pulp and then spat it out. When she tried to speak, slender-inked calligraphy flowed from her mouth in soundless articulations. After each outburst she shrank a little. And suddenly Jake was there too, looking both younger and angrier than she remembered. He parted his lips and words flowed from his mouth but they were crude scribbles, exclamation marks; some sentences violently scored through. She went to comfort him but he pushed her away every time she tried to get too close.

'Mum? Mum!'

Someone was shaking her shoulder. She opened her eyes. Anna was standing over her.

'What's wrong?' she asked.

'The island's on orange alert and a boat's coming from the mainland. Rath will pick us up and take us there. But Daniel...'

Anna began to cry.

'What's wrong with Daniel?'

'He's gone missing. He said he was just going to the shed to get something but that was half an hour ago.'

'Only half an hour? Don't worry – he'll be back soon enough. You know what he's like.'

'But Rath will be here in forty minutes,' Anna said, frantically wiping her eyes.

Summoning all her efforts, Rebecca managed to sit up. 'Alright. We have to go and find him.'

'Mum, you can't even get out of bed. I'll go.'

'Where?'

'The village, I think. I'll try the bar. That seems the logical place. And the beaches. Maybe even Rath's house. Oh god, there's really not enough time.'

'I want to come too.'

'Only last night you slipped on the ice. What if tonight something worse happens?'

Nothing was worse than the thought of not finding Daniel. But Anna was right – she'd be a hindrance, not a help. She slumped back against the pillows, defeated.

'Thanks for going. I'm sorry about all this,' she said.

‘Oh Mum,’ Anna said, enfolding her in a clumsy, pain-inducing hug. ‘I’m sorry too.’ Then she unclasped and stood up. ‘I’ll be as quick as I can.’

‘I’m sure you’ll be able to find him,’ she replied, trying to reassure herself as well as her daughter.

But once Anna had left, the worries came flooding in. Daniel’s Condition meant he had an underdeveloped sense of danger. He’d think nothing of making his way up the volcano and trying to look over the rim to see if there was any lava seething below. It was something he’d said he wanted to do before he left. Even cocooned in the warmth of the blanket the hairs on her arms stood up on end. With a monumental effort she pulled herself up into a sitting position. Pain jabbed at her lower back as she swung one foot, then the other, out of bed. But she couldn’t get back into bed now. She took a deep breath and stood up.

The Oramorph was on the bedside table. She piped a couple of drops onto her tongue. For good measure, she took a Tramadol too. She was not normally someone to exceed her dosage when it came to pain medication, but this was an emergency. Daniel had to be found as soon as possible.

She sat back down on the bed and began putting on the outdoor clothes that Anna must have laid out for her. Her bag had been packed, too. She hadn’t heard any movement in the bedroom – she’d been dead to the world for hours. It had had some effect. The pain was still there, but the rest had given her back some much-needed energy.

A few minutes later, she made her way slowly towards the stairs, and then down them, gripping the handrail tightly. It wouldn’t do for Anna to come back and find her in a crumpled heap on the floor. She put on her coat and opened the front door. The snow had begun to ease off but the sky was still leaden and grey. The ground was coated in a thick layer of snow. With or without the arthritis, she knew it would be practically impossible to walk all the way up the volcano. That wouldn’t necessarily stop Daniel, though. He had been desperate to stay on the island; he must have run off in search of somewhere to hide. Anna was making a mistake looking around the village. Daniel would be in an out-of-the-way place. Dimjuborgir, the abandoned house...and then it hit her. The hot springs. If her son was determined to stay hidden then he’d have to keep warm. She pulled the door to and went into the living room, where she hastily scribbled a note to Anna. ‘I know where Daniel is. The hot springs. I’m going there to find him. Please come after us.’ She placed the note on the kitchen table, where she hoped Anna would see it, and made her way back outside.

She paused on the doorstep. It was a long way to the hot springs. Further than the village and back. The painkillers had kicked in but even so, it was sheer lunacy to venture

out so far. She checked herself. Not lunacy. Love. When faced with an apparently impossible goal, the best thing was to break it down into manageable chunks. She would take this journey one step at a time. Hopefully Anna and Rath wouldn't be too far behind her. Hopefully they would all get to the boat on time.

One step. Another step. She looked over at the shed. There was the place she had fallen. The marks her body had made in the snow had been covered over. The pain from the fall was less easily erased. But she would not fall now. If she did, she would pick herself up and carry on. She had come here chasing someone. But she was not going to leave someone else behind.

Daniel was almost there. For a while he'd been able to smell sulphur, and his boots were encrusted with yellowish mud. He had grown accustomed to the cold and moved to a place beyond it. It was no longer blood pumping through his body but rivulets of ice-blue water. A place where the edges of his vision were blurred with fatigue, and where he could barely feel his feet. But he had to keep on going. If he collapsed here he would be covered over by snow and forgotten.

'Carry on, furless, you are so close,' the island encouraged.

He stumbled onwards. It was far too late to go back. The ground creaked beneath his feet. Then, from the distance, came a low resonant note. Another, and another. They sounded as if they were coming from a church organ.

'What's that noise?' he asked the island.

'The fire inside me is singing. But look, you have arrived.'

The snow had finally stopped and the visibility was rapidly improving. He could see the domino-slabs of black rock stretching onwards into the distance. The cave was in between two of these. He walked up to the slabs and began searching for the entrance. The first one had been too hot, he remembered. The second entrance had been near a boulder which was pointed at one end and had reminded him of a large, squat bird. It was not long before he found it, a narrow opening even darker than the rock that surrounded it. He stepped through the entrance.

The darkness was warm and wet, like the inside of a mouth. He felt his way down to the water's edge and placed the torch on a boulder nearby. The light illuminated the cave and green shadows flickered on the surface of the water. The air was warmer in here, but it had the curious effect of reminding him how cold he had been before, and he found himself shivering violently. Hands shaking, he managed to pull off his clothes. He left the torch on a nearby rock and slipped into the water, sighing with relief. Feeling began to return to his fingers and toes. The warmth permeated his body and he finally felt himself begin to thaw.

'Thank you for helping me get here,' he said, his voice echoing around the chamber.

The island shifted and creaked around him. It felt as though he were on a boat. Calm seas, no land in sight.

'I told you I would keep you safe,' Bodeg said.

Daniel closed his eyes and floated on the surface of the water, arms and legs outstretched. He felt very safe, and very relaxed.

‘Tell me something, Bodeg. How old are you?’

‘I do not know. For I was born into the dark depths of Oceanus. There was no moon, no sun and no steorras; no way of tracking time. The pressure in this abyss was what taught me to feel, the salt in Oceanus was what taught me to cry. Sometimes I torrrre myself apart and heat burst outwards and upwards, scalding my bodeg just to disturb the silence...’

‘And you got bigger and bigger until finally you juttet out of the ocean!’ Daniel broke in excitedly. ‘Then what happened?’

‘Wait. You move too fast, furless. Slowly I rose through the gloaming, until I sensed the colour blue. The world swirled and undulated in ripples of light and ribbons of heat. Fish darted around me, flashing silver. Finally, I broke through the surface and found myself somewhere else. It was strange. I did not know Oceanus had an ending. The heat rose within me and I spurted hot sparks into the grey emptiness above, calling out a greeting, asking for help. But nobody answered.’

‘How long were you alone for?’ Daniel asked.

‘Never truly alone. Always connexioned to other islands under the sea. But I did not hear, did not understand their voices for a long time. In those early years I knew nothing. I sat and waited, watching the sky turn from black to grey and back, watching the moon and sun rise and fall into the sky. I preferred the heat of the sun and I oftentimes called to it, begging it to stay, and mourned its disappearance every night. But in time I grew to understand the rhythms of light and dark, of rain and sea and wind.’

The island’s voice had become low and hypnotic. Daniel felt his eyelids grow heavy. He swam to the edge of the pool, so he could rest his head and shoulders against a rock. It would not do to fall asleep and slip under the water. Once secured, he closed his eyes and let the island’s words wash over him.

‘Wind wore away my harder edges, and the waves struck my body in relentless rhythms. I became weatherbeaten and learnt to accept the slow process of my erosion. Aging produced softness. Wingedwuns came, carrying seeds from other places, and silver green clouds of moss bloomed on my filmen. A thatch of grass covered my ridges and swells. Soon, I was teeming with skitli’s scratching erratic patterns across my bodeg. More wingedwun’s came. Fisk made their homes in my underwater hollows.’

‘What about the people? When did the people arrive?’ Daniel asked. He was interested in the other people who had heard Bodeg talk. He wondered what they were like,

if they'd ever stayed with the island through an eruption. Perhaps they'd even floated in this pool where he was now.

'What is there to say about you furlesses? Sailing across Oceanus, landing on my shores, burning and gouging and scratching my bodeg.'

The island's words echoed around the cave. The curved dome of rock above him began to shake. How quickly its mood had changed. He could feel the disturbance in the pool too – the torchlight picked out the ripples undulating across the previously smooth surface. The shadows in the pool darkened and lengthened, as if stretching out towards him. He had to find some way of calming the island down.

'Why don't we talk about something else? What about food?' he asked, hastily changing the subject.

'My first meal was a wingedwun. In the height of warm-days, he landed and lay still still still as stone. But then the boundaries of his bodeg began to shift like the tideline, and he dissolved into me. What a rush – his flesh was so full of memories of flying I no longer felt like I was standing still,' the island sighed.

The shaking subsided slightly.

'Ah, so that's why you like eating things so much. Not to fill you up, but because of all the memories and feelings you get? You must know so much,' he said.

'I know what it's like to fly high above the clouds for days without rest. I know what it's like to run for miles tracking the scent of iron-red fear. I have absorbed bodegs suffused with longing, tasted loneliness and death. I have pieces of many places inside me. But you got one thing wrong furless, I am never full.'

It was almost six o'clock. Anna was freezing cold, tired and completely and utterly dispirited. She'd checked the bar (closed) both beaches (utterly desolate) and even inside the church, because she wondered if Daniel was hiding in the last place he thought they might look for him. As she stood on the high street, it suddenly occurred to her that the last place she expected to find him wasn't the church at all; it was the harbour. She remembered there had been some outhouses there, and even some large bins. He was probably hiding behind one of those, laughing at how stupid they all were.

Anna began the walk to the harbour. She was not alone. The main street was fuller than she'd ever seen it. Everyone else seemed to be making their way there too, all of them laden with bags and suitcases. A woman was carrying a wheelbarrow piled high with kitchen appliances. Another woman was holding a stained-glass lamp, with blue, red and purple panels arranged in a pattern made of dragonflies. If it had been hers, Anna would have taken it too. She wondered what she herself had at home worth saving. There was a picture her dad had painted for her when she'd just moved in. He was a really great artist, but nobody had realised the extent of his talent until he'd retired and actually had time to paint. The picture was of two people – a man and a little girl with pigtails – sitting on a bench together. The trees around them were dripping with autumnal colours and there were puddles on the Tarmac around them. A scene from her childhood. When they had all gone to the park together, Daniel had frequently run off. Whilst her mother had gone to look for him, she and her dad had always ended up on the same bench, waiting for them both and eating the humbugs he kept in his pockets.

Nothing much had changed, then. Daniel was still running away. But now she was too old to sit patiently waiting for him to return; she had a responsibility to find him. God, her mum would kill her if she returned empty-handed. Unless he was already home and the two of them were sitting relaxing by the fire whilst she was out here losing her goddamn mind.

'Anna?'

The jeep had driven up alongside without her noticing. Rath had wound down the window. She almost burst into tears of relief. A lift home; someone to help her find her brother. It would be alright. It would.

'Where are you going? I thought we were meeting at your house?' he asked her.

‘It’s Daniel. He’s run off. We can’t find him. I checked the bar, the church, the beaches,’ she gabbled. ‘I just want to check the harbour before we drive back up to the house.’

‘Your fucking brother. Get in. Let’s go.’

They drove down to the harbour. It was slow-going, for there were so many people on the track leading down to it. They parked at the bottom. When Anna got out she saw that all three sides of the harbour were lined with people, faces half-hidden under thick hats and scarves. She hadn’t realised so many of them lived on the island. They clustered in small groups around piles of suitcases. A few appeared to be talking but most were silent, their bodies turned towards the ship, a hulking shape moored up at the end of the harbour. Uniformed officials moved amongst them. It didn’t look as if anyone had boarded yet. She hoped there would be enough time to find Daniel and join everyone else on the ship.

‘So I thought he might be in one of those sheds,’ Anna said.

‘It is unlikely. They are all locked.’

‘I wouldn’t put it past him to break a window to get inside,’ she said.

‘Alright. You look at the sheds and behind the bins; I’ll go and see if he’s hiding behind one of the boats.’

She watched him striding away. Rath had a terrible temper but he was good in situations like this, moments that required decisive action. She was glad he was going to look inside the moored fishing boats – that thought hadn’t occurred to her.

An examination of the sheds revealed nothing. The doors were all firmly locked with huge rusted padlocks, and she could see no signs of broken windows or other forced entry. In a way it was a relief, because the rusting facades and darkened windows looked like prime horror-film material. She continued onto the bins. Her heart leapt to see a dark shape huddled behind one of them. But closer inspection revealed it to be a couple of bin-liners full of rubbish. Feeling defeated, she made her way back to the jeep.

Where else was there left to look? The volcano, the lava field, Dimjuborgir – the island’s most remote corners. The evening would be spent on a wild goose chase and the evacuation boat would leave without them. People were already queueing up to get inside. It looked like the officials were in the process of loading up the oldest and most vulnerable islanders. A little old lady in a wheelchair, her shrunken body drowning in blankets, was being pushed towards the ship by an unsmiling woman in uniform. Behind them came another couple of men carrying a stretcher, then another. The men carrying the second stretcher seemed to be having a far more difficult job. Whoever was on it was screaming

something incomprehensible and thrashing from side to side in an attempt to break through the restraints they had been secured with. Curiously, Anna stepped a little closer to see what was happening. She saw an emaciated woman with long white hair, who was obviously in a great deal of distress. Of course, it was impossible to tell what she was shouting about, given that she was yelling in another language, but Anna realised she was saying the same thing, over and over again.

‘That’s Sera,’ Rath said, appearing next to her.

‘What’s wrong with her?’

‘She doesn’t understand what is happening. She doesn’t want to leave the island.’

‘What’s she shouting?’

‘Just a load of goat piss.’

‘But I still want to know what she’s saying.’

‘He’ll keep me safe, he’ll keep me warm.’

‘Who?’

‘It could be anyone alive or dead, real or not. It’s all the same to her. Anyway, I couldn’t find your fucking brother.’

‘Maybe we should go back to the house and tell my mum.’

‘We can at least try and get her on the boat before it leaves,’ he agreed. ‘Will you go with her?’

‘Of course not. I have to find Daniel. There’s a whole island that I haven’t searched yet. He could be anywhere.’

‘Alright. We will take your mum to the ship and then we will begin our search.’

Anna was glad to hear him use ‘we’. It would be dark in a couple of hours. The thought of being out in the snow by herself was not a pleasant one.

‘We’d better hurry,’ she said.

They got back in the jeep. There were too many people to drive across the harbour, so Rath reversed up the track to the main road. They drove out of the village. Freshly fallen snow crunched under the wheels. The sky was a grey-blue colour, luminous at the horizon. He turned on the car stereo. Someone was singing in a language she didn’t know. A deep voice, smudged with static. She was glad she didn’t understand what he was saying – the tone soothed her and it would be awful to find out that he was singing about something tragic. About a boy lost in the snow, for example. At least a few of the local songs must be. It probably happened all the time. Mainly tourists, she imagined. The very young or the mad. People who didn’t have enough common sense to stay inside.

Rath stopped the jeep. Their holiday cottage was on the left.

‘Will you come and help me with Mum?’ she asked.

He nodded and switched off the ignition.

Together, they walked to the house. Anna pushed open the front door.

‘Mum? Daniel?’

There was no response.

‘She’s probably still asleep upstairs. I’ll go and get her,’ she said to Rath.

The bedroom was empty. Her mum’s bedcovers had been pushed back, and lay crumpled to one side. Maybe she was downstairs in the living room. But the warm winter clothes she had laid out for her mum were gone. Where was she?

Anna clattered back downstairs. Her mum wasn’t sitting on the sofa, or at the kitchen table. The living room was cold and smelled of ash.

‘Well, Mum’s not here,’ she said, turning to Rath.

Rath was too busy reading a small handwritten note to share in her panic.

‘What’s that?’ she asked.

He handed it to her.

‘“Anna – I think I know where he is. The cave with the hot springs. I’ve gone to find him.” Jesus. That must be at least a forty-five-minute walk. She could barely make it up the stairs earlier.’

‘I am sure we’ll see her on the road if we drive up there.’

‘I wonder when she left? I hope she hasn’t been in the cold for too long.’

‘Come.’

They left the house and walked back to the jeep. Once they’d set off Anna checked her phone. 6:20 pm. The evacuation boat had probably left by now. She could feel the worry in her chest and her stomach; thick constricting knots that made it difficult to breathe. You’re with Rath, she told herself. He has a ferry – there’s a way off this island. Her mother had said it was scheduled to leave the island tomorrow morning anyway. But maybe she could persuade him to take them to the mainland tonight.

‘Sorry,’ she said to him.

He turned the music down. ‘Sorry for what?’

‘That you have to drive me around, looking for my brother and now my mother.’

‘I don’t have to,’ he said simply, laying a hand on her knee. She could feel the warmth of his hand through her trousers. The clenched-up feeling inside her loosened a little. But then she thought of the horrible boat ride, and facing Tommy, and again it felt a little harder

to breathe. With all that had happened she'd barely thought about what she was going to say to him. His face seemed foggy and far away, as if they'd been apart for years. She could feel the stickiness of another man between her legs. She pushed it from her mind – there were other, more important things to think about.

They descended a hill and Dimjuborgir loomed out of the snow on her left. In the dim light there was something very human about the silhouettes of the columns. She was glad of the warmth and safety of the cab, glad that she hadn't had to walk all this way alone. It was surprising that they hadn't yet passed her mum. How had she managed to get so far through the snow? Perhaps they'd missed her. She might have strayed off the path to rest and fallen somewhere out of sight.

Rath stopped the cab.

'We're here. Where the road ends.'

They started walking. The ground was white and everything else – the rocks and the odd tree – were different shades of grey and charcoal. The silhouette of the volcano was stark against the sky, the air crisp and tinted with sulphur. Occasionally their shoulders brushed together. The physical contact was reassuring. As they walked she listened to the snow crunching under their feet, to Rath's slow even breathing and her own more ragged exhalations. Then she heard a rumbling sound, deep but barely perceptible. Rath was obviously hungry.

'It's my fault you missed supper – you must be starving,' she said.

'I had something to eat earlier.'

'Oh, I thought I heard your tummy growling.'

He turned to her, frowning. 'No.'

The rumbling sound came again, much louder this time. She realised it was coming from under her feet and gripped Rath's arm tightly in alarm. For the second time in twenty-four hours the ground began to shake.

'Earthquake!' she shouted.

'I don't think so.'

'What?'

He nudged her shoulder. 'Look.'

A huge mushroom cloud of smoke burst from the volcano. It billowed into the sky and began to bloom rapidly outwards. She had not expected so much noise. The noise was louder than a jet plane, loud enough to block out all rational thought. Despite the urgency,

Anna stopped walking and looked over. It made her feel incredibly small and incredibly helpless.

Rath was tugging her hand, shouting something over and over.

‘What?’ she yelled back.

He pulled her towards him, indicating the direction of the car with his free hand. She shook her head.

‘My mum! Daniel! I have to find them!’

Presumably he couldn’t hear either, because he continued to pull at her hand. Desperately, she shook herself free and began to run through the snow towards the caves. She didn’t look behind to see if he was following. Please let me find them soon, she thought. The smoke was spreading rapidly and the sky was beginning to darken.

Daniel stared up at the roof of the cave. He could see his shadow flickering across the rock, its edges distorted by the reflections of ripples in the water.

‘Why don’t you tell me about Unna? Do you know where she is?’

‘Unna gave herself to me so willingly. She climbed up-up-up to my highest point and threw herself down-down-down inside me...’

‘Into the volcano? Like the ring in the fires of Mordor?’

‘I do not comprehend what you are saying furless.’

‘Don’t worry, it’s a pop culture reference. Please carry on.’

‘Life left when her top-round struck my bodeg. Then I swallowed her whole. I lapped her up. Each molecule contains a world contains a word. I drunk her dry I sucked the sentences from her bones I learnt her as she crumbled...’

‘You – ate her?’

‘She tasted deliciousssss...’ the island hissed.

Such was the gratification in its voice that Daniel wondered if Unna’s death had been entirely accidental. He had thought Bodeg and Unna had shared a special relationship, but it sounded like she’d been nothing more than a meal to him. Was that why the island had led him here too? Surely not, after all they’d shared. But what was that, exactly? The island had been happiest when he had given it some part of himself. In that respect, it was curiously human. Perhaps everything it had said to him, all the intimacies they’d shared, had been geared towards one thing. He wasn’t safe here. Heart thudding, he swam to the edge of the pool and pulled himself out. He began pulling on his clothes over his wet body as fast as he could. There was still time to escape. Still time to run back to his mother and onto the boat and away from the island.

‘What are you doing, furless?’ the island asked.

‘Nothing.’

The water in the pool began to ripple tremulously. Then he heard a low rumble. It rapidly increased in volume and soon was accompanied by a cracking sound, as if all the stone walls that enclosed him were beginning to split apart along fissures and lines of weaknesses.

‘What’s happening?’ he asked the island.

‘You lied to me furless. I know you want to run but you ent goin nowhere...’

The walls and floor of the cave began to shake. Suddenly, he became painfully aware of the confines of his own body, of his lungs still insisting on gasping for breath after breath, his legs holding him firmly upright, anchoring him to the ground. It would all disappear. *He* would disappear. The blood roared in in his ears and the rumbling doubled, tripled in volume, drowning out everything else. He dropped to his knees and curled up in a ball. He was going to be trapped in here and swallowed whole.

‘Stop it! Stop it!’ he yelled.

But the shaking continued. Then the torch rolled off the boulder and smashed. Darkness heavy with geological time bore down upon him like a weight.

She was not going to leave the island without her son. She would not stop looking for him until she found him. When she was no longer able to walk she got onto her hands and knees and began crawling through the snow towards the caves. Every bone, every muscle in her body ached, but that didn't matter now. Nothing mattered but Daniel. Life would be so grey without him. At school they had referred to him as a 'difficult child', and William had often said that he was a handful. But she had always found a certain poetry in his misdemeanours. Daniel aged seven, caught red-handed spearing earwigs with a safety pin.

'I wanted to make a kebab,' he'd said.

A few days later, putting worms and stones in William's shoes.

'I'm making spaghetti.'

She remembered his sheer incomprehension when he'd been suspended from school for licking another boy's naked back in the shower after P.E.

'Animals do it all the time,' he'd said.

William had walked out of the room in disgust, leaving her to try and convince him of the error of his ways. But she had been secretly proud of him for succumbing to his impulses and for following instincts that everyone else was unable to repress. She did, however, wish he hadn't run off like this. Still, she was close now; the ground sloped downwards, and she could smell that sulphurous mud.

She descended the slope in a seated position, using her legs to inch forward, step by step. Once on level ground she stopped for a break. Everything hurt. When she'd given birth they'd told her to breathe through the pain, as if it were possible to close your eyes and move beyond the confines of your own body using such a simple technique. Still, she tried it now, filling her lungs with air, desperate to summon her last reserves of energy. This was harder than any marathon she had ever done. You're so close now, she told herself. Look how far you've gotten. It's just a little further.

Inch by slow inch. Left hand forward, left knee forward; right hand forward, right knee forward. Stop. Breathe. Repeat. Her hands began to vibrate. As the feeling intensified she realised that the vibrations were nothing to do with her; they were coming from beneath the ground. Then she heard it. A low rumbling that swelled in volume until she could barely hear herself think over the roaring. The noise wasn't continuous; it occurred in bursts, like a heartbeat. Jake had played her recordings of eruptions before, but the sound she was hearing

now was far louder, far angrier, than the tinny reverberations she'd heard through the computer speakers. There wasn't much time. Her safety didn't matter but Daniel's did. She had to carry on.

Black smoke burst from the top of the mountain. It spread rapidly. Soon a premature night had descended. She fished her head-torch from the pocket of her anorak and turned it on. The small beam illuminated the snow a few feet in front of her, but nothing beyond that. Still, she must keep going in the same direction. The air smelt like burning rocks. It was not long before the fumes made her eyes and throat sting. Ash began to fall from the sky, softly as snow. She pulled her scarf up over her mouth and carried on.

Soon the snow in front of her acquired an orange hue. She looked over at the volcano. Liquid fire leapt from the crater alongside the smoke, glowing against the dark rock. If she had been further away she might have thought the sight beautiful. Here, only a mile or two away, it was terrible. The fire enveloped the island in a hellish glow, as if she'd descended into the underworld to find him.

Interminable minutes later, she saw it. The rocks stacked like dominoes. That was where the caves were. Screaming out loud with the effort, she managed to lift herself to her feet. Then she was stumbling across the snow towards them.

'Daniel! Daniel!' she shouted, but her voice was obscured by the roaring of the volcano.

Finally, she reached the rocks. Where was the cave entrance? A little further. She remembered the shape of this rock, and that one, there was the first entrance, then the rock Daniel had said reminded him of a bird and then...

It was gone. Where the entrance should have been lay a pile of fallen rocks. Rebecca looked around her, wondering if she was mistaken. She remembered coming out of the cave and seeing a small spindly tree on the right, notable because it was one of the few around. There it was. So the entrance should be right behind her. The eruption must have caused a landslide. Her son might be trapped inside.

Rebecca knelt down.

'Daniel!' she shouted, as loudly as she could. No answer. The worst-case scenario sprung immediately to mind. Her son's crushed, lifeless body. Darkness clawed at her heart. It was followed, seconds later, by something she had never experienced before. Pure instinct. Desperation without thought, without any form of rationality. A desperation that possessed her utterly. She had to get to him. Hands clawing at stones clutching at rocks moving them

one by one nails broken hands bleeding she had to get to him Daniel Daniel Daniel I know you're in there I'm coming I'm coming I'm coming...

Something had seized her something was shaking her she turned and did not recognise the person who towered above her, face smeared with ash, eyes gleaming red in the light of the volcano. A demon, she thought, trying to break free from its grasp.

'Mum,' the demon croaked.

Understanding dawned.

'Anna he's trapped he's trapped he's trapped help me help me.'

The words tumbled from her mouth, jumbling together. But Anna knew what she was saying. Her daughter knelt down beside her. They began to pull away the stones from the mouth of the cave, all the while screaming out his name.

Daniel hugged his knees to his chest. There was nothing safe about this cave any more. The whole place was shaking with the island's anger. Bits of loose rock kept falling from the roof and onto the floor all around him. The island had broken its promise to him, so he was ready to break his promise to the island. Ready to escape. The cave was so dark that perhaps Bodeg wouldn't realise what he was doing until it was too late.

He was used to finding his way in the dark. He inched his leg forward until he contacted the water. That meant the entrance was somewhere behind his left shoulder. He turned and began to crawl slowly towards it, as silently as a spider. Sensations experienced numerous times were magnified and distorted in the darkness. His skin tingled, sensitive to everything his hands brushed against. Each cool drop of water sent shockwaves down his spine. The sharp edge of each small stone felt like broken glass. But the cave was small and its layout familiar. Once he had found the ridges in the rocks that operated as steps down towards the pool, it was easy to navigate himself up to the mouth of the cave. The darkness felt warmer, narrower here. Yet when he reached the place where he'd thought the entrance was he encountered only stone. He must have gone the wrong way after all.

'I knew you would try to escape, furless,' the island said.

'I'm not. I just wanted a breath of fresh air.'

'You're staying with me, now, furless. You'll never be able to open my mouth.'

'What? You've blocked the entrance?'

The island laughed.

Daniel pressed his hands up against the rock and pushed. It was cold, unyielding. He found a smaller stone and managed to edge his fingers around it. But as he yanked it from the wall the stones around it came crashing down onto his hand. Bright lights burst behind his eyes. He was reduced to an electric sizzle of nerves, to pain that rendered him speechless. For a minute or two it was the only thing he could concentrate on. He sat down on the cave floor and nursed his hand. That had to have broken a finger or two. But he still had one good hand with which to escape.

'Even if you escape, furless, you won't get far. It's so cold outside furless, and I won't keep you warm. I'll get the wind to push you over into the snow,' the island said.

'I thought we were friends.'

'Islands don't have friends,' Bodeg replied, spitting out the final word in distaste.

‘So why do you expect me to stay?’ Daniel asked angrily.

He got to his feet and used his good hand to dislodge a stone from the wall. This time he was prepared, and managed to jump backwards without getting harmed.

‘Furless, come away from there,’ the island hissed.

He could feel its breath in his ears, could taste the staleness of it. He had unwittingly walked right into the island’s mouth. Its granite jaws had closed over him, swallowing him whole.

‘Daniel? Daniel!’

His mum’s voice, muffled by rock.

‘Mum!’ he shouted back.

‘That’s just your imagination, furless,’ the island said, but Daniel thought he detected panic in its voice.

‘Help!’ he yelled, as loud as he could, pulling frantically at the rocks in front of him.

‘We’re coming!’

Her voice was so close now. She sounded so fierce and desperate, a lioness who could claw through stone walls to save him.

‘Sorry Bodeg, I’m leaving,’ he said defiantly to the island.

‘No.’

The shaking in the cave doubled, tripled, in volume. Daniel could hear the thud of yet more rocks falling in front of the mouth of the cave.

‘C’mon, please,’ he urged.

But the island seemed incapable of a response. It was screaming now – wild inchoate howls of anger and distress. A granite body convulsing with the most destructive type of pain, the kind that took everything else down with it.

‘Mum! Mum! Quickly!’ he yelled, pulling frantically at the rocks. His crushed hand was throbbing but he carried on regardless.

‘Daniel!’

Her voice was almost drowned out by the noise of the island, but even so he could tell it was much closer now, only a few inches away. He redoubled his efforts. Then he saw it. A chink of reddish light. A draft of cold air.

‘I think you’re nearly there!’ he shouted to his mum.

The island’s howls intensified.

A blunt, heavy pain on the side of his head. Darkness gradually closing over him. The last thing he was conscious of was the feeling of falling.

The first thing she saw was a hand, the fingers outstretched, skin stained red in the light. She clutched onto it. The fingers did not curl around hers as a baby's would, but hung limply.

'Here!' she shouted, nudging Anna, who was digging beside her.

Anna's eyes widened. She gestured to someone else. Rebecca turned to her left. For the first time she noticed Rath. His face was grey with ash and the whites of his eyes were pink. He looked demonic but as she watched him pull away the rocks that blocked her from her son, she realised demonic strength was exactly what was needed right now. Whilst Anna and Rath worked away on either side of her, she remained where she was, holding Daniel's hand. She thought about all the news videos she'd seen of landslides and collapsed buildings and mining accidents, how the hands always seemed to be the first thing the rescue crews uncovered, hands scrabbling and desperate, reaching blindly up towards the light. The hand she was holding now had still shown no signs of life. She squeezed it harder, willing Daniel to squeeze it back.

Anna and Rath continued to pull away the rocks. As she looked down into the small opening, her head-torch picked out Daniel's body, curled up on the floor. He was not moving. Her son was not moving. Her heart thudded. She was painfully alive. Was he? If only magic existed because if it did she would pass all the life she had to him.

'Rebecca? Rebecca?' Rath shouted.

She looked up at him.

'You have to move! It will be dangerous to pull him out! The rocks!'

At first, she did not register what he was saying. The eruption was so loud and everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. Then Anna was tugging at her other arm.

'Come on!'

She let go reluctantly, and allowed Anna to pull her to her feet. But after only a couple of steps her legs buckled and she sank into the snow.

'Mum!'

How exhausted she was. But she drew on her last reserves of strength to get back up, and Anna half dragged, half supported her to a flat rock nearby. She collapsed onto it. Her daughter sat down next to her, put an arm around her waist. The two of them watched Rath, now half in and half out of the cave. Stones were getting dislodged in the process and falling onto his back. Anyone smaller was in danger of getting seriously hurt. Her son was smaller.

Nothing felt solid. She wasn't sure if she was shaking or Anna was shaking or the rock on which they were sitting was shaking. All three, perhaps.

She was not sure how long she remained sitting on that rock. Seconds can take lifetimes to pass. But eventually, centuries or perhaps minutes later, Rath was walking towards them, holding her son in his arms. Anna helped her off the rock so Rath could lay Daniel down. Some of his clothes were missing and so was one of his shoes. His arms lay limply at his sides. One of his hands was hurt. His fingers stuck out at odd angles, the nails bleeding and broken. She took off her gloves and ran her hands over his face. He was so still. So cold, too. Then she found it. A sticky, matted patch of hair just above his forehead. When she held her fingers up to the light they were dark with blood. Was he...? He couldn't be? She placed her hand on his chest, trying to find his heartbeat. But any faint rhythm was eclipsed by the shaking of the island. She placed her hand on the side of his neck, but her fingers were too numb to detect a pulse. Finally, she placed her bare hand a millimetre or two from his mouth. Was that the faintest wisp of warm breath, or was she imagining it?

His eyelids flickered.

The relief was almost overwhelming. She sank down into the snow, and placed her head on his chest. He was alive. She closed her eyes, suddenly exhausted.

A sensation of rising through the air. A series of jolts, which created sickening waves of pain throughout her body. When she came back into herself she discovered Rath was carrying her over his shoulder. He was carrying Daniel on his other one. How could he manage to lift them both? It was not a question she probed too deeply. This was a place where bodies could stretch beyond their limits.

She looked across at the volcano. The dark slope was striated with lava. From here they looked like glowing threads. They were rapidly lengthening, extending outwards towards the village. And yet she was not afraid. Daniel and Anna were here. Rath would carry them away from the island. The relief was immense. Despite the pain, her exhaustion overwhelmed her, and again she found her eyes closing.

Fever dreams of molten lava. She and Daniel and Anna sailing down a river of fire on a raft made of charred wood. She sat in the middle and Anna steered them using a long punt. Daniel stood at the front, arms outstretched. Then she heard a cry. In front of them, someone was drowning. Even though half the flesh had burnt from his face, and his features had distorted like melting wax, she knew it was Jake. She reached out towards him, but he had already disappeared under the surface. She stood up, ready to jump in after him. But Anna took one arm, and Daniel another. Together, they anchored her firmly in place.

Anna felt safer once they were in the car, hidden behind Perspex and metal. Such a relief to be away from that thick black smoke, muffled from the horrible roaring of the volcano. Rath was probably even more relieved to have put her mother and Daniel down on the back seat. He had been shaking afterwards from the strain of carrying them both. They drove through Dimjuborgir. The dark city looked like it was burning now, shrouded in black smoke and bathed in the reddish light of the volcano. The whole island would be burning soon. They'd reached Daniel just in time.

She turned to look at her mum and brother. They were slumped on either side of the car, sharing a musty blanket that Rath kept on the back seat. Both had their eyes closed. Daniel still hadn't regained consciousness, although when they'd checked he was still breathing faintly. The sooner they got to a first-aid kit so she could bandage that wound the better. Meanwhile, her mum was sleeping. Occasionally she shifted or muttered something under her breath. Anna watched her lips move. She thought she made out the words 'Anna' and 'Daniel', but perhaps that was just fanciful.

'Mind if we stop at the house?'

'There is no time.'

'I need our passports,' she said firmly.

'You must be quick,' he said.

Minutes later, he stopped the car and she hurried down the track to the house. Although she and her mum were already packed, her suitcase was too cumbersome to be moved easily. She emptied half the clothes from her mother's backpack, and then filled it up with some of her own. Of course, she put her passport in the front pocket too. Daniel's was already in there for safekeeping. There was no time to pack any of his stuff, but she knew he'd need a change of clothes. She hurried to the shed and picked something out of the piles of clothes strewn across the floor. Then she made her way back to the car. The air was sharp and burnt. By the time she reached it she was coughing violently.

'Here,' Rath said.

He handed her a bottle of water.

She gulped it down. The water tasted of sulphur. There were traces of the volcano in everything here.

'Better?'

She nodded, eyes still watering. They continued onwards towards the village. Ash had already settled darkly on the roofs of the houses. The place glowed with an eerie light, which stained the snow orange and made the window panes of the empty houses gleam. The harbour was deserted. The ship had sailed without them.

‘We must take the ferry,’ Rath said to her. ‘I will carry your brother over first. Then I will be back for your mum.’

He got out of the car and bundled her brother into his arms. Anna watched through the windscreen as the two shadows disappeared into the murk.

‘Anna?’

A croak from the back seat.

‘Mum! You’re awake.’

‘Daniel...’

‘He’s safe, don’t worry. Rath has taken him to the ferry. He’s coming back for us.’

‘Safe...’ her mum said, faintly.

‘How do you feel?’

‘Relieved.’

Anna got out of the car and climbed into the seat next to her mum. She reached under the blanket, and found her mum’s hand. It was cold.

‘I should never have brought us here,’ her mum said softly.

‘You weren’t to know about the volcano. Nobody was.’

‘I was selfish. I came to find...’ her mum said, and then paused.

‘What, Mum? What did you come here to find?’

‘It happened so long ago. It doesn’t matter. Not anymore,’ her mother said.

Anna gripped her mum’s hand more tightly. Cold fingers returned the pressure. She wondered whether she should say anything about Rath. But now was not the time.

‘Do you mind if I come and stay with you for a little while, once we’re home?’ she asked instead.

‘That would be nice...’

Anna leaned her head against her mum’s shoulder. It was only then she realised how exhausted she was. Through half-closed eyes she watched the ash fall onto the concrete around them. The ground was no longer white but grey. Ash was heaped up on the roofs of the sheds, piled into dark heaps against the walls. It had the same soft, dusty consistency as the powder in her dad’s urn. They still hadn’t scattered his ashes. She hadn’t let her mum do it. The thought of him becoming nothing, nowhere, was unbearable. But here, the ash had

overtaken everything. It smothered the land and the houses. If only she was holding the urn in her arms now, she could empty him into this other world where the ash dominated everything.

A shadow approached them through the murk. Rath. Grey-faced, a scarf around his nose and mouth.

‘Mum. Wake up. Rath’s back.’

‘Oh, thank God.’

Rath opened the car door.

‘Can you climb onto my back?’ he asked her mum.

She could.

They walked quickly to the ferry, Anna carrying the suitcases, and Rath carrying her mum. The volcano roared angrily. The atmosphere was acrid. Her eyes began to sting, then water. In the distance, the volcano became a hazy orange blur. Perhaps it was better that way. She did not want to see how close the lava was to them now.

They hurried up the gangplank and into the small cabin. Daniel was lying on one of the benches. She hurried over to him. In this light she could see that his hair was stiff with clotted blood. His face was pale, and his lips had an awful bluish hue.

‘I did not have time to take off his wet clothes. But I will fetch you a foil blanket and first-aid kit now,’ Rath told her.

Daniel was shivering. She pulled off his trousers, boots and jumper. The next time she looked around the blanket and first-aid kit were on the floor by her side, along with a bucket of water and a cloth. She tucked the blanket round him and began cleaning his wound. The water rapidly turned an alarming bright red colour. Soon she discovered its source. The cut looked like it would need a few stitches, but at least it wasn’t all the way down to the bone. Steri-strips would have to do until they got to a hospital.

She taped his cut, and applied a dressing. As she was doing so, he began to stir. Seconds later, she heard him whimper in pain.

‘Don’t worry, you’re safe now.’

‘Am I dead?’ he whispered.

‘No. You’re on Rath’s ferry. We found you.’

‘Is it angry?’

She must have misheard.

‘No, Daniel. Nobody’s angry with you,’ she said.

‘The island’s angry.’

That was the Condition talking. It was probably the Condition that had made him run away too. She couldn't bear to imagine what he had experienced on the island, trapped inside that cave. But he was safe now. They'd take him to see a doctor, get his dosage back under control. Daniel would be alright once they got him off this island.

'Don't worry, it'll be fine,' she said, as much to reassure herself as to him.

'Where's Mum?'

'She's on the sofa a couple of metres away from you. I think she's sleeping. No, don't look; stay still.'

She placed her hand on his forehead. The ferry's engines started. Daniel was whispering something but she could no longer hear him.

'Try and sleep,' she said.

The boat began to lurch as it sailed from the harbour. She should go and ask Rath to radio an ambulance to meet them before she became too seasick to move.

To reach the cockpit she had to go back out onto deck. Leaving her mum and Daniel to rest, she made her way out of the cabin. Outside, the wind howled. There was no taste of salt on the air as there had been on the previous crossing. Now there was just the bitterness of ash. She stumbled across the deck towards the cockpit, trying her hardest to keep as far from the sides of the boat as possible. The ocean was terrifying in this light. The crests of the waves were stained orange but their depths were obsidian. They smashed against the side of the boat, making her stomach lurch. What a relief it was to reach his cabin. She opened the door and stepped inside. He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her to his chest. The intimacy of the gesture made her realise how much she needed comforting. Surprising herself, Anna began to cry. She wept not out of sorrow but a desire to release all the emotions bottled up inside her. The anxiety over Daniel's disappearance. Worry about her mum. The relief when Daniel had finally woken up in the cabin. At some point she became aware that Rath was saying something under his breath. The words were foreign to her, but the low rhythms were comforting.

A couple of minutes later, feeling utterly drained, but a lot calmer, she detached herself from him.

'Sorry. I always seem to be crying on your shoulder,' she said.

'It has been a difficult evening. Your family. They are alright?'

'I think so. But I want to organise an ambulance for them. Can you call someone?'

'Of course.'

He picked up his radio handset, and she listened to the crackle of static as he communicated with someone on the mainland.

‘Thank you,’ she said, when he’d finished.

‘You know, I have a satellite phone,’ he said. ‘If you want you can call your husband. I expect he will be worried about you.’

She wondered if the eruption had made the news. Was Tommy glued to the screen, tears rolling down his face? Maybe he was frantically packing, ready to go and catch the first flight to Reykjavik. More than likely he was completely oblivious, balancing a microwave dinner on his lap as he watched *Fast and Furious*. She didn’t have the energy to deal with his questions. Besides, she didn’t want to talk to him with Rath listening in, silently evaluating the conversation.

‘Maybe later,’ she said.

He lit a cigarette. The air in the small cabin quickly became smoky, and she began to feel quite sick.

‘You shouldn’t do that. You’ve just inhaled so much smoke from the volcano. Your lungs are probably damaged,’ she said.

‘They were damaged before tonight,’ Rath said.

Still, he opened the window. Smoke drifted outside. The cold air rushed in, providing some relief from her nausea. To stop yourself from feeling sick you were supposed to find a point on the horizon and stare at it. But there was no horizon to be seen, for the nose of the boat pointed straight into darkness. No wonder sailors in olden times were afraid of sailing off the edges of the world.

‘I should go back to the cabin. To see my mum,’ she said.

‘Alright.’

‘Thanks again, for everything you’ve done.’

It came out too formally. As if she barely knew him. But now they’d left the island they were strangers to one another. There would be no more chances of intimacy now the world had widened again. Besides, the further they sailed from the island, the less she wanted there to be.

Rath nodded stiffly. She wondered if he could feel this new distance too.

‘Where will you go?’ she asked.

‘I will sail back to the island as soon as I can.’

She hoped, for his sake, that there was an island to sail back to.

‘Goodbye then,’ she said, turning away from him.

She walked across deck and back to the cabin, without looking back at him. Daniel was asleep but her mum had somehow managed to struggle into a seated position. Her body was still swathed in blankets, and she was looking out of one of the portholes. It seemed as if she was never completely spent; there was always an extra reserve of energy she managed to draw upon. Anna sat down next to her. Together they looked through the salt-smearred glass. Night had fallen now, and the dark contours of the land were indivisible with the ocean. But the fire leaping from the volcano was molten bright, illuminating the column of smoke that extended upwards from the crater. Lightning crackled around it. Anna sat in silence. She watched the burning island get slowly smaller as they headed out into the open sea. Eventually it was nothing more than a fleck of light suspended in the liquid darkness. Then it disappeared altogether.

EPILOGUE

Rebecca put the kettle on. In the past she would have hurried to see how many tasks she could complete in the time it took for it to boil: unloading the dishwasher; putting on the washing machine; sweeping the floor. Now she simply waited. Outside the kitchen window the grass was stiff with frost. The trees that bordered the garden were bare and black. As usual, her eye was drawn to Daniel's caravan, still standing despite all the storms that had battered it through the winter. She noticed that his light was on, and a curl of steam was rising from the chimney. At nine o'clock in the morning. Her spirits rose a little. Perhaps he was having a good day.

The kettle boiled. She made a pot of tea using the new loose-leaf stuff Anna had bought; a ginger, peppercorn, chocolate and rooibos mixture, because she was off caffeine. Anna was off a lot of things right now. Alcohol. Soft Cheeses. Smoked fish. Pineapples. Kiwi Fruits. Chickpeas. Red meat in moderation, cooked all the way through. She was taking her pregnancy very seriously. Various books written by so-called experts had prohibited these substances. Rebecca had told her that when she was pregnant she'd eaten what she wanted, and Anna had been scandalised.

'But you might have damaged us!'

The guilt had hit later that night, when she compared Anna's slavish devotion to motherhood with her own more devil-may-care attitude through pregnancy. She had spent hours searching for scientific proof that these prohibited foods had any impact on pregnancy. When she told Anna the results, her daughter just smiled serenely.

'Some of these are suggestions from an Ayurvedic diet, mum. It's important not to get out of balance.'

And Anna wasn't, not at all. Remarkable, really, considering all that had happened to her – to them all – in the past six months.

She put the teapot onto a tray, alongside three cups. As she picked it up she felt a mild twinge in her hands. The ache was deeply satisfying. A couple of months she hadn't been able to pick the tray up at all. As her rheumatologist said, she'd been working hard. They had been experimenting with different combinations of medication to find the most effective, which was tiring but necessary. She had been doing her exercises and attending regular check-ups. There would always be pain. But how foolish she'd been before, to neglect her own wellbeing through some misplaced sense of pride, and make it worse.

She walked slowly into the lounge. Anna was lying on the sofa, holding her phone in one hand and rubbing her rounded stomach with the other.

‘There’s something spiritual about it, you know, being a carrier for new life. Sick? Well, I did get a bit of morning sickness about six weeks in. It’s very common in the first trimester...’

Rebecca placed the cups and teapot on the coffee table. Anna looked up at her and mouthed a ‘thank you’.

‘...well, I don’t know. Actually, I left him.’

There was a tinny squawk from the other end of the phone.

‘I know, I know. Everyone’s really surprised. But the thing is, relationships don’t always stay the same. And we got together so young...’

Rebecca poured two cups of tea and carried them hastily from the room. She wanted to give her daughter privacy. Based on other phone-calls that she had overheard, Anna would soon be talking about her and Tommy’s sex life, or lack of one. She had no desire to hear any more about that.

She stepped into the garden, and made her way across the frost-tipped lawn to the caravan. The air was crisp and it smelt of winter, of ice and bare earth and the smokiness that always seemed to come at this time of year, even with no bonfires in sight. As she knocked on his door, she felt a familiar clenching sensation inside her chest. She had no idea what was happening on the other side. Was lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling? Would he even be able to open the door at all? She could hear music, or something approximating music, from inside; the wail of voices in an unknown language, jerky orchestral music.

‘Daniel! Let me in!’ she shouted, knocking harder, gripped by a sudden sense of panic.

The music was turned down. She heard movement, then the door opened.

‘Jesus Mum, there’s no need to yell.’

Her stomach unclenched. Daniel was fully dressed and unharmed. He was holding a piece of misshapen wood in his hand.

‘What’s that?’ she asked.

‘For baby William. I’m making him a toy. A rabbit on wheels. Do you think he’ll like it?’

‘When he’s a newborn he won’t know enough to understand what a toy is, or what “to like” means, or the concept of a gift is,’ she said.

His face fell.

‘But he’ll understand when he gets older. And Anna will really appreciate it,’ she added quickly.

‘Anna’s just buying all this plastic crap for him. It’s really bad for the environment. I wanted him to have something wooden,’ he said.

‘It’s a nice gesture. I brought you tea,’ she said, holding the cup out to him. Her hands were beginning to hurt.

‘Thanks, just put it there,’ he said, indicating the breeze-block steps.

She put both cups down in relief and flexed her wrists, glad that he was fumbling for his shoes and not watching. He came outside and lit a cigarette.

‘Anna’s on the phone,’ she said, by way of explaining her presence.

‘Ah.’

She sipped from her mug of tea and glanced sidelong at him as he smoked. He had changed since he’d come back from the island. This was more than the mood-swings associated with his Condition, the inevitable transition from the high to the low. He’d also become quieter, graver, more thoughtful. It was understandable. How awful it must have been, to be trapped in that cave. She still knew very little about what had happened. His therapist had told them that Daniel was exhibiting signs of PTSD. He had also cautioned her and Anna against probing too deeply into what had happened on Bodeg.

‘It’s still a source of confusion for him. Despite all my efforts, he still believes what he experienced on the island was real,’ he had told them.

She had tried her best not to ask him too many questions; to give him space as well as support. God knows if she had succeeded. But at least he was still here. At least they all were.

These days she was trying her very hardest not to communicate with ghosts. In fact, it was no longer Jake she dreamed about but the island, of those icebergs gleaming on the black shore, of the fire that leapt from the volcano’s crater. There had been such beauty there, but she had been too caught up in her own pain to appreciate it. Despite all that had happened on the island, she occasionally found herself seized by a longing to return, to experience Bodeg on her own terms rather than trying to see it through someone else’s eyes. But that wasn’t possible now. The volcano had devastated the island. Half the village had been destroyed, and they hadn’t yet started rebuilding, because it was still very much winter. Many of the displaced islanders were still on the mainland. Rath, however, had gone home several months ago. He’d emailed Anna, asking if she wanted to meet, but she’d declined. By that time, the bump had started to show. She hoped Anna would tell him eventually.

‘Mum?’

‘Yes?’

‘You’re thinking about Bodeg, aren’t you?’

‘No. I was thinking about Anna.’

‘Before that, then.’

‘How did you know?’

‘I could feel it, somehow. I don’t know. It’s hard to explain.’

He put his cigarette butt carefully in the ashtray and picked up his mug of tea. Perhaps this was it. He was finally ready to talk.

‘Try me,’ she said.

‘You’ll just tell me it’s all in my mind.’

‘What if I promise not to make any judgements? I’ll just listen,’ she said.

‘Alright.’

She was surprised. Perhaps there was something in her tone, a softness or a sympathy he rarely encountered in her, that made him want to open up. Maybe he was simply ready to talk. She turned to face him. His brow was furrowed, as if he were searching for the right words.

‘It’s not something that I see, I just sort of feel it. When you or Anna are thinking about the island the air around you seems to get darker. And it kind of tingles, like a storm’s coming.’

‘Does Anna think about the island?’

‘Of course. She has a piece of the island inside her. We all do. Especially me.’

He paused, and looked at her uncertainly.

‘Why you?’

‘It claimed me, you see. It claimed me and you took me back. I should still be there in that cave. Why did you come back for me?’ he asked, his voice rising.

‘Selfishness,’ she said. ‘I couldn’t imagine a world without you.’

‘You make it sound so simple.’

‘It was.’

He rolled another cigarette and lit it up.

‘I thought the island loved me, you know. It sounds dumb, but I did. It made me feel less alone. You know you can be held by things that don’t have arms. And it opened my eyes to things I’d never noticed before. Words, patterns, ideas. But then it turned out it didn’t love me at all. I know what you’re going to say now, that this is just my Condition talking.’

Of course she wouldn't. In this moment, that was precisely the wrong thing to say. But what were the right words?

'The best relationships are equal relationships,' she said. 'The island had too much power over you. But there will be someone for you, I promise.'

'How can you?'

'It's just a feeling I have,' she said.

He smiled, for the first time that morning.

'Trusting in feelings, not evidence? That's a first for you, Mum.'

He drained his cup.

'Thanks for the tea. I think I'll go for a walk now. To the broad.'

'What about breakfast?' she asked.

'I'll buy a bacon sandwich from the bakery.'

'Alright,' she said.

She hovered whilst he got ready and locked up the caravan, even though she knew she shouldn't. She wanted to make sure that he was taking a coat. After that night on the island, she never wanted to see him that cold again. Luckily, he put one on without her having to remind him; he hated being mollycoddled.

'Bye Mum,' he said, kissing her cheek.

She watched him stride across the lawn and through the back gate. Again, that clenching sensation. She'd be slightly on edge until she heard the gate clatter open again, signalling his return.

As she made her way back to the house, she noticed some white dots in the otherwise bare flowerbed. Snowdrops. The first flowers to push their way up through the frozen earth at the beginning of every year. Far more resilient than their fragile appearance indicated. She debated cutting a few to fill a vase, but decided against it. Why uproot them when they'd braved so much to emerge into the light?

When speaking to Daniel, she felt as if she'd been counselling him about a break-up. His Condition had such complex symptoms, but maybe, this time, the cause had been simple. A desire to be loved. His mind had created a world beyond this one where he could be. In this way, he really was no different from anyone else. Everyone was looking for something they didn't have. Life was like a long-age sea voyage into disorientation and darkness. To keep on living you had to cast off from everything you knew, and carry on searching for other people, for other islands.

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