

**People, Places, Spaces and Traces:
Writing *Lotte* and the psychogeographical
imagination**

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Declaration

This thesis – and the work to which it refers – is the result of my own efforts. Any ideas, data, images or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to their originator in the text or bibliography. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification.

Martin Raymond

28th March 2022

Abstract

Place is more than setting. Using psychogeographical methods and framed by critical theory, this practice-led thesis investigates how the interaction of geography, history, memory and imagination in recreating the past as fiction.

The first four chapters of this dissertation examine the role of place by way of classic psychogeographic methodology, modified by autoethnographic theory. Because the fieldwork was carried out during a global pandemic, it also considers the exploration of urban and rural terrain via Google Street View. The thesis discusses the role of archival material, photographs and personal memories. It interrogates the tension between creativity and ethical dilemmas involved in writing fiction based on family history.

The second part of this dissertation is *Lotte*, a novel inspired by the experiences of my grandmother in the inter-war period. My creative practice informed, and was informed by, my critical investigations.

A theoretical framework is provided by a survey of writers from a range of disciplines including Lefebvre, Bakhtin, Bachelard, Tuan, Careri, Stepanova and Didion. Concepts of space/place and the social ownership of space, particularly in relation to gender, are especially significant for my own creative work.

Three recently published novels are studied in detail. They share a psychogeographic approach to defining character and forming narrative through interaction with a carefully constructed sense of period and location.

All these elements are brought together to argue that an understanding of place can help the writer shape a credible illusion of the past, placing characters and events in a carefully realised imaginative landscape.

The novel is an original creative work. The critical chapters also make a unique contribution to knowledge by identifying the power of liminal places to enhance jeopardy, conflict and transformation, and by exploring how the relationship between memory and the digital *derive* enhances the writer's approach to time and space.

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My family had much to put up with. Anna and Chris not only indulged, but contributed to, their father's latest unlikely venture. Kipper, Anna's dog, listened thoughtfully to most of the ideas at an early stage, and also saved me from three years in front of a screen. And Marriann, who read and reread beyond the call of duty and who was always there, no matter if things went well, or badly.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	2
Abstract	3
Acknowledgments	4
Table of Contents	5
Table of Figures	7
Section 1 Critical Reflection and Practice	9
Chapter 1 People and Places: recovering the past	9
1.i. Genesis: Places and People	9
1.ii. Methodology: Archives	11
1.iii. Methodology: History, Geography and GSV	15
1.iv. Methodology: Imagination and Creative Praxis	28
1.v. Ethics	33
1.vi. Unique contribution	37
1.vii. Conclusion	39
Chapter 2 Theory: Places, Spaces and Traces	41
2.i. The Human <i>Umwelt</i> : Space, Social Meaning and Control	41
2.ii. Tuan: Space and Place	47
2.iii. Bachelard: The Poetics of Space	50
2.iv. Bakhtin: Space and Time	52
2.v. The Art of Walking: Imagination and Space	55
2.vi. Conclusion	62
Chapter 3 A Close Reading of Place	64
3.i. Representations: Space, Social Meaning and Control	64
3.ii. Locations: Space and Place	69
3.iii. Explorations: Poetics of Space	72
3.iv. Excavations: Space and Time	75
3.v. Excursions: Imagination and Space	83
3.vi. Conclusion	87

Chapter 4	Theory into Practice	88
4.i.	A Deeper Truth: Place, Space and Memory	88
4.ii.	The Top of the Town: Space, Social Meaning and Control	91
4.iii.	Crossing the Liminal: Space and Place	96
4.iv.	What Lies Beneath: The Poetics of Space	102
4.v.	Memorials and Voids: Space and Time	104
4.vi.	Space, Loss, Memory and Imagination	117
4.vii.	Conclusion	122
Section 2		125
<i>Lotte</i>		126
Bibliography		343

Table of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1. Ed Ruscha. <i>Every Building on the Sunset Strip</i> . 1966 (second printing 1971). Self-published book, offset lithograph, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4 x 3/8 in. Open unfolded: 7 1/8 x 297. The Getty Research Institute, 86-B19486.c1. https://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/worksofart/every-building-on-the-sunset-strip/ .	22
Figure 2. Doug Rickard. <i>A New American Picture</i> , https://dougerrickard.com/a-new-american-picture/ .	23
Figure 3. Vectors of four works about place.	31
Figure 4. The imagination as a point of convergence.	31
Figure 5. Creative praxis.	32
Figure 6. <i>Isochronic map of the world</i> . 1914. The Royal Geographic Society, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/What-travelling-was-like-100-years-ago/ .	52
Figure 7. Boyle Family. <i>World Series, Barra, Elemental Study (rippled sand with worm casts)</i> . Mixed media, resin, fiberglass. 1992 – 1993 - 183 x 122. Courtesy of Sebastian Boyle. https://www.dailyserving.com/2011/02/boyle-family/ .	64
Figure 8. James Hutton. <i>Unconformity</i> . 1787. Science Photo Library. https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/135482/view/hutton-s-unconformity-1787-artwork .	76
Figure 9. Jo Cound. ‘55 Baker Street, Stirling.’ Stirling City Heritage Trust. https://www.stirlingcityheritagetrust.org/2020/09/an-architecture-students-take-on-the-city-of-stirling/ .	80
Figure 10. Peter Lanyon. <i>Thermal</i> . Oil on canvas. 1960. 1829 x 1524. Tate St Ives. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/peter-lanyon-1467 .	86
Figure 11. ‘WWI Names A-L (l) and WWI Names L-Z (r), Stirling War Memorial Corn Exchange Road Stirling.’ https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/116958 .	108
Figure 12. ‘55 Baker Street Stirling.’ Unknown photographer. Rootschat.com. https://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=496369.0 .	110

<p>Figure 13. ‘Callander station: troops leaving for France 1914-18.’ Unknown photographer. Callander Heritage Trust. https://www.facebook.com/callanderheritage/.</p>	111
<p>Figure 14. ‘Stirling Railway Station.’ Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum. https://www.smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk/remembering-ww1/</p>	112
<p>Figure 15. Elspeth King. <i>Old Stirling</i> (Catrine: Stenlake Publishing, 2009) 31, ‘Military display King Street 1915.’</p>	113
<p>Figure 16. ‘Military display King Street 1915.’ Detail.</p>	114
<p>Figure 17. ‘Larbert Bellsdyke Hospital during demolition 1990s.’ Historic Hospitals: An Architectural Gazetteer. Mental Hospitals in Scotland. https://historic-hospitals.com/mental-hospitals-in-britain-and-ireland/mental-hospitals-in-scotland/.</p>	115
<p>Figure 18. ‘Stirling District Asylum c1950.’ Historic Hospitals: An Architectural Gazetteer. Mental Hospitals in Scotland. https://historic-hospitals.com/mental-hospitals-in-britain-and-ireland/mental-hospitals-in-scotland/.</p>	115
<p>Figure 19. Google Street View. Google Maps. https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@56.1389217,-4.1450711,3a,90y,270h,89.5t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sbC5YcWqIZ6LaPwIg8d1Z1g!2e0!7i13312!8i6656,</p>	118
<p>Figure 20. D.Y. Cameron. <i>Ben Ledi, Early Spring 1914</i>. Oil on Canvas (131×115.5). Tate Gallery. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/cameron-ben-ledi-n03209.</p>	119

Chapter 1

People and Places: recovering the past.

We must remember that the past is more unknown than known, that the vast majority of lived experience is penetrable only to the guided imagination. Tom Crewe.¹

1.i. Genesis: Places and People.

Henry James's notebooks are full of origin-tales – meticulous accounts of the seeds that grew into his plays, short stories and novels. They are mini dramas in their own right. Who told him the tale? How did they hear it? Where was he at the time?² How the story took root was important to James. Here is the origin-story of my novel.

A Sunday lunch at home with my daughter and her partner might be the sort of family gathering with plenty potential for drama. Her partner mentioned that he had stumbled across the collection of Asylum records held at Stirling University – the photographs of inmates from the Victorian period and the beautiful copperplate medical records.

‘And you know about your grandmother?’ he said. Casually.

‘Yes,’ I lied.

‘How she died in the Asylum – it’s all there in the records. You can look it up.’

My grandmother, Charlotte Raymond.³ Her early death was a recognized feature in family lore. Acknowledged, but not discussed. When I was growing up, she didn't feature in any conversations. My grandfather – by this time, with his third wife – was a vivid presence in my childhood. He had built a business through skill, hard work and a bit of post-WWI luck when he took over a business established by three sisters – distant relatives rediscovered after he was demobbed in Stirling. This apparent good fortune was not the whole story. He lost

¹ Tom Crewe, ‘Short Cuts: Found Objects,’ *London Review of Books*, 43, No 16, August 12, 2021.

² F.O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B Murdock (ed), *The Notebooks of Henry James* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1961). For example – ‘...the idea suggested to me by Mrs. Anstruther-Thompson, whom I sat next to at a Xmas dinner at Lady Lindsay’s.’ (198). Or the elaborate provenance of another source – ‘Mrs. Kemble repeated to me the other night a story told her by Edward Sartoris and told him by his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Algie, in which it seemed to me there was a *situation*.’ 59.

³ Charlotte was known as Lotte – that’s the name my grandfather used on the rare occasions she was mentioned. Charlotte is a common Edwardian name and is usually abbreviated to Lottie. Charlotte’s younger sister was named Marguerite, not a common name in Scotland at the turn of the century. In the absence of any other family significance, it suggests a yearning for the exotic. On more than one occasion prosaic, or lazy, census takers reduced Marguerite to Margaret. So I opted for the more European, more interesting, Lotte.

two wives at an early age, the first, Charlotte was the mother of three children – my father, aunt and uncle. There was never, ever, any mention of the Asylum.

Sitting at the lunch-table I had no Jamesian intimations of a future narrative. I was too upset. The image that first came into my head was the wall. The Asylum wall was a landmark on the pre-motorway main road from Stirling to Edinburgh. Off on a trip to the big city with my parents, I'd be in the back seat. The wall ran for what seemed like miles alongside the road.

'Bellsdyke.' That was all my mother said. It was enough.

As we finished lunch, I saw my father's mother – someone whom I had never met, heard little of and had only ever seen in one surviving photograph – dying alone in a narrow bed, somewhere behind that long grey wall. Much later, it took my supervisor to see the potential in the 'situation.' But my sense of the past seemed inadequate to the task. My father, aunt and uncle were all gone; there was nothing against which I could calibrate my imagination. Just a deep sense of loss, and even that had an air of melodrama about it, as if I wasn't really entitled to the emotion.

I booked the documents, sat down in a white reading room and read the bare facts; the admission on the 6th of April 1933 and her sudden death sixteen days later. What engaged my imagination was not so much the contents of the big book – the names of those admitted marching neatly down the page – but the smell. A raw, dirty smell of institutions, not the smell of home or of care, but the sort of smell that you would catch sometimes in the old days walking past hostels for the homeless.

The facts were limited. But to make sense of specific information you need context and that leads to other material and to other archives. And as I read through the boxes of papers, the realization grew slowly that the best way to tell the story was through imaginative engagement and a fictional reconstruction. But despite encouragement from my supervisors, the characters remained beyond my reach. Even the ones I'd met were shadowy – who can imagine a grandfather as a young man, the shipwright's son making his way? But I *could* see the places. From the archives I had a sense of the sprawling community of the Asylum. From my own memories I knew what the inside of the family shop looked like, little changed by the 1960s. And I knew the town of Stirling, the street plan of the Top of the Town pretty similar to the 1560s. I was familiar with the places that I had identified in the archives. I could understand the huge gulf that separated Lotte's childhood home in the narrow streets around the Castle from Snowdon Place, the address in the Admission Book. From the

physicality of that distance, the contrast between the different streets, I could imagine the enormity of the social journey my grandmother took and some of the costs involved.

The archives and my knowledge of place worked together in my imagination to create a landscape where it seemed feasible for characters to talk and move about, creating ‘...a world, great or little, in which (the novelist) can honestly believe.’⁴ Place gave me a connection with the people and with the past. It opened a deeper perspective on the archives. Each collection I explored had more resonance, partly because my knowledge increased, partly because I could relate it to my experience of a specific location. The archival collections, contextualised by my knowledge of place, provided material that shaped the novel and animated my characters.

1. ii. Methodology: Archives

My examination of the *Stirling Observer* for 1933⁵ started with a search for my grandmother’s death notice. However, the collection became a rich source, not just of background about clothes and prices, the ‘poignant trivia’⁶ that can make connections with the past. In its bi-weekly editions I also found specific historical events which I incorporated into my novel. The social culture of market-town Scotland between the wars was sketched out in the news stories. The sharp social hierarchy was laid out in the reports from the Sheriff Court and in the condescending tone of accounts of provisions for the unemployed. 1933 was one of grimmest years of the Great Depression, when unemployment in the UK reached 25%⁷. But in the pages of the *Observer* economic distress was something that only had an impact on the poorest classes – the jobless miners of the coal villages south of the town, or

⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (JM Dent & Sons: London, 1921), 7.

⁵ *Stirling Observer*, 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

⁶ ‘The importance of imagining “how it felt” is another gap in traditional history. It is what Sarah Waters calls the ‘poignant trivia’ of the period: “What does a dogskin coat smell like? How do you melt down a pewter cup on a kitchen fire? What is it like to share a bed with your servant?” Candida Lacey, ‘Publishing New Historical Fiction,’ *Open University Contemporary Cultures of Writing Seminar Series*. (Senate House, London. 21 October 2014), https://silotips.queue/candida-lacey-publishing-new-historical-fiction-open-university-s-contemporary-c?&queue_id=1&v=1627920967&u=ODkuMjQxLjIxMS4yMDk=.

Waters’ ‘poignant trivia,’ is more than circumstantial detail. The trivia of the past is not just about background veracity, they are the elements that the reader can identify with because they have relevance to our current lives. Conveniently for the novelist, the same details can simultaneously reveal the gulf that separates us from the past.

⁷ Ed Butchart, ‘Unemployment And Non-Employment In Interwar Britain.’ *University of Oxford: Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History*, Number 16, May 1997, <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/economics/history/paper16/16www.pdf>. The position in Scotland was even more grim – 26% of the workforce were unemployed in 1933. Richard J. Finlay, *Modern Scotland 1914-2000* (London: Profile Books 2004), 83.

those who had dropped off the edge of society and into Orchard House, the shelter for the destitute. A clearly defined role for middle-class women was visible through the advertising – clothes, household equipment and Mediterranean cruises figure prominently. Cars cost as much as modest flats. For this was also period where the new consumer industries rise as the old industries began to collapse.⁸ This was the cusp of the modern world – the Council debated the need for car parking and there was a proposal to link Stirling to the wider world with a local aerodrome.

I incorporated two specific stories from the *Observer* archive into my novel. The cancellation of Stirling High School’s pupil exchange from Dresden due to ‘the political situation in Germany’⁹ recognised the turmoil of the period and was a nod towards the international crises and the fears of another war that consumed this decade. I also used a story about an abandoned baby, which both reflected the social attitudes of the comfortable middle classes and provided a focus for the rumbling conflict between Lotte and Grace and their attitudes to motherhood:

‘Who would do that? Women crave a child, would give anything for a child. And others have one and throw it away. Like rubbish out in a bin.’ She let the words hang in the floury air.

‘It was well cared for. The baby. Well dressed and properly wrapped up.’

‘Cared for.’ Grace stopped rolling.

‘This,’ said Lotte, ‘is a terrible thing. For everyone. I don’t believe a mother does that out of badness.’

‘What do they do it out of then?’ Grace held the rolling pin in one hand. ‘Kindness?’ Lotte tapped the newspaper with her fingernail.

‘It will come out. There will be more to the story. The newspapers only tell you what it looks like, not how it actually is.’ Lotte turned back to the paper. ‘The poor woman.’

‘The bad mother,’ said Grace.¹⁰

Stirling Council Archive also held the potentially arid *Valuation Rolls*,¹¹ and the equally unpromising, *Register of Inspections: Housing Scotland Act 1935*.¹² The detailed information in both collections allowed me to track the movements of Lotte and Sam as they moved up the property ladder, and to uncover the enterprise of Lotte’s mother and two sisters in building the drapery business that my grandfather took over. These were not his distant

⁸ David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History* (Penguin Books: London, 2019).

⁹ *Stirling Observer*, 9th May 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

¹⁰ Raymond, *Lotte*, 204.

¹¹ *Valuation Rolls 1911-1941*, Stirling Council Archive.

¹² *Register of Inspections: Housing Scotland Act 1935*, Stirling Council Archive.

relatives, the lucky find of family mythology, but three determined women from Lotte's side of the family who had built a modest but valuable collection of properties from before the First World War. They ran retail businesses and had rental income. They bought 55 Baker Street and gave it a new lease of life after its first incarnation as *The Stirling Arms* public house. This shifted my whole perception of my grandfather's role in 'establishing' the business. I had encountered some remarkable women.

These archives unexpectedly gave my embryonic narrative additional tensions and opportunities. Here was a wider story about the role of women during WW1 and how that promise disappeared in the inter-war years. As Hilary Mantel neatly says: 'The reason you must stick to the truth is that it is better, stranger, stronger, than anything you can make up.'¹³

If the property archives were a find, *The Stirling Asylum Archives*¹⁴ were – as anticipated – horrifying and compelling. The Scotland-wide *Annual Reports*¹⁵ provided context and specific details on the Stirling Asylum.¹⁶ Gothic horror was not absent – extra vigilance was recommended in dress-making groups after instances of needles being swallowed. Caustic soda from the laundry was also an instrument of self-harm. The tone of professional detachment throughout, the clear 'othering' of the patients, was difficult to read with a 21st century sensibility. But the serious rigour with which the Board of Control, formerly the General Board of Commissioners for Lunacy in Scotland, went about their business also felt strangely enlightened. Suicides were surprisingly rare and each one was investigated by the Board in heart-breaking detail. And yet, through it all, was the absolute certainty that this was a place apart, and a place from where few would return.

This impression was reinforced by the most vivid of the archival material in the University of Stirling collection – the asylum magazine, *The Passing Hour*.¹⁷ Although it had a short life and was concerned with the Edwardian asylum, two decades before my period, it presented a vivid picture of a lively, self-contained community. It wasn't a subversive

¹³ Hilary Mantel, *The Reith Lectures: Can These Bones Live?* (BBC, 2017), http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2017/reith_2017_hilary_mantel_lecture1.pdf.

¹⁴ Stirling District Asylum Archive, University of Stirling

¹⁵ *Twentieth Annual Report of the General Board of Control for Scotland for the Year 1933*, Edinburgh: HMSO Stirling, 1934, Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

¹⁶ Chris Philo and Jonathan Andrews, 'Introduction: histories of asylums, insanity and psychiatry in Scotland.' *History of Psychiatry* 28, no.1, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X16678566>. This review of historical studies of Scottish asylums highlights the huge potential for further exploration of the rich archival record. The study also suggests that while many studies concentrate on the Victorian asylum, the 20th century has been less well examined.

¹⁷ *The Passing Hour: The Magazine and Chronicle of the Stirling District Asylum, Larbert, 1901-1906*, Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

publication – very few contributions were written by patients. This was an upbeat version of asylum life – a positive fiction – but also a reminder that the Asylum was a home as well as a prison.

The Passing Hour's long Edwardian summer – a photograph of the male patients with the cricket-ground roller, cheerful reports of concerts and dances – does not fully conceal the fact that all the way up to the 1930s and beyond there was virtually no prospect of treatment and recovery.¹⁸ Patients were there for life. This situation is reflected in my character, Dr Sneddon, desperate to find a cure, to unlock patients, no matter how brutal and uncertain the process, of how ruthless his personal ambition.

As well as the written archives, I made extensive use of photographs from public collections – a valuable resource to help locate the characters in time and space. I explore this process in detail in Chapter 4. I also made use of plans for a Nurses Home in the Asylum. Proposed in the late 1930s, this building project was a response to the rapidly developing professionalism of mental health nurses in the period. But the architectural drawings – with their cell-like rooms and senior staff at the corner of each floor – reinforced the idea that the Asylum didn't just constrain the patients. Everyone lived in a place apart, under observation much of the time and with little privacy.

These resources – the archive material, the newspapers, the photographs – contributed more than detail to help establish period atmosphere. They provided narrative direction and momentum. In combination with my own experiences and memories of the specific locations – houses, street, views – they helped to create a world that my characters could inhabit. The 'poignant trivia' of the past propelled the narrative.

¹⁸ Philo and Andrews suggest that the inter-war period is underexplored in relation to the Scottish archives compared to the volume of work covering earlier periods. The annual reports of the Board of Control reflect the static nature of the institutions and the lack of treatment regimes. Very few patients were discharged. For example, in 1933 there were 17,858 patients in Scottish asylums. The gender split was roughly 50/50 and 2823 were private patients. You were more likely to die in an asylum than be released. There were 1348 deaths and 291 patients were discharged. An additional 104 escaped – all but 17 were recovered. Treatment focussed on the value of occupation, especially outdoor work in the asylum farms and gardens, which was 'both health giving and sedative.' Stirling Asylum with 1042 patients in 1933 had extensive grounds – 352 acres of farm and 256 acres of garden. The farm supplied the Asylum with fresh food and had a 'considerable balance of net profit.' These outdoor tasks were for men: for female patients there was domestic work in the kitchen or laundry and needlework, knitting and dressmaking. Creative activities were treated with some suspicion: 'Better to encourage patients to take part in outdoor and domestic occupation rather than arts and crafts.' In Stirling Asylum there was a single female Occupational Therapy teacher, appointed in 1929. Source – *Twentieth Annual Report of the General Board of Control for Scotland for the Year 1933* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1934), Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

1.iii. Methodology: History. Geography and GSV

For György Lukács, the biographical novel is a subordinate form of the historical novel, lacking the proper scope to deal with the big moments of history.¹⁹ But as Michael Lackey demonstrates, biofiction is concerned with the psychological as much, if not more, than the historical.²⁰ While a fictional approach offered a way of exploring the interaction of character, period and place, the historical facts were still part of my method. The use of real lives in fiction can create excellent novels – Colm Tóibín’s *The Master*²¹ and Maggie O’Farrell’s *Hamnet*²² to name two. Lackey²³ makes a strong case for the role of biofiction as a medium which is less about period and more about the people who inhabited it. Lackey quotes Lytton Strachey: ‘Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past.’²⁴ It is the novelist’s task to imaginatively explore the human experience, not to write history: ‘to use rather than represent the life of the biographical subject.’²⁵ Milan Kundera clearly separates the novel from biography:

A biography’s value lies in the newness and the accuracy of the real facts it reveals. A novel’s value is in the revelation of previously unseen possibilities of existence as such: in other words, the novel uncovers what is hidden in each of us.²⁶

But there is value in keeping true to the basic facts, especially where the real characters involved are not established historic figures. Emma Donoghue writes of the ‘nobodies’ and notes her responsibility to use real names and core facts out of respect for people who get lost in the infinite wastes of history.²⁷

Utilising the bare facts of my grandmother’s life wherever possible started as an expression of respect and quickly unlocked rich sources of narrative material. The primary sources revealed a picture of her times full of imaginative possibility. World events crowded

¹⁹ Michael Lackey, ‘Biofiction: Its Origins, Nature and Evolutions,’ *American Book Review* 39, no. 1, (2017),

https://www.academia.edu/36741821/Introduction_to_Focus_Biofiction_Its_Origins_Natures_and_Evolutions.

²⁰ Ibid..

²¹ Colm Tóibín, *The Master* (London: Picador, 2004).

²² Maggie O’Farrell, *Hamnet* (London: Tinder Press, 2020).

²³ Lackey, ‘Biofiction,’ 3-4.

²⁴ Ibid..

²⁵ Michael Lackey, ‘Ireland, The Irish and Biofiction,’ *Eire-Ireland* 53, no 1-2, (2018): 98-119, https://www.academia.edu/40046197/Ireland_the_Irish_and_Biofiction.

²⁶ Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed* (London: Faber & Faber. 1996).

²⁷ Emma Donoghue, ‘Voicing the Nobodies in the Biographical Novel – in conversation with Michael Lackey,’ *Eire-Ireland* 53, no 1-2, (2018): 120-133, https://www.academia.edu/40041339/Emma_Donoghue_Voicing_the_Nobodies_in_the_Biographical_Novel.

in on social and cultural life, sometimes revealing ironies. For example, on the 6th of March 1914, the opening night gala concert for the Usher Hall featured a programme almost entirely made up of German composers – no sign of Elgar or Parry or other British Edwardian composers.²⁸ By 1933 Hitler was appropriating Wagner to the cause of the new Germany.²⁹ Music an area of cultural life vitally relevant to my character, both rising above jingoism and being subsumed by the most evil manifestation of nationalism. In my period, the 1914-18 war still casts its long shadow. *The Stirling Observer* of 1933 is full of reunions, commemorations, the celebration of brave mothers who lost sons. The grief is still raw, and yet new conflicts are looming.

The early 1930s were a time of great change, a threshold between the two wars, between a time of horsepower and livestock reared in urban spaces, and the modern world of cars, airports and consumerism. The role of women, social class relationships and social mobility were all in a state of flux in this period.³⁰ Through the archives there was a sense of the transient – the ‘between-ness’ of between-the-wars – with all the opportunities and anxieties that implies. To imagine my grandmother against that backdrop was to place her in these liminal times, physically, emotionally and socially.³¹

In medicine, this was also an era of pioneering experiments. The advances made in the understanding of trauma made during WW1 began to influence approaches to the treatment of mental health.^{32 33} Pioneering work with drugs in Italy and the USA during the early 1930s led to electro-convulsive therapy, a treatment at once brutal and effective.^{34 35}

²⁸ *Usher Hall Opening Concert March 6th 1914*, National Library of Scotland, Shelf Mark SJ4.1790.

²⁹ Robert L Jacobs, ‘Wagner's Influence on Hitler,’ *Music and Letters* XXII, Issue 1, (January 1941): 81–83, <https://www.scribd.com/document/440413460/Jacobs-Wagner-s-Influence-on-Hitler>. One piece of family lore I did have about my grandmother was her passion for music. It seemed appropriate to put both of these historical moments into my novel.

³⁰ Richard Overby, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane 2009).

³¹ There are other transitional decades. For example, Kirstin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonisation and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1996), explores how the convergence of social, political and economic pressures in France in the 1950s and 1960s had a wide impact on culture. Ross’s period of history was also marked by anxiety and a tension between tradition and modernity.

³² Suzie Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's legacy for Britain's Mental Health* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword History, 2014).

³³ N. Greenberg et al, ‘The Injured Mind in the UK Armed Forces,’ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society: Biological Sciences* 366, no 1562, (2011): 262-267, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0210>.

³⁴ Kathleen Jones, *Asylum and After: a revised History of the mental Health Services from the Early 18th Century to the 1990s* (London: Athlone Press 1993).

³⁵ Luke Dittich, *Patient H.M.: A Story of Memory, Madness and Family Secrets* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2016).

I took these facts and wove them into my narrative to raise questions about whether brave experimentation to advance science can cross over into reckless personal ambition.

These details of social tension and professional dilemma helped to shape the structure of my narrative. Dr Sneddon believes that ends justify means. Dr Fergusson believes his intentions are good – but does great harm. Grace was a member of the huge, and overwhelmingly female, workforce involved in domestic service.³⁶ In her character, I dramatized the stress of being in an uncomfortable liminal space – ostensibly part of a family while also being an employee. Delap³⁷ explores the blunt deficit of power that existed between domestic servant and employer, an antidote to the nostalgic National Trust vision of a secure Edwardian social system embodied in the Big House. But my novel suggests that the contradictions in the domestic servant's role might have been even greater in a small household. Employers who had recently been on an even lower rung of the social hierarchy faced their own insecurities.

What made these historical manifestations of social and technological change and conflict more vivid in my imagination, was the sense that they were happening in a familiar environment that I could relate to, places I knew and felt I understood. The complex nature of that understanding is interrogated in Chapter 4. But location is much more than a background in my novel. Lotte's restlessness, guilt and anxiety are expressed through her nightwalking. She constantly crosses from one social world to another, from Snowdon Place to the Top of

³⁶ In 1931, 1.4 million women worked as domestic servants. It was the biggest category of paid employment for women: David Eggerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History* (Penguin: London 2019), 199.

³⁷ Lucy Delap has explored this area in great detail, providing a balance to the romanticised landscape of *Downton Abbey*. See, for example, Lucy Delap, 'Campaigns of Curiosity: Class crossing and Role Reversal in British Domestic Service, 1890-1950,' *Left History* 12, no. 2, (2007), DOI:[10.25071/1913-9632.14968](https://doi.org/10.25071/1913-9632.14968). In this paper she says: 'The homes of servant-keeping women hosted confrontations between women of different classes, the dynamics of which are rarely available to historians.' 34.

The rich ironies and tension that exist in the relationships between employer and domestic servant have been explored in novels as disparate as Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), Henry Green, *Loving*, (London: Vintage, 2005), DH Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (London: Penguin, 1998), and the comic work of PG Wodehouse – *Stiff Upper Lip*, *Jeeves* (London: Everyman, 2000) – among many other examples. The unusual and forced intimacy between social classes, the sharp power imbalances and impact of external historic forces on domestic life, make domestic service an attractive topic for the novelist. Novels of the 20s and 30s – Lawrence and Green are examples – reflect the dynamic dislocation of established social norms between social classes. It is an intimate drama played out under a shared roof. In non-fiction, the psychology of the servant-employer relationship is explored in Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past*, (London: Granta, 2010) and a survey of representations of the servant in English literature is provided by Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below Stairs* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1993).

the Town. Her economic advancement and the risk of returning to poverty are reflected in physical movement. In the opening sequence she moves from the urban to a rural environment. In the 1930s, Stirling was very much a market hub for the surrounding countryside. This isn't only a town versus country tension. Stirling owes its historic and, arguably, its present importance to its location in a liminal place between Highland and Lowland – monarchs and tourists alike valued this unique position. Lotte's constant crossing and re-crossing of boundaries reflect her sense of displacement and unease – her restless searching. As I developed my thinking, the physical spaces and places became ways of taking forward the story (the narrative turns on encounters in the street and open road) and developing themes around social mobility, control and dislocation.

Another recurrent setting in my novel is France during the First World War.³⁸ I have visited locations on the Somme battlefield that are overwhelming expressions of grief. These war cemeteries and memorials are unique places. They exist somewhere beyond time and space. Dyer quotes John Berger – 'The sculptured war memorials are like no other public monuments ever constructed. They are numb' – before going on to conflate the physical memorial with the two-minute silence – 'In recording that silence, the Cenotaph would be an emblem of timelessness.'³⁹ 'Numb,' 'timeless,' the dead inhabit a world separate from the world of the living. The polished marble, the neat rows of white headstones break the heart but give no sense of the chaos and filth of the conflict. The Somme battlefield is now lush, neat farmland. Freightened with so much history and association, the Western Front, like the asylum, has become as much a place of the mind as a physical environment. To write about the Front, especially at this distance, is to build on the literary world set out by the histories, poems, plays, novels and memoirs. These are rich seams to mine and there is a comparative sense of freedom from setting characters in a place that is essentially imaginary. I didn't undervalue factual material and I read widely in histories of the conflict. But I also drew heavily on diaries, memoir and fiction. Fact and literary representations merged.⁴⁰

³⁸ The First World War was the great driver of social, cultural and technological change: 'A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars found itself under the open sky in a landscape where only the clouds were unchanged and where, in the midst of it all, in a force field crossed by devastating currents and explosions, stood the tiny, fragile human body.' Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller Essays*, trans. Tess Lewis (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2019), 49.

³⁹ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012).

⁴⁰ I read extensively across the literature of WW1 – Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930). *Sherston's Progress* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) and Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979) especially. But I was also alert to the artifice of any literary representations of such colossal horror. As a character in Frank McGuinness play *Observe the Sons of*

In my reading, I found many ironies and contradictions. ‘Cured’ trauma victims being sent back to almost certain death, officers treated for shellshock while the non-commissioned were shot for cowardice. Medical officers were required to certify that deserters were fit to be shot.⁴¹ Literature can go under the skin and explore these complexities through the imagined consciousness of actors in the drama:

“Thanks.” We lit up and blew smoke out over the wall of the range. The two of us standing and the third prone and still.

“Not one of mine,” he said.

“Of course not.” It was a mark of failed leadership. Another reason for shame.

“Were you at the Court?”

I had spoken to the dead boy twice. Once to pronounce him fit to stand trial and once to pronounce him fit to be shot. I wasn’t counting my third professional pronouncement.⁴²

Places, and specifically liminal places, which offered the opportunity of movement, change, paradox, were my imaginative portals to the past. Hilary Mantel speaks of looking around the room through her character’s eyes, and the importance of being able to see what they saw. So, the wallpaper becomes more important than other more ‘significant’ historical facts. Other sensory details have weight too – ‘what sound do your feet make on this floor of beaten mud’⁴³ – but always it comes back to location. Place and the human experience of place creates the connection with the past. Places, being present in the here and now as well as the past, allow us to connect with other humans through our shared experience of the physical world. Recognisable physical worlds make it easier to visualise the past. The centre of Stirling has almost the same street-plan as it did in the early twentieth century. Many buildings have been replaced in the streets around the Castle but have retained the vernacular character of the mediaeval town. And where change has taken place, when buildings have

Ulster Marching Towards the Somme (London: Faber & Faber. 2016), 19, says – ‘Invention gives that slaughter shape. That scale of horror has no shape.’ It is also the case that most ex-combatants were reluctant to speak: ‘Didn’t everyone notice at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield completely mute, not richer in experiences they could share, but poorer?’ (Benjamin, *The Storyteller Essays*, 49).

⁴¹ Simon Wessely, ‘The Life and Death of Private Harry Farr,’ *RUSI Journal* 151, no. 5 (2006): 60-64, DOI: 10.1080/03071840608522876, explains that sympathy for ‘cowards’ was not widespread among comrades. He also explores the ambiguous role of Medical Officers at the Front. MOs with a psychiatric background were treated with particular suspicion by military officers. Wessely’s paper cautions against applying the values of the present day to historic cases. A more sympathetic account of Private Farr’s case is provided by Oliver Emanuel’s play *The 306: Dawn* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁴² Raymond, *Lotte*, 227.

⁴³ Mantel, *Reith Lectures, Lecture 4*, 3.

been removed or replaced, it need not distance us from the past, but provide a sense of time passing,

My creative practice was focused clearly on the role of place as a means of recreating the past and developing character through interaction with space. These four critical chapters connect my own creative practice to theoretical discussions of the psychogeographic method (Chapter 2) and detailed exploration of how other authors have used a similar methodology in their fiction (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I intended to complete this discussion with a classic psychogeographical investigation on foot of the places and spaces, buildings and voids⁴⁴, which appear in my novel. But history intervened.

The global pandemic 2020-21 made non-essential travel difficult. Plans to walk around the sites had to be deferred. But in this limbo, I used an alternative exploratory tool which added another layer of interest to the research and led to a deeper understanding of my creative practice. I substituted direct engagement with the landscape of Stirling and surrounds with extensive use of Google Street View (GSV). There were two immediate issues associated with digital fieldwork of this type. The first was a feature noted by Maria Stepanova. Google Street View and Google satellite maps do not present us with now – they present us with a snapshot of whenever the Street View images were taken. Even Google satellite maps are updated only sporadically:

A woman leaves her lover, he smashes up the car and it goes to the scrapyard. He leaves town, she unfriends him on Facebook, but on Google maps the colourless box of the car is still parked outside her door.⁴⁵

The effect of looking at places as they were in the recent past – so much human activity in that short time – is to be overwhelmed by the volume of drama that has unfolded over nearly one hundred years. Hard enough to recreate the world of a few months ago, let alone attempt to go back to imagine the drama from several generations ago. GSV seemed to enlarge time more than bridge time.

⁴⁴ In the face of a multitude of definitions, I use the term ‘voids’ to denote not just a gap in physical space, but an absence in the historic record or in personal and family memory. In filling these voids through my own writing, I turned to a mix of the mimetic, recreating the exteriors and interiors of demolished buildings from photographs and the facts of official documents, and the meontic, imaginative invention. As Thomas McFarland, ‘The Place beyond the Heavens: True Being, Transcendence and the Symbolic Indication of Wholeness.’ *Boundary 2* 7, no. 2 (1979): 283-317, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303086>, points out, most artistic expression takes place where imitation and imagination meet.

⁴⁵ Maria Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory* (Fitzcarraldo Editions: London, 2020), 245.

The other effect of using digital technology to connect with a specific place was to emphasise that my response was strongly influenced by my prior knowledge and experience. As I scanned the town on my screen, I was testing my knowledge of the environment against what I saw. We do this all the time instinctively. It is how we interpret our surroundings – looking for patterns, changes to the norm.⁴⁶ These are primary human survival skills. This was more complex. I searched for a particular feature of Stirling, the place where the Castle Rock and part of the old town wall bulges out into the urban townscape. As I scanned about, trying to remember where the black rock made an incongruous appearance among shops and bus-stops, I was aware of how much that particular part of the town meant to me, how my mother would take me to the fruit shop nearby. The topographical detail wasn't essential for my fiction, but the emotional connection it made was so strong I had to take a break from the task. My physical distance from the landscape forced me to fill in, to float half-submerged memories and emotions. It is possible that I would have had these recollections while actually walking along Dumbarton Road. But I'm not so sure. I have wandered about that particular part of Stirling many times without even registering the rock outcrop, let alone having my vision blurred by associations. The Google Street View psychogeographic experience forced a realisation that the connection I had with this environment was filtered always through my own memories and through the stories I had been told about my family and their connections to this place. Digital observation had the effect of pushing memory into the foreground and also raised questions around the relationship between the real and the image, and how the distancing effect of technology influenced my engagement. Susan Sontag argues that the development of photography accelerated the reversal of the Platonic assertion of the superiority of reality over representation. Photography is complex, it retains enough of the original – 'photography is an extension of its subject'⁴⁷ – to create an unsettling effect. Disparaged by Marcel Proust as a means of connecting with the past, lacking texture and the essence of things, photographs also have a relationship with reality and with the past that creates unease among a variety of observers, from indigenous peoples to Honoré de Balzac.⁴⁸ Sontag's work on photography foreshadowed the arrival of digital technology and

⁴⁶ See, for instance, E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 2008).

⁴⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (London: Penguin, 2008), 155.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 159, 163.

social media.^{49 50} The multiple viewpoint, detached, constantly moving world of GSV, generates new questions about the relationship between place, memory and image.

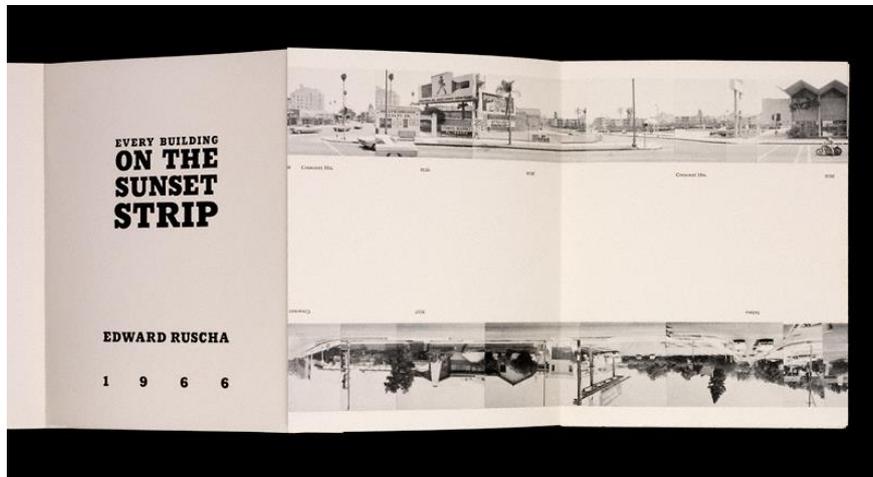


Figure 1. Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966 (second printing 1971). Self-published book, offset lithograph, 7 1/8 x 5 3/4 x 3/8 in. Open unfolded: 7 1/8 x 297. The Getty Research Institute, 86-B19486.c1. <https://blogs.getty.edu/pacificstandardtime/explore-the-era/worksofart/every-building-on-the-sunset-strip/>.

In 1966 Ed Ruscha published *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. His method was to fix a camera with timer on the back of a flat-bed truck and drive at 20 mph up one side of the Strip and then down the other side. Over the next four decades Ruscha continued to use this method to photograph the streets surrounding Sunset Boulevard, amassing 650,000 images.⁵¹ Using the technology available at the time, Ruscha gestured towards the process of capturing space embodied by GSV – a ‘continuous’ representation of a place at a particular moment.

And yet, when the arts writer Rob Walker used the Microsoft *Hyperlapse*⁵² app to follow Ruscha’s route down Sunset Strip he found that the effect was very different:

Unlike Ruscha’s documentation, this one is frantic and claustrophobic — instead of stopping time and inviting the viewer to scrutinize what's usually ignored, the "camera" scurries back and forth over the same route like a maniac.⁵³

⁴⁹ Sarah Bay-Cheng, “When This You See”: The (anti) radical time of mobile self-surveillance,’ *Performance Research*, 19, no.3, (2014):48-55,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13528165.2014.935168?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

⁵⁰ Maria Popova, ‘The Susan Sontag Guide to Photography in the Age of Digital Culture,’ *Slate*, Oct 11, 2013, <https://slate.com/technology/2013/10/susan-sontag-photography-and-social-networking.html>.

⁵¹ Mark Shiel, ‘The Ed Ruscha Streets of Los Angeles Project,’ *Mediapolis* 6, no. 3 (2021), <https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/2021/07/ed-ruscha-streets-of-los-angeles/>.

⁵² By establishing a start and finish point Microsoft *Hyperlapse* allows the viewer to follow a journey through Google Street View.

⁵³ Rob Walker, ‘The Hyperdocumented Sunset Strip,’ *Design Observer*, 25 May, 2013, <https://designobserver.com/feature/the-hyperdocumented-sunset-strip/37910>.

GSV is clearly some distance away from Susan Sontag's definition of what photography offers us – 'a thin slice of space as well as time.'⁵⁴ My own experience of using GSV as a research tool raised many questions about its role as a tool for capturing place and (especially) time.



Figure 2. Doug Rickard. *A New American Picture*
<https://dougrikkard.com/a-new-american-picture/>.

Doug Rickard's project, *A New American Picture*, sets out to look at issues around social justice in 'broken areas' of the United States using images taken from Google Street View. He describes the process of GSV as being – 'somewhere between the camera and the naked eye.'⁵⁵ While he acknowledges the ethical issues in using citizens' images without their consent, he also considers the images to be in the tradition of 'found-objects' in art. The images are framed and curated from existing digital representations but are not 'made' objects in the same way as Ruscha's.

Other artists have gone beyond the visual material generated by GSV and created art which draws on the data generated by users. Denis Cosgrove⁵⁶ explores how digital technology has given new scope to artists working in the tradition of Guy Debord's psychogeographical maps of Paris. GSV data can offer artists working in 'cartographic semiotics'⁵⁷ additional layers of possibility. Movement, even direction of gaze can be amalgamated and converted into graphic forms. Just as 'desire lines' cut the corners of

⁵⁴ Sontag, *On Photography*, 22.

⁵⁵ Spring Warren, 'Americans on Google Street: An Interview with artist Doug Rickard,' *Boom: A Journal of California* 12, no 4, (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1525/boom.2012.2.4.18>.

⁵⁶ Denis Cosgrove, 'Cultural Cartography: Maps and Mapping in Cultural Geography,' *Annales de Géographie* 117, no 660/661 (2008): 159-178, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-de-geographie-2008-2-page-159.htm>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

carefully laid out walkways and so challenge the intentions of planners, digital data can become works of art that contradict the official management of space.

Writers have also used GSV as a resource for their art. Articles containing ‘top-tips’ for writers frequently cite GSV as a way to fact-check locations.⁵⁸ The novelist David Nicholls has a more nuanced and thoughtful reflection on his own experience of using GSV as a research tool. Rejecting any suggestion of cheating, he cites works created out of the imagination without the benefit of a visit – Joseph Conrad’s *Nostramo*⁵⁹ or Stef Penney’s *The Tenderness of Wolves*⁶⁰ – against works by travellers who made the trip, like Graham Greene or Christopher Isherwood. Nicholls states that readers have their own imaginations and writers should avoid ‘the literary equivalents of looking at someone’s holiday snaps.’⁶¹ Readers have their own Google Street View too, of course, and accuracy can add to a sense of authenticity. But Nicholls concludes that a hybrid approach – GSV for detail and walking the streets for smells and sounds – is a practical response for the writer. My own suggestion is that digital exploration on top of personal knowledge of place creates a strange sort of emotional intimacy. I became a voyeur of my own past.

How far does this take us from psychogeographical engagement with place? John Wild argues that access to the digital data – GSV and all the information available via Google Maps – adds significant layers to the psychogeographic experience while simultaneously presenting a challenge: ‘What happens to digital representations of space when they become part of the lived experience of space?’⁶² The line between digital and physical becomes blurred to an extent that can add meaning to the emotional engagement with place. Insights and information can be shared, the art event *dérives* he conducted as part of his research allowed communities to take ownership of space in the traditional way, by walking, but also allowed a digital interrogation of space – using technology to enquire about ownership and history.

⁵⁸ Jef Rouner, ‘Writing Fiction in the Age of Google Street View.’ *Houston Press*, May, 2014.

⁵⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Nostramo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

⁶⁰ Stef Penney, *The Tenderness of Wolves* (London: Quercus, 2006). Penney’s agoraphobia meant she researched her pre-GSV novel in the British Museum, but her experience underlines the value of virtual travel to writers living with illness or disabilities. Mark Brown, ‘Agoraphobic tells of her struggle to win book prize,’ *Guardian*, February 8, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/feb/08/costabookaward2006.books>.

⁶¹ David Nicholls, ‘Google v. Old Fashioned Leg-work,’ *Guardian*, May 23, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/may/23/david-nicholls-one-day-us-google-street-view-novels-location>.

⁶² John Wild, *Psychology in the Digitally Expanded City* (PhD diss, University of London, 2019), 16, <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/handle/123456789/68502>.

Wild's work is in the tradition of the classic *dérive*. From the early days of the internet, parallels were drawn between traditional psychogeographic explorations and the technological landscape. For example, Amy Elias⁶³ notes – ‘the urban walking journey sounds a lot like web-surfing.’ She goes on to suggest that the way that digital maps can be constructed through user engagement, emotional responses to places, is very much in the psychogeographic tradition of ‘linking map to mood,’⁶⁴ as are the virtual worlds created by users in gaming. ‘Cyber-flaneurs’⁶⁵ can reappropriate reality in the best Debordian style and ‘let the environment affect them and experience new emotions.’ Visiting spaces through digital means can be potentially as radical an art form as walking. Text can overlay images, images can relate to maps, information about history and land ownership can be included in a way that questions and challenges.

There are other creative possibilities. ‘The provisional spatio-temporal quality’⁶⁶ of GSV gives artists, and specifically writers, access to an ‘autonomous reality which simulates the world but remains distinct... a detached gaze’ that is ‘non-judgmental.’⁶⁷ Rather than a tool to check whether a character would pass a coffee shop as they walk from the station to the river, GSV becomes a narrative device. This provisional nature of GSV allows the writer to:

...imaginatively fill in the gaps, to generate the storylines that endow these partial situations with possibility and meaning...the ultimate “interactive narrative” offering endless opportunities within the infinitely possible itineraries opening up the equally infinite stories of time, people and space.⁶⁸

What is missing, of course, is the physicality of place. The poor breakfasts, the fellow passengers, the smell of the bins and the bite of the wind.⁶⁹ For my own excursions on GSV

⁶³ Amy T. Elias, ‘Psychogeography, Détournement, Cyberspace.’ *New Literary History* Vol 41, No 4, (2010): 822,

https://www.academia.edu/544845/Psychogeography_D%C3%A9tournement_Cyberspace.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 836.

⁶⁵ Stella Sylaias, Maria Chountasi, Elena Lagoudi, ‘Towards a Digital Age Psychogeography and the Hybrid *Flâneur*.’ *Interartive*, December, 2018, <https://walkingart.interartive.org/2018/12/towards-a-digital-age>.

⁶⁶ Aronssiak Gabrielian, ‘The Narrative Landscape of Google Street View.’ *Mediapolis* 2, no2, (2017),

<https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/?s=Aronssiak+Gabrielian.+%E2%80%98The+Narrative+Landscape+of+Google+Street+View.%E2%80%99+Mediapolis+2%2C+no2%2C+>.

⁶⁷ Ibid..

⁶⁸ Ibid..

⁶⁹ Take a group of writers creating across a diverse range of genres; short story, essay, autofiction, travel, and novel – Kevin MacNeil, ‘Makar,’ *New Writing Scotland* 36, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2018), Liam Murray Bell, ‘Overland to Malta,’ *TEXT* 21, no 2, (October 2017), <http://www.textjournal.com.au>, Kapka Kassabova, *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and*

my memories of Stirling provided the imaginative stimulation. The engagement with gravity required to walk the steep streets around the Castle are not a feature of GSV. But the effort involved in walking around this part of town is locked in my memory – part of my understanding of the specifics of place.

Physicality, place and memory have a complex relationship. Nigel Helyer, the sound artist, writes of the ‘personal psychogeographies’ layered into the ‘mosaic of landscape and memory.’⁷⁰ Phenomenology, the way the body and cognition respond to place and the environment, the ‘lived spatiality... of being-in-the-world,’⁷¹ is closely linked to memory. Dylan Trigg describes how place creates a bridge from the present to the past, but in so doing the place becomes strange, ‘uncanny’ and takes on a ‘disturbing familiarity.’ The primacy of the body in responding to environment is what is missing from the GSV experience and consequently the impact of GSV on memory will be different.

For Aronssiak Gabrielian, GSV is both ‘familiar and unfamiliar.’⁷² This is evocative of the ‘uncanny,’ the unsettling effect identified by Trigg,⁷³ brought about by revisiting a place known in the past. The ‘uncanny’ is due to the difference between being in a place and remembering a place. With GSV we are one step removed from the place. By also remembering the place we observe through GSV, we are now two steps removed from the place. The absence of physicality of place cuts us off from one range of emotional, physical connections. However, if the sense of the ‘uncanny’ is due to the tension between present and past, as Trigg suggests – ‘the way we experience place in the present is never the same as in the past’⁷⁴ – then perhaps the extra distance that GSV provides allows an even greater imaginative freedom to connect place with past. To coolly peruse the house we once lived in from the comfort of a laptop screen is surely different from standing outside our old front door, exposed, in the flesh, to all the changes that may have taken place, all the sensory assaults on the preserved image we have carried around. Is the imaginary place and past we

Peace, (London: Granta, 2020), Geoff Dyer *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of DH Lawrence*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012) and Eva Blatar, *Permafrost*, trans. Julia Sanches (Sheffield: And Other Stories, 2021) – all steeped in both the physicality of place and its impact on the writer’s sensibilities.

⁷⁰ Nigel Helyer and John Potts, ‘Walking, Thinking and Memory,’ *Interartive*, Dec, 2018, <https://walkingart.interartive.org/2018/12/nigel-helyer>.

⁷¹ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013).

⁷² Gabrelian, ‘The Narrative Landscape of Google Street View.’

⁷³ Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

carry around in our head easier to retain when we visit via GSV than from a physical excursion?

For all the time-stamped immediacy of on-line images, digital psychogeography feels as if they are somewhere out of time. GSV images seem live but are captures of the past, as historic as a daguerreotype or Ed Ruscha's photographs. Yet the seemingly dynamic GSV doesn't create the same sense of time suspended. Unlike photography:

To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.⁷⁵

As we swing through 360 degrees, leap entire streets, we have the illusion of movement, of being inside time – Ed Ruscha's *Sunset Strip* v. *Hyperlapse Sunset Strip*. It is the artist's framing of time and space that creates the difference compared to the app. I can digitally visit the same streets that Doug Rickard digitally 'walked' for his project, but I won't be able to frame the scenes exactly as he did. I did promenade *Sunset Strip* via GSV. I jumped around randomly, and the experience told me little about time and place. It told me nothing of how hopeful the buildings looked in the early morning sun at that particular moment in history captured by Ruscha. For that, I needed his eye, his framing. For that, I went to the Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh to look at the yellowing concertina of *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*.

Google Street View can stand alongside documents from the archive, photography and maps as an invaluable tool for the writer, additional apparatus for the imagination. Digital psychogeography fizzles with potential – the additional layering, the placing of characters in space, the imaginative possibilities from identifying and completing a narrative glimpsed up a side street or at a window. GSV can provide the fruitful interaction of place, memory and imagination – a pixilated distance that can sometimes provide deeper insights. Where memory is involved, perhaps, counter-intuitively, we can be more 'in the world' of the past at our desk than in the field. There is scope here for an extended, hybrid psychogeography. But we must also heed Stepanova's warning and be conscious of the strange relationship between digital representations of space and time, particularly the distorting effect that the world of GSV has on our conception of time. And there is little of more significance to the writer than

⁷⁵ Sontag, *On Photography*, 15.

time. As the pioneer *flâneur* Charles Baudelaire noted: ‘...almost all of our originality comes from the stamp that time impresses on our sensibilities.’⁷⁶

Acknowledging the role of my own history and my cultural perspective and how these in turn connected to my understanding of place, was an unexpected gift of Covid-19. Autoethnography provides a systematic theoretical lens through which to study history and culture from the perspective of lived experience – ‘cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences.’⁷⁷ It was a helpful framework to make sense of the intersection of self and place. Individual experience and self-observation, analysed with rigour, provide insights that are both unique and universal. The conventional ‘scientific’ distance of objective observation is overtaken by ‘an epistemology of emotion,’⁷⁸ a personal engagement with culture and society that is rich and subjective. While autoethnography helped me to understand my personal interpretation of the past and the role of my relatives in that history, it didn’t fully explain the importance of place within that mix. There were liminal areas here to explore between autoethnography, life-writing, place-writing and psychogeography.

1.iv Methodology: Imagination and Creative Praxis

The application of the psychogeographic methodology in fiction will be examined in detail in Chapter 3. However, four recent works, all published in 2020 or 2021 provide an insight into overlapping approaches to life-writing, place-writing and fiction. The texts were chosen because they revealed different facets of an approach to place, and all four helped develop my own practice.

Jeff Young’s *Ghost Town*⁷⁹ employs a classic psychogeographic methodology. In a series of excursions around his native city, the author responds to the emotional connotations of buildings and districts. While the psychogeographical explorations lead to discussions of the recent social and cultural history of the city, the work is enriched and invigorated by the

⁷⁶ Roberto Calasso, *La Folie Baudelaire*, trans. Alistair McEwan (London: Penguin, 2013), 23.

⁷⁷ Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*. (Bibliovault OAI Repository, the University of Chicago Press, 2008),

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/40010651_Autoethnography_as_Method/citation/download.

Thomas Mann believed that the writer was conditioned by their background and cultural history – ‘...myths (are) passed on from one generation to the next ... they carry an enormous seductive power and control us from the “well of the past”’ (Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, 11). Thomas Larson’s *The Memoir and the Memoirist* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007) explores the complex relationship between the writer and their past. He argues that present experiences influence which elements writers draw from the past as they craft both memoir and fiction.

⁷⁸ Leon Anderson, ‘Analytical Autoethnography,’ *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no 4 (2006): 373-395, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>.

⁷⁹ Jeff Young, *Ghost Town: A Liverpool Shadowplay* (Little Toller: Little Toller Books, 2020).

author's own memories and experiences. There are also techniques borrowed from fiction. Each chapter has the characteristics of a short story – a quest followed by an epiphany for the narrator. Across the broader narrative, characters shift in and out of the different scenes and the narrator's relationship with the city changes across time.

In *Thin Places* by Kerri ni Dochartaigh,⁸⁰ there are strong psychogeographic elements, not least in the exploration of the concept of 'thin places,' liminal locations that:

...make us feel something larger than ourselves, as though we were held in a place between worlds, beyond experience.⁸¹

This is a complex work, exploring cultural questions about divided communities and how the trauma of political violence impacts on mental health, all seen through the frame of gender. The interaction of the public and private, political and personal, is set against a visceral relationship with place. The author explores the potential of place for emotional recovery – 'I was being soothed and nourished by an unnameable thing'⁸² – as well as acknowledging the limitations of landscape: 'Places do not heal us...Places do not make the light shine on crow-black nights.'⁸³ This is life-writing, but with strong autoethnographic strands where we learn as much about the broader socio-cultural challenges of searching for identity in the aftermath of political violence as we do about the intimate personal issues faced by the author.

While the historical and the personal often converge in this work, place remains a fundamental touchstone: 'We are the landscape, and it is us. We made our past, and it made us.'⁸⁴ And throughout, the reader is engaged through techniques of fiction – character growth and development, and an invitation to identify with the journey taken by the main character.

Sea State by Tabitha Lasley⁸⁵ is both life-writing and place-writing. The author immerses herself in the world of offshore workers, not through employment but through a relationship – an unconventional autoethnographical approach. She becomes her own study, examining the attitudes and behaviour of the world she observes through the lens of her own background and experience. This is also a study of place. Aberdeen city is a strong presence, but is seen from a particular perspective only, that of workers who pass through on their way

⁸⁰ Kerri ni Dochartaigh, *Thin Places* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2021).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁸⁴ ni Dochartaigh, *Thin Places*, 105.

⁸⁵ Tabitha Lasley, *Sea State* (London: 4th Estate, 2021).

to somewhere else – work or home. Much of the action takes place in airport or station bars – definitive liminal spaces.⁸⁶

What separates this work from either *Thin Places* or *Ghost Town*, is the explicit use of narrative devices. Psychogeographic and autoethnographic elements are couched within a structure which foregrounds jeopardy, suspense, character development and a classic quest narrative arc.⁸⁷ It reads like a novel.

Linda Cracknell's *The Other Side of Stone*⁸⁸ is a work of fiction, but one which explores the personal and the political through unwavering attention to place. From new-built marvel to overgrown rubble, the life and death of a mill on the edge of the Highland line is the focus for a succession of characters whose lives are changed by economic forces, gender expectations and the vagaries of chance. These are also themes which appear in the three non-fiction works cited in this section. Cracknell does not identify a location – many textile mills were built in the late 18th and early 19th centuries along the Highland line to take advantage of water-power and cheap labour.⁸⁹ But the place is a unifying structural element in the narrative and underlines the thematic persistence of inequality and rebellion. This is fiction which embodies a psychogeographic sensibility, to give stones a meaning and influence on characters' lives, arcing over decades of history.

The Other Side of Stone is a long way from *Ghost Town* in terms of genre, but not in terms of the way both works employ place to explore character and relationships with the past. In the three non-fiction works in this grouping, life-writing and place-writing converge effectively. Young, ni Dochartaigh and Lapsley all use a methodology that can be described as both psychogeography and autoethnography.

As I will explore further in the subsequent chapters of this critical study, there is something else at work across all four of these works. Each contains some elements of autoethnography, psychogeography but they also contain structural elements drawn from fiction. The way these elements work together varies across the four books. Broadly they can be placed in a matrix, leaning towards fiction or non-fiction, or towards autoethnography or psychogeography as shown below:

⁸⁶ Marc Ange, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2018).

⁸⁷ Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling* (London: William Collins, 2019), 179.

⁸⁸ Linda Cracknell's *The Other Side of Stone* (Edinburgh: Taproot Press, 2021).

⁸⁹ T.M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), 157.



Figure 3. Vectors of four works about place.

There is a point at which all these approaches, individually rich and rewarding reading experiences, converge, linked by the transformative power of imagination:

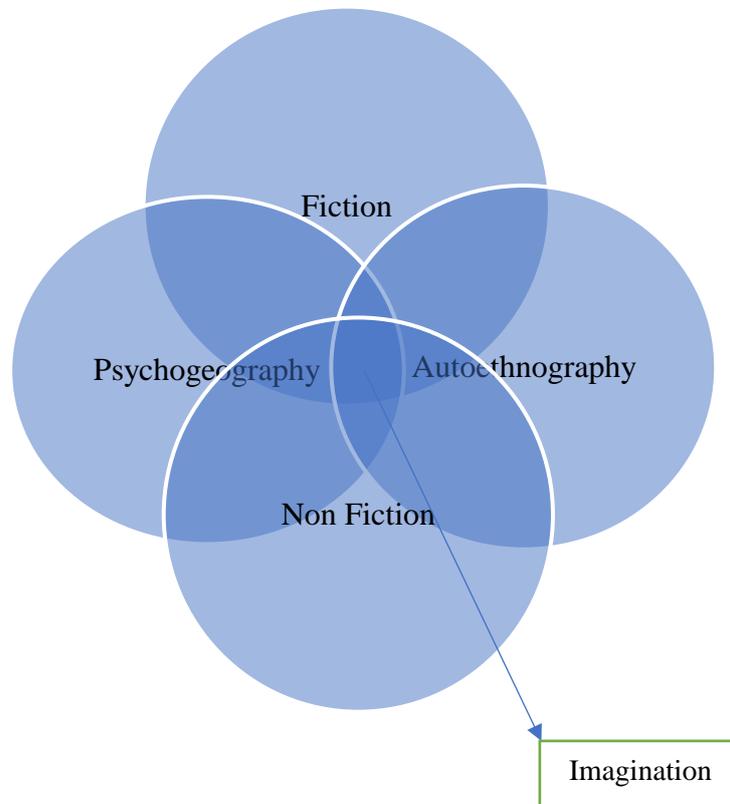


Figure 4. The imagination as a point of convergence.

My creative praxis was guided by strong elements of psychogeography, illuminated by an understanding of how autoethnographic dimensions coloured my thinking. The interaction of people with place allowed me to understand how time and space worked within the narrative dynamics of my novel. I was conscious of the transformative power of imagination. The process of creation started and ended with a story told; initially, the briefest of stories about a casual discovery in the archives. That seed was then developed through further research, a rigorous interrogation of, filtered by my own memories, an understanding of my personal perspective and presented through fictional techniques. In time, my novel will also become another family story that might inspire a future project. This praxis is sketched out in Fig. 5:

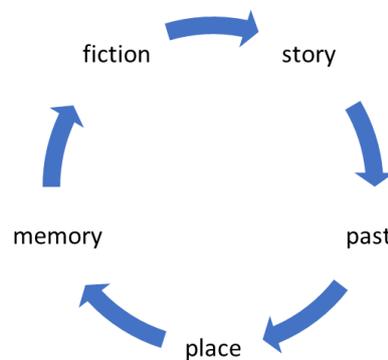


Figure 5. Creative praxis.

While I was aware of the autoethnographic framework which shaped my thinking, the role of place was a more powerful force in moulding my creative response. I was prepared to change some of the historical facts to increase tension and unclutter the narrative. But I stayed faithful to the geography. Where the facts, both family history and the socio-economic realities of the time, were important to me, they came alive in my imagination through their precise positioning in a landscape known to me and layered with connotations and connections. Accordingly, the main focus of the next three chapters is on place and my use of a psychogeographic methodology. The non-fiction disciplines of history and geography provided the frame for my creative work. Fiction provided both the structural tools and the imaginative freedom to explore characters remote in time, but close in relation to the locations they inhabited. But with that freedom comes a responsibility – to treat place, past and people with respect.

1.v Ethics

One of the challenges raised by autoethnography is the question of ownership. ‘Do they own a story because they tell it?’⁹⁰ Is your own story, or your family’s story, yours to use as you wish? Is the question more, or less, acute when direct relatives are involved? Did I feel a greater sense of freedom to tell a wider truth through an invented narrative because it involved my grandmother?

Hilary Mantel is unequivocal – ‘select, elide, highlight, omit. Just don’t cheat.’⁹¹ Is cheating avoided by invention that stays within the spirit of a period – its cultural norms and practices – while remaining faithful to a larger truth? Perhaps this how the writer retains a respectful relationship with place and time.

Maria Stepanova perceives an ethical danger for those who are tempted by enticing stories from the past, particularly family stories: ‘Past lives are endlessly submissive, allowing us to do whatever we may decide to do with them.’⁹² This is a question of posthumous human rights:

The dead have no rights: their property and the circumstances of their fate can be used by anyone and in any way.⁹³

Stepanova goes on to fill five hundred pages of discussion of her family history. Her qualms are overcome because she makes it clear she is not reproducing the past, not recreating how it was for her relatives. She is creating something new, based on her own view of the world, her own consciousness:

...the ceaseless fascination with one’s family’s past (and, beyond this, with the densely populated human context for those lives, the thick undercoat of sounds and smell, the coincidences and concurrencies, the synchronised timing of the wheels of history) and the clinical boredom with which I roll my own contemporary world backwards to that past, back to them and feel quite certain, in-my-gut certain, of how it was back then, the tram routes, the stockings that snagged round the knees, the music from the loudspeakers...an attempt to animate these structures...to revitalise them in accordance with one’s own experience and understanding.⁹⁴

Stepanova’s book is difficult to define – it contains elements of history, memoir and fiction. However, here is a statement of the novelist’s method in all its confidence and uncertainty – the deceptive power of the detail and the awareness, always, that this is not the

⁹⁰ Chang: *Autoethnography as Method*, 17.

⁹¹ Mantel. *Reith Lectures: Lecture 4: Can these Bones Live?* 5.

⁹² Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*. 133.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁹⁴ Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*. 99.

past, but your version of the past, coloured by all that you have known. I came back to this passage time and again, until it became a touchstone for my own creative practice.

Stepanova concludes that the most interesting aspects of family histories are the voids. Nothing can be reproduced as it was. Nothing in the past is certain. Our memories are distorting mirrors – she quotes Osip Mandelstam: ‘My memory...it works not to reproduce the past, but to make it strange.’⁹⁵

In writing my own fiction I internally debated every point of departure from the historic record and every point which was retained. For example, in Chapter 4, I discuss ‘The Lost Battalions of the Western Front.’ The legend of deserters living feral and free in no-man’s-land was a tale passed between soldiers. There is no evidence that the battalion existed in anything other than story.⁹⁶ The question of whether my character Peter tells the truth about his experience, or whether he draws on legend to project his sense of survivor guilt, explores a broader truth about post-war trauma.

The dates in the Asylum records show that there was just over two weeks between my grandmother’s admission and her death. I tightened the timescale to a few days to compress the action. What I wanted to communicate was something of my reaction when I read the official record and imagined the rapid unspooling of events. The savage dislocation from home to institution, how her sudden death must have impacted on a family already affected by the abruptness of her sectioning. Horror after horror. I altered the factual detail but tried to retain all the urgency, shock and grief.

As discussed above in section 1.ii., the debates in psychiatry through the 1930s were a critical phase in the development of the profession. Dr W.H.R. Rivers’ pioneering work in this area has been imaginatively explored by Pat Barker,⁹⁷ but I wanted to explore how Rivers might have influenced a new generation of psychiatrists who built on his ‘talking-therapy.’ For all his reckless and incompetent interventions, Dr Fergusson is not a cruel man. His form of therapy would, in time, be an alternative to Dr Sneddon’s more aggressive solutions. Unlike Barker, and Siegfried Sassoon, who view these innovations and dilemmas primarily, though not exclusively, from the point of view of the patient, I wanted to see this moment of psychiatric history from within the profession, dramatized through personal resentments and

⁹⁵ Ibid., 229.

⁹⁶ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 123.

⁹⁷ Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin, 2008).

ambitions. While the detail is invented, the narrative again reflects the tone and content of the material I found in the archive and in the histories of psychiatry.

Arguably, fiction can respect the integrity of the past and of the rights of the dead in a way that biography or history does not. History exposes the facts, where they exist, without consultation with the subjects.⁹⁸ In turning my grandmother and her family into fictional characters and populated their world with other invented people. My novel did not set out to ‘represent’ my grandmother and my family, but to use the bare bones of her circumstances to explore psychological realities as well as social and historical truths. I was dramatizing grief and circumstance, not reporting. I retained enough of the historical context to maintain the integrity of the events and ensure that characters’ reactions were appropriate to their era. I wasn’t ‘animating’ my grandmother – I was using her story to explore truths about the human condition at a particular time and place. And while my imagination was conditioned by my own memories, experiences and position in history, I wanted to give the past its due and to avoid easy modern judgements.

I filled in the vast unknowns in my grandmother’s story. Again, this meant I was not treating the past ‘as a huge planet waiting to be colonised.’⁹⁹ The lack of information was a stimulus to the imagination and protection for the people from the past. ‘In our own histories the most interesting part is what we don’t know,’¹⁰⁰ says Stepanova. Applying imagination to the mysteries in a family narrative can transform the most tenuous facts. I had a single Asylum ledger entry and little else. I had to invent. Writing about W. G. Sebald, Stepanova speculates that his hybrid method is the most illuminating way to portray the past: ‘I am so very in favour of any combining of the real and imaginary past, the documentary and the fictitious.’¹⁰¹ And yet, as Ben Lerner discusses in a review of a recent biography, Sebald’s

⁹⁸ Historians have their own theoretical debates around the role of narrative in exploring the past. Hayden White, ‘The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory,’ *History and Theory*, 23, no. 1, (1984): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2504969>, describes the fluctuating fortunes of narrative history, and Eileen Tamara, ‘Narrative History and Theory,’ *History of Education Quarterly*, 51, no. 2, (2011):150-157, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-5959.2011.00327.x>, explores the uneasy relationship between narrative history and critical theory. Both emphasise the defining feature of a form of history that creates a certain truth through story – it must be based on verifiable facts that other historians can examine. Literature set in the past creates a different sort of truth that is not reliant on verifiable evidence. For writers of fiction and history alike, there is a place for imaginative reconstruction: ‘How else can any “past” which is by definition composed of events, processes, structures and so forth that are considered to be no longer perceivable, be represented in either consciousness or discourse except in and “imaginary” way?’ (White, 34).

⁹⁹ Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, 134.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 361.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 236.

own methods are open to question: ‘...when “imaginative sympathy” passes into exploitative appropriation.’¹⁰² Sebald’s deliberate blurring of the distinctions between factual and imaginative writing was not my approach. But the reproach and warning were still present in my mind as I wrote.

Maria Stepanova’s interrogation of how writers can use and misuse the past was a strong influence on the development of my ethical thinking around how the past, and people from the past, can be portrayed in fiction. Her vision is challenging. She has little time for my core concept, that the past can be accessed through place:

Those places where the people of my family walked, sat, kissed, went down to the river’s edge or jumped into trams, the towns where they were known by face and name – none of them revealed themselves to me. The green and indifferent battlefield was overgrown with grass.... And this is for the best: the poet Alexander Blok tells us that no one comes back.¹⁰³

Stepanova’s engagement with the past comes through objects, the contents of her grandmother’s Moscow apartment – ‘monuments’ as she defines them. I had no monuments to work from. I possess nothing belonging to my grandmother. But the places where she walked and was greeted by name I did know. The liminal ground between past and present was accessible by walking the pavements outside 5 Snowdon Place. If pandemic restrictions meant I couldn’t drift about the streets, then I could access the street digitally. Above all, I could draw on the memories that I had of the way my father spoke of that address and of the housekeepers there. Being unable to affect a psychogeographic *dérive* meant that I had to recreate the Baker Street shop in my mind’s eye. It added another level of understanding to my creative process, explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

The process also led me to examine my motivations for writing *Lotte*. There are no limits to the subject matter of fiction. Why choose this one with all the ethical and practical difficulties – no living eyewitnesses, no one to help tell the tale? Beyond a few lines of archive and some recalled conversations, all I had were the places themselves. I am not a native of Stirling. I grew up in the nearby village of Callander, so Stirling was the big city. The connection is purely through my family. I wasn’t a resident, it wasn’t my hometown, and

¹⁰² Ben Lerner, ‘The Storyteller: a review of “In Search of WG Sebald by Carole Angier.”’ *New York Review of Books*, October 2021, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2021/10/21/wg-sebald-storyteller/>.

¹⁰³ Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, 499.

Sebald’s work is a very different mix of fact and fiction – novels presented as travelogue, history and memoir. But the handling of the personal, history, family history and place in a novel like *The Rings of Saturn* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999) helped me to formulate an approach to similar material.

yet I was much more than an objective visitor, a psychogeographical tourist. Perhaps these complexities are why place had such resonance and why it has such a big role in my imaginative construction of past lives.

In tracing the origins of my novel and exploring the methodological and ethical debates that shaped its development, the question remains, why write this story? On the complex matter of our relationship with our family, particularly departed members, Maria Stepanova concludes:

You realise that all the words said, paths taken and lessons learned aren't going to bring your dead back to life, even in the limited space of your writing. At the end, you're just standing there, somewhere, together with your lost ones – you alive, they not – in complete silence, a silence that is a form of embrace.¹⁰⁴

In writing *Lotte* I felt, if not a mutual embrace, that I had held, at least for a moment, my lost grandmother's hand.

1.vi. Unique contribution

The chapters which follow are about how theoretical and artistic understanding of place contribute to praxis. How does a writer use words to create worlds that can come alive within the reader's imagination? That co-design relationship, the collaboration between reader and writer, is the subject of this critical essay in four chapters.

Specifically, I have identified the role of place, not as backdrop or setting, but as a dynamic element in the construction of a literary experience for the reader. While based on a critical analysis of the development of my novel *Lotte* and reflections on my personal experience as a writer, I believe these conclusions will be of interest to other writers.

Considerations of the difference between place and space (discussed in Chapter 3) provide the writer with a way of distinguishing between different types of location and raise questions around gender, social class and identity. The tension between the freedom of space and the security of place reflects the narrative dynamics of many works of fiction.

Related to the dialectics of space and place, I also explored critically the role of Google Street View as a tool for the writer and examine the opportunities and limitations of digital *derives* – chiefly related to the role of time and its importance in fiction. GSV presents

¹⁰⁴ Matthew Janney, "Love's labours should be lost:" Maria Stepanova, Russia's next great writer.' *Observer*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/feb/11/maria-stepanova-russia-in-memory-of-memory>.

us with a unique version of time in relation to place. But a hybrid psychogeography is both a powerful tool to understand the role of place in fiction and a practical tool for writers.

Places are freighted with meaning and the way in which characters interact with those meanings gives depth to the narrative. Movement of characters in a novel is more than physical movement. The writer has to understand clearly how the process of moving characters from location to location generates meaning. For example, when Lotte moves from her plush drawing room to the dark country roads she is moving from the comfort of a defined, familiar ‘place’ to the freedom and hazards of ‘space,’ a definition that is further modified by her gender. Making a distinction between place and space as discussed in Chapter 2, creates narrative power. By discriminating in this way, the writer can contrast space with its attendant freedoms and opportunities with the comfort and constraints of the familiar.

Place gives the writer access to the past – geography working with history. Time and space are the poles of narrative energy – they define all stories. Look at this view, says the novelist, chart your way back into the past by considering how much it has changed – and not changed.

This study identifies the liminality of place as an element with great potential to drive narrative. Liminal spaces appear throughout my novel. The kitchen of 5 Snowdon Place is a contested space for servant and employer, where a housekeeper practices her skills in a space owned by someone else. Shops are a unique territory where social classes interact in a regulated and controlled commercial environment, where even the owner of the space defers to customers. Restaurants are arenas of social conflict and anxiety, and characters attempt to create secure places within their ‘own’ offices. The scenes on the open road describe encounters free from normal social conventions. And at dramatic moments characters are placed in the desolation of no-man’s-land, *la terre à personne*,¹⁰⁵ the ultimate borderland – space at the limits of human experience.

The liminal is transient and difficult to define. Neither here nor there. Places where characters make their crossings – from safety to danger, from one social class to another, where they change sides. Indeed, it is where change, the vital spring of narrative, is likely to

¹⁰⁵ David Diop, *At Night All Blood is Black*, trans. Anna Moschovakis (London: Pushkin Press, 2020) 59.

happen. I argue that the liminal is where the imagination, the imaginary evocation of the senses, is at its most powerful.¹⁰⁶

And alongside the liminal, voids represent a place – or non-place – where the temporal and the spatial come together to offer the writer rich creative possibilities. As we have learned from Maria Stepanova, that which is missing provides fuel for the imagination. Fiction becomes a powerful and unique mode of research. Here is Robin Skelton:

Creative writing presents itself as a parallel form of enquiry. The results of such endeavours are not *reconstructions*, but *re-imaginings*. They are the shadows cast on archaeology's cave walls.¹⁰⁷

Liminals and voids, facts and imagination – these are the novelist's tools. To explore the crossing points and to populate the voids – the writer's tasks.

1.vii. Conclusion

The process of transforming the bare bones of a family story, into a novel drew on a variety of methods. The process has been a dialogue between critical thinking and creative craft. The approaches outlined here – archival study, critical reading of history, pandemic-driven digital psychogeographical fieldwork and auto-ethnographic exploration of memory – informed and were informed by my creative practice. A combination of the distanced psychogeography of Google Street View and personal memory, constituted an imaginatively rich approach to place. Arguably as evocative as an exploration on foot. Even at a physical remove, memory and place can be a creative force. As Harold Pinter noted about Proust: 'his memory of the experience is more real, more acute than the experience itself.'¹⁰⁸

An understanding of place was central to my recreation of the past – placing character and action in a known environment helped build an imagined world. The narrative development of the novel was heavily influenced by the concept of liminality – temporal and spatial. Voids – long gone buildings, the missing elements in the archive and unspoken family secrets – provided imaginative opportunities. This practice was placed in the context of an ethical framework which acknowledged the contribution that personal and historical

¹⁰⁶ Take, for example, this passage from Diop's novel: 'They brought with them the scent of travel, the scent of their encampments in the scrub bush, the scent of nights spent on guard to defend their herds from hungry lions... They told of roads lost to the dust in daytime and recovered by starlight.' 99. This is an evocative representation of space, the Bakhtinian open road and the power of the sensual imagination.

¹⁰⁷ Robin Skelton, 'Vision-Seeking in the Deep Past,' *Penned in the Margins*, June 14, 2021, <http://www.pennedinthemargins.co.uk/index.php/2021/06/vision-seeking-in-the-deep-past/>.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Billington, *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 226.

facts can make to a novel, while also accepting that fiction always has the freedom to create new narratives.

These themes will be explored in more detail in subsequent chapters, from both a theoretical perspective and through the lens of praxis – examining my own creative work and that of other selected writers.

Chapter 2

Theory: Places, Spaces and Traces

‘That sudden, heart-stopping flash of light and space.’ Iain Sinclair.¹

2.i. The Human *Umwelt*: Space, Social Meaning and Control

The primatologist Frans de Waal places *Umwelt* at the core of any attempt to understand a living organism. *‘Umwelt stresses an organism’s self-centred, subjective world, which represents only a small tranche of all available worlds.’*² Humans, like all species, have a unique relationship with the environment. As other species also have complex language, tool use and cultures, the unique way that we experience the world is perhaps the only thing that differentiates us. And literature is one way to reproduce that relationship.

The human *umwelt* – how we live in our world – is fundamental to life. And to literature. Setting is more than a backdrop, it is our relationship with environment. The interaction of place and character adds layers of meaning to the text. This chapter scopes out the theoretical component of a practice-based project exploring spatial and temporal questions raised by psychogeographic methodologies. Subsequent chapters explore how these ideas can be observed in three contemporary novels and, in the final chapter, how their thinking contributed to my own creative methods. The impact of critical theory on my own text – a novel set in a precise geographical location and historical period and where the narrative is shaped by a strong interaction between character and place – will be a recurrent consideration.

Psychogeography places the relationship between humans and their environment at the centre of an imaginative process which is both exploratory and transformative. This chapter will consider the role of imagination in the representation of time and space and investigate how literature locates the individual in the world, recreating the human *umwelt*.³

¹ Iain Sinclair, *Black Apples of Gower: Stone-footing in Memory Fields* (Toller Fratum: Little Toller Books, 2015), 11.

² Frans de Waal, *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* (London: Granta, 2016), 8.

³ Place writing is a dynamic genre. Manchester Metropolitan University’s Centre for Place Writing – <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/english/place-writing/> – provides a useful overview of the diverse territories covered. It is not the purpose of this thesis to explore this genre, but a lifetime of engagement with writers on place has shaped much of my thinking, writing practice and relationship with the world. The development of place writing as a genre has developed rapidly over the past decade. While not the primary focus of this study, writers working in the area have influenced my thinking. Place writing is defined by Cooper and Lichtenstein:

One of psychogeography's attractions is that it is unconfined by precise definitions.⁴

The most widely used starting point is Guy Debord's description of psychogeography as:

The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.⁵

The freedom offered by this definition has allowed the development of a range of cultural, political, social and aesthetic approaches, from Henri Lefebvre⁶ and Michel Foucault's⁷ focus on space and its relationship to power and cultural hegemony, to human geographers like Yi-Tu Tuan⁸, Francesco Careri⁹ and Gaston Bachelard's¹⁰ aesthetic explorations. A recent survey of psychogeographic literature from the perspective of human geography underscores the relevance of the approach to contemporary concerns around gender, post-colonial issues, ecology and our increasingly complex relationship with the natural world.¹¹ This chapter will also look at Mikhail Bakhtin's¹² considerations of space in the context of time. The discussion will consider theoretical insights into liminal spaces: between interiors and exteriors, urban and rural, security and freedom and sanity and insanity. The focus will be on five aspects of the time/space dynamic which have been most useful to my writing practice: the social meaning of space and how that relates to social control, the distinction between space and place, the poetics of space, space and time, and walking as a methodology and how that relates to the imagination. Psychogeographical considerations of space, place and time

'place writing does its most vital work when applied to hybrid prose text that braid a range of different literary genres – including nature writing and memoir, travel writing and quest biography, to name just a few – in the textural mapping of particular places... but our pluralistic understanding of place writing also includes fiction... that places place – real and/or imagined – at their creative centre.'

<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/media/mmuacuk/content/documents/english/What-is-Place-Writing-June-2020.pdf>

⁴ Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2010), 9.

⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden MA Blackwell 1997).

⁷ Paul Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

⁹ Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice*, trans. Steven Piccolo (Ames, Indiana: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Mark Z Danielewski (New York: Penguin, 2014).

¹¹ James D Sidaway, 'Psychogeography: Walking through Strategy, Nature and Narrative.' *Progress in Human Geography*, 1-6, (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325211017212>. The inexactness of psychogeography, from a scientific perspective, is here presented as a strength – a flexibility and narrative power which has ensured continuing relevance.

¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist (Austin Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981).

offers the novelist unique insights into their own practice, and the role of the imagination in reflecting the real world in a literary artefact. Indeed, the creation of a literary text is one of the few ways that the relationship between the temporal and spatial can be explored:

Literature is a unique epistemological instrument that concerns intellectual, imaginative and emotional attitudes.¹³

The origins of psychogeography have been well documented^{14 15} and the reorientation of space as a social and political construct as developed further by Lefebvre¹⁶ and Walter Benjamin¹⁷ continues to be a stimulating body of thought-provoking critiques from gender¹⁸ and post-colonial perspectives¹⁹. By defining Cartesian mathematical space in social terms, Lefebvre expands our understanding of the interaction between humanity and the experienced environment. In Lefebvre's vision, space becomes something not absolute in itself, but a social production and therefore subject to hegemonic forces which either constrain or empower human action and opportunity. Space has its own history. The representation of space, how it is produced and controlled, is inexorably linked to social, political and economic history. 'Consider the case of a city – a space which is fashioned, shaped and invested by social activities during a finite historical period.'²⁰ Cultures create their own space, and these productions are never neutral.

While Lefebvre concentrates mainly on the visual construction of space through architecture and urbanism, Bakhtin²¹ places these productions of space into a literary context. Literature allows us to understand how space was experienced and perceived at different stages of history. This is the unique contribution of literature, to examine the human experience of representations of space:

¹³ Nele Bemong et al, *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope* (Gent: Ginkgo Academic Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Coverley, *Psychogeography*.

¹⁵ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989).

¹⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Lauren Elkin, *Flaneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, (London: Vintage, 2016).

¹⁹ Rolf J Goebel, 'Benjamin's Arcades Project Today: from European Metropolis to the Global City.' *Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* 47, no.5, (2011): 488-496, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.614771>.

²⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 74 .

²¹ Bemong et al, *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, 3.

[Literature] points at the spatial and temporal embedding of human actions in order to offer a better understanding of how humans act in their biotopes and semiospheres.²²

This is what gives representations of space in literature their power. The experience of space at a human level within the imaginative construct of literature allows for exploration of the most fundamental aspects of what it means to be alive – our relationship with the environment.²³ But literature also acknowledges that the semiotic meanings attached to the production of space define our perceptions. We live in a world where space has multiple meanings and literary texts help us to understand these layers of significance and how they have changed over time.

Careri²⁴ explores the meaning of space by following the Debordian path of walking as both metaphor and tool for artistic research. He considers the Aboriginal songlines as an example of space as something to be physically experienced at the same time as it conveys symbolic meaning: ‘By modifying the sense of the space crossed, walking becomes man’s first aesthetic act.’²⁵ He goes on to discuss ‘transurbance,’²⁶ his own word for the path, the journey that is the antecedent of architecture, the point where humans define space by the routes taken. These pathways range from ‘urban sheep tracks’²⁷ which link nomadic spaces to sedentary spaces in the modern city, to the ancient, hybrid, liminal space where the nomad and the farmer meet to exchange goods.²⁸

For Careri walking is not just a means of understanding the production of space, it is also a potential disruptor of space, and spatial meanings. His *andare a Zonzo*²⁹ – to wander aimlessly – updates the Debordian concept of *dérive*³⁰ to acknowledge how the modern city has created clear-cut zones, ostensibly for safety reasons, which can be challenged by walking. In crossing the territories, the production of separately defined spaces can be disrupted and subverted. The protagonist in my novel faces exactly this dilemma. Her habit of

²² Ibid., iv.

²³ James Wood, *The Nearest Thing to Life*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2015) quotes George Eliot: ‘Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.’ By engaging the reader with another’s experience of the world, the writer potentially extends the individual’s *umwelt* – connecting with the world in a slightly modified way.

²⁴ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 44.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.

²⁶ Ibid., 28.

²⁷ Ibid., 28.

²⁸ Ibid., 39.

²⁹ Ibid., 164.

³⁰ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, 93.

walking at night challenges social and cultural expectations, but also exposes her to real and imaginary hazards in the urban and rural environment.

The psychogeographic analysis of the text is a means of understanding how space is produced and given meaning. But in true Situationist style, the psychogeographic methodology can also precipitate change, or at least anticipate change:

Paris is ripe for revolutionary change and armed with detournement and the *dérive*, we are sent to the field.³¹

To understand the meaning of space is to precipitate change – knowledge challenges the hegemony of space. The experience of my own central character explores the potential and the limitation of this challenge in the particular historical context of a provincial town in the 1930s.

The asylum is perhaps the most clearly defined and uncontested space.³² According to Foucault it is uncontested because power is in the hands of doctors who have asserted a quasi-religious power over the space.^{33 34} The enclosed space of the asylum has been produced to make judgements. It defines ‘unreason’ and places the ‘mad’ under constant surveillance. The ‘medical personage’³⁵ has absolute power, able to define the space as ‘medical space’³⁶ without any discussion with the powerless patient. The relationship between mental health and the definition of space in a fictional context will be explored further in Chapter 3, but the asylum exists in reality and in the imagination as a place with a defined and resonant social and political meaning. The asylum is a clear example of the connection psychogeography makes between space and human emotions: ‘Fear appears as an essential presence in the asylum.’³⁷ My novel is set in Scotland in the 1930s when the shadow

³¹ Ibid., 98.

³² Michel Foucault, ‘The Birth of the Asylum,’ *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

³³ Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 159.

³⁴ Foucault is concerned with the passing of religious power to secular power. But it is, of course, worth noting that space, place and spirituality have a long history and contemporary resonance. Alice Tarbuck and Simone Kotva ‘The Non-Secular Pilgrimage: Walking and Looking at Ken Cockburn and Alec Finlay’s *The Road North*.’ *Critical Survey* 29, no. 1, (2017): 33-52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26382288>, provides a contemporary survey, while Ronald Blyth, *Divine Landscapes* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1986), gives a UK historical context.

³⁵ Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 158.

³⁶ Ibid., 159.

³⁷ Ibid., 145.

of the asylum loomed large.³⁸ In addition, there was the spectre of a psychiatric profession which was inching towards a more ‘scientific’ approach to mental health therapy through experimentation with drugs, and latterly ECT therapy and surgery. My work explores whether the Gothic Victorian asylum had become threatening in a new way.

The psychogeographic method also provides an understanding of how gender can define space. Criticism of psychogeography from the perspective of gender, highlights the way that the *dérive* and the *flâneur*, basic concepts in the exploration of urban space, are presented as a male preserve^{39 40} – ‘As if a penis were a requisite walking appendage, like a cane.’⁴¹ Rebecca Solnit and Lauren Elkin reclaim the street and the psychogeographic methodology to expose the gendered space which attempts to exclude women from certain spaces in the urban environment. Natalie Collie⁴² highlights the phallo-centric nature of the modern city which creates a sense of anxiety in order to deter women. Lotte, the main character in my novel, understands her hometown in a profound way, topographic details have layers of personal and social meaning for her. But at the same time, she is constrained in her movements by the expectations of her class and gender – ‘Why? Where do you go? Leaving your family. What if something happens? There’s men, there’s all sorts.’⁴³

The meaning attached to space also serves to control specific social classes and police the relationships between classes – ‘Space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships.’⁴⁴ Only nature is beyond this control – ‘The more a space partakes of nature, the less it enters into the social relations of production.’⁴⁵ But as Lefebvre explains, even the cypress trees of Lombardy are expressions of capital, defining the ‘marches’ of adjoining properties. Capability Brown’s creation of the eighteenth-century British estate is similarly a production of space to define social sanding and exclusivity.⁴⁶

Careri expresses clearly how the production of space excludes and separates:

³⁸ Maggie O’Farrell’s *The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox* (London: Headline Review, 2006), also explores the social tensions facing young women in the 1930s alongside the ultimate threat of the asylum.

³⁹ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso Books, 2001)

⁴⁰ Elkin, *Flâneuse*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴² Natalie Collie, ‘Walking in the City: Urban Space, Stories, Gender,’ *Gender Forum* 42, (2013), <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:331347>.

⁴³ Raymond, *Lotte*, 132.

⁴⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 82-83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁶ Patt Selanon, ‘Michael Foucault and the Perception of Landscape Architecture Practices,’ *BERAC* 2 (2012), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341262837>.

To put it simply, walking is scary, so people don't walk anymore; those who walk are homeless, drug addicts, outcasts... The only category with which cities are designed today is that of security. It might sound banal but the only way to have a safe city is to have people walking in the street.⁴⁷

The solution, as Debord might have suggested, and as Careri asserts above, lies in the *dérive*, to reclaim meaning from spaces by inhabiting them.

2.ii. Tuan: Space and Place

Yi-Fu Tuan approaches the question of space and its relationship with people from the perspective of human geography rather than from the cultural. Tellingly, however, he begins his exploration on the battlements of Kronborg Castle and a visit by the physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg.

Bohr said to Heisenberg:

Isn't it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe a castle consists of stones... None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely.⁴⁸

This, succinctly, identifies our human relationship with space and the transformative power of the text via the power of the imagination of both the writer and the reader. We will return to the role of imagination below, but Bohr's comments introduce Tuan's detailed explorations of how the physical world, human biology and culture are inter-dependent, and of how:

...the human person, who is animal, fantasist and computer combined, experiences and maintains the world.⁴⁹

He delicately braids the scientific with the mythic and aesthetic to create a taxonomy of space based on a clear emotional distinction between space and place. Place is more than a stable object: 'Place is security, space is freedom'.⁵⁰ This reflects the psychogeographic emphasis on the emotional impact of surroundings, but Tuan identifies the dialogue that holds our relationship with spaces and places in tension:

Human beings require both space and place. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Careri *Walkscapes*, 13.

⁴⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

This dialectic has clear relevance to the literary text. Narrative archetypes,^{52 53} reflect this balance between the settled and the disruptive, the quest and the return, home and away.⁵⁴

Careri observes this tension within the urban landscape: ‘...the spaces of staying are the islands formed by the spaces of going.’⁵⁵ Places are pauses within the nomadic space, Careri identifies the menhirs, Neolithic standing stones, as the earliest transformation of landscape ‘from a natural to an artificial state,’⁵⁶ creating place out of space – the origins of architecture.

Understanding the concept of how place can be defined, can be ‘made,’ has allowed me to see Stirling as more than a setting in my novel. Lotte’s childhood home in the Top of the Town, her married life in a house in King’s Park – and the meaning these places have for her – are part of the character’s development. There is an additional layer of meaning for me. Lotte is based on my grandmother and all the settings in the novel are carefully researched places she occupied. These homes, these places, define her story, as do the spaces she walks between them. My fieldwork, described in Chapter 1, explores my responses to engaging with these sites as a writer, and as a grandchild.

With the creation of places comes emotional attachment and a range of cultural connections: ‘Landscape is personal and family history made visible.’⁵⁷ Our attachment and response to both place and space provides a dynamic framework for analysis of the role of setting in literary texts. Tuan explicitly identifies the role of literature in exploring these connections and tensions:

The images of place...are evoked by the imagination of perceptive writers...By the light of their art we are privileged to savour experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall.’⁵⁸

The role of literature in preserving the nature of the relationship between humans and both space and place will be addressed again when we turn to the work of Bakhtin, but it is enough to note here that the experience of space and place changes over time, sometimes

⁵² Storr, *The Science of Storytelling*.

⁵³ John Yorke, *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (London: Penguin, 2014).

⁵⁴ For humans. Not so for animals perhaps: ‘Birds in flight,’ claims the architect Vincenzo Volentieri, ‘are not *between* places, they carry their places with them.’ Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: In the Shadow of DH Lawrence* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2012), 134.

⁵⁵ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 157.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

dramatically. For example, Foucault notes the role of the railways in the mid nineteenth century in transforming the understanding of space.⁵⁹

Place too is subject to change. Indeed, time is critical in the construction of place: ‘When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place.’⁶⁰ This is a dynamic which works through the literary text, and it also highlights the role of the liminal, the crossing points where space becomes place. Careri’s ‘*Terrain Vague* – simultaneously on the margins of the urban system and a fundamental part of the system,’⁶¹ is the definition of ‘edgeland,’ fully explored by Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts.⁶² This is where place barges up against space, ‘the marches... frontiers...intermediary spaces.’⁶³ Places of transition, tension, conflict are the building blocks of narrative, so the interest that writers take in the liminal is not unexpected. Sara van den Bossche and Sophie Wemnerscheid⁶⁴ make a case for the primacy of the liminal, where borders are crossed, and identities shaped. They are not spaces to be traversed, they are spaces of great value in their own right.⁶⁵ Tuan’s distinction between space and place provides a deeper understanding of these points of transition.

Other writers have investigated this further. Wallstein discusses the relationship between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, and finds the liminal point in the family, and so, logically: ‘it is the source of all happiness and misery.’⁶⁶ The family is at the crux of space and place, freedom and security. It is why thresholds are so resonant in literature – the difference between outdoors and indoors, transition points. My novel starts on a threshold:

She closed the heavy door behind her, shutting all of them in: Sam, the boys, the baby and Grace too, sensed their sleeping bodies in their rooms, imagined their breathing, the tiny disturbances in the quiet house. She pulled on her gloves. Embracing the dark, she let herself be collected up by the night.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, 243.

⁶⁰ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 75.

⁶¹ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 42.

⁶² Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness* (London: Vintage, 2012).

⁶³ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 22.

⁶⁴ Sara van den Bossche and Sophie Wemnerscheid. ‘Border Crossings, Rites of Passage, and Liminal Experiences in Contemporary Literature’. *DiGeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 5, no. 2, (2018): 1-6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.11116/jdivegendstud.5.issue-2>.

⁶⁵ Ange, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*. locates the liminal buildings that define the modern world, supermarkets, filling stations, airports, shopping malls and the intersection of place and space, locations that are neither here nor there and, in their same-ness, reassuringly familiar.

⁶⁶ Sven-Olov Wallenstein, *Bio-Politics and the Emergence of Modern Architecture* (New York: The Temple Hoybe Bell Centre for the Study of American Architecture and Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

⁶⁷ Raymond, *Lotte*, 126.

Thresholds are important for both the text itself and the creative process. The collection of essays compiled by Kate Kennedy and Hermione Lee⁶⁸ consider the role of interior spaces and their relationship with the wider environment in the production of poetry – the tension between W.H. Auden’s darkened New York apartment and the dynamic street outside.⁶⁹ Farley and Roberts explore similar ground.⁷⁰ In fiction, Glenn Patterson foregrounds changing domestic space to chart wider social and cultural changes.⁷¹ Interiors and exteriors in tension – space and place as the fundamental building blocks of literature – with the home as the embodiment of place and the open road the essence of space.

Our relationship with home is about more than relationship with physical place; home means so much more. In the same way, road is more than an embodiment of space. For an understanding of how the meaning of spaces and places is extended through the literary imagination we turn to Bachelard.

2.iii. Bachelard: The Poetics of Space.

I love a public road: few sights there are
That please me more; such object hath had power
O’er my imagination since the dawn
Of childhood, when its disappearing line,
Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
Beyond the limits where my feet had trod,
Was like a guide into eternity,
At least to things unknown and without bound.⁷²

The road, the street, the path is crucial to psychogeography – the link between place and space. For Bachelard the road and the house are key elements in the poetics of space. ‘And what a dynamic, handsome object is a path!’⁷³ mirrors the sense for imaginative freedom that Wordsworth finds in the idea of the ‘public road’ – the ‘disappearing line’ heading for ‘eternity’.

The house stands in dialectical tension with the road:

⁶⁸ Kate Kennedy and Hermione Lee (ed), *Lives of Houses* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*.

⁷⁰ Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Deaths of the Poets* (London: Vintage, 2019).

⁷¹ Glenn Patterson, *Number 5* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2003).

⁷² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, edited by J. C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 1805-06 Text, Book XII, line 145-152.

⁷³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 33.

Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams.⁷⁴

For Bachelard, place and space are freighted with all the collective weight of lived and imagined experiences, the lives we live and the art we consume all contribute to the meaning that accumulates. ‘A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.’⁷⁵ Where the interior and the exterior come together, the house has all the more potency of meaning. And Bachelard identifies the power of the liminal. To demonstrate the power of the liminal, Bachelard quotes an early psychogeographer, Thomas de Quincey: ‘Isn’t it true that a pleasant house makes winter more poetic, and doesn’t winter add to the poetry of a house?’⁷⁶ Bachelard goes on to say: ‘Behind dark curtains, snow seems to be whiter. Indeed, everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate.’⁷⁷ Between place and space, home and the road, here and there, ‘the dialectic of the house and the universe,’⁷⁸ lies the richest source of interest for the psychogeographer – and the writer. At the centre of the Bachelard taxonomy of images is the protective space that creates a delineation between protection and the world outside:

The house, with its protective corners, the hut, the shell, finally and *essentially* the circle which delimits the inside from the outside.⁷⁹

The power of the archetypal image comes from the connection it makes between the imagination of the writer and the reader, triggering resonances:

Bachelard marvelled at the mystery that the image can be both *unique* to the originating consciousness and yet *common* to different subjects.⁸⁰

My novel explores the meaning of home as sanctuary, and how that might change over time. For central to Bachelard’s argument is the additional dynamic of time. Our experience of place and space is not static but is inextricably tied up with our memories. And

⁷⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁹ Jacques Ehrmann, ‘Introduction to Gaston Bachelard,’ *MLN* 81, no. 5, (1966), 577, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2907980>.

⁸⁰ Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 100.

with our imagination: ‘In the reign of the imagination there are no young forests.’⁸¹ Space, time and the imagination work together within the text.

2.iv. Bakhtin: Space and Time

Ero Vaara and Anne Reff Pedersen⁸² categorise time: cosmological time, represented by the moment ticking away on smartphone and clock, phenomenological time, as experienced by humans decaying towards death, and Bakhtin’s concept of literary time, as constructed in the literary text. Tuan explores the history of time and finds it tangled in the objective realities of geography. In the tropics, where seasons matter less, time is ‘shallow’⁸³ For tribes who live in terrain where communications are difficult, events in distant villages happen in the past, details become hazy with time and distance. We speak of ‘long ago and far away’; the objective and the subjective become porous. An isochronic map of the British Empire⁸⁴ is a visual representation of distance expressed as time. It charts the world in terms of how many days it takes to reach territories – distance expressed as time and effort and centred on London as the controlling hub of Empire.

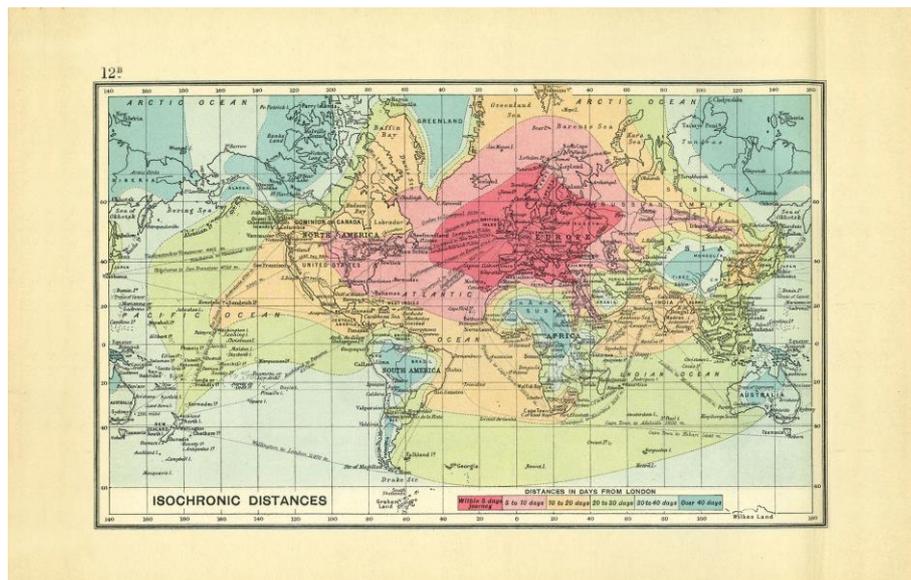


Figure 6. *Isochronic map of the world, 1914*, The Royal Geographic Society, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/news/What-travelling-was-like-100-years-ago/>.

⁸¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 206

⁸² Ero Vaara and Anne Reff Pedersen, ‘Strategy and Chronotopes: A Bakhtinian Perspective on the Construction of Strategy Narratives,’ *M@n@gement* 16 (2013/5), 593-604, <https://management-aims.com/index.php/mgmt/article/view/4007>.

⁸³ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 110

⁸⁴ Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society: *An Atlas of Economic Geography* (London: George Bartholomew, 1914).

Time and space in interaction is fundamental to the psychogeographic vision of the world, revealing layered depths of meaning in urban and rural landscapes. Adam Thorpe, contemplating the Neolithic stones of south-west England, listens to: ‘...the land speaking, and all its dead.’⁸⁵ The connection with personal memory, the intimate past of childhood and family is clearly welded fast to place, topography often having more resonance than people: ‘Place itself bore more freight of meaning than any individuals in the tree of ancestors.’⁸⁶ The distance travelled by my grandmother between her homes in different parts of Stirling can be measured in miles, years and social gradient. Because I am a relative and a writer, my fiction is also influenced by generational distance and the lens of family story and myth. Plus my imagination.

The chronotope brings together these elements – space, time and the imagination – to offer a convincing explanation of why the literary text gives a plausible description of how the world is experienced:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into a carefully thought-out, concrete whole.⁸⁷

This, says Bakhtin, is how literary representation works. The imagination welds the elements into a robust structure. If, as Immanuel Kant says, we experience the world through time and space, the writer applies their imagination to give a mimesis of this reality.⁸⁸ As in physics, time and space are holistic and cannot be separated.⁸⁹ Through history the literary text, usually drawing on deep folkloric roots, has been able to reflect changing concepts of time and space. As Bakhtin says: ‘They contain the great experience of humanity.’⁹⁰

Human experience of time and space is concentrated in a series of motifs – home, road, threshold, castle, public square. These recognisable mental images are the building blocks of all narrative precisely because they embody both time and space. Bakhtin’s post-structuralist vision embodies both the text and context. The shifting understanding of time and space are reflected in literary texts across centuries. For my own work, Bakhtin provided a framework to unpick the strands of time and space, absence and presence, memory and loss

⁸⁵ Adam Thorpe, *On Silbury Hill* (Toller Fratrum: Little Toller Books, 2016).

⁸⁶ Iain Sinclair, *Black Apples of Gower: Stone-footing in Memory Fields* (Toller Fratrum: Little Toller Books, 2015).

⁸⁷ Bemong et al: Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, iv.

⁸⁹ Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (London: Penguin, 2016), 41.

⁹⁰ David Shepherd, ‘A Feeling for History? Bakhtin and the Problem of “Great Time”’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 84, no. 1, (2006), 32-51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4214214>.

that were present in my text and that challenged me as a writer. Here was a practical theory that allowed me to understand my material.

Ljuba Tarvi discusses in detail the relationship between chronotope and metaphor and concludes:

If chronotope is ‘almost but not entirely’ a metaphor of time/space, one may ask if such irrefutable ambivalence hints at the difficulty of distinguishing the metaphorical operation from the conceptual one.⁹¹

Chronotopic motifs also have a motivic purpose, activating stored knowledge: “‘memory organising pockets” which direct the process of reading and interpretation.”⁹² They also have an imaginative resonance. This resonates with Bachelard’s poetics, the motifs which are full of creative potential. Juxtaposing Bachelard’s door with Bakhtin’s threshold is illuminating:

For the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open. ... The door schematises two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say wide open.’⁹³

This can be compared, or perhaps connected, to Bakhtin:

The chronotope of the threshold, or the chronotope of crisis and break in life...consists in the choice of a particular area which can be determined as the place of conjoining of different spaces, e.g., entrances, doorways, corridors, staircases, etc.⁹⁴

The door is transformed by the writer’s imagination into an image that encompasses both time and space. The threshold sits at the Bachelardian liminal between here and there, the asymmetrical dialectics of inside and outside⁹⁵ – the intimate and the immense.⁹⁶ As a writer, I have valued picking strands from both Bachelard and Bakhtin. It has helped me to understand the impact that apparently simple actions by characters – walking out of a door, walking in a particular street – can have on the reader.

⁹¹ Ljuba Tarvi, ‘Chronotope and Metaphor as Ways of Time-Space Contextual Blending: The Principle of Relativity in Literature,’ *Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso* 10, no. 1, (2015), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1590/2176-457320664>.

⁹² Bemong et al., *Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*, 12.

⁹³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 238.

⁹⁴ Eduard Vlassov, ‘The World According to Bakhtin: On the Description of Space and Spatial Forms in Mikhail Bakhtin’s Works,’ *Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* 37, no. 1\2 (1995), 47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40870668>.

⁹⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 231.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

The chronotopic motifs are not all concerned with the liminal, but the borders are often where conflict is at its most intense, where decisions are made and where characters change. For instance, Bakhtin provides an explanation why the road is a space where Lotte has transformative encounters:

On the road the spatial and temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways... Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road).⁹⁷

The road connects places that have specific meaning for my characters – time on the road is time suspended between home, places of work and social connections. The tension between place and space and time creates a triangular dynamic which can be applied to the literary text and can help shape praxis. Tuan, Bachelard and Bakhtin build on the work of Lefebvre to create a theoretical and praxiological framework. Space, place and time are in constant flux, each will influence the other, creating depth and new meanings within the text. In my own work, time and space are intimately connected to character and narrative:

The most central properties of the whole story are the character and action and for this reason both time and space are typically connected to these at some point.⁹⁸

2.v. The Art of Walking: Imagination and Space

The psychogeographic method is traditionally the act of walking. ‘Space calls for action, and before action, the imagination is at work.’⁹⁹ Contemplation and imagination are linked to action – interaction with space. Walking is a great resource for the writer. Partly it is about stimulus of the imagination. For Werner Herzog walking is a jump-start for the imagination: ‘...so many things pass through one’s head, the brain rages.’¹⁰⁰ For Hazlitt the experience is more contemplative:

Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and three hours march to dinner – and then to thinking.¹⁰¹

Simone de Beauvoir experienced therapeutic introspection: ‘Time with nature gave me greater familiarity with myself.’¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 243

⁹⁸ Tarvi, ‘Chronotope and Metaphor as Ways of Time-Space Contextual Blending: The Principle of Relativity in Literature,’ 3.

⁹⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 34.

¹⁰⁰ Werner Herzog, *Of Walking on Ice* (London: Vintage Books, 2014), 4.

¹⁰¹ William Hazlitt, ‘On Going on a Journey,’ in *William Hazlitt: Essays*, edited by Rosalind Vallance and John Hampden, (London: The Folio Society, 1964), 71.

¹⁰² Annabel Abbs. ‘Walking with Simone de Beauvoir.’ *The Paris Review Daily*, Sept 3, 2021, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2021/09/03/walking-with-simone-de-beauvoir/>.

Because walking is concerned with place, space and time, it has enormous imaginative potential. ‘Exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains.’¹⁰³ This form of engaged contemplation has been compared to reading: ‘I walk because, somehow, it’s like reading ... You are not alone. You walk the city side-by-side with the living and the dead.’¹⁰⁴

Visual artists have directly developed the creative possibilities of the act of walking. Richard Long and Hamish Fulton are among a large number of artists who have created new art forms which explore space and time.¹⁰⁵ For Richard Long ‘Walking is drawing on a grand scale.’¹⁰⁶ This would come as no surprise to Careri:

The act of crossing space stems from the neutral necessity to move to find the food and information required for survival. But once these basic needs have been satisfied, walking takes on a symbolic form that has enabled man to dwell in the world. By modifying the sense of space crossed, walking becomes man’s first aesthetic act, penetrating the territories of chaos, constructing order on which to develop the architecture of situated objects.’¹⁰⁷

Matthew Beaumont notes that the word ‘pedestrian’ was originally applied to uninspired, dull writing and only latterly became associated with walking.¹⁰⁸ The interaction of time and space underscores all narratives, and as walking is an activity which engages with time and space, writers often conflate the two activities: ‘walking is writing with your feet.’¹⁰⁹ For the early psychogeographers, walking was, ‘automatic writing in real space.’¹¹⁰ Through the methodology of walking the connection is made with time and space: ‘Poetry existed only in the meeting of the mind and the world.’¹¹¹ This dynamic relationship has inspired generations of diverse writers:

The psychogeographers, the *flâneurs* and the romantic poets all have something to say about journeys inwards and outwards, the way the rambling body can contain or guide a rambling mind, the way the digressions and loops of a spontaneous route can map or influence or even dictate the contours of a mind or sentence.¹¹²

¹⁰³ Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Elkin, *Flaneuse*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ David Evans, ed., *The Art of Walking: A Field Guide*, (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, 270.

¹⁰⁷ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 25.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London* (London: Verso Books, 2016), 228.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin Myers, *Under the Rock: The Poetry of Place* (London: Elliot and Thompson, 2018), 159.

¹¹⁰ Careri *Walkscapes*, 78.

¹¹¹ Adam Nicolson, *The Making of Poetry: Coleridge, the Wordsworths and Their Year of Marvels* (London: William Collins, 2019), 183.

¹¹² Jenn Ashworth, ‘The Lost Pencil,’ Walking Solo, Litfest, Lancaster Literature Festival, July, 2020, <https://litfest.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Lost-Pencil-Jenn-Ashworth.pdf> 4.

The two-way dialogue between emotions and environment is well documented across many forms of artistic expression. Writing about the artist Graham Sutherland, Christopher Neve says: ‘Have you never experienced this in your own life, the transfiguring of what you see by what you feel?’¹¹³ Walking can also make a connection between the environment and emotion, a cornerstone of the psychogeographic method. Thorpe relates how, in Eskimo culture, frustrated individuals will gain release by walking in a straight line until they have walked their anger out, then place a stick in the snow, a marker of the strength of their rage.

The stick, led up to by the line of footprints in the snow, remains a visible trace, a homeopathic depositing, not only of the final mastering but of the rage itself. *A Line Made By Anger.*¹¹⁴

In her nocturnal walking Lotte engages with the world in a way that helps her deal with feelings of frustrations and anger. Here she is, talking to the asylum physician Dr Fergusson:

‘Voices in our heads are what we all do to make sense of life as we live it. There is no harm in it. Unless it is a different voice. Someone else.’

‘No, it was all me. My voice. But there was no commentary when I was walking. I was living.’ She looked up at the barred window. For that time, when I was out walking, I didn’t need to comment in my head because it was all there in front of me. I didn’t need to think much.’ She looked back at me again. ‘If that makes any sense?’

‘When you felt fully alive?’

She frowned. ‘No, I was alive all the time. I’m not, I wasn’t, in some kind of coma. But I felt as if I was at the centre of this huge world swirling overhead. And connected to it. I hadn’t felt that since I was small.’¹¹⁵

In true psychographic style, this is time and space interacting with the human imagination, aesthetic action located among the everyday. As Careri notes, those pioneers of the psychogeographic, the Dada collective, took their artistic vision out into the ‘banal’ stretches of the city, releasing art from the galleries and studios. Walking aimlessly allowed the emotional connections to be made. They ‘defined this experience as “deambulation.”’¹¹⁶ Walking through space exposes the individual to the full emotional impact of the environment. In my own practice, I used my own experience and memory of spaces,

¹¹³ Christopher Neve, *Unquiet Landscape: Places and Ideas in 20th Century British Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020), 87.

¹¹⁴ Thorpe, *On Silbury Hill*, 82.

¹¹⁵ Raymond. *Lotte*, 215.

¹¹⁶ Careri, *Walkscapes*, 27.

augmented by Google Street View to visualise my characters at key transition points. One such moment is Lotte's first sight of the Stirling Asylum wall:

On one side of the road there were cottages, some new-built council houses. On the other an endless grey wall, big mature trees beyond, their trunks black. Lotte was mesmerised by the wall, its length and its uniformity, for what seemed like miles there was no variation, the large irregular boulders, the rough coping stones. How high was it? Well above head height, you couldn't see over it. Was it climbable? 'Is it climbable, Peter?'¹¹⁷

The long grey wall is still there, although the Asylum itself is gone. By examining its outer length, via GSV, I could imagine its impact on a new patient. Would my practice have been different if I had walked the length of the wall? Indisputably different, but not necessarily less effective in creating an imaginative response.

Walking has been interpreted as having a fundamental relationship with the way humans interact with their environment. In a discussion on the relationship between Bachelard's poetics of space and the poetry of John Clare, Jonathan Bate suggests:

The interior order of the human mind is inextricable from the environmental space we inhabit. Sanity depends on grounding in space. But it also depends on grounding in time.¹¹⁸

If inner harmony can be explored in literature by interacting with the environment through the act of walking, then inner turmoil can be investigated in the same way, a territory of particular significance to my own troubled protagonist. Beaumont's historical survey of London by night, reveals the transformative effect of darkness, creating an alternative city populated by outcasts and the displaced.¹¹⁹ The effect of darkness is to emphasise the liminal:

The road at night is the site on which the commonplace and the mythical, the mundane and the marvellous, interact.¹²⁰

In my own text, Lotte meets a tramp under a hedge at night:

She ran her gloved hand across the top bar of the gate, smooth from leaning farmers and stretching beasts.

'Just cows, just cows, just cows,' she said, breathing purposefully.

'Just fucken cows alright lassie.'

¹¹⁷ Raymond, *Lotte*, 335.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 171.

¹¹⁹ Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

Stepping back, the skin on her arms crackled with electricity, she felt her pulse in her fingertips. There was a peak of fear but then it was gone. There was no mystery here, she could understand this voice in the dark.¹²¹

The encounter would be mundane in daylight but mysterious at night. Shortly afterwards a cattle float appears to her as a cottage on the move. A transformation from commonplace to marvellous in the misty darkness.¹²² As a child and teenager I was often out on unlit country roads. I am familiar with how the imagination can make the mundane terrifying.

Beaumont pushes this phenomenon a little further, quoting the consummate nightwalker, Charles Dickens: ‘Are not the same and insane equal at night as the sane lie dreaming?’¹²³ The liminal territory between sanity and insanity can seem porous when walking at night, the normal categories disrupted.¹²⁴ But even in daylight there is a strangeness about the idea of space:

[Ivor Hitchens] used to say that nature seemed to him to consist more of spaces than objects, and that it often appears that he instinctively drew the air and light that vibrates in the interstices of the view rather than the view itself.¹²⁵

This is a rare articulation of what space at its most fundamental means. The curious, elusive nature of pure space that all humans inhabit. Difficult enough for a visual artist like Hitchens to capture, but even more of a challenge for the writer:

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.¹²⁶

Philip Larkin seems to question the power of words to capture the infinite. And here is the dilemma. Space, place, spatial forms are challenging for the non-visual artist. Bakhtin is alert to this quandary:

¹²¹ Raymond, *Lotte*, 127.

¹²² There are practical applications of engaging with urban spaces in the darkness. Nick Dunn and Dan Dubowitz, ‘Dark Inscriptions: Placing Theory and Tracing Practice in Nocturnal Glasgow,’ *Writing Place*, No2, (2018), <https://journals.open.tudelft.nl/writingplace/article/view/2641/2868>, apply psychogeographic theory and practice to a community *dérive*, looking at familiar places with fresh eyes at night.

¹²³ Beaumont, *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*, 162.

¹²⁴ ‘Acquainted With the Night’ by Robert Frost evokes the unsettling disruptive power of darkness over time and space. Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* Edited by Ian Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1973) 152.

¹²⁵ Neve, *Unquiet Landscape*, 176.

¹²⁶ Philip Larkin, ‘The High Windows,’ in *Collected Poems*, edited by Anthony Thwaite (London: Faber & Faber and The Marvell Press, 1988), 165.

...verbal art does not create an external spatial form since it does not operate with spatial or plastic materials, like sculpture, painting or drawing. In this respect the dialectics of verbal art consists in the usage of non-spatial material, i.e., language, to depict a spatial object. According to Bakhtin. “the plastic-pictorial moment” of constituent is an obligatory element of the poetic of narrative.¹²⁷

Bakhtin also notes that the use of words to evoke the concrete in the mind of the reader is the routine magic worked by the literary text:

The spatial forms (in the case of Goethe, very frequently, concrete geographical localities) are entirely indispensable as object for the application of human creative activity, material substance for the affixing of a “vestige of a single human will acting in a planned (i.e. temporarily determined) way”.¹²⁸

The character in a literary text is rarely separated from their fictional world. The social, cultural and physical universe of the character determines action. By applying their imagination to the tangible geography inhabited by the character, writers reflect and transform topography in the production of a novel, and turn the physical into words which in turn engage the imagination of the reader. For Bachelard, the imagination is a transformative tool – acting not just on space but on time: ‘imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future.’¹²⁹ The power of imagination is arguably what creates the human *umwelt*: ‘We don’t live in places,’ says Wallace Stevens, ‘but in the description of places.’¹³⁰ The imagination isn’t just the ‘laboratory of the possible’¹³¹ but constructs the environment we live in, our experience filtered through imagination as well as experience. My own work as a writer has translated my experience of very specific locations into a literary artefact, using my own spatial engagement to describe my characters’ interaction with the same places. As Foucault suggests, this is a primary function of fiction – to construct a new environment:

The possibility exists for the fiction to work within truth, for a fictive discourse to induce efforts of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders, or “fabricates” something that does not yet exist, that is, “fictions” it into existence.¹³²

¹²⁷ Vlasov ‘The World According to Bakhtin: On the Description of Space and Spatial Forms in Mikhail Bakhtin’s Works,’ 40.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 18.

¹³⁰ Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Deaths of the Poets* (London: Vintage, 2017), 305.

¹³¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 19.

¹³² James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (London Harper Collins, 1993), 211.

Within this construction, psychogeographic praxis emphasises the engagement of the individual with the environment:

Psychogeographical traits in contemporary literature typically encompasses non-linear narratives structured peripatetically by walking and spatial exploration, the presence of ambiguous anti-fictional narrators and the construction of the cityscape as a palimpsest with temporal layers that blur the boundaries between past, present and future.¹³³

As I have discovered with my own work, the interdependence of individual and environment is crucial:

There is no possibility of understanding human thought and experience...other than through an understanding of place and locality.¹³⁴

What Bakhtin adds to this focus on space and place is an understanding of how time interacts with both to create narrative:

The intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. Time thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible: Likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.¹³⁵

This process happens through human consciousness and imagination. Literature is arguably the only way¹³⁶ to understand how space, place and time interact – to explore the human animal in its *umwelt*, but to go beyond the biological to also consider cultural resonances.¹³⁷ My psychogeographic methodology with its emphasis on close study of the environment, urban and rural, its interest in the liminal, its emphasis on emotional engagement with space and place and its concern for layered time, has transformed my creative practice. As Lukács suggests, the novel is not an inferior facsimile of life, but a means of transforming human experience through the imaginative melding of space, time and character:

¹³³ Ella Mundie, *Psychogeography and the Novel: Fictions of Place, Motion and Identity 1920-1965*, (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2015), 13.

¹³⁴ Stephen Burt, 'Wallace Stevens: Where He Lived,' *ELH The Johns Hopkins University* 77, no. 2, (2010): 325-352, [doi:10.1353/elh.0.0085](https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.0.0085).

¹³⁵ Beaumont, *Nightwalking*, 249.

¹³⁶ Arguably, of course, there are other ways. Franco La Polla 'The Psychogeography of American Amusement Parks' *Revue Francaise d'etudes Americaines*. No. 36. 235-240, (1988), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20871837>, asserts that the theme park, with its imaginary worlds that mimic the real world and that play with the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, also provide an insight into the dynamics of space and place. La Polla suggests that this experience mirrors the way readers engage with literary texts. The theme park and fiction both construct 'fake truth.' Beyond that similarity the parallels are less clear.

¹³⁷ Tiit Remm & Kadri Kasemets, 'Chronotope as a framework for landscape experience analysis,' *Landscape Research* 45, no. 2, (2020), 257, DOI:10.1080/01426397.2019.1594738.

...the outside world cannot be represented. Both the parts and the whole of such an outside world defy any forms of sensuous representation. They acquire life only when they can be related to the life-experiencing inferiority of the individual lost in their labyrinth, or to the observing and creative eye of the artist's subjectivity: then they become objects of mood and reflection.¹³⁸

2.vi. Conclusion

The insights provided by the writers examined in this chapter directly influenced my writing practice. The social meaning and poetic resonance of physical spaces help to enrich the interaction between character, action and location. Understanding the social meaning of space, as defined by Lefebvre, was vital in the development of creative themes in my novel particularly around social mobility, gender perspectives and historical realities. Place becomes layered with meaning, transforming everyday environments and explaining more unusual settings. For example, Foucault's discussion of the asylum was vital in helping to delineate the uniqueness of that environment and the role of physicians in such a controlled space.

Careri provided an understanding of how individuals develop a relationship with space and the role of walking as engagement with the environment. This directly related to the experience of my principal character – the role of walking in her mental health struggles, the way that walking helps her define her own world and links the places that are significant in her life. The work of Tuan offered the essential distinction between place and space. The dialectical tension between safety and freedom, between security and escape, between home and the road, between family and the wider world, defines much of Lotte's experiences in my novel. Beyond this distinction, Bachelard's description of the poetical significance of the indoor and outdoor environment also unlocked the potential of spatial elements and explained why the mundane can have such significance. Lotte's relationship with her home in Snowdon Place or Dr Fergusson and Dr Sneddon's use of workspaces to define their professional hierarchy, owe much to a Bachelardian sense of physical space having personal and social resonance beyond the purely physical.

With the chronotope, Bakhtin enfolds the temporal into the spatial. *Lotte* is a novel where time plays as important a role as place. Characters are defined by their past

¹³⁸ Mary Gluck, 'Reimagining the *Flâneur*: The Hero of the Novel in Lukács, Bakhtin and Girard,' *Modernism/modernity* Vol 13, no. 1, (2006), 759, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426397.2019.1594738>.

experiences. Dr Fergusson's experiences of the Front shape his complex triangular relationship with Dr Sneddon and Lotte. Lotte's own past, whether it is the positive example set by her mother and the aunts, or the trauma surrounding her cousin's death, both expand and limit her aspirations. Scenes dramatizing conflict between Dr Fergusson and Dr Sneddon alternate between the wide-open spaces of a shooting expedition and the claustrophobic confines of asylum offices, but these encounters are all suffused with reminders of their war service. In a scene subsequently cut from the text of the novel, Lotte and her husband cross an archetypal Bakhtin chronotope, the threshold, to take possession of a house that represents her husband's social ambition. Lotte crosses that same threshold often to escape the confines of the house, family and expectations. Walking on the open, rural roads, she encounters the past in the shape of Peter, her cousin. An understanding of Bakhtin's work both prompted these scenes and gave them additional layers of meaning. The theoretical models were direct influences on the overall planning of the novel and, at a more granular level shaped the writing of specific scenes.

Having established a theoretical framework from the literature, I will go on to identify how theory can help us explore three contemporary novels with strong themes of place and history.

Chapter 3

A Close Reading of Place

The mind – the culture – has two little tools, grammar and lexicon: a decorated sand bucket and a matching shovel. With these we bluster about the continents and do all the world's work. With these we try to save our very lives. Anne Dilliard.¹

3.i. Representations: Space, Social Meaning and Control

The culture is more than literature, and visual artists have more to work with than word and syntax. As part of their *World Series* the Boyle Family invited friends wearing blindfolds to throw darts at a world map. One dart obliterated the island of Barra. The Boyles repeated the dart throwing exercise with larger and larger scale maps until they had selected precise areas on the island. On site, they then threw a metre-square grid – over the shoulder – to remove any conscious engagement with the selection of place.² Where it landed, an exact replica was produced in resin and fibreglass and hung on white gallery walls.



Figure 7. Boyle Family, *World Series, Barra, Elemental Study (rippled sand with worm casts)*, Mixed media, resin, fibreglass, 1992 – 1993 - 183 x 122, courtesy of Sebastian Boyle, <https://www.dailyserving.com/2011/02/boyle-family/>.

The work of the Boyle Family is, controversially, at the extremes of artistic representation:

¹ Brian Dillon, *Suppose a Sentence* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), 153.

² Patrick Elliott, 'Presenting Reality: an introduction to the Boyle Family,' in *Boyle Family*, edited by Patrick Elliott at al. (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2003), 15.

[The]production seemingly eliminated the artist's involvement, first in the visual appearance of the works, then in the choice of objects for the work, and finally in the process of choosing the site itself.³

Are there direct equivalents of the Boyle Family in literary art? Svetlana Alexievich's oral testimonies⁴, seem to offer one example of where the writer becomes recorder. But here the illusion of direct human speech is created through the artistry of author (and translator). Creative non-fiction sits closer to traditional photography in the visual arts – reality presented through perspective and framing. However... The Boyle Family's art seems to create a dilemma. 'Is the work reality or representation?'⁵ But of course it is representation. We are invited to look again at the familiar – 'our primary objective is to teach ourselves to see'⁶ – the perspective transformed by presentation. And just as literature creates its own version of place through words, the Boyle Family is not 'art-free' but transforms the apparent actuality of place through the artists' skill and vision.

Fiction does more than frame reality, it creates its own world. The novel is an artistic artefact – the place in fiction is imagined landscape. The medium of literature, language itself, is 'the line that divides the actual conditions of our daily lives from the imaginative representation of those conditions.'⁷

In this chapter I will review the craft and imagination of three writers as they transform details of place into literary art in three contemporary novels – *The Bass Rock* by Evie Wyld⁸, *All Among the Barley* by Melissa Harrison⁹ and *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us* by Adam Scovell¹⁰. All focus on place and will be examined through the lens of the theoretical paradigms discussed in the previous chapter. They will also be explored in the context of my own practice and how I resolved issues in my own fiction. This triangular relationship of place, author and practice is reflected in Adam Scovell's observation:

³ Chris Townsend, 'Mark Boyle and Joan Hills at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague,' *British Art Studies* Issue 3 (2016), 7, <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-3/boyle-1970>.

⁴ Svetlana Alexievich, *Second-Hand Time: The Last of the Soviets*, trans. Bela Shayevich, (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016).

⁵ Chris Townsend, 'Mark Boyle and Joan Hills at the Gemeentemuseum,' 8.

⁶ *The Boyle Family*, Directed by Georgia Boyle and Fran Robertson, aired 2001, BBC 2, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwFaGh_QpDM.

⁷ R.F. Foster, *On Seamus Heaney* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 136.

⁸ Evie Wyld, *The Bass Rock* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020).

⁹ Melissa Harrison, *All Among the Barley* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

¹⁰ Adam Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us* (London: Influx Press 2020).

Places are at the centre of my writing ... It took a long while walking about Strasbourg, again and again and again, to figure out what would catch the eye of this character.¹¹

The emotional dimension of this dynamic will be explored in Chapter 4 – the process of linking narrative tools and character to place is not an objective process. My own characters are based on close family members and they inhabit spaces and places that I have known from childhood and which are infused with family lore. As Melissa Harrison says: ‘I need to care about a place, I need to be able to draw on it for all those long hours at my desk. Facts aren’t enough.’¹² This subjective engagement with place, past and praxis will colour this discussion.

Like my own text, *Lotte*, all three novels have female central characters who are acutely aware of the space they occupy in the environment. Isabelle in *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us* has agency to walk the streets of Strasbourg, a confident *flaneuse*.¹³ While she never experiences physical threats from the environment, she is subject to supernatural threat from the sexually violent figure of the Erl-King who haunts her imagination. Edith in *All Among the Barley* is, if anything, even more confident in an environment that she knows intimately. And yet, for her too there is a sense of supernatural threat from her imaginative engagement with ancient symbols of witchcraft. For the female character in *The Bass Rock* the environment is full of very real physical threats. A core theme is the ubiquitous threat from men in environments where women through the ages, are exposed to male violence. There are gradations of threat across these novels, but even for the confident Isabelle and Edith in her native ground, space is something for women to negotiate, not to own. Edith has her role in farm and household work assigned to her, her knowledge and country skills do not permit her freedom in the world she inhabits.

The risk, perceived and actual, to women out in the world on their own is a key factor in my novel. Lotte has her freedom curtailed by perceptions of risks. While she has knowledge and skills to help her navigate the risks of nightwalking, the actual threat comes from someone she knows and trusts – the man who collaborates in her artistic endeavours. While this is not a specifically feminist project, an understanding of the meaning of space

¹¹ Adam Scovell, interview in *The Double Negative*, July 2019, <http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2019/07/a-quick-but-rich-dose-of-strange-fiction-the-big-interview-adam-scovell/>.

¹² Melissa Harrison, Interview, *The Clearing*, Little Toller Books, July 9, 2015, <https://www.littletoller.co.uk/the-clearing/an-interview-with-melissa-harrison/>.

¹³ Elkin, *Flaneuse*.

from a female standpoint¹⁴ has helped to guide my approach as a male writer with a female protagonist.

Like the family home, the community is an ambiguous place, apparently secure, but often more hazardous than the open space of road and woodland or strangers in the street. This is a core theme in *The Bass Rock*. The community overseen by the Reverend Brown, is close, welcoming, misogynistic and extremely dangerous. The secondary, supportive status of women of the period is projected onto unsettling and demeaning rituals, all in the name of the community. *All Among the Barley* also portrays a rural community which can be at once supportive and excluding, embracing and hostile, open to the lure of the fascist Order of English Yeomanry. The pastoral is deceptive, and women are vulnerable in an environment where they have little power.

The effect of place on mental health is most clearly articulated in *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*. The first sentence – ‘It was an autumn day in Strasbourg when I first saw the Erl-king’¹⁵ – connects place to inner turmoil. The novel goes on to equate a mental health crisis (and its resolution) to the streets of the city, a relationship between emotion and place that has become almost visceral: ‘The streets were now mapped over my skin more than I had ever felt before, visibly rising on my flesh.’¹⁶ The place, the character and perceptions are caught in a triangle of influences where place is firmly linked to state of mind.

One place which bristles with meaning is the asylum. In both *The Bass Rock* and *All Among the Barley*, the asylum looms over the narrative. In both novels there is no question about the darkness and fear contained within the walls. Edith in *All Among the Barley* end up in the in an asylum, where she spends most of her life. Her destiny is foreshadowed by references to the fate of her grandmother:

For it was she who told me about my grandmother – Father’s mother – and what had happened to her in her last years...she went on to describe the modern therapies being used to treat lunatics, like giving them convulsions instead of cold baths.

“Of course, it came too late for your poor old grandmother. Who knows she might have been cured!”

...

“Do you mean she was a lunatic?”

“Well – yes, darling. Quite insane. She died in the county asylum, apparently. Surely you knew?”¹⁷

¹⁴ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

¹⁵ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter has Made Us*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁷ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 84.

Harrison's referencing of innovative treatments and the importance of a revealed family secret reflect my own novel. The shame and fear of the asylum with the added menace of cruel treatments are also a feature of *The Bass Rock*:

"They do all sorts of treatments at the hospital with the cold baths and that. None of it helps, but when she's left alone for long enough she'll come out of herself."¹⁸

Later in the novel, at a significant plot point, the asylum is evoked in full Gothic horror:

Betty looked up at her, black hair plastered over her face, catching in her eyelashes. "He took my Mary's brain. He had them burn it out of her."¹⁹

These two novels do not explore the institution in the same detailed way as Patrick McGrath's *Asylum*,²⁰ for instance, where the enclosed setting and symbiotic relationship between staff and patients shape the narrative. McGrath plays with the duality of the institution, the powerlessness of the patients and the tension between the terror of the incarcerated and the apparent professionalism of the staff. The atmosphere of McGrath's novel and the ambiguity of an unreliable physician narrator were both noted as I planned my own work, but Harrison and Wyld's subtle use of the powerful meaning of asylum, for both character and reader, were strong influences on my novel. *Asylum* lives in the imagination with such power that novels from the Victorian period to contemporary novels like Jenni Fagan's *The Panopticon*²¹ can use the imagery of the all-powerful institution and be confident of the reader's comprehension and fearful response. The opening scenes of Fagan's novel feature a female character being driven to the institution by two policemen; they pass along the endless walls before turning in through the gates. A similar scenario occurs towards the end of my own novel. I hadn't read *The Panopticon* before drafting my scene. An example of unconscious mirroring – writers independently reaching for the same images of powerlessness and exclusion.

¹⁸ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 205.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁰ Patrick McGrath, *Asylum*. (London: Penguin, 1996).

²¹ Jenni Fagan, *The Panopticon* (London: Windmill Books, 2012).

3.ii. Locations: Space and Place

All three novels are precise about location. Wyld's title is topographical, Harrison's book features two maps, Scovell quickly locates the reader in time and space:

I was near Place Gutenberg at the time, sitting in a café reading and writing as I had done regularly throughout the summer, enjoyably in the epicentre of the city watching its streets breathe with people.²²

And the opening sentence of *The Bass Rock* could not be more explicit about place and time: 'The small supermarket in Musselburgh is open until 10 p.m. and the staff look offended by me as I walk in at 9.35.'²³ Harrison places her narrator at the centre of the frontispiece map, '...the day the Hunt ran me down in Hulver Wood when I was just a girl. It was December,'²⁴ and continues to precisely locate and date the action of the novel. Scovell's method is geographically detailed. The novel works well as a guidebook to the city of Strasbourg: 'I wandered past the stalls that lined the Rue du Vieux-Marche-aux-Poissons and back up to the main square.'²⁵

This precision of place is something I wanted to reflect in my own novel. Exterior and interior places are based on visits, documents, maps and photographs. Where direct access was not possible to buildings – my grandmother's childhood home was demolished and access to some surviving buildings was impossible – I referred to documents, plans and old photographs, and, as discussed in Chapter 1, Google Street View was used extensively. In my novel real environments were described where possible, words used to create a simulacrum where my imagination could place the characters.

Tuan's²⁶ differentiation of space and place can be applied to all three novels to explore the concepts of freedom, familiarity and security. Scovell's use of non-fiction techniques – history, geography and philosophy are discussed as they would be in factual accounts of the city – allows him to directly address the tension between belonging and exploring. Over a number of pages the concepts of *Fernweh* (a longing to be far away) and *Heimweh* (homesickness), are discussed. The relationship that exists between space/place and freedom/security and the almost physical impact of place on the individual are at the heart of *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*:

²² Scovell, *How Pale the Winter has Made Us*, 11.

²³ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 5.

²⁴ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 1.

²⁵ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter has Made Us*, 24.

²⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

There needed to be, so I thought, a word that described, not the desire to travel far from home for joy, but instead the desire to travel away out of sheer necessity. The divide between place and self had melted to such a drastic and alarming level that journey was no longer a feasible concept to describe my own state.²⁷

Isabelle's deep, layered excavations of the streets of Strasbourg are contrasted with her partner's travels in South America:

In the coming weeks he would no doubt come back with a thousand stories to tell and a thousand reasons to want to return to South America...I could match his stories, I thought, as I followed the river along the Quai Turckheim, with the stories of Brice, Dr Patrice and *grand-maman*; the stories of the streets and houses and chalets and stones that I had reconstructed my body and mind from.²⁸

The concepts of space and place are reversed here. Freedom is in the deep knowledge of place, not encounters with far away spaces.²⁹ Recovery comes from exposure to the emotional impact of stories and stones, the place and its history. In literature, the messiness of ambiguity can be fully investigated without the necessity of conclusion.

In *All Among the Barley*, the home – that most secure place – is at the heart of Edith's existence: 'In the midwinter the farm is one thing, you see. Then it is the world.'³⁰ But that is not the whole story. Security limits. Edith's life opportunities are restricted to being a lady's companion. The free space of the city, London, is far out of her reach. In the climactic scenes the home comes close to being burned to the ground, but it being saved is little comfort for Edith, sent to the asylum for the rest of her life. A different sort of ambiguous security:

I have had such a happy life. This place is truly wonderful, even though some of the other women staying here are – and there is no kind way to put this – not quite right in the head...For the last few years I have even had my own room.³¹

For Edith and for the characters in the other two novels, the family is the ultimate insecure place. Isabelle is fleeing her father's death and a hostile family: 'Is this the cure, I remember thinking; the cure to the mourning of a hated loved one?'³² For Wyld the family home is at the dark Gothic heart of the novel.

²⁷ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 72.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁹ Gareth E Rees, *Car Park Life* (London: Influx Press 2019), makes the point that the most mundane and familiar can be transformed by insight and imagination. There is also an important debate around what 'far-away' and 'remote' signifies; for example, Malachy Tallack, 'The Heart of Beyond.' *Boundless*, March 19, 2019, <https://unbound.com/boundless/2019/03/19/the-heart-of-beyond/>.

³⁰ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 225.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 319.

³² Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 23.

In *Lotte* the family exercises a more subtle control. Expectations can be as limiting as the threat, or the reality, of violence in the home. The limitations of family as a manifestation of security and belonging is also explored in the character of Grace. Through war she loses her own chance of family but finds herself in the role of an insecure, semi-detached ‘member’ of a family as a trusted domestic servant.

A significant dynamic of my story depends on the tension that exists in the threshold between space and place – the liminal. Stirling in the 1930s was both a minor provincial centre and a regional market town of great historic significance. The tensions between these extremes of civic identity are reflected in the local newspaper. A report in the *Stirling Observer* records the Town Council’s consideration of the need for an aerodrome to improve connections with London.³³ The same newspaper reflects the strict social hierarchy, secure and comforting, but reinforcing the huge disparities of wealth and status. A community where everyone knows each other and are always prepared to make judgements. For Lotte, Stirling represents security, and like Edith with her understanding of the countryside, she knows the territory well. But it isn’t enough. For women in traditional social structures, places become prisons. Seeking space and freedom – Lotte with her music and her focused walking, Edith through her supernatural connections with the earth – leads to a diagnosis of madness and the ultimate ‘secure’ place, the asylum. Isabelle, the twenty-first century character – an independent professional woman – has perhaps greater freedom from societal constraints and so can use her knowledge of place to work through her grief and her crisis. But she still has to struggle against gender expectations of how she should respond to grief: ‘When was I coming back to *sort everything out*?’³⁴ her mother asks, repeatedly.

As a male writer with a female protagonist, I was very aware of how much I could learn from the craft and perspective of women writers and from male authors facing a similar challenge. This is what any thoughtful writer learning a craft would do. But using the lens of critical theory to examine the relationship between gender and contested, liminal space provided me with additional questions and insights. Theory gave me a context for attentive reading and listening. This helped me to shape my story.

³³ *Stirling Observer*, 2nd May 1933.

³⁴ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 31.

3.iii. Explorations: Poetics of Space

As discussed in Chapter 2, fiction does much more than describe place and space. Places have meaning, and that meaning will create responses in the reader. Wyld places characteristically Bachelardian³⁵ images at the centre of her novel. Cupboards and drawers have a sinister presence in the family house that Ruth feels, ‘didn’t quite sit with her correctly as *home*.’³⁶ Cupboards connect past violence to present violence. In the Bachelardian world cupboards are at the heart of the home, commandeered by Wyld as repositories of secrets and supernatural interruptions.

Harrison’s detailed description of the interior of Edith’s family home emphasizes the inadequacies of rural housing between the wars. This is no curated heritage site:

There was an outdoor privy with a tin of Keating’s Powder to keep the flies down. Wych Farm was draughty and ramshackle.³⁷

Harrison includes a description of the ‘mysterious circular patterns we called “witch-marks,”’³⁸ a detail that will have great significance later in the novel when the supernatural plays a part in Edith’s unravelling mental health.

Home is an element in Lotte’s story too. Her changing personal and socio-economic status is charted through her relationship with three addresses. As she occupies houses which become more opulent than the last, the buildings begin to lose their meaning. They become houses more than homes. Lotte’s ultimate destination, the asylum, is the complete inverse of home, an impersonal, externally controlled environment without comfort and real security. The asylum is also the workplace of Dr John Fergusson, the other major character in my novel. He is alienated from home. Away from work he is alone, estranged from his family, all human relations channel through his work, making the blurring of the professional and the personal more likely. His silent cottage is the non-home, a place that can be defined by the inverse of the reader’s understanding of a positive definition of home. Similarly, in the episodes set in France during the Great War where Fergusson’s own demons are incubated, the conventional meanings of place are reversed. A bombed school becomes a prison for a condemned soldier – education and enlightenment not just crushed but perverted: ‘Outside

³⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

³⁶ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 17.

³⁷ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

the Corporal was sitting on a large piece of rubble. Between his knees the letter E and the letter C were carved in the fragment. He stood up as I came out.³⁹

Nature and the poetics of rural space, play a major role in Wyld and Harrison's work. As Harrison says: 'I'm not sure I could write anything without knowing the seasons as it affects so much of the landscape.'⁴⁰ Her focus on seasonality, specifically the minute details of the progressing summer season, is more than background. Summer, the harvest, the richness of the growing season convey a specific meaning to the reader – the potential loss of the bounty of this ripening drives the plot. Edith's intimacy with nature, and with her familiar – the pet landrail – are critical to an understanding of her character.

Wyld's use of the poetics of space are equally characteristic of her work. Nature is mysterious and beyond the human. Her foxes appear regularly – 'A small fox stands in the spotlight, its nose pressed against the glass so that its teeth show.'⁴¹ 'She wondered if she had gone mad again, and started when she saw, curled in the bracken, a sleeping fox. Or perhaps it was dead...Not dead, she caught the rise and fall of its little ribs.'⁴² The fox is a predator, but natural, unlike the perverted predations of violent men. Nature is beautiful, strange and offers the characters no resolution:

Butterflies, white and blue and black, that should have been long dead, coasted the still air. "Tell me something," she said to them or to the dove or to the trees – she wasn't sure – "tell me what to do next." Silence.⁴³

The topography of place becomes full of symbolic meaning for Wyld. The Bass Rock itself is a permanent presence linking historic periods and generations. Enigmatic, a fixed point for all the characters.

How Pale the Winter Has Made Us is, as befits an avowedly psychographical novel, focused almost exclusively on the urban, but the mix of non-fiction within the narrative allows explorations of other environments. In a discussion of Oliver Franck, 'one of the foremost landscape photographers of the twentieth century,'⁴⁴ Scovell presents one of his celebrated woodland photographs. It is a work that perfectly reflects Bachelard's observations on the ambiguity of woods:

³⁹ Raymond, *Lotte*. 311.

⁴⁰ Harrison, Interview, Little Toller Books.

⁴¹ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 194.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁴ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 174.

Forests with the mystery of their space prolonged indefinitely beyond the veil of the tree trunks and leaves, space that is veiled to our eyes, but transparent to action.⁴⁵

The value of photography within texts will be explored further in Chapter 4, but the use of this photograph of nature at this stage in the novel encourages the reader to consider how the complexity of the city – as simultaneously transparent and opaque as the forest in Franck's photograph – impacts on the mental health of the narrator.

In *Lotte* the setting is mainly urban, contrasted with the open hills all around, and the controlled, artificial rural environment of the Asylum estate. The walled garden is particularly meaningful here. A miniature of the wall that surrounds the entire asylum, it is sheltered, fertile and locked:

The walled garden was the part of the Asylum that seemed to me to be most redolent of our purpose. It wasn't just the high wall, blocking out everything but the crowns of the tallest trees. It was the quiet that always nestled here. All but the loudest disruptions were held back by these old stone walls. The regular rows of vegetables, the flower beds in season, the careful structures, cane and string painstakingly lashed together by patients to provide support for beans and peas, all set out the virtues of patience and order in a way that hours of indoor instruction could not manage. Perhaps it was the delicate balance of discipline and freedom that the garden offered.⁴⁶

The irony extends to the wider estate. Lotte is interviewed by Fergusson while looking out over the grounds. This is a privilege he extends to her as a favoured patient – interviews usually take place in an institutional room with windows too high to see the surroundings. At several points, characters look down from high windows; the estate is within sight but not within reach. Access is forbidden.

The high vantage point – with the landscape laid out like a map – elevates the characters, giving them a strange intimacy with a landscape no longer hidden. At the same time it creates distance. These are moments when the imagination can take hold. Sam, Lotte's husband – with his background in urban Belfast and Birkenhead – sees Stirling Bridge from the vantage of the Castle Rock, and references *Kidnapped*.⁴⁷ The ancient border between Highland and Lowland is filtered through the fictional vision of Robert Louis Stevenson. A darker lens is provided by Lotte's cousin Peter. On home leave from France, he gazes over the River Forth from the Ochil Hills on a perfect summer's day. As he talks about the war, his

⁴⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 203.

⁴⁶ Raymond, *Lotte*, 263.

⁴⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*. (London: Penguin, 2007).

words conjure images of destruction. In Lotte's inner eye she sees smoke rising, a burning Castle. Place is transformed by imagination:

They both looked out across the sun-lit land, the great hills away to the north. Lotte closed her eyes. She saw the Castle, flames shooting through the old roof, stones raining down, men shattered like the rubble that lay along the edge of the castle rock, a tall black column of smoke reaching up through the white passing clouds and beyond.⁴⁸

3. iv. Excavations: Space and Time

How Pale the Winter Has Made Us is all about time, how it heals or doesn't, how the past is in the present and how places absorb and then reflect time like light on old stone. It is fitting that the novel concludes with a photograph and description of the astronomical clock in Strasbourg Cathedral. Scovell's method is a psychogeographic search for layers; each detail of the cityscape, every street walked, is a potential route into the history of place. Distance walked and time explored become one. This can extend to the smallest detail:

Each stall was a cacophony of objects, all shouting for their story to be heard, to be taken out of the flowing, meaningless white noise of history and to be given purpose and voice. There were old beer bottles, perhaps clinked together in pleasure when first full; boxes of postcards sent by the dead to the dead with thoughts and kindness; piles of battered watches, all the more deceased due to their lack of ticking but which perhaps had once been essential in meeting loved ones in those early days of courting...⁴⁹

The great distance of time shortened by the narrator's (and writer's) imaginative vision.

Harrison also examines the relationship between physical distance and the past. Edith, after a lifetime in the asylum, is physically separated from her home:

Awake, I would picture in loving detail the valley's fields and farms, its winding lanes and villages, conjuring up a vision of a lost Eden to which I longed to return. But at last I came to see that there is a danger in such thinking; for you can never go back, and, to make an idol of the past only disfigures the present and makes the future harder to attain.⁵⁰

This is a passage full of carefully crafted irony, but the relationship between space and time is the main theme of the novel; the dissonance of physical separation from the past is not just a psychological concern, it is political too. The role of time and space in fascist nationalist narratives is a major theme of the novel:

⁴⁸ Raymond, *Lotte*, 200.

⁴⁹ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*. 55.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 324.

“...who above all understand the irreplaceable value of our rural traditions, and wish to protect the health and purity of our English soil.”⁵¹

If Edith is separated by time and distance, for Scovell the opposite is true. His narrator, Isabelle, sees little separation between past and present. Current preoccupations and explorations of the past through walking and digital research exist on the same plane:

He continued working with Dritzehn and the other two men, Han Riffe and Andreas Heilmann, drawing all three into a contact for his latest, as yet secret, project. *Your father is dead, Isabelle*. Why the men agreed is not quite certain, especially considering Gutenberg’s many sporadic failures...⁵²

It is a common theme of all three novels that the first-person narrators have a close, indeed supernatural, connection with past and place that brings both comfort and terror. Space and time are layered – as in geology.

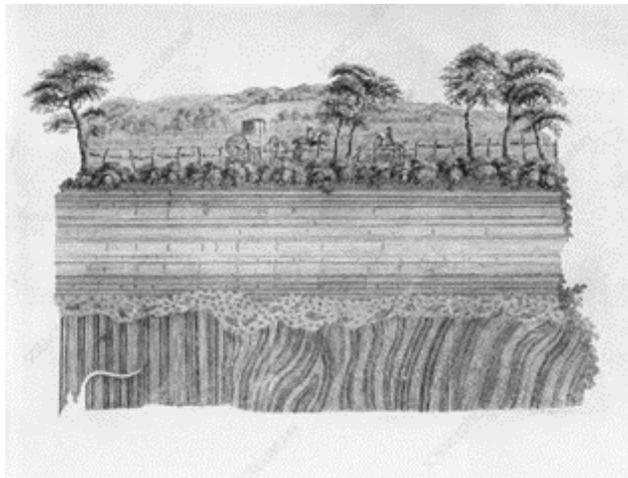


Figure 8. James Hutton, *Unconformity* 1787. Science Photo Library, <https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/135482/view/hutton-s-unconformity-1787-artwork>

In Isabelle’s imagination people inhabit place across time and live on in the space they occupy:

Gutenberg seemed to be doing his utmost to not notice the strange, new presence of the merry-go-round, glaring straight towards the building of the Concorde Assurance, now occupied by a Societe Generale bank, a Cyrllius clothes shop and a lingerie shop called Chantell which lay directly in Gutenberg’s eyeline. His modern view was to be the ever-changing collections of women’s lingerie and negligee, turning the body into lavish patisseries.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 299.

⁵² Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 36.

⁵³ Ibid., 27.

Gutenberg, the original pioneer of modern communication, becomes a window shopper, a consumer with a touch of the voyeur. The imagery contrasts the gravity of his historical presence with the triviality of the goods on display. But the curtain between past and present is permeable.

Wyld's vision of the past – communicated to the present via place – explores some of the same territory, but her version of the male gaze is significantly darker:

Maggie is trancelike. "What would it take?" she says. "What if all the women that have been killed by men through history were all visible to us, all at once? If we could see them lying there. What if you could project a hologram of the bodies in the places they were killed?"⁵⁴

The image of a hologram is a perfect representation of the layering of time and place – and encapsulates one of the novel's core themes.

Chronotopic motifs work through all three novels. The lanes between farms and fields are Edith's world. They lead, always, back to Wych's Farm. The irony, again, is that no matter how far she walks on the roads, they lead her back to the start. Until, of course, she is removed from her environment completely and has only memory roads to walk. In Wyld's most historical narrative, fugitives take to ancient tracks through the woods, but for Sarah, the witch whom the family initially save and later murder, the paths lead nowhere. Only Isabelle in *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us* is redeemed by the streets and suburban roads she traverses. The promise of the motif – of new life and movement – is reached only after struggle and scarring encounters with stories from the past and the supernatural sexual violence of the Erl-king.

I could feel his breathing, the spindly fingers of his terrible hands wrapping themselves over my shoulders, as if he were ready to devour me there and then. But instead he was ready to leave...⁵⁵

All three authors also focus on the liminal, points where different worlds meet or overlap. Harrison creates a night out in a market town to define where the urban and rural meet:

The ladies' room was full of young women chattering like sparrows. They reminded me a little of Mary before she was married, but of course they were town girls, and far more sophisticated: doubtless they would have found her rustic and quaint.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 140.

⁵⁵ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 210.

⁵⁶ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 96.

For Harrison, the liminal is also about unreliability, the narrative points where different versions of reality overlap. The climactic fire is a mystery:

I wanted to tell him that my rage had lit the rick, that I had used my powers to save myself and so it was my fault that everything, everything, had been lost.⁵⁷

...

Frank told me in a letter that most people in the village believed Father had torched the ricks, so deep in debt was he; Frank, though, was of the opinion that they simply heated and caught fire from being damp and badly made. Of course, I confessed at the time that I had set them alight with my powers and so caused the farm to burn. I told everyone who would listen, I told them over and over, but they merely hushed me, and after a while I came here.⁵⁸

Throughout the novel, the liminal is not just about truth meeting fantasy, past meeting present, urban, rural and sanity, madness, it is about an acceptance of a porous world. For Edith, the supernatural world, the world of nature, and the rational world of precarious tenant farming slide into each other. This shifting liminal world is reflected in the moral dynamics of the novel which explore our capacity to treat different interpretations as valid. The liminal is also about uncertainty and nuance:

What I try to do in my books is require readers to exist in a state of moral complexity and doubt, instead of simplifying an issue or sorting the world into 'good' or 'bad.' It seems to me that the inability to tolerate complexity is in very short supply now.⁵⁹

Harrison goes on to explain that she is not an ardent psychogeographer: 'To the psychogeographer it might be an unpeopled, liminal palimpsest ripe for decoding,'⁶⁰ but her own exploration of ambiguous places reflects the core moral impetus of her novel. She wants the reader to embrace uncertainty, unreliability and engage with characters who avoid categorization.

For Wyld, liminality presents itself at every turn. The untamed and indecipherable world of nature abuts the rational human world. Spiders appear on shoulders, foxes at glass doors and the bestial, physical and metaphorical is lurking everywhere. The wardrobe – where you step out of 'public' space into private space or imprisonment – is a recurrent motif in the novel. The beach, on the edge of infinity, is at the other extreme. But no less terrifying. Between sea and land, human and inhuman, the strand is the theatre for the most critical scenes in the novel.

⁵⁷ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 317.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁵⁹ Joe Melia, interview with Melissa Harrison, 2018. *Bristol 24/7*, <https://www.bristol247.com/culture/books/interview-melissa-harrison/>.

⁶⁰ Harrison, interview, Little Toller Books.

Edith, Harrison's protagonist, tells her story from the asylum. She is separated from the events and location of her narrative not only by time but by distance. Indeed, figuratively, there is no distance greater than that which separates a patient in an institution from the world outside. Edith's distancing is temporal as well as spatial:

Wych Farm...I would like to think that my brother Frank, or perhaps one of his sons, have the living of it now; but since a lifetime has passed since I last saw its acres, and because of everything that happened I have been prevented from finding out.⁶¹

The idea of the asylum being outwith time and space, a place apart, more distant than any exile, sent me back to my own drafts. Being without power, being a prisoner beyond the reach of appeal or laws, maroons the character beyond their memories or any sense of normality. Such a strange, dislocating environment would create unpredictable responses in vulnerable individuals. I reconsidered the response of Lotte; would she rage against the constraints, or would she feel so far from her past that she easily accepted the new reality?

Stirling is as historic a setting as Strasbourg. And I had much to learn from Scovell's layering of time. The *Rough Guide*-style deviations are in constant but complementary tension with the compelling narrative of Isabelle's interior life. Similarly, but more discreetly, in my novel, the ancient townscape of the Top of the Town is a regular backdrop through Lotte's story. The historic settings in the Stirling streets have been preserved through successive renovations and improvements and put the past under my characters' feet: a conventional image that I was at pains to avoid describing directly. But I also wanted to reflect the fact that residents tend to take this history for granted. The presence of deep geological time in the quartz-dolerite sill and crag-and-tail geology of the old town⁶² and the rich architectural and social history of the area,⁶³ also create layers of time beneath the characters. I was keen to refer to the steepness of the streets and the drama of the topography. Architecture provided additional opportunities for texture. The shop at the centre of Lotte's family life, 55 Baker Street, is a historically significant building, designed by John Allan. His elevations draw on historic features associated with the late-19th Century revival of English Tudor styles, but which reflect the early-modern origins of Baker Street, a vision that is both alien and

⁶¹ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 3.

⁶² I.B. Cameron and D. Stephenson, *British Regional Geology: The Midland Valley of Scotland*, Third Edition (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1985), 119 and 135.

⁶³ John Gifford and Frank Arneil Walker, *The Buildings of Scotland: Stirling and Central Scotland* (New Haven Yale University Press, 2002)

vernacular.⁶⁴ The building's first incarnation was as the 'Stirling Arms' public house. My novel features the transformation of the pub into a retail unit by Lotte's three aunts. A group of enterprising women occupies one of the most prominent buildings in the town and transform it from an exclusively male place into a clothes shop catering for women and men. Three women, pre-First World War, at the height of the Edwardian patriarchy, express their economic agency. Through the location and style, the building forms a connection with the burgh's ancient mercantile past. These layers, historical, universal and specific are all present at this address.



Figure 9. Jo Cound, '55 Baker Street, Stirling,' Stirling City Heritage Trust, <https://www.stirlingcityheritagetrust.org/2020/09/an-architecture-students-take-on-the-city-of-stirling/>.

My approach to using the symbolic power of place to focus character and provide narrative depth was partially inspired by the extensive use Wyld makes of the landscape to connect past to present and create meaning in her novel. The Bass Rock is as a symbol of continuity: 'The Bass Rock looked not unlike the pony, in its stillness, its disregard for the weather.'⁶⁵ A symbol of indifference too, or perhaps collusion:

There is blood on the mattress, but where it comes from is unclear. It could be from so many places. A tugboat sounds its horn at the lighthouse keeper as it passes the Bass Rock.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Stirling Local History Society, *John Allan: A Man of Original Ideas* (Stirling: Stirling City Heritage Trust, 2018).

⁶⁵ Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 269.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 327.

North Berwick Law is the location of ancient sexual violence, ““What happened to the woman in the shepherd’s hut?””⁶⁷. The same place has significance for Ruth, the twentieth century victim of male violence: ‘There was an old shepherd’s hut on the Law that looked over the town – no roof and the wild ponies sheltered there.’⁶⁸ A humble collection of stones of the hillside becomes a liminal place where past and present meet. Wyld layers time over space and place, underlining one of her bleak reflections – ‘*Men*, she thought with affection. *What are they like?*’⁶⁹ The persistence of male violence held in the stones and woods provides the answer. The irony of ‘with affection,’ adds a grain of complexity that lifts the work above and beyond exegesis.

In my own novel many locations have historic layers. The Old Town of Stirling, The Church of the Holy Rude and Inchmahome Priory in the Lake of Menteith, are all real locations with rich histories. Inchmahome was formerly a place of sanctuary. Lotte flees there at a critical moment. The boatman asks:

‘Would you care for the Mary Queen of Scots story?’
 She smiled. ‘No thank you. I know it.’
 ‘You’re paying,’ he said. ‘I felt I should offer at least.’⁷⁰

The Lake of Menteith Hotel, where Lotte escapes from the rest of her party, is an opulent destination for a prosperous, but perhaps socially insecure, middle-class family in the 1930s. Lotte’s inner turmoil is in contrast with the calm dining room which overlooks a landscape full of connections with a hounded historical figure.

The asylum, a closed community retaining its history and stories behind high walls and barred windows, generates its own unique opportunities for narrative. Research in the rich Stirling Asylum Archive⁷¹ generated almost too many options. Other archive sources associated with Stirling Asylum also highlighted potential narrative strands. The twelve-foot by twelve-foot rooms in plans for an extension to the nurses’ home within the Asylum grounds,⁷² communicated a great deal, not just about the claustrophobic social environment of staff in the Asylum noted in Chapter 1, but also the significant role of newly professionalised nurses.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, un-numbered page beyond p355.

⁷⁰ Raymond. *Lotte*. 299.

⁷¹ Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

⁷² A&W Black Architects, *Stirling District Mental Hospital: Addition to Nurses Home*, 1937, Falkirk Council Archive.

The Asylum physician John Fergusson's own mental health dilemmas feature locations in France between 1914-18. These, too, are based on extensive reading across memoir, historical scholarship and primary sources. For the Stirling scenes I also made use of contemporary travel writing,^{73 74} period maps and photographs.^{75 76} All this is standard practice for a writer looking for period authenticity. What my reading of critical theory suggested was the additional dynamic that tension between time and space could bring to my work. This perspective was given additional nuance by the study of the three selected novels and particularly by their treatment of the liminal moments and spaces.

My period, the 1930s, is a perfect example of a transitional period. Placed between the trauma of one war and anxiety about the next – seemingly inevitable – conflict, characters naturally look backwards and forward. Although the period was one of economic disaster for many, it was also a period of economic transformation, with the growth of middle-class consumerism.^{77 78 79} The spending power of the middle classes can be seen in the pages of the local Stirling newspapers just as clearly as disparities of wealth.⁸⁰ When Lotte's family embark on their car trip into the country, I wanted to demonstrate the casual mobility that this new consumer power permitted. To move from town to country and back again in an early-closing afternoon, for fun, was an experience formerly restricted to the very wealthy. In their visits to a hotel I draw attention to the sort of infrastructure created to meet this new demand. But I also explore how individual concepts of time and space were transformed by technology and the increasing wealth of the middle classes. Personal transport becomes the liminal – a place that is both private and public. To step into your own car is to demonstrate individual power over time and space.

A more established form of human interaction with time and space was the railway, still in its heyday in the 1930s. I set an important scene at Stirling railway station during the Great War. Stations are a classic liminal space, at the cusp of coming and going, those going away and the left behind, stasis and movement. The station platform is a threshold. All of these tensions were exacerbated in a pre-telephone world and the transition for combatants

⁷³ H. V. Morton, *In Scotland Again* (London: Methuen, 1933).

⁷⁴ Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1979).

⁷⁵ Elspeth King, *Old Stirling* (Catrine: Stenlake Publishing, 2009).

⁷⁶ *Ordnance Survey Map of Stirling 1923*, National Library of Scotland.

⁷⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*.

⁷⁸ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars* (London: Methuen, 1988).

⁷⁹ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-1945* (London: Penguin, 1984).

⁸⁰ *Stirling Observer* 1933. Stirling Council Archive, and *Stirling Journal* 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

returning from the un-real world of battle zone to the domestic could not have been more extreme. When Lotte meets Donald his simple act of stepping off the train is a liminal moment of great intensity.

The train doors opened, lurching figures in greatcoats, kitbags. A movement forward from the ragged line of women, each giving the others space to scan the opening doors. The search in the gloom for faces, the hope that it was one they could recognise easily.

Peter was never large. But his coat and bag diminished him further. She knew he was changed from the moment she hugged him. There was an unyielding steel to his back and shoulders, narrow, bony and rejecting.

‘How was the trip?’ she said. Foolish question.⁸¹

The relationship between time and space is an existential, but slippery concept. Thinking about spatial-temporal theories is of immense practical value to the writer. Bakhtin,⁸² Bachelard,⁸³ Tuan⁸⁴ all contributed to my own thinking – about imagery, concepts of distance and time, liminal moments and settings, as well as the relationship between character, narrative and locations. I applied this thinking to the three novels explored in this chapter. Using a theoretical lens to observe how other writers tackled these challenges has been transformative.

3.v. Excursions: Imagination and Space

The protagonists in all three novels are shown walking on almost every page. It is how they encounter their worlds. They are characters created by writers who are alert to the literary opportunities of the pedestrian as much as the practical challenges:

The snow feels heavily and my journey to the university quarter was long and more difficult than I had anticipated due to the weather, continually slipping on the pavements as my shoes had a smooth sole.⁸⁵

For the pedestrian, footwear is significant. Accordingly, Lotte’s boots feature strongly. They are the means by which she establishes agency over space. For Isabelle, walking is how she engages with grief: ‘I continued to walk the streets of the city, in a permanent state of loss.’⁸⁶ But it is by walking and noticing urban details that Isabelle embraces her grief: ‘There were two depictions on its sides that I imagined were ignored by passers-by even in good

⁸¹ Raymond. *Lotte*, 240.

⁸² Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*.

⁸³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

⁸⁴ Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

⁸⁵ Scovell, *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, 96.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

weather,⁸⁷ Walking and seeing are transformative. Her encounters with the people whose stories expand her vision from the darkness of her father's suicide, Michel the homeless drunk poet,⁸⁸ for example, are made possible because she is out, on foot.

Edith walks. There is no option – but for horse and cart or infrequent bus. A bicycle ride is a novelty. Her 1930s is a period on the cusp of a transport revolution, tractors are on the horizon – ‘the world between the wars was very fragile’⁸⁹ – and a technical transformation that Edith will not witness is on its way. For now, she walks and so accumulates the deep knowledge of the natural world that will contribute to her undoing: ‘I showed Connie the woods and copses too, and pointed out the ones that had been planted as cover for foxes – like Hulver Wood at the end of our lane.’⁹⁰ But the knowledge accumulated on Edith's walks and the way it is transformed by her vivid imagination lead her onto dangerous ground:

That this could happen was further proof that I was not a real person, I realized; not real in the way that other people were real: Frank and John and Connie, for example. None of this would have happened to them. Perhaps I had made myself up entirely, and kept doing so every day...⁹¹

Wyld's characters, even the ones with access to trains and cars, walk. And as they walk their imagination transforms:

Wolves have been reported on the edge of these woods. Agnes was found just beyond the boundary of the silver birches, where the light is snuffed out even at midday. You feel the wolves, or the ghosts of them, nearby, watching.⁹²

Even in a period when wolves were an actual presence, being watched by their ghosts is uniquely unsettling.

Walking and imagination are rich companions for the characters in all three novels. Their stories are driven by how they interact with the world around them – both the natural and the built environment. Lotte walks to escape, to find a peace and fulfilment that is denied her by the thwarting of her artistic or commercial ambitions. She partially escapes from the role assigned to her by social class and by motherhood but walks into social judgement and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 198.

⁸⁹ Alex Preston, ‘Fascism Grows Like a Fungus,’ interview with Melissa Harrison, *The Guardian*, August 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/11/melissa-harrison-facism-grows-like-fungus>.

⁹⁰ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 85.

⁹¹ Ibid., 306.

⁹² Wyld, *The Bass Rock*, 151.

physical risk in a world that cannot incorporate her energy and vision. Her escape drives her on to an island – an inland island surrounded by both water and land. From there she sees more clearly a solution, but it is too late. Her walking has not transformed her life positively, and in the asylum, walking is limited to corridors and grounds. Her imagination and vitality are finally only defeated by male, institutionalised power, embedded in the isolated world of the Asylum.

The three selected novels have deepened my understanding of the core dynamic of space and time, the tension between space and place, and the power of the liminal. The borderlands of time and of space – layers of history, thresholds, the road, urban and rural, nature and humanity – are the building blocks of narrative, material for the imagination and craft of the writer. But another liminal is where fact and fiction meet. In Harrison's 'Historic Notes' she says: 'The Order of English Yeomanry is an invention, but in febrile, depression-hit Britain in the 1930s dozens of similar groups...sprang up.'⁹³ In the acknowledgements she credits Martha Crawford, a psychotherapist, 'who helped me understand what a psychotic episode might look (and feel) like, and how it might be represented on the page.'⁹⁴ Some facts are inviolate, some are negotiable. All three novels mesh actuality – factual touchstones – with imaginative creation. *Lotte* does the same. The judgements about what facts are inviolate and which are transformed or invented create liminal tensions on every page. The reader has to trust the choice made by the writer. The responsibilities involved in this process will be examined in Chapter 4.

The complicity of doctors in the British Army during WW1 in giving testimony at courts-martial and the subsequent execution of soldiers, has already been noted in Chapter 1.⁹⁵ There is enough depth of irony here without the need for any invention. Similarly, memoirs and histories highlight that 'success' in psychiatric treatment of officers resulted in the patient returning to action and mortal risk.⁹⁶ However, there is no recorded history of physicians easing condemned men out of their agonizing last night with injections of adrenaline. Similarly, Stirling Asylum was known for its compassion and professional care and management. Drs Fergusson and Sneddon are inventions, albeit inventions located within an accurate representation of both the daily regimes of the asylum and the physicians' well-

⁹³ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*, 329.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁹⁵ Grogan. *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's legacy for Britain's Mental Health*.

⁹⁶ Siegfried Sassoon. *Diaries 1915-1918*. (London: Faber & Faber, 1983).

meaning search for psychiatric treatments that might enable patients to return to the world beyond the wall.

The Boyle's sandy beach isn't a sandy beach. It is a construct of resin and fibreglass. It is a place transformed by the vision and skill of the artist. And time as well as space can be transformed by craft and imagination. This is the alchemy of the three writers studied in this chapter. Using only words, time and space are suggested in a way that explores the fundamental relationship between humans and their world. Visual artists have a wider repertoire of material to work with. Their media brings their work closer to the actuality of place. But what can painters do with time?

Peter Lanyon painted in oils at a level of abstraction far from the exact representations of the Boyle family:

The key to understanding his artistic project is that lines like these do not concern space so much as time: they are temporal elements to guide the eye round the canvas, analogous to the eye following a wave as it rises and unfolds.⁹⁷



Figure 10. Peter Lanyon, *Thermal*, Oil on canvas, 1960, 1829 x 1524, Tate St Ives, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/peter-lanyon-1467>

Lanyon perhaps demonstrates that the moment as well as the place can be represented visually.

The liminal, porous space between the imagination of the writer or visual artist and the imagination of the reader or viewer is perhaps the borderland that is the most significant.

⁹⁷ David Gange, *The Frayed Atlantic Edge*, (London: William Collins, 2020), 327.

3.vi. Conclusion

In Chapter 1 I surveyed four works from different genres to explore the range of ways we can encounter place across fiction, memoir and place-writing. This chapter focusses on the textural detail of three contemporary novels. Although very different in theme and structure, all three share a focus on the interaction between character, narrative, time and place, and all three offer insights into the way that the novelist's imagination interacts with place to create a fictional world. Literature can reflect reality, but always transforms it. Places in literature are changed through the novelist's vision and craft and are only realised through the reader's imagination. The novels explored here demonstrate literary application of psychogeographical practice – a deep immersion in the layers of meaning that can be attached to urban or rural landscapes. All three novelists make connections between the past and present through place and natural spaces and they examine the social meanings of space: specifically, the relationship between gender and space. The novels also reflect the dichotomy that exists within Tuan's concept of space and place – the symbiotic tension between security and oppression, between freedom and exposure to risk. This detailed reading had an impact on my own practice. The recurrence of walls (in the asylum and elsewhere), the role of high vantage points, the significance of liminal spaces (from railway stations to no-man's-land) are examples in my own writing of the influence of close reading and critical theory.

These texts often go beyond a psychogeographical unpacking of the layers that connect place to the past and to human stories. They also reflect a recognition of the uncertainty that often defines a relationship with specific locations. Liminal spaces sometimes harbour doubt. The threshold is often a place of reflection and indecision. By imaginatively connecting place with narrative and character, the literary text can approach our place in the world in a way that explores the liminal and tentative, the places where the social and individual meanings of space intersect.

In Chapters 2 and 3 I have explored how literary theory and practice helped develop my work. Chapter 4 will describe how my psychogeographical practice, alongside memory and imagination, contributed to that process.

Chapter 4

Theory into Practice

Unless you have geography, you have nothing. Catherine Mintler.¹

4.i. A Deeper Truth: Place, Space and Memory

The physicality of walking and the internal landscapes of the imagination have a long and fruitful relationship. ‘Intertwined materialities and sensibilities with which we act and sense’² are the springboard of imagination. John Wylie, walking the well-worn coastal tracks of the Devon coast, speaks of being ‘in’ the landscape as well as ‘up against it’, where the ‘bone-pain of walking is realised in an aching halo of landscape.’³ The effects of a long day out become projected, through the workings of his imagination, on to the formerly welcoming terrain. A reminder that the emotional impact of walking in the landscape isn’t always invigorating and enlightening.

Before engaging the imagination, the psychogeographic explorer must engage the feet and heart and lungs:

One of the gnomic but luminous equations that Benjamin jots down in his Arcades Project reads: “The system of Parisian streets: a vascular network of the imagination.”⁴

And it isn’t just feet, but footwear that facilitates emotional engagement with landscape, as Kerri Andrew’s survey of women walkers suggests: ‘If she was lucky, her boot-clad feet

¹ Catherine Mintler, ‘Solitaire Ambulante: Hemingway’s Modern ‘Man-of-the-crowd’ – the Post-War Journalist *Flâneur*,’ *Ernest Hemingway Society 16th Biennial Conference*, Venice International University. July 2014,

https://www.academia.edu/25970780/Solitaire_Ambulante_Hemingway_s_Modern_Man_of_the_Crowd_the_Post_War_Journalist_Fl%C3%A2neur.

² John Wylie, ‘A Single Day’s Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path,’ *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no.2, (2005), 245, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3804521>.

³ John Wylie, ‘A Single Day’s Walking: Narrating Self and Landscape on the South West Coast Path,’ 244.

⁴ Matthew Beaumont, *The Walker: On Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City* (Verso: London, 2020). 184.

could outpace her distress.’⁵ Indeed, Virginia Woolf, a towering figure in the history of literary walking, places significant meaning on shoes and boots.⁶

The sheer physicality of walking, boots on ground, is difficult to ignore in the city of Stirling, particularly in the medieval streets around the Castle. When my father owned the shop at the centre of my story, JM & M Nimmo at 51-53 Baker Street, he used the strapline, ‘It Pays to Climb the Hill’ on his adverts in the *Stirling Observer*. With adolescent superiority I used to question the wisdom of drawing attention to a barrier, but I recognise now, far too late, that it reflected an astute understanding of place and the people who lived there. The hill, the verticality of the town, was a part of belonging to place. In Seamus Heaney’s definition a connection to place that is ‘lived, illiterate and unconscious’, rather than ‘learned, literate and conscious.’⁷ My father’s strapline was a statement of understanding, of empathy with a life lived on a slope.

Walking as engagement is, as Wylie suggests, also walking as exhaustion. The physicality linked to the emotional, the material experience of steep streets is part of the imaginative response to place.

But what if you cannot walk the streets? The global pandemic of 2020-21 went through several phases. As explained in Chapter 1, except for a brief gap in the late summer of 2020, a common theme of all these stages was a restriction on travel. Psychogeographic research was technically a reserved occupation, close enough to travel for educational purposes. To me that dispensation felt like an indulgence, a luxury, with so many furloughed and families divided.

Necessity is the mother of contrariness. Wouldn’t structuring this chapter by walking the same routes as Lotte be too obvious? Was my journey really necessary? Did I need to walk round Stirling, streets I had known for nearly seven decades? I knew these places so well. And perhaps there was an extra dimension to explore. Here is Ernest Hemingway, on a winter’s day in a café in the Place St.-Michel:

I was writing about up in Michigan and since it was a wild, cold, blowing day it was that sort of day in the story. I had already seen the end of fall come through boyhood,

⁵ Kerri Andrews, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*. (London: Relation Books, 2020), 162. Virginia Woolf had some of the best boots in the literary world.

⁶ John Nash, ‘Exhibiting the Example: Virginia Woolf’s shoes,’ *Twentieth century literature : a scholarly and critical journal*, 59, no. 2 (2013), 283-308, <https://dro.dur.ac.uk/11499/1/11430.pdf?DDD11+dng0jn+dng0jn+dng0jn>.

⁷ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Sense of Place,’ in *Pre-occupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), 131.

youth and young manhood, and in one place you could write about it better than in another. That was called transplanting...⁸

This notion of ‘transplantation,’ writing about place when physically distant from the subject was an aspect of Hemingway’s literary method⁹ – distance and memory providing perspective. His connection with the story is through the weather and season. GSV would not have provided Hemingway with that link – on screen it’s always the same season.

My approach in this chapter is to reflect on the memory of place rather than document my immediate experience of place. The methodological aspects of a memory focussed approach and the implications of prompting and augmenting recollections using Google Street View have been discussed in detail in Chapter 1. In this chapter I want to look more broadly at the impact of my personal connection to place on my praxis. I was not a detached observer when I wrote about Stirling in my fiction. I didn’t observe the stonework in the walls near the Castle or note the way light fell on the setts with the cool gaze of the *flâneur*. The slippery setts in Baker Street were the reason why I split my eyebrow down the middle when I flew off the seat-belt-free seat in my father’s car and connected with the lethal metal dashboard of a 1965 Morris Oxford.¹⁰

Did the Covid-related barriers to travel deprive me of the traditional psychogeographic practice of walking and observing? Elizabeth Bowen, not a noted psychogeographer, pointed me towards a deeper truth:

...the eye, I suppose being of all the organs the most easily infatuated and then jaded and so tricked. Seeing is pleasure, but not knowledge.¹¹

For Bowen, the beauty of Rome is deepened and darkened by an awareness of its history. To understand the past is to transform what you see in front of you. Personal history adds a further twist of complexity. To explore place and its relationship to our own family, culture, memories and narrative takes us into an area where psychogeography and autoethnography¹² overlap, where the landscape becomes animated by a particular type of history.

As Bowen discovered with Rome, there are plenty tourist guides to historic Stirling. My guide was a personal guidebook, formed by experience and stories, myths and lies, tales

⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast: The Restored edition* (London: Arrow Books 2011). 17.

⁹ Jeffrey Herlity, *In Paris or Paname: Hemingway’s Expatriate Nationalism* (Leiden: Costerus New Series No 191 Brill /Rodop’s, 2011).

¹⁰ Dylan Trigg, *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, asserts that the body has primacy in how we connect to place.

¹¹ Elizabeth Bowen, *A Time in Rome* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 4.

¹² Heewan Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*.

told, and tales hidden. The reality of place is enriched by the subjectivity of family and personal history and is a rich stimulus for fiction. Geography as a mould for the imagination – the landscape of memory.

The desire to transform the world is not uncommon, and there are a number of ways of fulfilling it. One of these is by adopting a certain subjectivity, aggressive or passive, deliberately sought or simply the result of a mood, which alters experience of the world and so transforms it.¹³

This is how imagination enhances and combines knowledge and the observed landscape. The lens of memory creates as much as it sharpens. ‘The nature of memory is to mix imagination and fact.’¹⁴ My fiction drew on my memories and lived experience of place to create work which explored the deeper truth of how lives were lived in the past. Place, for me, was a unifier of time and space – a liminal point between past and present. This chapter will explore place through that frame, passing from location to location, some private, some public, some urban and some rural, but always located at a point of tension between past and present. Using the theory explored in chapter 2 and the practice of others examined in Chapter 3, I will examine the social meaning of landmarks which appear in my work, investigate the nature of space, and, where sites are now absent, the meaning of voids. I will go on to review the poetics of space as applied to settings for my fiction, space and time – the interaction of history and geography – and conclude with a personal account of the murky, liminal lands where place and imagination connect.

4.ii. The Top of the Town: Space, Social Meaning and Control

‘With Malcolm, everything *means* – especially what seems insignificant, ordinary, simply part of the ground on which the action is to be painted.’¹⁵ This is Brian Dillon on Janet Malcolm. There is a hint of critique here – a yearning for mere background. But space is never without meaning. The message of Chapter 2 of this study is that to deny space its meaning is to deny cultural, socio-economic, gender and personal history. Chapter 3 demonstrated how fiction can harness the meaning of space and give ‘background’ an intensity that galvanises character and narrative. To utilise the rich potential of place I had to research and understand its meaning.

¹³ Patrick Keiller, *The View from the Train: Cities and other Landscapes*. (Verso: London, 2013), 9.

¹⁴ Thomas Larson. *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative* (Athens Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007), 25.

¹⁵ Brian Dillon, *Suppose a Sentence* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020), 160.

Taking my pandemic walks around Stirling via Google Street View, I first visited my grandmother's childhood home in Upper Castlehill. There is a wall, green slopes and some trees. On GSV I am dazzled by a low, early-Spring sun. The back of Stirling Castle Visitor Centre is visible on the uphill side of the street. In the 1930s it was the Castle Hotel. It is the only building left in this street, it is an 'inverted' building, entered from the Castle Esplanade and carpark three stories above. My Uncle Charles was manager of the shop and visitor centre when it was first re-incarnated as a tourist facility. Such is the imprint of family connections on this small space, the Top of the Town. Of my grandmother's home, 34 Upper Castlehill, not a trace remains. One of many voids.

Walking downhill, cursor-jumping around the corner, we come to Lower Castlehill, a continuation of the same road. The airy view disappears. Lower Castlehill is narrow and shadowed. There are few cars. And then, as we move the Google lens down the street, a young man appears on the pavement. Mouth open, his parka wide in the fresh breeze, a can of Strongbow raised high, he salutes the visiting technology.

The energy and defiance captured here says as much about the history of the area as the displays in the Visitor Centre. I am wary of the romanticisation of poverty. An American summer-school student, a native of a tough stretch of the Mid-West, once asked me: 'Why do you people love poverty so much? You can't get away from it, books, paintings, films...'. Easy to reply that it is because we have so much of it and have done for centuries. Or that misery, despair, desperation and addictions are the stuff of story and the rage, inventiveness and collective energy generated by hardship is enough to power an entire literary culture from Burns to *Shuggie Bain*¹⁶. The persistence of inequality is nothing to be proud of.

Poverty endures but is regularly transported. Chapter 2 of this essay explored theorists who have dissected the ways that the meaning of space is moulded by socio-economic forces. Poverty is exported to peripheral estates; inner cities are gentrified. Yet some spaces resist. My grandmother's home was demolished following decades of public concern about the crowded, insanitary housing in this part of Stirling. Citizens were decanted to the new Raploch estate along the Drip Road, an area which was formerly an open space utilised by the travelling community.¹⁷ 34 Upper Castlehill wasn't the worst building, it is all there in the records.¹⁸ ¹⁹ Other streets in the area were razed and rose again as innovative modern Council

¹⁶ Douglas Stuart. *Shuggie Bain*. (London: Picador, 2020).

¹⁷ Elspeth King, *Old Stirling*.

¹⁸ *Housing Scotland Act 1935, Inspector's Report*, Stirling Council Archive.

¹⁹ *Valuation Roll*, Stirling Council Archive.

housing, architecture which reflected the vernacular, retaining much of the medieval street plan. This remains one of the poorest parts of Stirling.

My novel doesn't romanticise poverty. There are reflections of the energy and resourcefulness – particularly shown by women – as well as the harsh realities. Poverty, and its association with place, is a dynamic driver in the narrative. Lotte and her husband both come from relatively poor backgrounds, both are dislocated from their childhood places and families. They end up living in the best street in Stirling, car-owning, fully respectable if not quite attaining the social authority of the professional classes. Lotte stayed within walking distance of her childhood home. The now vanished childhood home was still there in 1933, just up the hill from the shop in Baker Street which was her means of ascent. It was a constant reminder of where she came from, and where she might, with bad luck, poor judgement, or an Act of God, rapidly return. Did she avoid the building? Or did she embrace the reminder by frequently walking past, as she does in the novel?

Underfoot she felt for the precise moment where the street took her downhill again, the sudden watershed when the ground shifted under you. And then she was in Upper Castlehill, another canyon, the great expanse of the Forth and the glare of open country down to the sea blocked by the dark buildings. She paused briefly at the passageway into number thirty-four, A black entry against the dark damp sandstone. They were scattered now. Her sister, her aunts, her mother. And Peter. They were all gone. But she felt a need to pause here, to note their presence in this place where they once all breathed the same air.²⁰

In this way, place does not only have a socio-economic meaning. Places have personal resonance. We all have our own private maps:

I did my best to avoid passing through the area where I grew up, turned my head when a bus from one side of the city to another came close to one of the hospitals where my mother had been a patient (or worse, the hospital where she died) ...²¹

My father died in the old Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, now the Quartermile luxury development. Like Brian Dillon, for years I took looping circumnavigations of the city centre to avoid being stuck at lights outside the gates.

A shortcut from the Top of the Town, the historic heart of Stirling, to the Victorian town centre around Barnton Street, is the Arcade. For Benjamin, the shopping arcade is the very definition of advanced capitalism, of commodity fetishism, an oppression that went

²⁰ Raymond. *Lotte*. 140.

²¹ Brian Dillon, *In a Dark Room: A Journey in Memory* (London: Penguin, 2006), 192.

beyond social and economic oppression to crush the human condition.²² But the historic reality is more complex. Retail has long been a woman's world. Women still dominate the retail workforce.²³ It was a way to break out. Lotte's mother and two sisters used their knowledge of what other women wanted to escape poverty, to become property owners and forge a life independent of men. This dynamic is explored in my fiction. Working women were pushed back into the home in the 1920s and 1930s, firstly by men returning from war and then by economic depression which prioritised jobs for men.²⁴ But what of women who had established independent businesses? What extra tensions were there for women who were property owners? By 1933 my grandfather had bought 5 Snowdon Place. At the time there were no female property owners in that street. Even in the poorer streets at the Top of the Town a female property owner is hard to find. By the start of WWI, the Nimmo sisters owned the shop at 55 Baker Street, two flats above, and their home at 34 Upper Castlehill.²⁵

These were women who had taken control of their space, who had used economic freedoms to escape, if not to wealth, to a level of precarious comfort. Lotte moves from an environment of female agency to one of respectable convention where her options begin to narrow. Her escape into compulsive walking takes her out into the urban streets and rural roads by night. Solnit,²⁶ Elkin,²⁷ Andrews,²⁸ Harrison,²⁹ as well as male writers on the subject including Beaumont³⁰ and Self,³¹ all reflect on the exclusion of women from public space through actual or perceived risk. In the eyes of all the other characters, her nocturnal walks expose Lotte to male danger. When it comes, the actual threat is from someone known and trusted. But that does not stop a conspiracy to remove her to the 'safety' of the Asylum.

Through the literature of walking, the dangers faced by women travellers have been defined most commonly by men. As Andrews³² demonstrates, lone female walkers have crossed the country from early times in safety. Dorothy Wordsworth serves as an early example. At one point in her extensive second tour of Scotland in 1822 she and her

²² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

²³ 63% of sales and customer service staff are women. Office for National Statistics, *Women in the Labour Market* (London: ONS, 2013).

²⁴ John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (London: Penguin, 1984).

²⁵ *Valuation Rolls*, Stirling Council Archive.

²⁶ Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*.

²⁷ Elki, *Flaneuse*.

²⁸ Andrews, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*.

²⁹ Harrison, *All Among the Barley*.

³⁰ Beaumont, *The Walker: On Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City*.

³¹ Will Self, *Psychogeographies*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

³² Andrews, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*.

companion, Joanna Hutchinson, feel threatened out on the open road.³³ This is a rare occurrence, the two women travel within the confident bubble of their class and their familiarity with rural byways. I gave Lotte a different sort of class confidence from being able to read her environment, to have developed strategies to deal with threats. She has a strategy for dealing with a group of drunk men and does not need to be ‘rescued’ by Thornlee:

She stayed calm. It was a busy street. She wasn’t alone.

‘Brass are you?’

‘First we’ve seen.’

In the confined space the smell of alcohol was strong.

‘Gentlemen,’ she said. ‘You’ve had a fine evening I can tell, please let me past.’ Stay calm. The aunts’ advice. Never look scared because that makes it worse. And get your shoes off to run hard. Better cut feet.³⁴

None of these strategies of place are of any help in the Asylum. She hasn’t the knowledge to deal with the professional confidence of the men of science. She has no rights. There is nowhere to walk to. During the pandemic lockdowns of 2020-21, citizens got a tiny taste of what restrictions in freedom feel like. A sliver of insight into explicit controls over public spaces and private places. In the Asylum everything is controlled, so being able to understand the meaning of this space is pointless. There is nothing to be done, no way of subverting the regulations. The professionals define the space. As a patient and a woman she is doubly constrained by the men in charge.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the asylum is an extreme example of a controlled space. There are other environments where control is more nuanced, but no less oppressive. In the 1930s a quarter of all women in employment worked in domestic service.³⁵ The extremes of this sector are experienced by Grace, Lotte’s housekeeper. The domestic servant is in an uncertain position, part of the family, but ultimately an employee. At home, but at work.

For housekeepers like Grace, the domestic environment lacked the distance and formal separation from employers of a country house or large townhouse. 5 Snowdon Place was extensive by modern standards, but domestic servants, employed by families with modest incomes in what we would now call family homes, found themselves in a sharply liminal space. Included and excluded. Responsible for the home and childcare, but without

³³ Dorothy Wordsworth, *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth Volume II*, edited by E De Selincourt (London: Macmillan, 1952), 391.

³⁴ Raymond, *Lotte*, 258.

³⁵ Delap, “‘Campaigns of Curiosity’: Class Crossing and Role Reversal in British Domestic Service, 1890-1950.’

any ownership of the space they occupied. What did the home mean to women in Grace's position?

For Lotte there is the additional irony of moving from relative poverty and a background in an occupation where she 'served' customers, to a position of authority. Did she treat Grace as she would a junior shop-assistant? – 'She had not been that familiar again. Grace was one thing, but she had enough experience of shop assistants to know how to put them in their place.'³⁶ The challenges faced by women with no experience of directing servants are well documented.³⁷

The social meaning of space, both indoors and outdoors, determined the narrative direction of *Lotte* and the tensions between the characters are fuelled by the different meanings they ascribe to spaces. Lotte feels no fear in streets she grew up in. Sam, who grew up in similar urban spaces, responds with alarm and precipitates his wife's removal to an even more hazardous space because he fears these same streets.

Social class, gender and power all define space. But in my novel the contrast between 34 Upper Castlehill and 5 Snowdon Place, defines Lotte's story. Number 5, the principal setting for the Stirling scenes in the novel, is still an imposing and beautiful house. It is semi-detached with No 3 and is modest against the elaborate and ostentatious houses that stretch away into Kings Park. 'Nos 3-5, c. 1820, is semi-detached Georgian, a gabled whin ashlar house with fanlit arched doorways. But it is an exception for the street which is otherwise Victorian.'³⁸ These other houses are 'immense; a towered assemblage...' '...imposing...' and project a 'douce respectability.'³⁹

Lotte and Sam, with their experiences of cramped tenement stairs, the restlessness of working-class communities in Upper Castlehill and Birkenhead, must have shared a sense of dislocation in 5 Snowdon Place. A sense of anxiety too. They all had a long way to fall.

4.iii. Crossing the Liminal: Space and Place

Lotte had three homes in Stirling – we won't count Stirling Asylum. All appear in my novel, but we do not go inside 21 Wallace Street. The building is still there. It once overlooked the livestock Market. The long, red-sandstone frontage now looks into the blue, featureless side wall of Tesco. Wallace Street is made up of low-level tenements, the sort of upper-working

³⁶ Raymond, *Lotte*, 138.

³⁷ Delap, 'Campaigns of Curiosity,' 33-63.

³⁸ Gifford and Walker, *The Buildings of Scotland: Stirling and Central Scotland*, 748.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 748.

class/lower middle-class, late 19th Century family accommodation that you can find in all Scottish cities and bigger county towns – same style, different stone. They are handsome and solid. It was Lotte and Sam’s first family home. My father, the oldest child, spent his early years there.

But homes are more than economic indicators. Homes are the epitome of Tuan’s definition of place – security and belonging. Or so we believe.

“Do not trust houses,” the French-Egyptian poet Edmond Jabes once remarked, “they are not always hospitable.”⁴⁰ Homes are only welcoming, are only places of security if we feel comfortable there. The unease that Lotte feels in her home is what propels her out into the night. This is not a sense of physical or psychological jeopardy, her husband Sam doesn’t threaten her with violence or oppression, he is a kind man. But Lotte is denied artistic and professional expression. And then there are the Victorian villas of Snowdon Place, the wide street. In 1933 the Valuation Roll lists the neighbours – doctors, merchants, shipowners, factory owners and distillery owners.⁴¹ ‘In three years here the vertigo had never gone away.’⁴² Lotte is exiled from her old home too. Upper Castlehill is associated with the trauma of Peter’s suicide, the old family circle has been destroyed.

Her sense of place has shifted to a broader attachment to the town itself. Her comfort comes from streets she knows well. And the people, a knowledge that gives her unique insights into what customers might want. That, and her music, a talent which connects her to the temporary community of the audience, provides an engagement that goes beyond family. Home and family attach us by imagination to a building, a house. This can manifest itself in strange ways. After I discovered Lotte’s story, I often found myself in my car outside 5 Snowdon Place. I never lingered too long. It is exactly the sort of neighbourhood where authorities would be notified within the quarter hour.

Beaumont has an insight into the grip that buildings like 5 Snowdon Place can exert. For him, some places are haunted – by memories and associations. ‘The word “haunt,” incidentally, is related to the Old English Ham, meaning home.’⁴³ Places which have distant, even tenuous associations for us can exert a pull, similar to the places we lived in as children. For Beaumont, all buildings are subject to a ‘parallax effect,’ where the actual building can be seen from more than one point in space, and so it becomes a third thing, a composite of the

⁴⁰ Beaumont, *The Walker: On Finding and Losing Oneself in the Modern City*, 244.

⁴¹ *Valuation Roll*, Stirling Council Archive.

⁴² Raymond, *Lotte*, 136.

⁴³ Beaumont *The Walker, On Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City*, 14.

two perspectives. At once looming over you, and then more intimate as you huddle under the entrance, your experience becomes a blend of the two. Perspectives on buildings observed can be temporal as well as spatial:

All houses, from the parallax perspective are spectral; they haunt us...The virtual building invoked to provoked by these encounters with the material building in time as well as space is then ...'the architectural uncanny.'⁴⁴

Knowledge of the past provides this temporal dimension. Perhaps the overlying Bachelardian dimension provided by the childhood family home is a peak expression of place seen from a spatial and temporal perspective. Who has not driven past, or Google Street-viewed, a childhood home? Or, like Brian Dillon, taken a different bus route to avoid the rush of associations? The task of describing a childhood home or garden is a staple creative writing exercise.

If the family home is a contender for the ultimate archetypal expression of place, what of the asylum? There are many parallels – difficulty of escape, absence of human rights, vastly unequal power structures, limitations of freedom masquerading as protection. The striking lesson from the Stirling Asylum Archives and the Annual Reports of the General Board of Control for Scotland⁴⁵ and the earlier Circulars of the General Board for Lunacy⁴⁶ is the extent to which the professionals believed in their mission to protect their residents from a world that was hostile and dangerous. The wall was there to keep the world out. Their community was a floating microcosm separate from a society that was cruel, threatening and without understanding. The Asylum 'Magazine and Chronicle,' *The Passing Hour*,⁴⁷ documents this closed but caring world. It is an authorised version, as noted in Chapter 1. The reports of dances, concerts, sports and entertainments defy the darkness of Gothic versions of the asylum. Although he also deals with another period of history, it is a reflection of Patrick McGrath's insight into asylum life that he combines traditional Gothic horror with the even more terrifying ordinariness of domesticity within the institutional walls.⁴⁸ That mundane but isolated community life is reflected in every issue of *The Passing Hour*. One common

⁴⁴ Ibid., 238. Which connects, of course, with Trigg's sense of the 'uncanny when the body responds to places it has experienced in the past.' Trigg, *The Memory of Place*, 5.

⁴⁵ *Annual Reports of the General Board of Control Edinburgh*, Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

⁴⁶ *General Board of Lunacy Circulars Edinburgh 1840-1898*, Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

⁴⁷ *The Passing Hour*, Stirling Asylum Archive, University of Stirling.

⁴⁸ Patrick McGrath, *Asylum*.

experience of Edwardian life which was lacking was the excursion. Lacking for the residents, but not the staff:

In recognition of that all forms of physical restraint had been abolished ... a Coronation Picnic was arranged ... Staff went from Larbert to Balloch by train and then by steamer to the head of Loch Lomond.⁴⁹

I included a reference to staff excursions in my novel, not just to highlight the restrictions on the residents, but to sharpen the normality of the Asylum – the community magazine, the staff outings. Normal. But not normal.

There is still an NHS Forth Valley secure facility on the site of the old Asylum. I have visited a patient there. It is a nondescript, modern building – built to budget. There is none of the grandeur that attaches to photographs of the old Asylum, no celebration of society's intervention in the lives of the troubled. But wherever there are locks there is a crucible. Although the locked ward is an extreme example, all places which have an element of compulsion, either through duty, economic necessity, illness or attendance requirements, have an element of the crucible – schools, hospitals, workplaces. I set some scenes in *Lotte* in a workplace, an environment where power differentials, economic compulsion and the restrictions of set hours generates pressures and tensions between characters. The scenes set in the shop also acknowledge retail's liminal environment – at once private workplace but also a public space. This was even more acute in the past – it was where communities exchanged gossip, an essential factor in creating networks, and a source of female power and agency.⁵⁰ “‘We’re a shop, sir. It’s talkin’ all day!’”⁵¹

In Tuan's definition of place there is a constant reshaping of the relationship between security and the loss of freedom.⁵² In the crucible of the family home, the workplace and the heightened restrictions of the asylum, these tensions can become intolerable. The wider community can exert similar pressures. If place is defined by familiarity and knowledge, then communities also have a capacity to constrain at the same time as they offer security. This avenue has been explored extensively in literature. Elizabeth Strout, for example, examines the dynamic in *My Name Is Lucy Barton*.⁵³ Characters can leave, but never escape, the

⁴⁹ *The Passing Hour*, Vol II, no. 5, Sept-Oct 1902.

⁵⁰ Melanie Tebbutt, ‘Women’s Talk? Gossip and “Women’s Words” in Working-class Communities, 1880-1939, in Andrew Davies and Steven Fielding ed., *Workers’ Worlds: Culture and Communities in Manchester and Salford 1818-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1992).

⁵¹ Tebbutt, 150.

⁵² Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

⁵³ Elizabeth Strout, *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (London: Penguin, 2016).

formative influence of their community, their perceptions of the world are formed within an early network of relationships. Snowdon Place and Upper Castlehill are different communities within the same town. They are two very different places and Lotte negotiates the border between the two. She has expertise in the Upper Castlehill culture, which provides her with professional insights, but the terrain of Snowdon Place is more difficult to navigate. The liminal zone is cultural and socio-economic as well as geographical.

The point where place borders on space, is fundamental to my novel. For example, walls appear frequently – markers, where private property begins and ends, where secrets are concealed. Stirling’s status as a liminal place also adds layers of meaning to my narrative. From her windows in Upper Castlehill, Lotte looks south across the meanders of the Forth, the Ochils beyond and the broad plain that leads away to Edinburgh and the sea. A short walk through the Snowdon Cemetery, where she is buried, gives a very different view towards the line of high hills – Uam Var, Ben Ledi, Vorlich, Stùc a’ Chroin – that mark the Highland line. Lowland/Highland, English/Gaelic, industrial/agrarian, ‘wild’/ ‘civilised’ – as mentioned in Chapter 1, the old bridge across the Forth appears in my novel freighted with romantic meaning for Sam. His childhood reading of *Kidnapped* colours his view of Scotland. As Alan Breck says in Chapter XXIV: “’Forth is our trouble; ye ken the saying., ‘Forth bridles the wild Hielandman.’”⁵⁴ Such a dramatic view of a place of transition would transform the cloudy damp prospects across the Carse of Stirling. The Old Brig of Stirling becomes a link between two worlds. The view transformed by the imagination – the visual enhanced by knowledge. Yet another place altered by its liminality and the work of the imagination.

At the beginning of my novel, Lotte pushes out from the streets she knows, the place she understands, into the night roads of rural Stirlingshire. Her walk to the village of Thornhill across the Carse is a venture into a rural world, the freedom and possible terrors of space. Beyond the streetlights, she is in a world where cattle floats can look like moving cottages in the dark, where tramps instil less terror than unseen cows moving around the black fields: ‘A gate to her right closed across the wider dark of a field and she jumped at the stumbling bulk of invisible cows.’⁵⁵

In the 1930s car ownership was still low, despite the advent of ‘days out’ by car as a distinct leisure activity.⁵⁶ At night, the rural roads were dark and relatively car-free, but Lotte is safer there than the urban streets she knows well. Walking into space she goes beyond the

⁵⁴ Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, 187.

⁵⁵ Raymond, *Lotte*, 127.

⁵⁶ Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

duality of the town, a known, familiar ‘place,’ that offers her security and constraint, that both confines and supports her.⁵⁷

Towards the end of her story, Lotte makes a more dramatic crossing from the known and secure to the other and unknown when she goes to Inchmahome Island in the Lake of Menteith. From the perspective of the ruined Priory, a sanctuary, separated spatially and temporally, she observes her family on the shore. As noted in Chapter 3, the island in an inland lake has a particular resonance in literature.⁵⁸ Land enclosed by water enclosed by land, lake (or loch) islands are a common image in a Romantic definition of landscape as ‘wild’ and ‘untamed.’⁵⁹ Lotte makes her decision to assert herself in this place of chosen isolation. She stands on the shore, on the edge of a bright future. The following day she will be taken to the ultimate enclosed place, from where there is no easy route back.

As I wrote about these places and explored the dichotomy between concepts of space and place, I was again conscious of Heaney’s distinction between a ‘lived’ and ‘learned’ understanding of territory. Because my boyhood village of Callander was so much more rural in character, Stirling seemed like the big city. For me, the orange-lit urban streets were full of dangers, mostly imaginary. The pitch-black country roads, on the other hand, were secretive and familiar.

My knowledge of Stirling is learned, mainly through family lore. My grandfather spoke of Stirling with the same sense of awe that I imagine he had from the beginning. He loved its setting, close to the hills, the ancient history. Perhaps unusually for a man with his background, he wore his kilt with pride. He is buried in the Snowdon Cemetery, alongside all that history.

I do not have any of that feeling of ownership. The complexity of emotions I feel about Stirling are based on second-hand associations. No first loves, sudden successes or crushing humiliations befell me under the shadow of the Rock. I feel more of a sense of ownership now, having written about it. Reading the archives, rolling the facts around in my imagination for two years, or more, I have transformed it into a place that has more

⁵⁷ Sarah Moss in *The Fell* (London: Picador, 2021), presents walking as therapy within a gendered frame. Her character’s excursion is transgressive in a time of pandemic lockdown and she potentially faces additional judgement as a woman and a mother.

⁵⁸ Gavin Francis, *Island Dreams: Mapping an Obsession* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020).

⁵⁹ Keith Hopper, ‘A Sense of Place: W.B. Yeats and the Isle Lake of Innisfree’. *Geography* 93, Part 3 (2008): 176-180, DOI:[10.1080/00167487.2008.12094241](https://doi.org/10.1080/00167487.2008.12094241) and Peter D McDonald, ‘A Poem for all seasons Yeats, Meaning and the Publishing History of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” in the 1890s.’ *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 19, (1999): 202-230, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3508943>, discuss this most famous example of an inland island in literature from the perspective of two different disciplines.

associations, more meaning, for me than it had before. It is a form of possession, somewhere between lived and learned. One way to own a place is to imagine it.

4.iv. What Lies Beneath: The Poetics of Space

The central philosophy underpinning all of my work to date was that places exerted their own feelings — nonsense, of course, half-thought-out old guff that sounded okay at literary events ...⁶⁰

This quotation comes from Kevin Barry, so philosophic assertion is swiftly undercut by ironic contradiction. It is taken from a short story where the narrator's writing, and his personal life, are transformed by location. For Barry, the process is mysterious, it sounds like 'old guff,' but place might still be transformative. The poetics of space are in the uncertain zone that separates what is visible with what lies beneath. Here is where the press of imagination works on what you see and what you feel under your feet. The setts in Baker Street and the streets around are not just of historical interest to me, they are connected always with the road accident and my split eyebrow. In my memory the incident is also associated with my father's firm conviction that in the era of motorised transport the setts should be overlaid with good, grippy tarmac. Before someone was killed. Following the same logic, I spent several days as a reluctant teenager helping cover the heavily varnished, dark wood ceiling in the shop with squares of white hardboard. It was probably Victorian – the original pub ceiling – but practicality overturned aesthetics. And yet, there is a deeper Bachelardian poetic at work here – mutability. The medieval streets adapted and changed to the evolving demands of centuries of mercantile contingency. The Victorian ceiling could adapt too.

The building at 55 Baker Street was always a commercial property. The building began its life as the Stirling Arms in 1890. The architect, John Allan, recognised the historical location with a Tudor effect gable and bow windows which overhang the street in a convincingly archaic way. My relationship with the building follows a process where the bricks and mortar become transformed by what Beaumont calls 'spectres.' Following Michel de Certeau, he describes the process of insinuating; 'a second poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning.'⁶¹

⁶⁰ Kevin Barry, *That Old Country Music* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020), 153.

⁶¹ Beaumont, *The Walker: On Finding and Losing Yourself in the Modern City*, 14.

When I think about the shop, I can organise layers of images which start by taking account of its social meaning as a retail workspace and community landmark. I can add a temporal dimension by projecting back in time to consider my family's long connection with the site, or to the fire that nearly put an end to the business in the 1960s. I can go on to consider the imaginative praxis of John Allan who contrived to fill a space left by an ancient demolished building with a faux-historic corner building, which in time became genuinely historic. All these things converge as I convert the churn of my imagination into words on a page. But that weight of association only makes sense if it resonates with readers. Will readers respond to descriptions of long wooden counters, the sharp hierarchy of assistants and walls of tiny drawers stacked up to the dark panelled ceilings?

Beyond the buildings, beyond the town, my characters often find themselves in elevated places. In an early scene Peter and Lotte climb a wall. The view is transformative. They see their world differently:

‘It’s just the same,’ she said. ‘The view. It’s just what we see from home.’ Although the angle was different, it was what they saw from the kitchen window at home. The airy view over the smoke and jumble of the town, to the curves of the river, the way the bends almost curled back on themselves, the far away hills and the chopped off finger of the Monument.

‘No, it’s not,’ said Peter. ‘We made it ourselves by climbing up here. Look, it’s sharper, brighter. I’ll draw this when we get home. No one else has seen this view.’⁶²

It is the first of many elevated viewpoints, the high widows of institutions, hillsides, tenement windows. The Old Town of Stirling in its entirety is an elevated view-point – the *Top* of the Town.

Places, individual houses, the things in them, have a poetic resonance that engages with emotions at a fundamental level. We pick our words carefully to capture this materiality: ‘My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see. That – no more and it is everything.’⁶³ Words can only work when they engage with the reader’s inner eye, their imagination. The poetic power of place and space combine to create that spark.

Hemingway’s theory was that if you, the writer, could reduce what you saw in your imagination to the igniting gestures and images – don’t elaborate why you feel sad about your marriage ending, just nail the image of the burning farmhouse that launched you on that train of thought – then you could get your readers’ minds to

⁶² Raymond. *Lotte*. 160.

⁶³ Joseph Conrad, ‘Preface,’ *Typhoon and Other Stories*. (London: Everyman’s Library, 1991), 5.

make the same turns at the same intersections and convey the world more immediately than through exposition.⁶⁴

This is place with a function in fiction which goes beyond any mere background. The poetics of space infuse the concrete with the emotional. The specifics of location become the universals of feeling⁶⁵ – the vital liminal space between the mind of the writer and the reader.

4.v. Memorials and Voids: Space and Time

'Fiction is the holding and wielding of time. What you do with time is what matters.'

Colm Tóibín.⁶⁶

When I worked with advertising agencies, I was always intrigued by the concept of daypart.⁶⁷ Media buyers negotiated price with media owners on criteria mainly related to size and type of audience segment. But this was overlaid with the concept of daypart. Some of this makes logical sense – teenagers watched TV when they came home from school, older people were short of alternative activities in the afternoons. I speak, of course, of a pre-internet age.

But there was more to daypart than students whiling away their afternoons with *Countdown*. People had different preoccupations in different dayparts. They thought about what snacks they might buy later in the day as they watched early morning news. In the dread-zone of a Sunday evening, with Monday hours away, their thoughts would turn to holidays, escape. And in a rare moment of harmony, families could settle in to watch the same show on a Saturday evening. This then, was a moment to advertise anything that might involve a shared decision – ready-meals, confectionary and cars.

⁶⁴ Nathan Heller, 'What We Get Wrong About Joan Didion,' *The New Yorker* January 25, 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/02/01/what-we-get-wrong-about-joan-didion>.

⁶⁵ The pathetic fallacy, Ruskin's critique of poets who falsely represent nature for emotional effect, is a reflection on how the authenticity (in context) of how place is represented is as important as the emotion that it may generate. Bertram Morris. 'Ruskin and the Pathetic Fallacy, or How a Moral Theory of Art May Fail.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 14, no. 2, (1955): 248-266, <https://doi.org/10.2307/425861>. The congruity of the emotion and its external manifestation as defined by TS Eliot, *Selected Prose of TS Eliot*, edited by Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 48, is also relevant here. The balance between the representation of place and the emotion that it conveys to the reader should be appropriate, proportionate and authentic.

⁶⁶ Colm Tóibín, 'On Joyce's Craft,' *Words Ireland Lecture Series 2020* (15.00), <https://wordsireland.ie/for-writers/lectureseries/>.

⁶⁷ Thinkbox, *How TV is Traded*, <https://www.thinkbox.tv/getting-on-tv/useful-resources/how-tv-is-traded/>.

Time of day matters. So does season, year, period – all the divisions we place on time. The different times of the day in *Lotte* define what the characters are doing, but I was also aware of the emotions that come more easily at dusk. Here is Lotte on the island:

She was abruptly on the shoreline at the opposite side of the island from the small pier and the boat. Across the still water the hotel was doubled in the Lake, the white refection as vivid as the real thing. Lights were on now. Two pinpoints, one upstairs and one downstairs in the room where she had been sitting.⁶⁸

As I wrote, I thought often about the work of Peter Davidson. His writing on the interaction of latitude, light, season, weather and emotion is instructive and moving.

One of the surest ways of defining the mind of the north is to define it in terms of light: prodigality of light in the white nights of summer, paucity of light in the dark of the year. And the slow blues of twilights between them and the lamps coming on one by one.⁶⁹

Time is identified as a live thing, something to be wary of: ‘Sunday evenings were the time of greatest peril,’⁷⁰ ‘protracted spring and autumn twilights...a feeling of belatedness, of time running out.’⁷¹

Davidson goes beyond connecting time to emotion by invoking the particular resonance that comes from light effects in particular locations: ‘...a lifelong attentiveness to place, and to the change and flux of light and season, especially, but not exclusively in the north.’⁷² Time of day, season and location cannot be separated:

Melancholy is one of the pleasures of the north, the appreciation of that which is beautiful even as it changes or disappears, the sense that northern conditions make the passage of time acutely apprehensible.⁷³

Elsewhere, Davidson sharply dismisses the romanticism of those who view the North as a playground. His observation is that place, season and time of day can combine in northern latitudes to create a unique emotional experience for those attentive to the light.

I took the precise time frame of my novel from the recorded facts. My grandmother died in the Asylum on the 22nd of April 1933. She was admitted on the 6th of April.⁷⁴ I compressed the timescale to six days before and six days after the date of admission. That

⁶⁸ Raymond *Lotte*. 300.

⁶⁹ Peter Davidson, *The Last of the Light: About Twilight* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷² Peter Davidson, *Distance and Memory* (Manchester: Cancarnet 2013), 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁷⁴ *Stirling Asylum Archive*, University of Stirling.

year, the early part of April was dull and cold, according to the *Stirling Observer*, but there was ‘fine Spring weather’ by the middle of the month.⁷⁵ The liminal months and weeks – an unpredictable season. I have always felt at home in spring and autumn, where the daily, or hourly, variations in the weather can seem like a new season or a reversal to an old one: ‘The light outruns the weather as spring draws into summer.’⁷⁶ These are dynamic times of the year – perfect for a narrative where being out in the weather is significant. I noted the technique used by Jon McGregor to describe human affairs in the same paragraphs, in the same breath, as reports of the interaction of season and weather: ‘In February there was no snow but the frosts were hard. Ruth was sent a Valentine’s card and knew that it came from Martin.’⁷⁷

Reflecting the season, respecting weather and the implications of time of day, noting how time interacts with place, are not marginal in my work. Filtering the interlacing of the spatial and temporal through the human consciousness is the practice of all art forms. In this essay I have drawn on visual art and its exploration of place, time and the human experience.

Places in art are not real places. They are productions of imagination and craft. Consequently, time as well as space are subject to individual interpretation. Illness, physical as well as psychological, distorts time. Perhaps it is the greatest manipulator of perceptions of time:

The family starts to live in accordance with another rhythm, a variable tempo marked by the organising of hospital appointments, the dull terror of an encroaching diagnosis, the sudden precipitous speeding up of time occasioned by an emergency in the middle of the night. You live as if time had been splayed and dissected...⁷⁸

I wanted Lotte’s illness to be equivocal, revealed in sudden outbursts, but she is not ‘mad.’ She is impatient and she experiences distortions of time. When she is walking alone time lengthens, in the dark there are long hours where life is paused. Peter appears. Lotte steps out of time at these points, that is part of what she gets from these retreats. Time is conditional. Here is Brian Dillon again:

What we persist in calling time is in fact only the evidence of movement in space, inscribed in the world around us in so many useful exhilarating ways: the motion of the clock’s hands, the exuberance or languor of the seasons, the infinitesimal or suddenly accelerated erosion of the face or body.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *The Stirling Observer*, 14th April 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

⁷⁶ Davidson, *Distance and Memory* 15.

⁷⁷ Jon McGregor, *Reservoir 13* (London: 4th Estate, 2017), 86.

⁷⁸ Dillon, *In the Dark Room*, 167.

⁷⁹ Dillon, *In the Dark Room*, 192.

The most obvious temporal factor in *Lotte* is the fact it is a historical novel. The time frame ranges from 1914 to the eve of the Second World War. At the time people did not know they were living in a crucial period of history, bounded by two wars and gripped by economic and social upheaval. The anxieties generated by living at this time of dynamic change have been noted by historians.^{80 81}

Any approach to the period must come with an awareness of the multiplied fears and forebodings and the widespread sadness that make a consistent background and foreground.⁸²

All wars produce liminal moments – MacMillan suggests wars can create, accelerate or delay change.⁸³ A period between two global conflicts is cursed in a special way.

The Stirling War Memorial in Corn Exchange was unveiled by Field Marshall Earl Haig in 1922, part of a complex process of national healing that has been carefully documented and explained by Jay Winter⁸⁴ and by Geoff Dyer.⁸⁵ It is a modest sandstone obelisk with bronze work.

The Corn Exchange Road memorial is plain. It eschews angels, great men, heroic, helmeted infantrymen in attitudes of resilient defence or quiet contemplation. This memorial lets the dead speak for themselves. All of them. 744 for the Great War. Closely packed in neat columns.

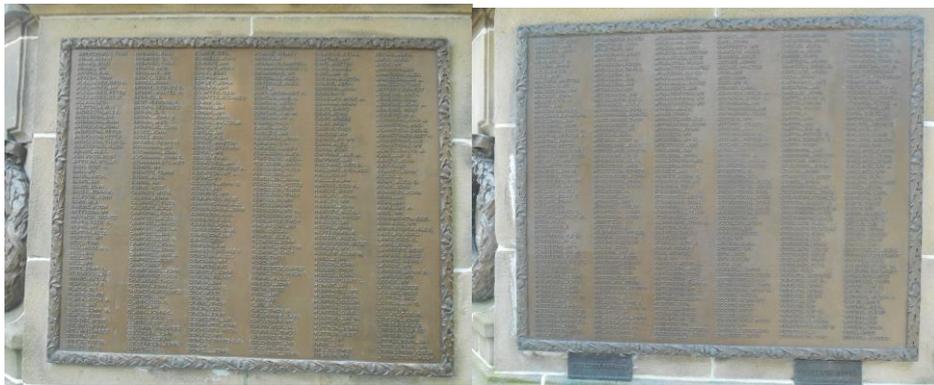


Figure 11. WWI Names A-L (l) and WWI Names L-Z (r), Stirling War Memorial Corn Exchange Road Stirling, <https://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/116958>

⁸⁰ Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*.

⁸¹ Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s: The Deceptive Decade*.

⁸² Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁸³ Margaret MacMillan, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (London: Profile Books, 2020).

⁸⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Geoff Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*.

Geoff Dyer's book explores the meaning of memorials, the great towers of Thiepval and Vimy Ridge and the overwhelming rows of crosses in the huge cemeteries across Northern France and Belgium, places kept so immaculate it is as if, he says, time does not exist. Municipal memorials are ostensibly looked after, but are often victims of council cutbacks and the odd bout of vandalism. They are so much part of the landscape they are almost invisible. But at their core are the names. The significance of the names register with fewer and fewer people as time goes by, but alongside familiar black and white photographs and a few war poems they are the most prominent cultural reminders of the period. Dyer focuses on the impetus that created these memorials in the inter-war years, the need to mark and remember in a particular way, to create new places to help the bereft make sense of their loss. This weight of grief and memory was everywhere in the 20s and 30s. So much so that Dyer concludes: 'The war, it begins to seem, had been fought in order that it might be remembered, that it might be memorialised.'⁸⁶

That great moment in time, the First War, changed people's perceptions of time in the same way as an illness might, both accelerating and drawing out. That distortion of time altered the meaning of place, too.

Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage, were hollow or obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.⁸⁷

This quotation from *A Farewell to Arms* is often used as an indicator of the disillusion and waste of World War One, the betrayal of youth, the lies of the hollow words. There wasn't great support for waste and betrayal in the 20s and 30s. As Winter points out, there was plenty grief and suffering, but few wanted to add the pain of pointless loss to the mix. There is plenty 'glory' and 'honour' on the memorials. But Hemingway was prescient, for now, over a hundred years on, what remains are the places. 'The concrete names of villages' are

⁸⁶ Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, 19. Dyer draws heavily on Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. The discussion on how best to memorialise war is dynamic and constant. Prof Nina Parish and colleagues have interrogated the role that memorials to war, and to WW1 in particular, have in defining our understanding of critical moments in the past. Museums allow for a more complex communication of the past than memorials, but even here there can be distortion. The museological language of the displays and the architecture of museums dedicated to war, with their 21st century, cosmopolitan emphasis on victimhood and suffering can de-contextualise and de-politicise the complexity of violence and conflict. C. Cercel, N. Parish, and E. Rowley. 'War in the Museum: The Historial of the Great War in Péronne and the Military History Museum in Dresden,' *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, no. 2, (2019): 194-214, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2019.1580846>.

⁸⁷ Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 144.

what we know of the War, the great battles named for minor rivers, obscure hamlets. That and the awe we still feel at the great columns of names on the memorials.

This is the culture of loss that Lotte and the other characters inhabit. Both my maternal and paternal grandmothers were young women through the four years of war. The boys, their classmates, boyfriends, crushes, enemies, were all of fighting age. All risked becoming names on memorials. Time and place came together in a terrible way. The role of memory in the two decades between the wars must have distorted not just time but how they viewed places. Did they linger around the war memorial or find a different route into town?

Photographs were another entry point for both the War and the 1930s, and a way to explore time and space. The photograph below shows J M & M Nimmo's shop. The canyon-like nature of the street is clear. As are the setts. 55 Baker Street looks imposing amid the other buildings. There is no date for the photograph. Only that it is post World War One. Is that a blurred figure in the doorway? Was it one of Lotte's aunts? An assistant? Or Lotte herself? Or maybe just a display of clothes, given shape by my imagination and the need to for an image of her.

For I have no photograph of Lotte. That is not entirely true. I have seen a photograph of Lotte. Once. It is in the possession of one of my cousins, I think. But that is it – one brief sight of a photograph. What do I recall? She was very attractive, very well dressed, sitting at an upright piano.



Figure 12. '55, Baker Street Stirling,' unknown photographer, Rootschat.com, <https://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=496369.0>.

She wears a beautiful bracelet on her left wrist, the one closest to the camera. It was the subject of much speculation from my mother and my aunt. It had ‘gone out of the family.’ Always a bad outcome. Her black curly hair. Did I make that up, to fit my description in the novel?

This, then, is a complex relationship with the photographic resources. A memory of a photograph is one stage removed from the primary function of photographs, to create a ‘kind of little simulacrum’⁸⁸ that merges time and space. Photographs from the past do something more remarkable: ‘that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.’⁸⁹ This is not memory in any conventional way. ‘Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory.’⁹⁰ Perhaps because I didn’t have her photo on my desk as I wrote, I have been protected from the counter-memory. It forced me to engage more imaginatively. It has certainly given me more latitude in how I describe Lotte.

Photographs have great power to weave connections between time and space. So much so that they can initiate a whole work of fiction. *How Pale the Winter Has Made Us*, for example: ‘I started with around forty photographs I’d picked up around the flea markets of Strasbourg.’⁹¹ I can’t claim that much, although when I discovered the details of my grandmother’s death in the Asylum, the partly remembered photograph haunted me.

Another batch of photographs did take a firm grip on my imagination and influenced the novel. These were photographs of railway stations taken during the First World War. Stations are liminal spaces deeply immersed in time, indeed, as we have seen in a previous chapter, the railway system virtually invented modern timekeeping.

⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9. Sontag, *On Photography*, 15, is even more succinct: ‘All photographs are *memento mori*.’

⁹⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.

⁹¹ Adam Scovell in conversation with Robert Macfarlane, Granta online, <https://granta.com/robert-macfarlane-and-adam-scovell-in-conversation/>.

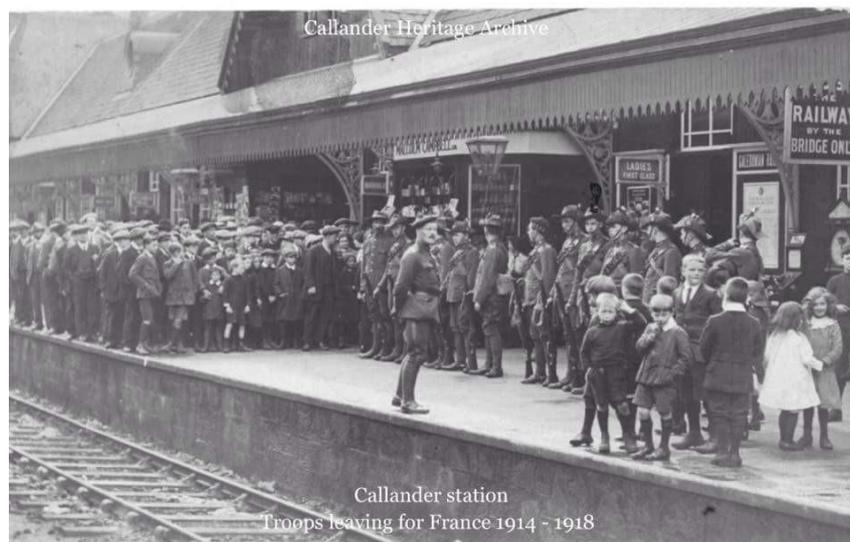


Figure 13. 'Callander station: troops leaving for France 1914-18,' Callander Heritage Trust, <https://www.facebook.com/callanderheritage/>.

This is my home village, Callander, not Stirling. The spatial connections between a small village and a global conflict seem to me to be particularly moving. But Stirling was also a relatively small place in 1914 and the connection with the barracks at the Castle meant that there was a strong military tradition.

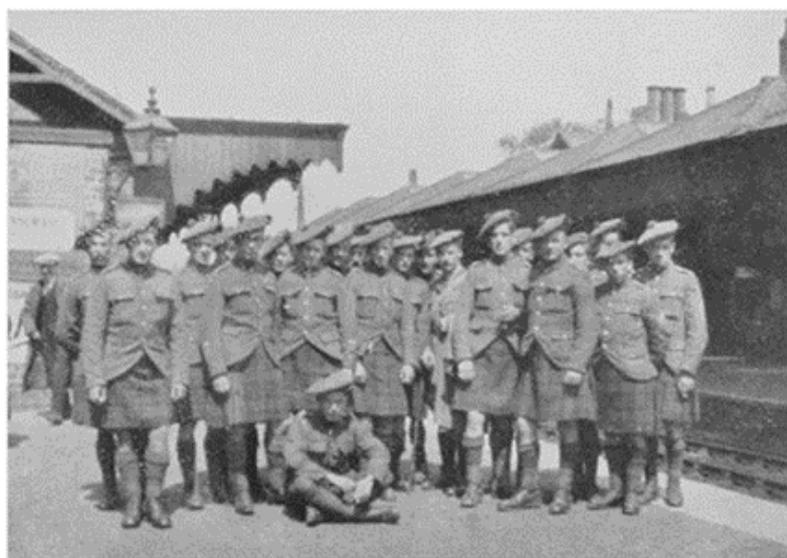


Figure 14. 'Stirling Railway Station,' Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum, <https://www.smithartgalleryandmuseum.co.uk/remembering-ww1/>.

Inspired by these photographs, I set a scene in *Lotte* in Stirling Station. I went to the other liminal moment associated with these spaces – return rather than departure. But the focus on the critical temporal event, the transition from space to place, is a core chronotope in my novel. Stations are where the Bakhtinian threshold and open road meet.⁹²

Similarly, I drew on a photograph from Elspeth King's book to create a scene involving Lotte and her sister, a moment where Lotte is brought face-to-face with the dangers Peter is facing in France. The photograph shows captured German field guns at the top of King Street, Stirling in 1915.



Figure 15. Elspeth King, 'Military Display, King Street 1915,' *Old Stirling* (Catrine: Stenlake Publishing, 2009), 31.

Two soldiers guard the weapons. It is a fine piece of wartime propaganda. Most people in the photograph are aware of the photographer at an upstairs window, they are still and posed, unlike the blurred cart and motorcyclist in the background. There are two women, a child, a pram. A boy, who might just reach conscription age within the next three years, looks carefully at the mechanism of the gun. There are only two men out of uniform. And right at the centre of the image, two young women stare straight out at us. They have little of the stiff formality of even informal pictures from the period. The two young women are cool, poised

⁹² Railway stations are also the forerunners the airport and motorway services of the later 20th century – the non-places of Marc Ange, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*.

and confident. They are, I imagined, the two sisters, Charlotte and Marguerite on the verge of their lives.

Lotte walked up to the rope stretched between poles pushed between the cobbles. She was as close as she could get to the wheels, the vicious simplicity of the barrel, the oiled complexity of the levers and the breech. It was as powerful and beautiful as a steam engine. She thought of Peter's love of the intricate and functional, how he loved to sketch down at the station – the precise detail of moving parts.⁹³



Figure 16. 'Military Display King Street 1915,' detail.

What is the temporal-spatial truth embedded in these photographs? It is true that photographs, like paintings, 'give the illusion of stopping time.'⁹⁴ Or, as Walker Evans notes in relation to photographs; 'what any present time will look like as the past.'⁹⁵ The reality, of course, is the terrible revelation articulated by Barthes:

What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: She is going to die: I shudder... over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.⁹⁶

⁹³ Raymond, *Lotte*, 210.

⁹⁴ Davidson, *Distance and Memory*, 6.

⁹⁵ Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment*, 290.

⁹⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

Photographs also have a particular role to play in understanding places which are no longer places.

Here is Stirling Asylum, or at least one of the buildings in the complex.



Figure 17. ‘Larbert Bellsdyke Hospital during demolition 1990s,’ Historic Hospitals: An Architectural Gazetteer, Mental Hospitals in Scotland, <https://historic-hospitals.com/mental-hospitals-in-britain-and-ireland/mental-hospitals-in-scotland/>.

By 2021 even this ruin had gone. Like the site of 34 Upper Castlehill, it is a void. At least there are photographic records of the Asylum site in its glory.



Figure 18. ‘Stirling District Asylum c1950,’ Historic Hospitals: An Architectural Gazetteer, Mental Hospitals in Scotland, <https://historic-hospitals.com/mental-hospitals-in-britain-and-ireland/mental-hospitals-in-scotland/>.

The voids are poignant commentaries on the effect of time on place. But as Elizabeth Bowen states in the quotation at the start of this chapter, the visual is no great guide to the past. Even when photographs stop time in the historical moment, photographs shorn of knowledge deceive. As Susan Sontag also says, for all their power photographs ‘cannot themselves explain anything,’ and as such are, ‘inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, fantasy... Only that which narrates can make us understand.’⁹⁷ Maria Stepanova

⁹⁷ Sontag, *On Photography*, 23.

takes this argument a stage further: ‘Only photography shows the flow of time as if it never existed ... Text is a different matter: it consists entirely of time.’⁹⁸ And Tom Crewe notes that photographs are nothing without the exercise of imagination:

[Photographs] remind us that the exercise of the imagination is fundamental to our experience and understanding of history: we mentally extrapolate from objects or photos to the people and environments that produced them.⁹⁹

The more work I did to imaginatively narrate the past, the less I worried about the lack of visual references. Any concerns I had about the voids – the buildings gone, the photographs taken from the wrong angle, the photographs half remembered – slipped away. What did it matter that I had no photographs of Lotte, or the building at the heart of my story? Would I have been any the wiser without context? And I had other sources to draw on. I had the dimensions of the property that Lotte grew up in. Four apartments – 177 square feet, 108 sq. ft., 241 sq. ft., and 162 sq. ft. – not huge, not tiny. In 1935 it was owned by David Muir, the estranged husband of Margaret (Lotte’s aunt) then residing in Canada, and was occupied by James Plank a confectioner, and his wife and two children. The rent was £15 a year.¹⁰⁰ The inspection was due to concerns about the state of the housing across the whole area – 34 got a clean bill of health. It was demolished anyway. From the detail that it was no longer owned by Margaret Muir, I guessed that something had happened to take the family away from the property. I had no idea what it might have been, but it was enough to develop a narrative about an event that had dispersed the family.

If photographs are untrustworthy guides to time and space, then voids are negative expressions of time and space. Contextual knowledge and imagination have a lot to do. But what is the correct balance between knowledge and imagination? What facts should be respected?

Some decisions are easy. Three hotels initially featured in *Lotte*. The Golden Lion in King Street Stirling has been around since 1786, but the Lake Hotel at Lake of Mentieth and the (ultimately cut) Roman Camp Hotel in Callander became hotels in 1936 and 1939 respectively, beyond my 1933 timeframe. Both were established in response to increasing demand from well-to-do motorists for refreshment and accommodation as part of the growing popularity of tours of the scenic countryside by private car. The underlying rule here is the

⁹⁸ Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, 294.

⁹⁹ Crewe, ‘Short Cuts: Found Objects’, 27.

¹⁰⁰ *Housing Scotland Act 1935. Register of Inspections, Upper Castlehill*, Stirling Council Archive.

one I adopted throughout. To stay true to the broader historical trend, but to adapt the factual detail where necessary to accommodate, or drive, the narrative.

Other decisions were more complex. There were no electric shock treatments in Britain until the late 1930s. I felt it was too much of a leap to include Electroconvulsive Therapy experiments in the Stirling Asylum. Nor were there experiments with drugs in the Asylum. But the wider impetus within the medical profession to find a ‘cure’ for insanity, to be able to send residents home, was a recognised broader historic truth from this period.¹⁰¹

Similarly, the notion of a ‘Lost Battalion,’ of deserters, made up of a mix of combatants, existing beyond the legitimised conflict in no-man’s-land is a well-established myth. Paul Fussell describes it as the ‘finest legend of the war,’ and credits its popularity as a myth to the fact it; ‘conveys the point that German and British are not enemies: the enemy of both is the War.’¹⁰² It is a perfect imaginative expression of the potential of the ultimate liminal space. Historical myths, as well as historical facts have their place in imaginative reconstructions. Which facts are sacred is a dilemma for all historical novelists.

Pat Barker adds an author’s note to the conclusion of *Regeneration*: ‘Fact and fiction are so interwoven in this book that it may help the reader to know what is historical and what is not.’¹⁰³ I keep Barker’s key character, Dr W.H.R. Rivers, off-stage in *Lotte*. But I was keen to reflect the spirit of humane rigour he brought to his psychiatry. I drew on Sassoon’s¹⁰⁴ personal reflections and to the imaginative reconstruction of Rivers and his work at Craiglockhart set out across Barker’s ‘Regeneration’ series of novels.¹⁰⁵

Here is Tom Stoppard to an actor who questioned a historic detail in rehearsal: ‘It is only a fact. Truth is quite another thing and is the work of the imagination.’¹⁰⁶ And so we return to the role of the imagination in making sense of time and space.

¹⁰¹ Roy Porter, *Madness: A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰² Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 124.

¹⁰³ Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (London: Penguin Books 2008), 241.

¹⁰⁴ Sassoon, *Diaries 1915-1918*.

¹⁰⁵ I also drew on Pat Barker’s *Toby’s Room*, (Penguin: London, 2012) to help develop the character of Peter, a veteran with facial injuries. Marjorie Gehrhardt’s *The Men with Broken Faces: “Geueules Cassees” of the First World War*. (Peter Lang e-book, 2015), <https://www.peterlang.com/document/1053406>, was also helpful with its exploration of the social and cultural impact of facial wounds in post-war Europe. Fictional and historical insights supplemented each other.

¹⁰⁶ Hermione Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life* (London Faber & Faber, 2020), 615.

4.vi. Space, Loss, Memory and Imagination

On my Google Street View tour, following Lotte around the town and country, I paused at one point on the bridge which crosses the B822 in the Carse of Stirling. The Forth is modest here and the flat lands stretch off in all directions. But there in the distance is the unmistakable shape of Ben Ledi.



Figure 19. Google Street View, Google Maps, <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@56.1389217,-4.1450711,3a,90y,270h,89.5t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sbC5YcWqIZ6LaPwIg8d1Z1g!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>.

The same shape that the artist D Y Cameron repeatedly captured, the hill at the end of the plain. Working from his studio in Kippen (a village elevated above the Carse), Cameron became obsessed with Ben Ledi and its position on the edge of the Highland line. He painted, drew and etched the motif over and over. In Cameron's representations of Ben Ledi there is an understanding not just of geography but history – the political, social, economic and cultural significance of this liminal space. The image engages the viewer's sense of distance and longing – the imaginative possibilities of time and space.

This was the country road I had Lotte walk as dawn came up:

Blues and pinks in the sky, cloudier than she had imagined, hanging over the broad fields of the Carse. Her legs were tired now. She was hungry. She took out Grace's scone. It had crumbled away in her pocket to half its size, but she ate it anyway. The great hills to the north – Ben Ledi, Stùc a' Chroin, Vorlich – were fully formed now.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Raymond, *Lotte*, 129.

The liminal made visible, the lowland levels with the Highlands in sight. My feet were not sore from the hard road, the GSV image featured the painfully white clouds and intense blue of an afternoon in high summer. It was a long way from my setting, near dawn in treacherous April weather. I had Cameron's more ethereal image in mind.



Figure 20. D.Y. Cameron, *Ben Ledi, Early Spring 1914*, Oil on Canvas (131×115·5), Tate Gallery, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/cameron-ben-ledi-n03209>.

I might have got more from actually walking the B822. It would have been illegal under lockdown restrictions in place at the time. But also immensely hazardous – the traffic on country roads is much more dangerous now than it was in the 1930s. And, if I were honest, I got more from Cameron's work. I felt the stillness, the distance, the cold, the loneliness and peace. That is what I wanted for Lotte. What I needed to imagine.

However, the visual stimulus, both real and artistic, did not tell me what it was like for a woman in the 1930s to be out alone on the country roads. For that, I needed to read history, to read writers like Solnit, Andrews and Dorothy Wordsworth. I needed history and geography, time as well as space.

The role of place in my imaginative process was vital. Baker Street, Upper Castlehill, Snowdon Place were as important as the characters. I had to imagine the exteriors

of the buildings, all that they meant socially, politically, culturally and poetically, the details of their interiors and what was outside the window, the displays on the counter tops in the shop to the view from the Top of the Town all the way down the Forth for these were the settings that animated my novel. These descriptions are what bound the narrative and located the characters; ‘...a need for the concrete, those things that anchor...in time and space.’¹⁰⁸

The tools used to provide this positioning, this grip on the temporal and spatial, are words. Beaumont points out that words heal the split between the inner and outer life – positioning characters in the world. And they do so by using what Raymond Williams calls, ‘...the most deeply known human community – language.’¹⁰⁹ What makes this connection between writer and reader possible is language and the transformative power of imagination. To give nearly the last word to Henri Lefevre: ‘Everything is changed into something else by my imagination.’¹¹⁰

In writing about the past, the interplay between the imagination and historical fact is complex. Hilary Mantel explores this relationship between historical record and the novelist’s imaginative, subjective interpretation of the facts:

You are not buying a replica, or even a faithful photographic reproduction – you are buying a painting with the brush strokes left in. To the historian, the reader says, “Take this document, object, person – tell me what it means.” To the novelist he says, “Now tell me what else it means.”¹¹¹

The novelist transforms what they find in the archives and creates a different version of the past.

But there is something else I was conscious of in the writing of this novel. How personal a process it was. How I drew on my own engagement with the places I was writing about. A quotation from Linda Cracknell helped me to understand this element of my practice:

The writing of any story is mainly re-writing...I think of it as a repeated walk; a loop with varieties and diversions. Re-writing our memories is like that too. We subtly reconstruct them as we go, so that life stories are less like photographic, objective reality and more like an act of imagination reinvented over and over.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Kathleen Vandenberg, ‘Joan Didion’s Memoirs: Substance and Style,’ *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 39, no. 1, (2017): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440357.2017.1326451>.

¹⁰⁹ Beaumont, *The Walker: On Finding and Losing Oneself in the Modern City*, 185.

¹¹⁰ Keiller, *The View From the Train: Cities and Other Landscapes*, 184.

¹¹¹ Mantel, *Reith Lectures, Transcript Lecture 1*, BBC, 2017, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2017/reith_2017_hilary_mantel_lecture1.pdf.

¹¹² Andrews, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking*, 249.

This captures so much of the experience of writing – the way memory, place and history become woven into the process of making and remaking sentences. The work of Joan Didion was a trusted guide, her exact craft and the immersion of self in her work. Not so much her later memoirs of loss, but her exploration of family mythology, *Where I Was Coming From*. She was practiced in writing about place and past. This is how she wrote her first novel – living in New York she found herself:

experiencing a yearning for California so raw that...I sat on one of my apartment's two chairs and set the Olivetti on the other and wrote myself a Californian river.¹¹³

This sort of homesickness is a form of grief, a loss. And grief and loss are also about time:

What's left is what all plays – all stories – are about, and what they are really about is time...what governs the narrative we make up, just as it governs the narrative we live in: the unceasing tick-tock of the universe.¹¹⁴

It is why the voids are as significant as the buildings that are left behind. They embody in their absence all the people who have gone. It is why photographs, for all their inadequacy and sadness, are important. It is why places mean so much, for they are the connection to what has been lost. This is where Didion's work helped me make sense of what I was up to with my novel. She helped me to understand *why* I had written it as well as *how* I had written it. 'Didion begins a memoir on loss by foregrounding writing itself.'¹¹⁵ By writing about death Didion tried to make sense of it, absorb loss into her sentences. In her cool craft is an attempt to understand loss.

There is another void here. My grandmother's death was never spoken of. Not by my grandfather, my father, uncle or aunt. These Asylum deaths rarely were. There is a record of her admission to the Asylum, a record of her death¹¹⁶ and a notice in the *Stirling Observer*¹¹⁷ and *Stirling Journal*.¹¹⁸ Not enough, perhaps, for nonfiction. But plenty for fiction.

The demands of writing, the apparent timelessness of places and their associations, combine to give comfort. I could not have set the novel anywhere else but Stirling. It was part of the story, a clear fact in the centre of the fiction. Fiction is the artifice we use to understand time and space. But it is also the artifice we use to understand loss. For

¹¹³ Joan Didion, *Where I was Coming From: A Memoir* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004). 156.

¹¹⁴ Lee, *Tom Stoppard: A Life*, 692.

¹¹⁵ Vandenberg, 'Joan Didion's Memoirs: Substance and Style,' 44.

¹¹⁶ *Stirling Asylum Archive*, University of Stirling Archive.

¹¹⁷ *Stirling Observer*, Tuesday, April 25th, 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

¹¹⁸ *Stirling Journal*, April 27th, 1933, Stirling Council Archive.

all our efforts, the past is out of reach, loss remains beyond our total comprehension. Just as well:

We can never fully retrieve the past from these relics – a blessing surely, as the past in all its detail would overwhelm the present – but it doesn't stop us trying.¹¹⁹

I thought I was writing about loss to make sense of time and space, but really, I was writing about time and space to make sense of a loss.

4.vii. Conclusion

A psychogeographical approach to writing unlocks the layers of meaning in place, bringing history and geography together to animate character and narrative. Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in 2020-2021 limited traditional psychogeographic fieldwork, but also necessitated a fruitful hybrid approach, melding digital tools with personal memory. Bringing personal recollections to the foreground and distancing physical engagement with the environment has the effect of approaching place from a creatively rich direction. Memory engages additional strata of associations with the environment and triggers reflection on the writer's own relationship with the environment. By focussing on a narrow geographical area, my creative practice connected memory to individual and social history, while a theoretical understanding of place and space released the rich potential meanings embedded there. The difference between space and place animate Lotte's social journey and help precipitate her crisis. Dramatising her journeys – moving between locations which have very different social meanings – reveals the distance she has travelled socially, emotionally and physically. The communities she inhabits both embrace and exclude her. The home represents security but also a snare. The Asylum is simultaneously a sanctuary, prison and a workplace. Physical surroundings can be full of impact and meaning. The banisters in Lotte's different homes are tiny textural details but interpreted through a Bachelardian lens, they are no longer guardrails, security, but a reminder of past trauma. Similarly, an understanding of the Bakhtin's interpretation of time and space not only gives thresholds and open roads a narrative dynamic, but invests walls, high windows and islands with layers of meaning. Even that which is lost, the people and places which are now gone, have a strong presence within an understanding of place. For the writer, imaginative reconstructions based on faint traces in the historic record emerge from a tension between respect for factual frameworks, however

¹¹⁹ Frances Stoner Saunders, 'The Suitcase,' *London Review of Books* 42, no.15, 2020.

fragile, and creative freedom. The voids are also a reminder of the importance of time in creating fictions – through the dynamic of chronotopes or the role of seasonality or time of day in colouring narrative. Photographs are another type of void – traces that emphasise loss – evocative triggers for the imagination bringing together time and place.

Fiction is not history; the relationship is nuanced and contested. Fiction aspires towards a different type of truth. An eclectic range of research and theory can be combined to create a work of the imagination that uses factual material for the ultimate purpose of creating a more powerful and convincing fiction. Historical truths can be incorporated where they contribute to character and narrative, but can be distorted or abandoned where they might dilute the strength of the fiction. The value of staying faithful to place is that location not only carries with it great literary potential, but it is a point where time and space can intersect. Place is a liminal point between past and present, where writer and reader can exercise their imagination within a constructed historical world that is connected to a recognisable landscape.

Throughout this critical study, and through the creative text which follows, the physical act of walking is a strong presence. I have discussed in detail the alternatives – the role of the digital derive, the power of memory – but the physical act of walking is a fundamental means of direct engagement with the human environment. It plays a key role in the development of my central character. Psychogeography tells us that there is much more to walking than the distance covered. Multi-dimension interaction with surroundings is at the core of the psychogeographical approach, an approach that has led me through a consideration of methodology, theory and close reading to a detailed investigation of how an understanding of place has informed my own writing. The relationship between character, narrative and place is deep within the texture of my novel. Where the action happens, how the characters respond to their environment and the significance of details of indoor and outdoor settings are all animated by this study of the meaning of place. The result is not a hybrid historical travelogue because art, while it reflects reality, also transforms it. My version of Stirling in *Lotte* reflects not just this critical study but my own experiences and memories of the place.

Lotte is not primarily ‘about’ place. It is concerned with the tensions between freedom and security, about being true to yourself but being kind to others, it is about means and ends, it is an exploration of gender injustice, about meaning well and doing badly, about the long impact of war and the imperative always to do no harm. But all of these themes are embedded in a story which is told through the placement of characters in a particular environment. How

they respond to place is at the centre of how the story unfolds and the themes emerge. What Helen Gardner says about TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*, that they: '... do not begin from an intellectual position or a truth. They begin with a place, a point in time, and the meaning or the truth is discovered in the process of writing and the process of reading,'¹²⁰ is true of *Lotte*, as it is of many novels. The process of writing and reading is driven by imagination – 'the great stewpot or crucible of the imagination.'¹²¹ An understanding of how place, space, and traces of the past impact on human beings – the psychogeographical imagination – animated the writing of this novel.

¹²⁰ Billington, 242.

¹²¹ Philip Horne, *Henry James: A Life in Letters* (London: Penguin, 1999), 500.

Section 2

Lotte

Thursday 16th March 1933.

She closed the heavy door behind her, shutting all of them in: Sam, the boys, the baby and Grace too. Lotte sensed their sleeping bodies in their rooms, imagined their breathing, the tiny disturbances in the quiet house. She pulled on her gloves. Embracing the dark she let herself be collected up by the night.

On the pavement she paused, inhaled the cold air, sharp with smoke and dampness. As distinctive in its way as the smell of her baby's hair. This was what she needed.

She strode down the wide familiar street that curved past the high villas, their towers and gables, on around the crouching mass of the dark church on the corner. Her boots clicked on the stone. She felt no need to think about how she might be seen by others – perhaps a fellow insomniac, reading or smoking near a window.

The road was straight. Above to the right, the bulk of Stirling Castle floated between the rock and the inkier black of the sky. Three pinpoints of light up there, always. Lotte marched on. Her heart beat faster as she concentrated on the soothing mechanics of walking, finding a pace that would take her the maximum distance in the time she had. An apple and a crumbling scone in one pocket. In the other, her purse.

The last few villas were the biggest, back from the street, only the steep roofs catching the gaslight above big stone walls. She was on the edge of town now where paths ran down through the woods from behind the Castle rock. She did not want to run into a group of working men, emboldened by drink and the dark. Not that she feared working men, how could she? But she was wary of drink and wanted no intrusion in her solitude.

A parked car lay ahead, one red light glowing against the immense dark of the open country beyond. As she approached she quietened her step, ghosting as she went past. A daring lovers' tryst? Very modern. Or was it a commercial traveller sleeping here to avoid costs? Perhaps one that served the shop. She did not want an awkward conversation in the dark.

Then a junction. North or west? She sniffed the air like an animal. Already it was clear of the smoke that gathered under the lights on cold nights. There was a suggestion of a

frost but, if anything, she was too warm inside her tweed coat. She turned to the west, the long level road along the Gargunnoch Hills, the flat fields of the Forth stretching away on her right. A road so straight there were no surprises in the daylight. But in the depths of the night it was adventure itself.

Occasional lamps gleamed from cottages and farms, in the distance the ochre clusters of lit villages. The still air amplified her steps on the road. She kept well out from the hedgerows and ditches, clipping along briskly on the gravelly centre. As her eyes adjusted, she distinguished different grades of darkness. The faint light of stars through scattered clouds picked out the dusty breadth of the road. Darkness pooled under trees and in the shadow of hedges. Out here there was no smooth tarmac and she could smell and feel the animal waste under her boots. No matter, they'd clean, and she couldn't always watch her step. She was out here because she did not want to watch her step. A gate to her right closed across the wider dark of a field and she jumped at the stumbling bulk of invisible cows. Her heart raced in the old, bad way. Calm, calm. She breathed slowly, taking her body in hand, settling it like a fidgety horse.

She forced herself over to the gate. Took in the sweet, silage smell of cow breath and the tearing sound of pulled grass. She ran her gloved fingers across the top bar of the gate, smooth from leaning farmers and stretching beasts.

'Just cows, just cows, just cows,' she said, breathing purposefully.

'Just fucken cows alright, lassie.'

Stepping back, the skin on her arms crackling with electricity, she felt her pulse in her fingertips. There was a peak of fear but then it was gone. There was no mystery here, she could make sense of this voice in the dark. And besides, there was a five-barred wooden gate.

'Good morning to you, missus.' The voice was Glasgow, of course, but not the roughest sort with notes of somewhere else, Ireland or Argyll. She could see his shape between the bars of the gate, sitting up, half under the hedge: hair, a beard, eyes white in the starlight. Over the smell of damp and dirt, the sharpness of spirits.

'Good morning.' She was breathing normally again, her heart at rest.

'A fine bright night to take the air.'

'Yes it is.' Politeness could get you through any encounter. 'Spring weather can be uncertain.'

'You don't need to tell me of that. The only warm air here is the breath of these beasts and that would stun an elephant.'

‘The dawn can’t be far off.’ She slipped her father’s watch out of her inside pocket. After 3am. She calculated the effect of the dull flash of gold on the man. But no, she knew there was no danger here.

‘The dawn is earlier every day.’ He coughed and in the dark field some cows made a short, thumping run.

‘Are you travelling far?’ She gestured back towards the streetlight glow. ‘You’re only a few miles from the town.’

These last few hard years had increased the traffic of men and women on the roads. Whether heading north or south, their quests funnelled them into Stirling where they beached in the vennels and the lodging houses.

‘Town isn’t the place for me. I am not partial to the company.’

‘Are you going to a job?’

‘Work isn’t the cure.’ He had made no attempt to rise, but his eyes never left her. ‘It’s the money that can put your right. Put you back to where you came from.’

‘And where have you come from?’

‘I had my business.’ He paused, pulled on a bottle and the ether smell came through the dark again. ‘I am an engineer. We were small, three men strong. The best axle brackets in Scotland.’

There was a rustle above in the trees. Birds beginning to move.

‘But carts are going and there was nothing from the bank and then you’ll do anything to stay afloat even if that sinks you quicker.’

She was leaning, listening as his voice dropped away. She reached into her pocket, into her purse. Without pulling it out she felt inside for a folded pound note.

‘Please take this.’ She bent and passed the note through the bars of the gate. His hand came into the dim half-light and touched her glossy gloves for a second. ‘And please try to give up the alcohol. You know it will not help.’

‘Thank you, madam.’ She sensed he wanted to say the right thing. ‘I would have been welcome in your house once. I will be again.’ He was gathering himself as if to rise.

‘Please, I’ve disturbed you long enough. I must move on. Goodnight, and I wish you well.’

She walked on quickly, not through fear of being followed, but to get away from what he embodied, a once comfortable life sprawled now under a hedge. How close they all were to having nothing. She glanced back. There were only black shadows where the gate lay between the hedge and the arching trees. But beyond the Ochils and the Castle rock, there

was a lightness to the sky. She felt strong and clear. This was better than sleep and far better than a dark bedroom, the clock ticking and Sam restless in his own room.

At a crossroads she took a road to the right. As the sky became less dark, the black hills to the north began to form. The going was easy and level, her heart was steady and she turned to the fields and hedges. Sam, the house, the shop, Sheila, the boys, her constant sense of anxiety were all soothed by the smells and sounds of the night. Even the words of the tramp could be worked away by the regular beat of her boots on the road, the ping and rattle of the odd stone she scuffed and sent rolling into the verge.

Then she saw the cottage. At first, she could not distinguish whether it was coming towards her or she towards it. She stopped. It continued. Square and dark with two small lights downstairs. Again, her heart broke into a run. *Was it happening again?* A live drunk behind a gate was something she could understand. But this vision was a real threat. She stood, tall and tense, quivering as she waited for her mind to make sense of the impossible.

As it approached in the dark she heard the growl of the generator, a modern farm with its own electrical power. And then it was upon her. Towering, forcing her to step back on to the verge. The two men in the front, one old, one young, above the headlights and underlit by the dashboard, their brown coats and caps. Then as the float inched past not much faster than she could walk, she peered in through the slats. The huge liquid eyes of the calves, the delicate lashes and the sound of their breathing. Market day, of course. She watched the cattle truck sway into the dark till all that was left was a tiny red light.

A first bird sang. A blackbird, invisible in a tree as she passed below, its soaring treble filling the tree and the night. The single voice was joined by others as the sky lightened. She looked back over the hedge to the south and east. Blues and pinks in the sky, cloudier than she had imagined, hanging over the broad fields of the Carse. Her legs were tired now. She was hungry. She took out Grace's scone. It had crumbled away in her pocket to half its size, but she ate it anyway. The great hills to the north – Ben Ledi, Stùc a' Chroin, Vorlich – were fully formed now. Closer, she could see the lights of Thornhill, built on the slope above the Carse, like a coastal village. She sang,

'I to the hills will lift mine eyes
From whence does come mine aid...'

Her voice rose above the road and mingled with the birds. The mist was thickening in the half-light when Peter appeared out of a lane, sauntering, swaggering even. He was wearing his helmet with the camouflage cloth, the one in the only picture she had of him in France. The only one not in a studio, no painted backcloth, but summer fields stretching

away. This morning he had no rifle, but his pack was high over his shoulder, a cup or a canteen clanked. His face was pale but unmarked, tired around the eyes. Suddenly she noticed how gritty her own eyes felt.

‘Hello, cousin.’ He winked. ‘You’re early out.’

‘Late. I’m not sleeping.’

‘Over-rated, sleep.’ He had a cigarette in his mouth now. The match flared in his face, warming it. She would have touched his cheek, felt the stubble that was still new to him. But that couldn’t be.

‘I’m better out here, in the open. You said in the open it’s safe.’ She drew closer to him, to the glow of his cigarette in the dawn.

He smiled in the shadow of the helmet. ‘Little good it did me, in the open, out under the flares.’

‘I can’t do it. This life isn’t working for me.’

‘You’re a woman now, Lotte. What did your mum say – you make your bed? My mum would have said the same. They were all great fatalists – the aunts.’

‘Until they made things happen out of nothing.’

‘You have your own family now.’

‘I think I’d be better away from all of them. And then I think they would be lost. And I’d be lost too.’

‘They need you, Lotte, more than you need them. Get some sleep, some peace.’

‘I’m lost.’

‘But you’re not, Lotte. In your fine coat and collar.’ He let out a thick screen of smoke. ‘You’re a woman of this town – of some standing. And the children. Keep on. This is nothing. Try a three-day bombardment.’

Two farm girls, a milk-churn between them, came out of a road-end in a giggle of gossip.

‘Fine morning missus,’ said one. The other rolled her eyes. What was this woman doing out in the dawn?

Lotte marched on. Peter usually cheered her, but it wasn’t a lasting help. She walked on as the sun rose and the birds settled. She passed two cars and a motorbike trailing exhaust before she came into the village to the chimes of the church bell. Six o’clock. At the inn she asked the maid for a pot of tea and if she could call a car to take her back to town. As she drank the tea from the floral cup she looked out of the window across the ground she had

crossed in the night, towards the Castle and the smoke rising above the town as fires were lit in a thousand grates.

The car took her back down the same roads she had walked in the night. In the gathering light and shifting mist the journey seemed shorter, prosaic. But the calm she had absorbed from the darkness stayed with her even though the ride in the back of the large car diminished the distance and the wildness. The night, the walking, had worked.

The road seemed so different now, in daylight, in the shell of the car, it was just scenery passing. She couldn't identify the gate and there was no sign of the tramp.

When they reached town she asked the driver to drop her round the corner. As she walked from Melville Terrace into Snowdon Place, she saw Dr Campbell's car leave a plume of blue smoke in the roadway.

At the foot of the front steps she looked up to see Grace standing in the doorway. The two women said nothing. Grace turned her back and Lotte followed her into the sitting room. The house was silent.

'Where is Sheila?' said Lotte.

'Sleeping upstairs. I called Dr Campbell.' Grace offered nothing more. She was going to drag this out, it seemed. Lotte pulled her hat off, ran her hand through her hair and made towards the doorway, the stairs. Grace stood in her way:

'Best to let her be. The child has suffered all night. As if she was choking. Breathing coming and going. I held off waking the house. Because I knew you were out again.'

'Let me see her.'

Grace stood square in the doorway.

'I waited till they'd all got up and breakfasted and were away to work and school. "Is Lotte not up yet?" Sleeping late, I said. And Sheila too. Just let her sleep. Imagine what it was like for me, waiting, holding off, hoping all was well' She gathered up the corner of her apron to dab the corners of her eyes, one after the other.

'Please tell me what Dr Campbell.' Lotte clung on to the night's peace even though the front room was flooded with light now, motes floating.

'He did a full examination, Dr Campbell. Colic he said, and left a bottle.' She looked out from under her brows. 'Just colic. But that's not how it looked in the middle of the night.'

Lotte stood, walked into the light of the long window.

‘Why? Where do you go? Leaving your family. What if something happens? There’s men, there’s all sorts.’

The two women faced each other. The rich red rug glowed between them in the morning sun.

‘Because I need to. I need to walk.’

‘I paid Dr Campbell out of the housekeeping – so he wouldn’t send an invoice. I lied to your husband, your children. I can’t lie for you always.’

‘I know. You’re like a sister. This,’ she swivelled on her heel, taking in the room, ‘would be so much more difficult without you.’

Lotte turned away again, into the light. When she heard Grace’s feet on the stairs she went over to the piano and lifted the lid gently.

Chapter 1: Thursday 13th April 1933

Lotte looked down into the garden. She watched as Grace moved along the clothesline, the weak sun on her hair, red with flecks of white. Beside her, the three-year-old lifted the next wet bundle from the white circle of the basket, her silent babble constant as Grace dipped and stretched. Reflected in the window, Lotte ghosted against the brightness of the grass, the orchard beyond with its haze of green buds. Grace pinned Sheila's clothes on the line. Identical white dresses, grouped together, almost holding hands.

She turned away from the window. The bedroom mirror, long, framed, was set at an angle that added to her height. Black skirt, white blouse, the tangle of hair and her face – insomnia pale. In the shadow of the room her brown eyes looked as black as her hair and skirt.

'No grey,' she said, softly. 'No grey.'

Out on the landing, light from the cupola overhead flared on the dark wood of the curved corner table. Downstairs a clock began to chime discreetly.

'Ten,' she said. 'Already.'

She took the stairs deliberately, as if counting, down its long curve. On the inside of the steps, as she always did, away from the mahogany banister with its brass studs, the iron rods. She thought of the stairs in her old home. This was not like the shared tenement stairs she had grown up with, spiralling down into the dark, past the sounds of rage and joy, muffled behind the blank doors on the gloomy landings. The smell of dust and cooking – and worse – as you descended. Here, all was sun and beeswax. She clicked the final brass fitting on the newel post with her rings. For luck.

Down in the hallway she took in the bright semi-circle of light above the front door. The hall table. The umbrellas, walking sticks in a tight bundle. For a second there was silence – Sam at work, the boys at school, Grace and Shelia down the garden. The world was her's alone. This was when all was well. Content. Settled. She felt the urge to pause, put her foot on it, like trapping a leaf on a breezy day.

Grace and Sheila were coming, their voices rising, through the back door, through the kitchen, up the back stairs, along the passage, their feet on the parquet and then on the tiled hall.

‘Mummy! See me helping!’

‘Of course, sweetheart. Are you feeling better now?’

Grace contemplated her. Sheila nodded vigorously.

‘She’s the best helper, aren’t you?’ Grace put the girl’s hair behind both ears. The curls sprang out straight away. ‘She does more every day. All good things to learn.’

‘There are plenty other things to learn than hanging out washing,’ said Lotte.

Grace licked her finger and rubbed at an invisible mark on Shelia’s cheek. The girl made a face and ducked out from under her arm. She pushed into Lotte’s side.

‘Mummy save me!’ She giggled, looking up at Grace.

Grace reached behind and retied her apron. The cotton draped white and spotless almost to the floor.

‘I’ve bean soup for us at lunchtime.’ Grace pursed her lips at Sheila. ‘Missy’s favourite.’

‘Ugh.’ The girl shoved away from her mother, bounced off the hallway wall and leaned back against the housemaid.

‘Careful. Careful,’ Grace said, gathering the child in to her side. ‘Bean soup?’

‘Just for you and Sheila,’ said Lotte. ‘I’m thinking of going out. It is such a fine day.’

‘Me too.’ Sheila called.

‘No. You and Grace will have lots to do here and you don’t want to miss the bean soup. We can take a walk into town in the afternoon maybe.’

Shelia was between smiles and tears, balancing with one shoe on top of the other as if deciding which way to go.

‘Of course,’ said Grace. ‘It’s helpful to give me warning.’

‘I just need to get out. You know that.’

‘Whatever you want, that will be fine for me. And Sheila.’

‘I’ll be back after lunch and we can all go out before the boys get home from school.’

‘Of course,’ said Grace. ‘You do as you think best.’

A little silence fell in the hallway. The three of them, gathered in the light of spring, the back door open, the house coming alive with the chill air from the garden, a smell of damp earth and trees.

‘I need to be out, Grace. If you think I shouldn’t, then say.’

Grace took one step towards her, and smiled. Sheila slipped into the space to be circled by the two women.

‘I just need to know what the plans are. We’ll be just fine here you know that. I can take a bit of ordering about.’

‘What would I do – ‘

‘– without me? You’d be fine.’ Grace ran her hand along the edge of the hallway table. ‘There’d be a bit more stoor. And Sheila.’ She wriggled her fingers down the back of the little girl’s collar. ‘Might go hungry. But you’d all be just fine.’

‘I know that’s a lie,’ said Lotte. ‘But it’s a nice lie to tell. I’m sorry these have been difficult times. But we will get there. I’ll get there.’

She leaned over Sheila’s head and touched Grace on the arm. Lightly, like a breath of wind.

‘Come away Sheila-shilla, till I show you how to soak the beans in a pot.’

‘Beans in a pot,’ said Sheila. ‘Beans in a pot.’ She looked over her shoulder as they marched down the hall. And then they took a step to the right and were gone.

Lotte stood tapping one foot on the polished floor. The black and white tiles with their strange perspectives and shifting shapes. Deep in winter nights she sometimes stood in the cold hall – her coat on, the house silent around her – searching these tiles for patterns, her walk almost forgotten.

But not today. Not with the spring sun. She took her coat, the one with the fur collar, for there was brightness but no heat in the sun, and her hat, pulled down over her wild hair.

‘I’m away,’ she shouted into the deep well of the house. There was a bubble of sound from the kitchen, far off. She buttoned her gloves, took an umbrella out the stand, the black one, matching, and opened the door.

In the past week, as the seasons turned, the wide street had gone from photograph to painting, from monochrome to intense colours, the flowerbeds across the road in the Crescent vibrant with green, yellow and blue. She stood for a moment at the top of the steps. Wondering. She wasn’t a visitor here. These were her steps, more or less. Her railings. The little front garden was kept finely clipped by Mr MacKenna. And there was Mr Dick’s villa across the way. The hulking mass and tower of Mr McAree’s house. She didn’t know all the names, the distillery owner, the dentist, the accountant, the Inspector of Schools, the Medical Officer for Heath, the architect, the shipmaster, the iron-founder. Her neighbours. ‘They might have bigger houses, but ours is the oldest,’ said Sam. ‘They’re all show. Our house was the very first in the street. When the rest had cows grazing.’ Sam made a joke out of the

snobberies and insecurities of the neighbours, but there was a serious undertow, as if he were trying to push away his own insecurities and snobberies. And though their house was older, they were the recent arrivals.

It wasn't so much the houses for Lotte but the gardens. The grounds. The huge open spaces between the buildings seemed a wild extravagance. 'Look,' said the proprietors, 'we've so much space we can squander it. We would rather have the beeches, the lawns, the bushes as big as trees. And even though you will never see us in these gardens, we can buy this land just for the pleasure of looking out at it.' She thought of the two rooms with six of them living there, the door on to the narrow stair and then out on to the street. Someone always in the shadowy hallways and stairs. Here the lavish garden, the wide pavements and wider road were usually empty. A gardener behind a wall, a housemaid, hardly ever a neighbour, and then a nod, no more. 'Not unfriendly,' said Sam. 'Just their way.'

In three years here the vertigo had never gone away.

She took the hill at a hard pace. Her heart beat faster, the blood pounding in her ears, she could sense the great channels though her body swelling. When that happened at night, in the dark, lying in bed, there was nothing she could do. Accelerating, racing, the more she panicked, the faster it got. But out on foot, when she was moving, she could take control, slow down, focus on the world and not the dark inside her head. Even on the flat she kept a fine rhythm, the sound of her heels on the stone always soothed, but she did not slow for hills. And here there were hills everywhere. This was her Stirling, the town of hills and cobbles and old streets.

The ancient streets, the streets of Kings, and Queens. On days she felt attuned to the world, she could smell the ages coming up between the cobbles, the history in the filth that collected between the stones. Some cars and vans rattled past, the pale blue coal fire smoke high above against the rapid spring sky. Past the County Buildings and the bulk of the Carnegie Library, the Athenaeum spire. Almost-grand buildings of a former capital.

Window shoppers peered at the sweeping bow front of McCulloch and Young. The new windows full of clothing, craft supplies, furniture. Everything and nothing. A man in a long brown coat and bunnet was very carefully examining a tastefully arranged cascade of long woollen underwear. She stopped and stood alongside him, following his intense eyeline.

When he realised she was looking at underwear with him, she felt him flinch like one of his own beasts caught with a switch. She spoke before he could start away, back to the farm.

‘They’ve the exact same, you know. Up the hill. At half the price.’

He looked at her, his clear outdoor eyes, not quite eye contact.

‘Aye.’

‘Just two minutes. Save yourself a shilling.’

She moved off before he would be crushed by embarrassment. The hussy speaking to him in the street. She knew the town men better, their bold hopeful eyes.

She turned into Baker Street. The cobbled hill narrowed away into the distance, into the haze of smoke and poverty. There were fewer vehicles up here, only delivery vans and the odd military car passing on its way to the Castle. A breeze came down the dark canyon. Old newspapers, bloody butcher’s wrappings, rose up in the middle of the street. Women hurried past, all in dark clothes, the older women wrapped in shawls as if against Highland gales. There were plenty Gaelic speakers up here towards the Top of the Town. When she lived here she would hear them through the walls sometimes. The songs, some surging with joy like waves on the shore, others a distilled essence of misery.

Outside the shop – their shop – she paused to take in the windows. Too many prices. Just a few to set the level were fine, but too many confused the customer. And more colour might help. She went through the double doors, both wide open despite the cold in the shadowy street. Everyone was busy with customers. Lotte hung back and noted how her arrival brought a tiny change of mood. Did Mrs Wilson increase the volume of her conversation with her customer? Her white hair as rigid as the cornicing around the shop, she was showing a linen nighty. The customer looked much more prosperous than their usual clientele. Someone fallen on hard times perhaps. Did the two sisters, Lolly and Lizzie, start to move just a bit faster? They were both serving a more typical pair of customers, an adult daughter, backed by her formidable mother, haggling over several pairs of overalls. One sister was talking to the customers, stroking the rough cloth of the overalls as if it were the softest, deepest velvet while the other balanced on the steps opening one of the hundreds of narrow, precisely labelled drawers that lined the walls.

They weren’t twins, Lolly and Lizzie, one was the elder, but she was never sure enough of not mixing them up to use their names. One had a gladder eye, she knew that, and Sam thought she was responsible for a few extra customers. Probably Lolly, if she was the one who had once told her: ‘You could join us, become a sister. Lolly, Lizzie and Lotte.’

She had not been that familiar again. Grace was one thing, but she had enough experience of shop assistants to know how to put them in their place.

Lotte organised a bowl of remaindered wool, turning it from a jumble into a careful pile, labels upwards, and marvelled at how everything – the boys, Sheila, Grace, Snowdon Place, the MG and the Collard and Collard piano – all depended on whether customers would turn to this display and want to buy.

She turned as she heard the door open, up at the top of the stairs at the back of shop. And there was Sam, so neat in his suit. Immaculate, glints of gold at cuffs and watch chain across his waistcoat. She walked past the customers – Mrs Down-on-her-luck now held an embroidered pale blue nighty up to the light – and followed Sam into his tiny office. He sat in his wooden seat back to his desk, a smell of duplicating paper filled the narrow room. Light fell from a distant skylight.

‘Princess,’ he said.

‘Sam,’ she said

‘Sheila?’

‘Grace.’

‘Of course.’ He reached over and pulled a spindly chair from under a table piled with paper weighted by a huge adding machine, its handle cocked like a weapon. ‘Sit down, talk to me.’

‘Aren’t you busy?’

‘I’m never too busy to talk. You know that.’

She stood still, upright, and smiling because she did love Sam for his clever silliness, for his ability to have walked into all this, the shop, the paperwork, the adding up, and picked it up so fast, for his suit and his watch and his accent with only a mere trace of where he came from. Like her own it was almost neutral, a better disguise than the smart clothes.

‘McCulloch’s windows are snaring them before they get round the corner.’ She tapped her foot against the tall metal filing cabinet. ‘Horrible windows, but they’re stopping.’

‘All that glass, all that square footage, all that overhead. They need to sell a lot more than us to pay it off. Looking isn’t buying.’

‘If they look long enough, then...’

‘Then they’ll come here.’ He crossed his legs, pinching the crease of his trousers so they wouldn’t stretch and bag. ‘For what they want. For what they can afford. I know these people, they’re no different from Birkenhead. They want value. They know what they can afford.’

‘But I lived up that hill. I do know they want a bit more than we can offer.’

‘Times are hard and not getting easier.’ He could dig in quickly and she didn’t want to leave an argument hanging until he came home and it spoiled everyone’s dinner. You couldn’t fault his determination. It was a great strength. Mostly.

‘Times won’t be hard for ever and we’ll be left behind. Mrs Wilson’s stock – ‘

‘– is exactly what we need right now. Cheap and cheerful.’

‘Cheap, it’s true. But her foundations are pre-war. Start bringing in a little quality. Just a bit more expensive, a bit more lively, and see where it goes. Higher margins.’

‘Lotte, Lotte.’ He leant forward now, took her hands, his thumbs circling, soothing, irritating. ‘You don’t have to worry about this. We’re safe.’

‘We can’t ever be safe.’

‘As safe as we can be, then.’ His hands gripped tighter now, pulled her towards him. ‘There’s no point in any of this if you fret and worry like... ‘

‘Like my mother, my aunts?’

‘They made all this possible, I know. And it wore them out.’ Sam let her hands drop. ‘But the shop is alive now like it never was before. And these are the hard times. Hardest times since the war. When people have more money again, anything is possible.’

‘If we’re prepared.’

‘Just go back to the house and enjoy it. Enjoy the baby. Grace spends more time with her than you do.’

He broke off abruptly. She knew that he was searching, looking closely for any sign that she might be about to erupt, cause another scene in the shop. As had happened before. With the entire staff frozen behind their counters, eyes wide, no one able to act, waiting for Sam to come out of the office to bundle her away. And the customers all with a tale to tell. But when she knew it was coming, it didn’t happen.

She pulled the belt of her coat, tightened the knot, put the confrontation away. ‘Let’s talk about it later.’

He stood and kissed her, just briefly, but he meant it, she could tell.

‘OK, later.’ He turned away, back to the invoices, the accounts, the tedium that connected all the strands, the ties that constantly needed to be adjusted and trimmed. She could do all of that and more. She wouldn’t let Sam take all that her aunts had built.

Looking into the back-shop, Government Surplus and Menswear, Mr Clark, the bachelor, was earnestly bent over the counter. Two pairs of long woollen underwear drooped over the glass front, flopping, headless wraiths. The farmer in his long coat had his back to

Lotte, still as a carving. She didn't interrupt, but stepped lightly down the few stairs, nodded left and right – Mrs Wilson, Lolly and Lizzie – and was out again in the rattle of the street.

Lotte kept going uphill. As she pushed against gravity, she felt her body working, carrying her, responding. Her legs never tired. She'd always had strong legs. Good legs. These steep streets were her world.

It was busy. The rumble of vans and the thump of handcarts on the setts. Just before lunchtime, there were enough people about so that she had to step off the pavement. More men now. Before the economy collapsed, men were invisible here until Saturday nights. Now, they were about in daylight, running errands, real and imagined, filling their time. Until what? Until good times came back. The women never had that aimless look, they always had a destination, a mission. She passed the shops – chemist, grocer, household goods, brushes, wines and spirits, post office, grocer, furniture, more wines and spirits. And pubs. The Glengarry, The Forth Arms, The Caledonian, The Corn Exchange Tavern. More pubs than shops, it seemed. As she climbed the canyon narrowed, as if life were focused by the rising hill. The buildings leaned in, the awnings and the streetlights arcing above. People nodded and murmured as she passed. Older women who knew her when she was young, friends of her mother, her aunts' friends, neighbours and customers, younger women who knew her as someone who had left. Lucky. Not, good for her. Lucky her.

Before she got to the sharp elbow of Bow Street she paused and turned, looked back down the slope. The shop had once been in a perfect place, halfway up the liveliest street in town. But she could see how the economic life of the town was moving, sliding downhill towards the big new stores. And the buildings here were decaying. She looked up at the damp streaks, the small trees flourishing up in the high gables, the crow's steps with missing steps.

She strode on, into Broad Street, past her aunt's first shop – still a grocers. Then on uphill, steeper now. The Castle hidden by buildings but its hulking presence there all the same. Out of habit she went even faster here, past the few groups of men in uniform. Her age should protect her, but she was never sure. Underfoot she felt for the precise moment where the street took her downhill again, the sudden watershed when the ground shifted under you. And then she was in Upper Castlehill, another canyon, the great expanse of the Forth and the glare of open country down to the sea blocked by the dark buildings. She paused briefly at the passageway into number thirty-four. A black entry against the dark damp sandstone. They

were scattered now. Her sister, her aunts, her mother. And Peter. They were all away. But she paused here, despite the chill she always felt, to note their presence in this place where they once all breathed the same air.

She was off again, downhill, turning back towards her home. Her home now. But as if to complete the tour of her past she cut along Wallace Street, the red sandstone terrace, facing south. Up there, its windows long and deep, was the first home they had bought after they got married. A fine flat, high and sunny. Proximity to the Auction Market kept it inside their price range. The street full of the great brown plates of manure that were never fully cleared between market days. Walking here with Peter on leave, he had called it a minefield. This grand terrace was full of cattle every Thursday. It sounded and smelt as if they were in a cottage in the middle of a lively field. Up there with the two boys, babies then, looking down on the broad swaying hides of the beasts.

‘Where are they going?’ said Douglas.

‘New homes,’ she said. ‘Nice new homes with deep grass and the sun on their backs.’

This walk was her own thirty-year long journey through this town. House to house. She walked it nearly every day as a compulsion, an addiction. As she walked the iron that seemed to stiffen her body and tighten her mind into a dark hard knot was loosened. The barbed-wire tangles eased. By repeating she made a pattern, the weather, the people, the pace – every-day, the same but different, her steps created a rhythm. No, it wasn’t an addiction, she had told Dr Campbell. She often missed days. It was healthy outdoor exercise. He had agreed. She dropped his pills through a grating as she walked home from the surgery.

She was out again that afternoon, in Murray Place, walking a pace or two in front of Grace and Sheila.

‘You could take account of those of us who are a wee bit slower,’ said Grace. She was pushing the baby-chair and had Shelia by the hand. Lotte paused. She took in the window of every shop they passed. Every detail, prices, products, displays. And not just the clothes shops. It was all the same business ultimately – responding to the customers, their needs, desires – wants fulfilled or frustrated.

Lotte stopped abruptly. She put her forehead to the cold plate-glass window. Shelia stretched up to the glass and did the same.

‘What do you think, these irons? The electric ones. Will they catch on?’

Grace stood behind, looked over their heads, Lotte leant back, looked up at the reflections.

‘From my professional point of view?’

‘As another opinion.’

‘I hear there have been shocks. Burns are bad enough without shocks.’

Lotte turned, put her fingers through Sheila’s curls.

‘I’m not suggesting you know more about ironing than I do,’ said Lotte. ‘I have done my share of ironing. And had my share of burns.’

Grace stared into the window. ‘The ironing at Siggshill House took a whole day.’

Grace adjusted her hat, tucked her hair under. ‘And little thanks. That’s why it’s fine working for you.’

‘A happy time, though,’ said Lotte. ‘Meeting Thomas. Mr Thomas Semple, chauffeur to garage owner.’ She knew Grace’s story.

‘Three garages.’ Said Grace. ‘He had vision. Mr Semple. Vison, but not so much luck.’

‘I didn’t suggest that. No one knows better than us the work it takes to build a business.’

‘It came between us and a family.’ She had both hands on Sheila’s shoulders. ‘Then it was too late.’

‘Mr Semple,’ Lotte turned away from the window. ‘Was a hero.’

Grace looked away. ‘A hero. And stupid. He was old enough. He didn’t have to go.’

‘Oh Grace.’

‘Lotte!’

Both women turned, Shelia squinting up into the glare.

‘Mrs Semple, good afternoon, and Sheila.’

‘Frederick,’ said Lotte.

‘Mr Thornlee,’ said Grace.

‘You’ve escaped the printing machine?’

‘I’ve put two thousand handbills through its jaws this morning. Including three hundred for your husband.’

‘We are grateful, I’m sure.’ Lotte gave a little bow of her head. Almost ironic.

If Frederick looked tall it was mainly due to his thinness and his dark suits and high collars rather than his height. Was it the same suit? Or did he have more than one identical

outfit? The dash he hoped to cut was always slightly undermined by the inky marks on his cuffs.

‘I’m out to buy some provisions, I’m not as fortunate as you, with Mrs Semple to help you out. But I’m glad I’ve seen you.’ His attention was focused now on Lotte. The other two could have been in another street. ‘I’ve something to discuss with you.’

‘Nimmo’s are always first to pay you, I’m sure.’

‘No, no it’s not money or invoices. It’s something much more important. Let it wait until practice tomorrow.’

‘Mr Thornlee. Don’t tease.’

‘It’s not the place to discuss things.’ He looked about theatrically. ‘Out here, on the open pavement. I’ll see you in church tomorrow evening.’ He half-glanced at Grace. ‘It will be worth it, I promise.’

His grin seemed guileless. He was not someone to tease, but he had the air of someone whose thoughts were not always spoken.

‘Well then, I’ll have to wait.’ Lotte adjusted the fur collar of her coat.

‘I shall leave you to your errands. Mrs Semple, Sheila. Lotte.’

They watched his stiff gait as he hurried off and then was abruptly gone into MacEwan’s.

‘Don’t say a word,’ said Lotte.

‘I haven’t,’ said Grace.

‘Mum,’ said Sheila.

‘He means well,’ said Lotte. ‘He’s just a bit awkward.’

‘Forward.’

‘No, I don’t think so, he just doesn’t know how to talk sometimes.’

‘You need to watch them. Single men,’ said Grace, without a trace of humour.

‘Not married ones?’

‘All of them.’

‘He’s a brilliant musician. Brilliant.’

‘Brilliance isn’t everything.’ Grace was still looking at the spot where he had disappeared into the grocers.’ She took Sheila by the hand. ‘It must be four, we should get on. Shouldn’t we, sweetheart?’

Sheila made a face. Lotte took her other hand.

‘What is his great secret, do you think?’ Said Grace. She was setting a firm pace now, Sheila running between them to keep up.

‘He’ll have found a new piece for me. I’m sure it’s how he spends his evenings. Looking for obscure music. Like the version of ‘Lead Kindly Light’ he found. It took the congregation two verses to recognise it.’ She tightened her grip on Sheila’s hand.

‘Maybe.’ Grace wasn’t amused.

‘He’s a church organist, not a Lothario,’ Lotte said.

‘Stop!’ Both women looked down. Sheila had been half-dragged for the last few steps, the toes of her white sandals scraped with fine dark lines.

That evening at seven they sat in the dining room. Sam at the head of the table, his back to the window, Lotte and Sheila, wriggling, at one side of the table, the two boys at the other. The novelty of a spring evening meant there was no need for electric lights. But it was a pale and tentative gloaming. Grace had brought the six plates of broth up from the kitchen on the big tray. She served them all then placed her own plate at the end of the table and took her seat.

They bowed their heads, and Sam said,

‘Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and ev’rywhere adored. These mercies bless, and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee.’

‘Amen.’ They whispered.

‘When does Grace say grace,’ said Charles. There was the briefest of pauses, but when Sam laughed quietly there was a wider ripple.

‘Very good,’ said Lotte, ‘although we might all have just possibly heard it before.’

‘No, Charles, I’ve never heard that before,’ said Grace. ‘That’s very funny.’

‘Quietest Monday for a long time,’ said Sam.

‘There have been more pit lay-offs,’ said Lotte. ‘And one of Mr Drummond’s men told Grace that two more seedsmen have been let go.’

‘If the farmers aren’t buying seeds then the outlook is never good.’ Grace added. She was considered to be the expert on all things agricultural, and a great harvester of gossip.

‘I’d already ordered handbills from Wingates. The less you take in, the more you have to put out. The Thornlee boy was straight round with them before we closed. Expecting the money in his hand.’

‘He’s hardly a boy,’ said Lotte.

‘He’s sharp enough. You’d think it was his own business and he wasn’t the hired help.’ Sam tucked his chin into his stand-up collar and did a pitch perfect Frederick Thornlee. “‘You understand the times we are in, Mr Raymond, we do need the payment before I can leave them with you. You don’t let people pay for their clothes after they’ve worn them for a week.’”

The boys giggled.

‘He’s a very good musician,’ said Lotte. ‘You should make allowances and be less cruel.’

Sam put his spoon down on the empty plate. Straightened it.

‘He did say he’d met you and Grace.’

‘And Sheila,’ said Grace. Sam looked up. ‘Sheila was there, too.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Sam. ‘He told me. He’s a great lad for the detail.’

‘He has some news for me. I’ve no idea what it is. But he’s discovered a new hymn maybe.’

Sam made further adjustment to the plate. ‘Grace. I think we’re all finished.’

She collected the plates, stacked the spoons on top, neat and silent. When he heard her safely on the stairs down to the kitchen, Sam said: ‘I know he’s harmless, Lotte, he’d make a good minister himself, he’s got the air of one, but don’t get yourself any deeper in that church.’

‘It’s not the church. It’s the music. You know that.’

‘I know. I know we don’t have the fancy singing at the Methodists, but it’s hardly a concert party in the Holy Rude, and he’s not John Barbirolli.’ He paused for a moment. ‘It’s not something to take too seriously. Not for a wife in your position.’

Lotte pinched the white tablecloth between her fingers. Two little white peaks of snow. The only sound was the faint swish of Sheila swinging her legs under the table. The boys were silent, eyes down.

‘Seriously?’ The word crackled and hissed. Lotte worked at the tablecloth

‘I know it’s important, your singing, your music. But you’ve had your time. Your moments. Everyone loved you – your voice. Don’t spoil it.’

‘Loved.’ She said this as if interrogating the word.

‘And there’s nothing wrong with a few solos on a Sunday. People in the shop talk about it. Atheists sit through the sermons just to hear you. You’ve brought sinners to God.’ Sam tried a smile. ‘Just be sensible about what’s... about what’s appropriate.’

Lotte looked round her family. The betrayers. The fear and anger couldn't be separated, burning inside. She saw the flickering looks, one to the other, Douglas and Charles, Sam to both, Sheila's big eyes staring up at the big brass light fitting.

She stood up, the solid silver salt cellar in her fist, like a grenade. They all turned to her, still, watching her hand.

'Don't speak about this again.' Lotte pronounced each word distinctly, addressing them all. Then smiled. 'I'm not so hungry now.' She placed the silverware delicately on the tablecloth. On the way to the staircase, she passed Grace, the tray between them. They said nothing.

Chapter 2: Tuesday 18th April 1933

The scream wasn't cut off completely when the cover was stretched tight, only muffled. It went on for as long as I was in the room. I had noticed Nurse Clark before, with her constantly untidy hair and huge eyes. The other I didn't know, but from her voice she was from the north. They were chatting about the dearth of hot water in the Nurses' Home. The screams went on, the canvas cover rippled and bulged at knee and fist level.

'You could have been more generous with the sedatives, Doctor,' said Nurse Clark, tucking a wayward strand of hair behind her ear. A bold one.

'She will quieten soon. Just keep an eye on the movements, Nurse Clark.' A little authority was my style. It is important not to be authoritarian. The more junior staff were the source of the real information about the patients, so it was wise to have a relationship.

'Of course, Dr Fergusson,' she said, with an additional adjustment of her hair.

'Keep an eye on the clock. And her movements. Make sure you record her disposition when she is finished.'

Nurse Clark provided me with a broad smile. The other one continued to stare down at the canvas cover. The movement was intermittent now. The sedative, the cold water and the pointlessness of struggle subdued patients quickly.

'I'll write it up immediately she's back in her bed, Doctor.' It can be hard to distinguish ambition from mockery in our nursing staff. I took a sharper tone with Nurse Clark.

'It's not so much the immediate effect of the treatment that should concern us, Nurse, it is whether the patient is calmed and soothed by this therapy.'

Clark adopted a serious professional face, nodded.

'Long term, Nurse, long term. That is how we must work here. Our horizon is distant. There are no quick fixes.' Generally, we had few fixes at all.

The Highland nurse was watching the black canvas. There was no screaming now. Just a faint rhythmic panting, breath coming in short sharp grateful bursts, the patient under

the required physical and mental pressures, pressures that would benefit her condition. Cold baths are the most humane response to hysteria.

‘I shall leave her in your exemplary care,’ I said. Nurse Clark dipped in what might have been a curtsey, a no-man’s-land between deference and insolence. The other nurse looked up at me for the first time. Something bordering on judgement in her eyes. It was possible that she had recently come into our service, perhaps from general nursing, and was yet to realise just how much more complex is the form of medicine practiced here. We need time, observation, patience.

Which is why I have started this journal. Beyond my physician’s daybook and my case-notes, beyond my scientific observations, I feel the need to record my world, no matter how trivial it seems. For now I have the time, with Emily and the children in Buxton, I shall sit every evening and pin the days down. Otherwise, they will drift away in the wind. And some things are worth recording, for today a rare private patient was admitted.

Her Certification was in itself unusual. Our patients divide into distinct groups. That is the nature of science – the creation of categories, sub-sections, samples, segments, controls, criteria. In our community there are two groups. There are those whom you would immediately recognise as a danger to society.

Then, there are patients who are so normal that visitors struggle to comprehend why they have been roughly, legally deprived of their liberty as if they were the worst of felons. Even the most depraved of criminals require more than the signature of two physicians and an officer of the court to place them behind walls.

The second group is, of course, much more interesting. The wild-eyed are clearly poor lost souls, they simply provoke pity and fear. But the articulate, the charming, the attractive, they are more fascinating. And dangerous.

Mrs Raymond, Charlotte, is remarkable even by the standards of a private patient. Dr Cunninghame admitted her yesterday afternoon. Dr Cunninghame is a young man in the early stages of earnest pomposity. A character trait he has developed to impress Dr Sneddon, I assume. But our leader calls him The Corporal in private.

‘Is Corporal Cunninghame joining us?’ he will say. Only in my presence. Sneddon is unimpressed by bright boys from small towns who have found their way to university and into this service. That is my background too. But Sneddon judges me by different criteria. Because of our shared experiences – and the power he believes he has over me.

Cunninghame’s record keeping is immaculate. We are taught that everything begins and ends with accurate notes. To set the world down clearly and precisely. Without

equivocation. But sometimes, our enthusiasm for categories blind us to the infinite range of the human condition. As we catalogue, the nuance slips between our fingers. I was not shocked by Dr Cunninghame's notes, I have worked in this service for too long. But I was surprised. Even more so when I met Charlotte for the first time today.

As is my custom, I was first to arrive in the consulting room. A bare room with poor light. Table, two chairs. I was standing looking up at the high window when she was brought in. I love the mature trees at this time of year. The huge beeches, here for longer than any buildings on this estate. The massive buttresses of the trunks and the sprawling complex arches of the branches hazed all over with tiny green spots of new growth. The great iron tree dependent on the most delicate growth for its renewal.

Assistant Matron Kennedy suddenly acquired the airs of a lady's companion. 'Mrs Raymond for you, Dr Fergusson.'

You couldn't but notice her eyes. A dark brown that was close to black. And her black hair, curled, in a fashionable cut, exotic for Scotland, and her skin, so pale it seemed to glow.

'Please sit down.' I waved toward the plain wooden chair. There was nothing in this building that was not utilitarian. 'While Matron is still here, is there anything you need that we can provide?'

Mrs Raymond shook her head. She was a straight, narrow presence in this small room. Assistant Matron Kennedy pulled the door shut behind her. This was always an intimate moment.

'Please, sit.'

She maintained eye contact, a rare thing here, as I sat down opposite her.

'I'd say welcome to our hospital, but welcome always seems out of place in these circumstances.' It was an awkward way of putting it, I realise, but it doesn't help to be too assured, too professional. The patients need to know we are human.

She pointed towards the window.

'It's the bars. It's the thing I keep seeing.' She smiled. A fleeting, flashing thing in the grey room.

'You will get used to it. We're not a prison, but we are a hospital for unpredictable illnesses. We must make sure that the patients see the treatment through.'

She stared at the marked wood of the table. 'And what is my treatment?' When her eyes came up, I felt as if I had been smacked across my cheek. A remarkable woman. They often are here, of course, but she would have been remarkable anywhere.

‘This is a place to rest. For illnesses of the body, convalescence follows treatment. Here convalescence is the treatment.’

She said nothing. I was forced to continue.

‘And while you rest, we shall talk. We will discuss those things in your life that have been the cause of your...’ I paused. It is important to find the right word, to show you understand the patient. ‘Your complexities.’

She blinked. It was as if she had switched me off like a light and back on again. I went on: ‘The things in your life that have caused you anxiety. That have changed your behaviour.’

‘Things?’

‘Pressures. We all have them. Sometimes there are just too many.’

‘I don’t believe my pressures are enough to keep me here.’ She looked up and away to the window and the sky behind the bars.

‘Few people think they should be here, Mrs Raymond.’ She looked back at me. ‘May I call you Charlotte?’

She hesitated, considering. ‘If you wish.’ Her voice was neutral, educated, with little trace of the local burr. There was nothing in Dr Cunninghame’s notes to suggest that she’d had more than basic education, and although clearly well-off, she was not from the professional classes. At this stage in the admission process it is often difficult to either get patients to say a word or to let you say a word – two extreme reactions to disorientation and fear. Often there is little meaningful communication. Charlotte was different. And yet there was a hesitancy about her confidence. I do not mean the natural effect of being in this place – even with as sympathetic and sensitive a professional as myself. This seemed more of an uncertainty about how much of a private patient she was going to be. Some treated the staff, including the physicians, as if they were their own household servants. But most private patients were malleable, overwhelmed by shame, or perplexed by their apparent betrayal at the hands of their nearest and dearest.

‘The bars are as much to keep these pressures away from you. Until you are strong again.’

‘And talking to you is my treatment?’

‘A weekly discussion of your progress will be part of it. When possible.’ It was important not to over promise. Even though I was already sure that I would schedule as many sessions with her as I could.

‘And the rest of my time?’ She was looking away from me now, at the window again.

‘All of your time here is therapy. There is the kitchen, the laundry, a whole community here to be involved with. Once you have been assessed.’

‘The kitchen? Laundry?’

‘Therapy comes from work and from living. A rhythm and pattern to your life will help. We will assess you to see which occupation will suit you best.’ I had said these words often. It seemed so banal, but I had seen the benefits of establishing a new, artificial life inside the walls. A reflected life perhaps, a flickering image of the real world, but one that was controlled, adjusted. I remembered something from the certification papers: ‘And your music. We have a programme of concert parties here. For the staff as well as patients. If you have talent you are encouraged. You may have much to contribute.’

She ignored that. ‘And when will I see visitors?’

‘Visits are something that we discuss only after you’ve settled.’ I was careful not to demoralise patients at this point. ‘Jumping between one world and another is often unhelpful.’

She stared at me. ‘We need you to focus on yourself,’ I said. ‘Not on others. Thinking about others all the time is often the root of problems. For our female patients.’

‘My family?’

‘Only after a period of time.’

‘My children? And I help to run a business.’

There were three children in the notes, eleven, nine and three years old.

‘We have to lift you from that responsibility. All responsibilities. For a short while.’ It was difficult to explain the benefits of seclusion, isolation. Impossible even. But given what I had read in the notes of Certification, I was poised in case she flew at me across the table. That sort of thing wasn’t unusual during admission interviews.

‘Do you have children, Dr Fergusson?’

‘Yes I do.’

‘Then you know how painful this is.’

I agreed that it was painful. ‘My two children are currently with their mother in England. She has had to look after her ailing mother.’ I lied. ‘So I understand the pain of separation.’

She stared. Her eyes huge.

‘But often it is for the greater good. As it will be in your situation too.’ She was calm so I was on edge. This was often the critical moment for patients, men as well as women, the point where they realised they were not trusted with their own children.

There was nothing sexual in her gaze. I am alert to the use of wiles where attractive patients are concerned. More alarmingly, she was treating me as an equal.

‘Who decides when I am well?’

‘It’s a decision taken by myself, in consultation with my medical and nursing colleagues.’

‘And who decides when I see my children?’

‘Again, it is a collective – a medical – decision.’

‘What great power you have over me.’

There was little point in arguing. It was a plain statement of fact.

‘There’s a great freedom from handing over decisions.’ I smiled. But she was studying the table again.

‘So, I am here until you decide I can leave, and I have no appeal?’

‘You’re a patient, my patient, not a prisoner. You are here for your own good.’

‘My own good.’ She had disengaged from me now. It was time to let this session come to an end.

‘Shall I get Mrs Kennedy to take you back to your room?’

There was no reply.

I stood and knocked on the door. The key turned and Mrs Kennedy was there, serious and professional. Charlotte sat, motionless.

‘I will look forward to seeing you again.’ She did not look up.

Afterwards, I went up the swooping main staircase, busy with nursing staff and patients. The focused busy rhythm of a well-run building. No running and no loitering either. The smell of bleach and wax-polish and the faint crinkle of the staff uniforms.

Upstairs, I paused at one of the long windows. The massed bones of the trees looked even more impressive from this height. I had stood at many windows like this. Sashes tightly locked. Rarely bars at this height. I thought of another view, over the capital city. Our most famous patient, Lieutenant Sassoon, described the vista over Edinburgh as more desolate than the Front, particularly on Sundays. I found it depressed my spirit too, perhaps because the city was a constant reminder of normal life, just out of reach.

Dr Andrews and I would stand at the window through that winter of 1916, watching the light die early in the afternoon, before the building shut down for the long terrifying night.

In our three month's detachment we met Rivers twice, his focus was always the patients not colleagues, but his presence was all over the hospital. A castle of damaged men.

'The old man's the future,' Andrews said.

'He has many to convince.'

'Look at the evidence here, man. Conclusive.'

'It's all a bit ... anecdotal,' I said.

'It's better than any other treatment. And this could not be a bigger test. What these patients have been though isn't normal. And yet he cures them.'

'So they can go back to France and get a final cure out on the wire?'

'It's what they want. They're proper soldiers.' Andrews was an only son of the manse from up in Angus somewhere. He later lost his enthusiasm for psychiatry and retrained in anaesthetics – the coming thing. He was cut to bits by a long-range shell less than a year later, while assisting with a field amputation near Pozieres.

'They'd be better with a poorer psychiatrist don't you think? One that kept them mentally shattered but still in possession of intact flesh and bone. Our success is generally a death sentence.' I said as I watched the ships and Fife beyond disappear behind a drift of rain.

'Sometimes I don't think you understand soldiering one little bit.' His nail tapped the window for emphasis. For someone brought up in the Church, Andrews had a great appetite for the martial spirit. He was a better army doctor than I ever was because he understood that amid the shattering and tearing there was an excitement that couldn't be experienced anywhere but on the battlefield. Little good it did him.

Under Rivers' remote influence we learned that we physicians could not apply a simple cure to these sundered souls. All officers of course; private soldiers had to find their own solutions. Golf, fresh air, reasonable food, a tranquil choice of paint colour in the day room – these were all part of the treatment, but Rivers also knew that the source of recovery was inside the patient. You couldn't force them to come to talk about the unspeakable or force them to come to terms with the irreconcilable. You had to give them time to come to you. Patience. It wasn't the army way. So, we junior doctors were all swiftly shuffled through before the contagion could set in and we might be infected by these radical thoughts. But like a clever virus, Rivers' way would lock into your thoughts in a short time. Those of us who didn't end up like Andrews were carriers for life. Not that we ever mentioned it back at the Front. MOs were suspect enough, psychiatric training placed you firmly on the side of the shirkers and the cowards.

But Rivers brought me into this service – the asylums with their long corridors, their narrow, commanding windows. My future had been shaped by those four years just as much as many of the men and women who were our patients. Soldier or civilian, the sights they had seen when the smoke suddenly cleared out the trench or when they spotted the telegraph boy turning the corner into their street, these were the moments that led them ultimately to our admission rooms. We were alike in that respect – the patients, Sneddon, myself – all on a journey that had the same departure point.

Sneddon clattered into my office without knocking.

‘Our doors are always open,’ was his code. ‘We can’t have colleagues burrowing away in their own dens. We need collegiate sharing here. Professionals learning from each other. Communicating. Shut doors have no place.’

Difficult to argue with that – unless you had two closed doors and the formidable Mrs Nicholson as a defence outside your own inner sanctum. In addition, few of us chose to visit Sneddon.

‘Doctor.’ He stood in the doorway. I had one wooden chair, borrowed from the dayroom, to offer visitors. But he liked to stand.

‘Doctor,’ I said.

‘The Councillors’ visit. All in hand?’

‘Selected patients for them to meet. Lunch in the medical staff dining hall. Round table discussion afterwards and tea with carefully selected nurses before they go.

‘I’ll draft an agenda. For your approval.’

‘Perfect. Preparation is detail.’ He caught my eye.

‘Detail is preparation.’ I completed the favoured homily of Professor Deacon and Sneddon’s reminder of our shared training in Edinburgh.

‘I’ll have all the paper-work done by Wednesday.’ And then I said nothing. He would have to get to the actual reason for his visitation without my help.

‘Admission book up to date?’

‘Dr Cunninghame has done precise work. Chrystal clear notes.’

‘A busy weekend I see. Dr Kidd of Slamannan sweeping his streets clean again.’

‘He is doing his bit. He has an arrangement with the local police Sergeant.’

‘And the Sheriff. We are not an alternative to gaol.’ He was leaning against the door frame now, both hands now deep in his suit pockets. Casual. Dangerous. ‘And a new private patient.’

‘Yes,’ I said. Let him come to me.

‘And she’s not a difficult sister or mother-in-law standing in the way of an inheritance?’

‘She’s a thirty-six-year-old mother of three. Her address is in Kings Park. Her husband is a shopkeeper.’

‘Prosperous one?’

‘Nimmo’s, you’ll know the shop.’ I replied. It was a barb.

‘I’m not a customer.’ Sneddon deflected my thrust and we both smiled. When colleagues overheard our polite badinage, this habitual chit-chat, they assumed it was the ease of old colleagues, familiar since student days. How could they know of the abyss of frustration and resentment that divided us?

‘I didn’t think that for a second. Workwear. But not our work. And cheaper clothes for the people up in these streets.’ I said.

‘She’ll meet plenty customers in here. Have you spoken to her?’ He raised a bushy eyebrow. ‘Already.’ He closed the door and stood full square over my desk. I was always tempted to stand up at these times too. But that in itself would have been a sign of weakness.

‘Just briefly, an hour or so ago. She’s back in her room now.’ Sneddon knew all this, of course.

‘I hope she is prepared for the dayroom.’ He took his watch out of his pocket. Gold winked, the chain hung heavily.

‘No one is prepared for the dayroom.’ I said.

‘Private patients...’ He stopped. It was a statement that did not need elaboration. He went on. ‘Diagnosis?’

‘Hysteria. Environmental stresses. Boredom, her children growing, a busy husband. I suspect a few months shelter from all that will give her respite.’

‘Let nature take its course?’

‘With our help and guidance.’ I said.

‘And a little sewing. Perhaps some tennis as the weather picks up?’

‘Cunninghame noted that she was a skilled musician. Plays piano and sings. Almost professional.’

‘Excellent, a concert party or maybe a turn for the Councillors when they remember us again.’ Sneddon was smiling.

‘All tested solutions.’ It was too early for a confrontation.

‘Tested. Tested isn’t research, Dr Fergusson. We are not warders, or games instructors. We’re scientists.’

‘Dr Rivers...’ I couldn’t help myself. Sneddon hated the fact I had the contact with the great man. His response was to discredit and dismiss. He cut me off:

‘Dr Rivers’ patients had a choice of languishing in a madhouse for ever, shooting themselves or going back to do their duty and lead their men. They weren’t normal patients.’

‘Our patients are never normal,’ I said. Sneddon almost smiled again at this. But I could see he was on a serious mission.

‘We are scientists. We need to develop treatments. Explore.’ He paused. ‘Your new woman, for example. She is all of the things you say. But she is also a surging mass of chemicals. All with their own capacity to bring joy or pain. It is our task to understand her chemistry.’

‘There are the baths.’

‘The baths. The baths? Are we a hydrotherapeutic hotel?’

‘We are a therapeutic community.’ I nodded sagely.

‘You read the scientific papers. Chemicals are our future. And we should play our part in creating that future.’

I realised that was why he was here, standing over me. At this moment. I resolved to keep Charlotte away from Sneddon. To take a stand against his plans, his experiments. Even if it took desperate measures.

‘I think I need to talk further. To build a better picture of her situation and needs before we look at other options.’

‘Don’t get too attached. Dr Fergusson.’ He turned, hand on the iron doorknob. ‘You know, and I know, where that can lead.’ Then he was gone.

He did not have to add that final threat, it was implicit in every conversation we had. I closed my hand round my paperweight, a curled ammonite I’d found on a beach in Skye, and in my mind sent it arcing into the panel of the door, into the space formerly occupied by Sneddon’s head.

Sneddon liked to move the time of the weekly medical briefing. Other Medical Superintendents I worked under had taken great pride in the immovability of these meetings. At Rainhill the medical meeting was at eight-thirty every Monday morning, and had been since 1864. Sneddon would change the time and day via memorandum. We were expected to cancel whatever other commitments we had. It was a demonstration of power.

‘Doctor Cunninghame. We will start with admissions.’ Sneddon sat at the top of the table with his back to the glare of the window. We arranged ourselves in roughly hierarchical order, though Mrs Nicholson was placed at Sneddon’s right hand with her open notebook and a large stack of minutes and papers.

Cunninghame briefly described the admissions. Sneddon pursed his lips at Charlotte’s name but said nothing.

‘Which room has the private patient been allocated?’ said Dr Mackenzie. She adjusted her glasses. Cunninghame looked down. We were all in awe of Dr Mackenzie. She was the best psychiatrist in the building. Even Sneddon recognised that. ‘Someday,’ he had told me once, after one of these meetings, ‘she will be Superintendent.’ It wasn’t clear whether that was a prediction or a threat to put me in my place.

Meanwhile, Cunninghame searched his papers. Sneddon let him suffer for a few moments before stepping in to rescue him: ‘Matron will have that detail.’

Meanwhile, Dr Harris carefully studied the admission list and kept his pen poised over an open notebook. Our senior by a decade or so, Harris’ role was to provide historical context to any issue. Other than that, I could not remember a single contribution. He was an attentive attendee, however. Both Sneddon and I had attempted to catch him out on recall of previous decisions and his responses were always sharp.

We worked briskly through the short agenda. Finally, Sneddon came to the last item.

‘Any other,’ he paused here, always, ‘competent business?’

We looked at each other.

‘No? Then perhaps you will indulge me,’ he said. ‘I’d like you all to look at this paper. Mrs Nicholson has two copies. We will circulate by seniority. I’d very much welcome your views.’

Mrs Nicholson placed a scientific paper in front of me. ‘*Drugs, hysteria and the establishment of a positive progression to recovery.*’

‘When would you like our views?’ Dr Mackenzie was squinting through her horn-rimmed glasses at her copy. Harris and Cunninghame, excluded by their lowly place in our short but steep pecking order, studied their own notes.

‘Is this not,’ I tapped my copy of the paper, ‘rather a distraction, when we have so much to do?’

There was a silence, so that the hum of the whole community seemed to fill up the room. Our colleagues waited.

Sneddon leaned back in his chair.

‘I admire, Doctor Fergusson, your commitment to the...’ he paused here ‘... to the, practicalities, of our profession.’ He let that settle. ‘But we are all agreed, are we not, that we are scientists first and physicians second?’

Dr Mackenzie flicked the few pages of the paper. I placed my copy flat on the table so Sneddon could not see my hands shake. He went on:

‘There’s no hurry, I appreciate the demands we face.’ I felt his eyes on me as he said this. I didn’t rise to it. Around the table heads nodded sagely.

‘I’ll have this with you tomorrow,’ I said to Cunninghame, fighting to keep my voice even as I felt Sneddon pass behind me. I adjusted the lapels of my coat, mantling my rage.

Chapter 3: Friday 14th April 1933.

‘Walls are for climbing.’ Peter reached above his head, his fingers claws, shoved into the space between stone and stone. At thirteen he had two years on her, and an extra foot’s reach. ‘Don’t tell me you don’t want to know what’s on the other side?’

With a shuffle and twitch and a small hail of dried mortar that Lotte brushed out of her hair, he was abruptly above ground, suspended above the earth by the toes of his plimsolls and his hooked hands.

‘Don’t fall.’

He snorted and there was more debris.

‘Watch there isn’t glass.’

‘It’s a wall not a window.’

‘Along the top. There’s sometimes glass.’ He was so high now she had to squint against the glare of the white sky to keep him in sight. He was a slow-moving blur. And then he was still. Straddling the top of the wall, impossibly high. He stared away into the hidden distance.

‘Oh God.’

‘What?’

‘It’s amazing. You won’t believe this.’

‘What?’

‘What I’m seeing.’

‘Tell me.’

‘No, never. You’ll have to come and look.’

‘How?’

‘Climb up. It’s easy.’

She could imagine what it was like on the other side of the wall. That wasn’t a problem. She could make things happen in her head, especially with Peter, she could create anything in there. But that was not the same as seeing it, living it. She could imagine what it

might have been like before her father died, before she could talk. But that didn't help much. It didn't make the dark times disappear.

She had imagined what moving to a town unfamiliar and strange would be like, suddenly living with aunts and cousins, including Peter, whom she had never met before. It was terrifying. But the reality was that everything had worked out just fine. After a month or two, it was as if they had never lived anywhere else. So, imagining was all very well, but sometimes, quite often in fact, what you projected inside your head turned out to be completely wrong.

And this wall was a challenge, something to be overcome. This, said her mother, was life. One thing after another. What mattered was how you dealt with it. Did you run away, or did you take it on?

She approached the wall.

'Guide me.'

'Reach up, but not too high, so you can pull up.'

She felt the rough edges under her fingertips. Her toes scratched and scabbled as her arms pulled up. The tips of her boots too big for the cracks between the stones, the old red stones.

'Now pull up with your hands and push down with your toes.'

And so she rose, determined. Not needing Peter's instructions now, but scaling the wall, moving in a new way.

'A real mountaineer.' Peter's face was close now, almost level. She reached long over the rounded coping stones, felt for a grip. She seemed to swing out for an instant, but though her other hand was pulled and rasped, she hung on. Her hand found an edge again, gripping and pulling, and there she was facing Peter, legs astride, high above everything. Strangely secure.

'It's just the same,' she said. 'The view. It's just what we see from home.'

Although the angle was different, it was what they saw from the kitchen window at home. The airy view over the smoke and jumble of the town, to the curves of the river, the way the bends almost curled back on themselves, the far away hills and the chopped off finger of the Monument.

'No, it's not,' said Peter. 'We made it ourselves by climbing up here. Look, it's sharper, brighter. I'll draw this when we get home. No one else has seen this view.'

He swung round, swaying out over the drop, longer on the other side, falling away into a tangle of scrub, the backs of houses and yards for chickens and pigs. The graveyard,

the village of the dead, was down to the left. Peter's sweeping hand took in the hills to the north, the traces of white on the tops, clouds going back all the way to the edge of the world. And familiar though it was, it did seem wilder, bigger, and now theirs. No one else was up here, seeing all this from the same spot.

'And then there's that.' He pointed, almost straight above. Lotte put a hand down to grip the rounded stone and looked. The black cliff loomed over them, the rocks merging into the Castle, wall upon wall ending in the cut-out edge of the battlements against the glare of the sky. For the first time she felt the vertigo, a sense she was not on the wall, but projected high up there onto the battlements. Precarious. She gripped the stones between her knees with both hands.

'Looks taller from here.' Peter was looking at her, not at the view. She had no brother, but this must be what it was like. 'You're not a bit frightened, are you?'

'Course not.' And she wasn't. This was more than fun. This vertigo, the air under her boots, brought an intensity, living but more so. Her ruined skirt and drawers – 'Do you have any idea what it takes to buy these?' – blackened by the damp soot that smeared the saddle of the wall were a small price to pay. And when the man opened his window and shouted at them from one of the toy houses below and they climbed down, Lotte led the way, sliding the last few feet down the wall. Her hands and fingers were black and streaked with blood, her boots scuffed beyond polish. The looming row didn't matter, the damage was a badge of honour, tokens of a shared adventure.

She hadn't slept properly since Sheila was born. That is what she told everyone. But the truth was that she hadn't properly slept since they moved here, when Sheila was tiny. She had moved into the bedroom at the back – thinking that sleeping alone might help. It wasn't quiet she needed. The rooms she had slept in all her life had high windows, suspended above streets full of life and noise, late and early. Broughton Street, when she was a child in Edinburgh, Upper Castlehill, even Wallace Street, were deep wells of activity where the last revellers merged with the first commercial activity, a relentless tapping of iron on stone, furtive conversations and the sudden shouts of men and women – joy and anguish.

Here, the clock ticked on the upstairs landing, a dog barked discreetly, the wind worked on the branches of the apple trees and nothing was louder than the pumping of her heart and the pulse of blood in her ears.

To lie still was to feel the night all around, life closing down. To get up, to feel the dressing gown against her legs, the polished boards under her feet, the cool of the stairs, was to stay alive. She wandered the rooms, the streetlight on the long wood of the dining room table, the fading fire in the sitting room, the lingering cooking smells down in the kitchen. Everywhere the closed doors, Grace and her family all asleep, all shut firmly out of her world for these dark hours. Every night she found herself drawn to the windows, to the streetlight, the wide road and the blank dark faces of the houses. It was as familiar as breathing, this steep town and its castle. And so, she walked.

She wanted nothing for these expeditions. Her boots were of fine soft leather, but handmade, robust. Her coats, hats, always suitable. Her father's watch, so she was never caught by the dawn, the home waking up.

At first, she had walked the streets round the King's Park. The villas, the high walls, the gravel drives. The trees, dripping or sighing or full of birds. She met no one. There might be an occasional light in an upstairs window for her to speculate about. Someone working over papers, fretting a business decision? An argument, a blighted bedroom? But there were no raised voices, no shrieks, whatever despair festered in these tall houses with their turrets and battlements, their long windows and high chimneys, it happened silently, politely.

Breaking out of the quiet residential streets to climb the hill felt like no risk at all. The route up past the empty municipal buildings, into the streets she'd grown up in, was such familiar ground that she could sometimes return home and be unsure if she'd dreamt it all, whether she'd imagined or experienced the journey. The mediaeval town held no fears for her. The vennels and doorways pitch black. It was like owning a dangerous dog, frightening to others, reassuring to her. She loved the cobbles, wet and deserted under the streetlights.

Tonight she took the turn into Spittal Street – she didn't want to pass the shop, start to rearrange the window in her head at this time. These walks were to empty her mind not to fill it up. That was easy enough to do. At the top of Broad Street, she paused. The wide market street, the stone skeleton of Mar's Wark, its black eyeholes. The iron grills. This was always a haunt of the dispossessed and the dislocated. Of all the dark corners of the Old Town, this was the one her mother warned her about most often.

'No one will hear you away up there,' she said. 'Everywhere else, if you get in trouble just shout. Somebody will come. No one will leave you.'

She had never been sure of that, never reassured that amid the mayhem of some nights in these streets anyone would distinguish her genuine cry for help from all the other howls. Now, she leaned close to the wall, smelled decay, urine, the fruit smell of spirits. She peered

into the absolute black of the graveyard beyond but could see nothing, hear nothing. Behind her, the perpendicular stone of the Church. The stained-glass was black from this side, the glory of their light reserved for the inside, for the believers. Clouds passed behind the pointed spikes on the buttresses. The saints shadowy. She thought about the dark interior, the dry bible smell, the silence, the organ pipes. A dead building waiting to come to life.

She hurried past the wide mouth of the Castle parade ground. There were soldiers and movement at the gates to the Castle itself, even at this deep time of night. They worked to another timetable. She hurried past. Where there was a break between trees and houses, she paused to look out over the town. The lights of the new houses down in the Raploch. ‘Too posh,’ they said up here. As if the damp, the crumbling stairwells, rattling windows that kept you awake in even a light breeze were to be chosen over new houses with gardens and hot water. She looked beyond the town down the Forth, the lights of the villages, the mines, the shale works, the farms glittering off into the night all the way to the open sea. This was one of the things you missed, living below the rock, down on the flat ground beside the river, this sense of having the nation in your gaze. Behind her, over the endless walls, she could hear the slap and thump of the soldiers, their boots and their rifles. The secret codes, military rituals that had been part of the night sounds of this place for centuries. Lotte’s world was up here on this ancient hill. The ancient, black church and closes, the cemeteries tumbling down the slopes, the derelict tenements, the life inside shaking the stones and slates from their walls and roofs, the wildness barely contained.

As she walked back downhill, the stones wet, slippery with rain and spit, Lotte sang in her head: hymns, musical hall songs, opera. Singing out loud would not be helpful. But she needed to express her joy, for this was when she was happy, when everything seemed possible, when it was all solved, her plans for the shop, for her music. By not thinking, by concentrating on the world around her – the feel of the stones, the smell of the coal smoke – she could sense a future, hidden still in mist, but out there. Even Peter could be resolved.

At breakfast she knew she looked tired, but her tiredness had been remarked on for so long, that walking all night was easily concealed. For Sam, breakfast was as much a symbol of family cohesion as dinner. And cohesion centred on his performance.

‘My father was on the scaffolding, fitting plates by six am every day. We ate together only on public holidays. Christmas, Easter, Whitsun. And on the Twelfth, for those years in Belfast I suppose.’

‘Did it make a difference?’ she once asked. ‘To the family?’ It might have been before Sheila, while they were in Wallace Street, when they would eat breakfast in the sunny bow window, the street far below.

‘Families were different then.’ He’d replied, waving towards the two boys, ‘Fathers weren’t expected to talk to their children. That was for mothers. Respect. That was the thing.’ The two boys had sat, silently. Were they cowed by Sam’s booming personality, filling the room? Or did their sidelong glances suggest that she was their concern? Worried for her, or wary of her volatility? She had shaken her curls and winked at Charles. He’d smiled back, shyly.

Today, Grace brought the porridge in, plates steaming. Strangely, for someone born in Belfast and brought up in Birkenhead, Sam was a great believer in boiled oats for breakfast. Sometimes he was more Scottish than the Scots. The boys looked down at their plates.

‘Eat up boys,’ said Lotte. ‘Grace is an expert with porridge. You’re very lucky.’

‘Mr Ward was even more discriminating in his porridge tastes than Sam,’ said Grace.

‘You see. Breakfast of successful men,’ said Sam.

‘Particularly when we were in Sussex. We had to take a sack down with us. The local staff were amazed. They’d only read about it.’

‘Dr Johnson said oats were for feeding horses in England, people in Scotland. Like potatoes in Ireland. Can’t go past the basic foods.’ Sam drained his tea.

Lotte looked on. She heard the talk, the spoons chinking, tea pouring. She watched the passing of teapot and sugar and salt, Grace making sure the boys ate up everything, fussing at Sheila. She watched them swim about as if through the glass of an aquarium. Voices reached her. But in the same way as sounds reached her when she was walking at night; distant, unconnected noises.

‘I have an idea,’ said Sam.

Grace looked across the table. Lotte swam up to the surface: ‘An idea?’

‘Yes. The weather’s so good, let’s go for a run in the car on Wednesday.’

The boys rolled their eyes.

‘I’m sorry, boys,’ said Sam.

‘Why early closing? Can’t we wait till Sunday? Have a whole day?’ said Lotte. ‘For the boys.’

‘I thought maybe just us.’

‘I can look after Sheila,’ said Grace. ‘And see to the boys when they come in.’

‘No,’ said Lotte. ‘No, it should be a family outing.’

‘But the boys shouldn’t miss school,’ said Grace as she tidied the plates.

‘No.’ Sam was adjusting his tie, his high collar. ‘We can’t have that, but the four of us can go. This weather might change and the car costs too much to sit in a garage.’

‘I could do a picnic.’ Grace smiled at Lotte. ‘It will be good for you to get out in the open air. Help you sleep.’

Lotte passed her plate to Grace, collected the plates from the two boys.

‘No picnic, we’ll eat out. Where shall we go?’ Sam brushed crumbs from his suit.

‘Ladies? Where will we explore?’

‘You choose,’ said Grace.

‘Lotte?’ said Sam.

‘Honestly, I don’t mind.’

‘Up into the country,’ said Grace. ‘The lochs. The hills.’

‘Yes,’ said Sam. ‘The hills, the mountain air. Just the thing. What do you think Lotte? The Trossachs?’

‘That would be wonderful,’ said Grace. ‘Or what about the Lake, over to the island?’

‘Excellent idea. Lotte?’

Lotte glanced up. It was Grace who responded: ‘Where would you like to go?’

‘I don’t mind,’ she said. Lotte felt as if she was returning to them, their voices becoming sharp again.

‘Drink more.’ Grace leaned over with the teapot. ‘You need to find a way to sleep more.’

Lotte felt a twist of anger begin to swell in her chest, but she inhaled deeply and gestured the teapot away.

‘Sorry, I’m just a bit wearied,’ she said. ‘A trip to the island would be perfect. If the boat is running.’

‘I’ll ask,’ said Grace.

The two boys were silent.

‘Boys,’ said Lotte. ‘We will go and take a look. On your behalf. Then we will go back later, in the summer. Promise.’

Douglas and Charles looked only slightly less disappointed.

‘But what if we can’t?’ said Charles. ‘What if something happens and we can’t go back? This might be our only chance.’

‘Don’t be silly,’ said Grace. ‘If your mother says we will go back we will.’

‘Exactly,’ said Sam. ‘Time to get ready.’

‘Come,’ said Grace. ‘Let’s get you organised and out the door.’

‘I promise,’ said Lotte.

She stood on the top step of the nave. Just a few feet of elevation but it raised her over the seated congregation. Far bigger than the usual Sunday morning gathering, this evening concert. No, not a concert, the Minister was clear about that. But despite his prayer of welcome and the hymn they would all finish with, it was a concert, a recital. Lotte stood alone. Frederick was half-hidden, hunched over the keyboard and tucked away behind the brass lectern. Her recital. The faces along the pews, the hats, the suits, dressed up and here because they wanted to hear her. Not out of duty or habit, but preference. They had come out on a beautiful Sunday evening, just hours away from the start of the working week. Some she knew, faces jumping into focus in the crowd. Sam and Grace were a few rows back, the boys refusing to sit in the front pew. Sam winking, she was sure, but she let her gaze sweep past him. Letting them all down was her greatest anxiety. And she could do without anxiety for breathing was everything, keeping control of her lungs, her diaphragm.

She looked over her shoulder, saw Frederick’s eyes fixed on her, framed in the mirror above the wall of stops. He nodded, she nodded and he began, the chords rolling towards her. She filled her lungs, and then her voice joined the organ and out it went, like a great bird flapping lazily into the stone spaces of the old church. From the tiny place in her chest, a few pints of air swelling and opening and blossoming as the sound grew and filled the space above the heads, the hats, the tight perms, the collars of the best coats, rubbing against the old pillars, the lost corners and pushing on past the back row to the great beech doors with their brass studs, and on, upwards, the sound, her sound, her voice, reached into the great arched spaces of the mediaeval roof, a gentle airburst of purity and emotion.

There were no nerves now. She followed the contours of the song like a map, simultaneously in the moment of the note and looking ahead to where the music led. She stepped along the intricate path of the notes, the bass drone of the organ under Frederick’s feet pacing out the steady rhythm. As she sang the words – ‘shepherds watchful’, ‘peace

abiding' – were transformed, became strands of feeling to snake and twist among a hundred people.

There was no rush. There might have been a time she wanted this over as fast as possible. When to have done it, was to be preferred to the doing. She thought back to the concert parties in 1918, in that winter fifteen years ago. That had been a real test. She was twenty-one. Her mother and her aunts had no illusions about her audience.

'We live within a shout of a barracks, we know fine the ways of soldier,' said her mother.

'And a filthy, dirty shout it is too,' said Aunt Jessie.

That crowd in that camp shed was so much bigger. All angry men who wanted to get home, for it to be over, the army life that had enveloped them, harmed them. Now they were adrift in camps, waiting. She felt she was thin compensation for those long empty months. She had rushed her songs the first time, uncertain. But they cheered at the end for long minutes. And they listened. They were all under army discipline, so, despite the family warnings, she didn't have to fear shouts, comments. There was plenty noise when she went on, in her demure Sunday best. But when she could feel their silence, their attention as she sang, she almost lost the rhythm of her breathing. That had been a bigger event, more people in the echoing tin shed, more things to go wrong. It had changed her life.

But tonight, here in the Holy Rude, affected her more deeply. Perhaps it was the ancient place, the stones, their weight pressing down on the rock, on the whole town. Perhaps it was the deeper silence here, beneath her voice and beneath the organ, the quiet of concentration and total attention. She felt their focus all the way through her flesh down into her bones. It galvanised in a way that pregnancy and motherhood never had. She was absorbed in the music-time, lifted out of normal time. And yet this wasn't conceit.

'Look after yourself, no one else will,' said her grandfather.

'Rise above,' said her mother.

'Be yourself,' said Peter.

This was her, and there was no conceit. If anything, she felt humbled that something as natural as her voice, given direction by the music and sharpened by hours of practice, could touch so many people. They would go home and remember this, remember moments that she had created. Years from now, at good moments and terrible moments in their lives, they would remember the way she phrased a line, the way she left the note hanging there in the cool evening air of the stone space. It was modest and infinite at the same time, this

difference she had made to the way that others saw the world. And in these hanging, transcendent moments she was truly herself.

The noise in the dining room of the Golden Lion Hotel always made her uncomfortable. It was hard to believe that gossip and cutlery could combine to make such a din. Even on a Tuesday, even in these difficult times, the clatter was constant. It meant there was always a much greater chance of picking someone up the wrong way. Or being picked up the wrong way.

Mrs Dorothy Wingate was there first. The printing business was just round the corner. They hugged, Lotte took her coat off and sat. They were close to the window and the glare was painful.

‘I’ve had to listen to John telling me to make sure I mention the invoice at some point and then I’ve had to listen to Frederick telling me how he has exciting news that he’s not going to tell you until practice tomorrow night. You are the main topic of conversation in that works.’

Lotte laughed. ‘You can take it as done that you’ve told me about the invoice. John knows there is no question about it. Unless you buy a new coat on the way home and never say a word.’

‘That is an idea. We could start a whole new trading system.’

‘And as for Frederick, I’m just as sure his news isn’t as spectacular as he is trying to suggest.’

Dorothy looked down at the card menu.

‘No, Frederick is very talented.’ She paused, squinted at the card. ‘With his music anyway. He has a touch of artistic flamboyance about him. And he is too much on his own. As a bachelor.’

‘He’s just a bit frustrated by his situation.’ Said Lotte.

‘He has a very good situation with us.’ There was a sharpness about Dorothy that sometimes verged on the spiky, but Lotte felt a real warmth for her. It was always clear with Dorothy – when you had overstepped a mark you knew about it. With others you could snag a tripwire and never know. Not at the time anyway.

‘I know that, he speaks so well of you all at his work, but he’s stuck with me and other amateurs. He should be involved in music full time, a professional, working with professionals.’

Dorothy looked directly at her. What had she said?

‘Don’t say that. He is lucky to be able to play for you. Your voice is unique. I’m not an expert, but your concert at the Holy Rude was magical. People were crying.’

‘Was it that grim?’

‘You know what I mean. You moved them.’

‘It’s just for fun.’ Lotte picked up her own menu now.

‘But it isn’t really, is it?’ Dorothy was serious.

‘It could have been more. Once. But it is too late now. It’s just silly now.’

‘That’s ridiculous.’ Dorothy leant towards her. ‘You have a gift you use it as fully as you can.’ There was a pause, a beat. ‘Just don’t rely on Frederick.’

At other tables the diners looked up as a mild commotion simmered at the doorway. Mrs Arbuthnot and Mrs Jenkins arrived and emerged from their fur coats, passed to a waiter who bundled the fur high like a trapper’s sled and carried them off to the cloakroom.

‘Late as always,’ said Jane Arbuthnot, taking a seat at the head of the table. She started to un-pin her hat, velvet with a collection of game-bird feathers, when she saw that Mrs Jenkins had sat down with her own hat still on. The removal quickly became an adjustment. ‘I met Elizabeth outside the shop and we just lost track. Talking, you know.’

Elizabeth Jenkins smiled thinly. Like Dorothy she was in her early forties. Her husband was a partner in the oldest solicitors in the town, and so she was the discreet holder of all their secrets.

Mrs Arbuthnot made the first conversational move by reminding the group that her son was about to graduate in medicine from Glasgow University that summer.

‘A difficult outfit choice, I’m sure you’d agree, Elizabeth.’ Mrs Jenkins’ sons were both lawyers in Edinburgh. ‘I shall prod you for advice later. Children are such a gift.’

Dorothy was childless. This was a game she sat out.

‘And Charlotte, both your boys show promise do they not?’

‘They’re good boys at school,’ said Lotte. ‘Douglas shows real promise at music.’

‘You must be proud. Taking after his mother.’

‘He has a real passion for it.’

‘He plays beautifully,’ said Dorothy. ‘Very mature.’

‘So important for them to have an interest,’ said Mrs Jenkins.

‘Just like my two.’ Mrs Arbuthnot was tackling her grapefruit half. ‘Andrew just loves his books, and John would rather play golf than make money. Almost.’

‘It’s not like a...’ Mrs Jenkins paused to put down her spoon. ‘Profession, though? Is it? Music?’

‘It...’ Lotte felt the rushing in her veins. The deep twist round her heart. There was no point in saying it. They wouldn’t understand. ‘It’s a calling.’

There were smirks over the white tablecloth. Except for Dorothy: ‘Any of us who have heard Lotte sing know that it’s more than a hobby.’

‘Of course.’ Mrs Jenkins almost touched her lips with her linen napkin. ‘But a profession is so important for young people. To set them on their way.’

‘That’s what I told my two.’ Mrs Arbuthnot had decided where she was going to side on the question. ‘I told them retail is all very well, but you need choices. A profession gives you that. You will not have to serve behind a counter at ten o’clock at night. You can leave that to your father.’ They all laughed quietly.

Mrs Arbuthnot was safe in the knowledge that everyone here would be aware that her husband’s days of late-night shopkeeping were over. As the owner of the biggest furniture emporium in the town, he had plenty of minions to face the customers late on a Saturday night.

‘Let us hope none of them have to go off to fight again,’ said Lotte. She did not want to deliberately darken the tone, but she hated their air of comfortable certainty. Had they no experience of malevolent fate? Dorothy had been pregnant twice and had no children. She understood.

‘I know my boys would do their bit,’ said Mrs Jenkins.

‘And mine,’ said Mrs Arbuthnot.

‘I hope mine don’t have to,’ said Lotte.

‘Hear hear,’ said Dorothy.

‘We all hope that it won’t come to anything, of course.’ Mrs Arbuthnot was always alert to any potential unpleasantness around the table. Any unpleasantness was for later, never across the table.

‘It may not come to that,’ said Mrs Jenkins. ‘I heard that the High School debate voted against fighting for King and Country. Was your oldest involved?’ She gave Lotte her full attention for the first time.

‘He is much too young,’ said Lotte. ‘But I hope he knows what horrors are involved and appreciates that everything has to be done to avoid conflict.’

Mrs Jenkins nodded sympathetically: 'There is no question we would prefer peace, but we must, all of us,' she paused again to glance round the table, 'high and low, do our duty if it comes to it.'

'My husband did his duty in Greece.' Lotte knew she was on solid ground. Mr Jenkins' special skills had placed him well out of harm's way as a contract lawyer for the army.

'We all did our duty,' said Mrs Jenkins.

'And my two boys will be first to sign up again,' said Mrs Arbuthnot, parking her knife and fork neatly across her almost empty plate. 'They will, I'm sure, be in high demand in the military.'

'Doctors will be needed,' said Lotte. She didn't look up.

'But did you also hear, Lotte, of the exchange visit being cancelled?' said Dorothy, pointing to a way out.

'Douglas wouldn't tell me anything of what goes on in school if I paid him,' said Lotte.

'I did hear something,' said Mrs Arbuthnot, but sadly it didn't seem to be enough to be able to lead with this particular piece of gossip.

'We had the school call to cancel a handbill for a concert they were hoping to have. A concert with their exchange school in Dresden.'

'Why?' said Mrs Jenkins.

'The school didn't say.'

'It will be because of the situation there,' said Mrs Arbuthnot. 'Herr Hitler and the new government.'

'Yes,' said Mrs Jenkins, 'they have much to do there, probably not time for frivolities. School exchanges.'

'There's a country to sort out, over there,' said Mrs Arbuthnot. 'We could learn a few things. The National Government.' She snorted, politely.

Mrs Jenkins pointed to an imaginary spot on the tablecloth:

'Precisely, inflation, communists. And...' she lowered her voice, but not that much, '...our Hebrew friends.'

'You can criticise their methods, a bit rough and tumble, and his supporters are the very worst sort,' Mrs Arbuthnot lowered her voice too, glad of a chance to conspire with Mrs Jenkins. 'But their heart is in the right place.'

‘They would take over any profession.’ Mrs Jenkins was animated now. ‘Law. Medicine. It will happen here if we aren’t careful.’

Lotte and Dorothy were silent.

‘I suppose in business you are used to their malign networks?’ Mrs Jenkins sat back in her chair.

Lotte felt her shin tapped under the table, she looked up to see Dorothy raise her right eyebrow a fraction.

‘My goodness yes,’ Mrs Arbuthnot moved quickly to avoid a silence. ‘It’s almost an accepted part of the furniture trade, you can’t compete with one big family all looking out for each other’s interests.’

Then, for fear of further unfortunate pauses in the conversation, Mrs Arbuthnot abruptly moved them on. To the abandoned baby.

‘Dreadful!’ said Mrs Arbuthnot, diverted. ‘What sort of mother? Left out on the coldest night of the year.’

‘Where?’ said Mrs Jenkins, who had clearly been kept from such distasteful news by Mr Jenkins. It was inconceivable that he was unaware.

‘Ballengeich Cemetery,’ said Dorothy.

‘Did you not live up there, Lotte?’ Mrs Jenkins said this quietly, smiling.

Lotte felt the a shoe on her shin again, a gentle rub, so she said:

‘I did, and Mrs Arbuthnot is right, there are good and bad in every place, every part of town.’

‘Good and bad everywhere. And there are always those with the gumption and hard work to pull ourselves up.’ Mrs Arbuthnot, nodded meaningfully.

‘Amen to that,’ said Dorothy. ‘And what do we have planned for these lovely spring days?’

As the conversation meandered on, Lotte found herself drifting away. Dorothy would pull her back in at moments, but she felt as if she were listening to the wireless, with the signal growing faint, the static crackling.

‘Are you feeling well?’ said Mrs Arbuthnot while the coffee was being poured into the tiny cups. ‘You are quiet.’

‘Perhaps rehearsing songs in your head?’ said Mrs Jenkins, with a thin smile.

Later, there was intense debate over the bill. ‘Us independent women, we are worse than the men. Are we not like the National Council of Women?’ Said Mrs Arbuthnot. They

laughed. Coats on, they moved out into the keen air, Mrs Arbuthnot hesitating long enough to be able to work out the direction Mrs Jenkins was taking. Dorothy and Lotte walked together.

‘Sorry about bumping your leg. I’m so clumsy,’ said Dorothy. They smiled together.

‘You’re a good friend,’ said Lotte, taking her arm. ‘It’s just, these women.’

‘I know. But this is a small place, if we only spoke to the people we agreed with we would have no one to talk to. Or hardly any.’

‘If I could work round them like you do, all would be easier.’

‘You have to bite it down. We all depend on each other, and not just in business. It’s not worth the battles.’ They walked in silence for a few steps, paused to let a barrow come out of a pub. ‘It is difficult though.’ Mr Wingate was Jewish. Dorothy had once confided in Lotte. But he was converted to the Baptists and well disguised.

‘I feel on the fringes of all of it,’ said Lotte.

‘You’ve as much right to be there as any. You earned it.’ Dorothy stopped. Two women side by side in a busy late afternoon street. ‘I know it has been difficult. I know you have Grace, she must be a great help, but you have me too.’ She kissed Lotte on both cheeks. And she was gone, round the corner to the print works. Lotte stood for a while, watching the traffic, the people, as if from a great distance.

Lotte ran up the stairs at Upper Castlehill, the four, spiralling flights, lifting her skirts. She had been dawdling home from the milliners, such a fine October afternoon, the low sun, the shadows sharp, when in Bow Street she passed Maggie Tulloch.

‘I’d not bother going home this evening,’ she said, ‘there’s a huge row at your place.’

When she got to the top landing all was quiet. The hallway silent. When she opened the kitchen door it was as still as a photograph, everyone frozen, waiting. She stood, breathless.

Peter, head high under the oil lamp. His mother, Lotte’s Aunt Margaret, with her hands flat on the table leaning right across, her eyes flashing. Lotte’s mother sat at the table, the fingers of her hands locked together in front of her as if handcuffed, or praying. Aunt Jessie, was over by the fire, sewing, stabbing, pulling, her own rhythm

Lotte said nothing. No one had registered that she was there. She didn’t need to ask. It was clear what had happened.

‘Lotte, you tell them,’ said Peter. He didn’t look at her, his eyes were fixed on his mother. ‘Tell them what it’s like to be around here, with all these uniforms on the streets and me in my work clothes.’

Lotte said nothing.

‘You don’t have to go,’ said Lotte’s mother, staring down at her hands as if they might suddenly become dangerous.

‘But I will have to go sooner or later. They can’t rely on volunteers forever.’

‘I’m not going to say you’re wrong there,’ said his mother, ‘but stop and think for a minute why they need so many.’

‘Aye,’ said Lotte’s mother, ‘ask Mrs MacKay, or Mrs Wills, or Mrs MacDonald, or Mrs O’Hare, or Mrs Smith, or Mrs Reilly or Mrs Caitlin.’

‘Or Mrs Laing,’ Peter’s mother joined in. ‘Ask her. Two she lost, on the same ship. The same day. Two letters. The same post.’

Peter shook his head. ‘I’m going.’

‘Lotte speak to him,’ said Jessie from the corner. Her spectacles flashed in the firelight. ‘He’ll listen to you.’

Lotte took her hat off, put her bag on the chair. She stepped over to Peter and held his arm.

‘Don’t treat him like a boy. He is going. He can’t stay.’

Her mother made a noise between threat and exasperation.

‘Lotte understands,’ said Peter. ‘Listen to her.’

‘We can’t persuade him to change his mind. It’s going to be better if he goes with our blessing, surely?’

‘You know nothing at all of what this is like,’ said her mother. ‘Are you giving him your blessing to be blown to bits? Or come back here half a man? No legs or burnt with gas?’

Lotte started to speak. Her mother cut her down. ‘That’s the blessing you’re giving him.’

Aunt Margaret was still motionless over the table. Tears fell on to the oil cloth.

‘It’s only Lotte wants you to go,’ her mother said. ‘Only her thinks you’d be better off with your face cut away.’

Lotte clung on to Peter’s arm like a spar:

‘He’s brave but he’s clever too. No one is as quick and clever at keeping out of trouble. Most come back and he’ll be one of them.’

‘It’s about six months since this started,’ said Peter. ‘In early, out early. I’ll be back before you’ve missed me.’

‘You’ll be back before you know it, right enough,’ said Lotte’s mother.

Peter’s mother said nothing. Something had been settled without being settled. The three sisters, who could fix anything, who could persuade anyone, had been thwarted by Peter, and Lotte. It was a kind of victory for them both. It was up to Peter, his life. And she would always support his freedom, long beyond the point where it was sensible.

Chapter 4: Wednesday 19th April 1933.

‘I thought this would be a more pleasant place for us to talk,’ I said.

We settled down on a bench at the far end of the garden, where it looked out over the rest of the estate. She was in a long dark skirt and a fitted white blouse, with a plaid blanket over her shoulders. It put me in mind of refugees in France, the dislocated, the comfortable suddenly put out on to the roads. Although we sat at each end of the bench, meeting patients outdoors was not normal practice. But if Sneddon wanted us to innovate, I was prepared to do my bit.

She looked out over the bare trees against the white sky: ‘This is beautiful.’

Her eyes were the darkest I have ever seen. I found myself staring at the curve of her eyelashes. Her eyes were tired. Asylum eye, common to staff and patients, but at this stage in her stay they still had some sparkle.

‘Not what you expected?’

‘I expected a straight-waistcoat.’

‘We try to avoid restraint at all costs.’ It was one of Dr Sneddon’s proudest achievements, a continuation of our long policy of minimal restraint. We didn’t count threats and drugs as restraint. ‘It’s a tradition here. Before the war they rewarded the staff with grand outings after a long period without the use of restraints.’

‘Outings?’ She half turned. It is interesting to me, a student of the human condition, that the conventions of polite conversations survive in these unconventional situations. It is how we cope with the unthinkable. We thank the physician for the death sentence.

‘Yes, to Rothsay, the entire staff. In two batches one July day. Train, steamer, meals.’

‘While the other half looked after the patients?’

‘Indeed. Without restraint.’

She pointed to a tree at the bottom of the slope. ‘Look at the leaves on that one. There’s always one that’s ahead of the rest.’

The tree was vivid with the green stubble of new growth. ‘What kind is it?’ I asked.

‘No idea.’ There was a faint smile. ‘I am a town girl. Born in Edinburgh.’

‘I was a student there. And worked there during the war.’

‘I wasn’t there for long. Then I moved with my mother to live with her sisters. To Stirling. The Top of the Town.’

‘Notorious.’

For the briefest moment I saw what lay behind the admission report, what the GP and the Officers had seen. Her eyes flashed with a sudden, unlikely ferocity. ‘None of it’s true.’

Her voice had a quiet intensity. I wasn’t alarmed, there were plenty staff around, but I did not want this session to end prematurely. And an accent was suddenly there, behind her educated voice: ‘There are good people and bad people everywhere.’

‘In Snowdon Place?’

‘*Especially* Snowdon Place.’ Her anger was gone. These flashes of lightning, gone as soon as they came, must have been a test for her family.

‘But it must be more pleasant?’ It was a much better street than I could aspire to currently.

She didn’t reply immediately. ‘My husband has worked very hard. So have I’

‘It is a lovely street. I’m sure a lovely house.’ She said nothing, so I went on. ‘And yet you ran away.’

She turned on me again. ‘Ran? Away?’

‘The walking.’

‘Am I here because I like to go for a walk?’

‘Walking is a healthy, wholesome pursuit. I am an enthusiast. Love to walk. I shoot. But at night? A woman?’

‘It’s not allowed?’ She furrowed her brow. ‘Or is it showing some dark weakness I have? I’m running from my family? Is that your diagnosis, Doctor? I have had these conversations with my GP. With Dr Campbell.’

‘Your family were concerned for you. It is dangerous. A woman at night on her own. I know this is 1933, but they were worried that you put yourself in harm’s way.’

She was quiet. This is our work. Things happen in these swirling silences. We don’t normally record this level of detail, in case notes, but this is how insights are gained. This was the moment where relaxation, secluded surroundings, and the gentle probing of a concerned professional brought about self-awareness and reflection. This is the future of my profession.

‘I wanted to be on my own. That is all. I didn’t have to think when I was alone in the night.’

‘I understand that, but the danger?’

‘I never felt afraid.’ She paused again, more useful reflection. ‘No, never afraid.’

‘You were brought up in a poor household?’

‘In a slum do you mean?’ I had broken the moment. Poor practice. I had allowed her to convert reflection into anger.

‘I meant you’d be aware of what men can get up to in the darkness.’

‘That I’d be seen as street walker because I walked the streets? I never felt at risk. It was a comfort to me to walk. In the town and out in the country.’

‘What did you think about as you walked?’ She was instantly calm again. So unpredictable, inconstant.

‘I sang. Out loud. And in my head. I watched the world grow light. I felt the ground under my feet and sensed the miles dropping behind me. Do you need more?’ She looked towards me again; was this mischief? Mockery? Intelligent patients were always more of a challenge. ‘Or do you want to ask me about my marital relations? That is what Dr Campbell was most interested in. And if I’d taken to motherhood.’

‘We can talk about all of these things,’ I said. ‘We can have many more conversations like this.’

‘And that’s my treatment?’

‘Yes. This is, I believe, the best way. Better than.’ I paused, I would have to make her a conspirator at some point, but I didn’t want to frighten her too soon. ‘Better than other treatments.’

‘What are these men doing?’ She pointed, hands still under her blanket, towards a group of six men wrestling with the grass roller. They struggled, not with the weight – they were all big men – but with the coordination of their forces against an inanimate object. We were too far to hear, but the staff member was gesticulating wildly, as if he was the crazy one.

‘It’s the cricket pitch. Preparing for the season. We are quite good.’

‘Do you play?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘it’s not my game. I never learned. Dr Sneddon is very keen. He is the Medical Superintendent. He went to a school where they played a lot.’

‘The staff is the team?’

‘No, mainly patients.’

She was silent as the dumb show continued at the end of the grounds.

‘Will I be employed? Everyone seems to be.’

‘Private patients are special. We can discuss.’

‘I’d like somewhere away from the day-room.’ She said it without expression.

‘You are not at risk there.’ I said. ‘The staff are always alert.’

She turned towards me again, I felt her presence, the narrow space she took up on the bench. ‘I’m not frightened of anger. I’ve dealt with customers all my life.’ It wasn’t clear if she was joking. She went on: ‘I’d like to work in the garden.’

‘Women patients work in the kitchen, laundry or in the sewing room.’

‘Not the office? I have skills.’

‘The asylum office doesn’t meet the criteria for recuperative occupation. It can be too stressful an environment I believe.’

‘I’d like the garden.’

‘I shall see,’ I said. ‘We should go back in. It’s much colder now.’

The cloud had thickened and the light was lower. In truth there had been no warmth in the brightness, a spring day of sunshine and cold, an illusion. I walked Lotte back along the paths through the immaculate flower beds.

Nearly two years ago Sneddon had ordered me to the treatment room. Not for the first time. The patient, a woman in her thirties was sedated on the bed. I didn’t know her. Sneddon had to maintain his own case load, so I assumed it was one of his. A nurse was fussing, adjusting the pillow, the gown and sheet. The restraints.

‘That is all we need for now, Nurse. Dr Fergusson and I can manage from here.’

A final tightening and she left. The light, this late on a December afternoon, gave the room a gloomy chill, appropriate for our mission.

‘Cheer up John.’ Sneddon was always at his most dangerous when he used my first name. ‘It’s not the lab of Dr Frankenstein.’ He tightened a wrist strap by a notch. ‘Or the cabinet of Dr Caligari.’

‘You know where I stand here.’ What did I loathe more? The vileness of Sneddon’s methods, his ambition, or the fact that he could compel me to collude?

‘You’re standing there as the Depute Medical Superintendent of one of the biggest, and best, asylums in the country. And we are advancing medical science by taking forward an important exploratory procedure.’ He looked over his glasses at me. ‘Have I missed anything?’

I said nothing. Sneddon smiled, another danger sign: 'And you're my oldest friend. I'll add that to the brew. It is fitting we do this together. Both our names will be on the paper.'

Friend! Was it mockery or did he really believe it? We seemed destined to be locked together, smiling and pretending, drawn back even when we tried to escape. The charade even when we were alone. What boiling emotions we conceal under our white coats, our professional courtesies. But he was right, he couldn't do this on his own, without collaboration. And maybe it was appropriate it was me. We had known each other through momentous times. From perching together in anatomy lectures, all the way through the war. Sneddon's good war – his glittering war. My university prizes leading nowhere. Even my presence here in this hospital was due to him. Some days it seemed like destiny.

'This poor girl,' he gestured, 'has tried to kill herself four times. Should we do nothing, she will without doubt try again.'

He turned her limp wrist under the strap, her eyes were open, but she barely acknowledged his touch.

'See?' Her wrists were criss-crossed with blue scars.

Sneddon turned to the drug trolley.

'Water, hanging, cutting, she's been inventive in her methods. Imagination is so often part of this pattern.' Sneddon selected a syringe. 'What should we do? Keep her here till one day she gives staff the slip? Steals a needle to swallow or some carbolic acid from the laundry?'

He stepped over to the corner and opened his own leather bag. 'Send her back to her family and let them have the guilt and horror of finding her hanging in an outhouse somewhere?'

'Difficult cases will always be with us,' I said. I had no appetite for another debate. I had had them in this room in similar situations. I wanted it to be over. Until the next time.

'Difficult. But they shouldn't be impossible. There's only so much we can do with our lawns and our laundry and the garden.' He turned and looked over his shoulder at me. 'And your talking.'

'If we don't listen and don't understand we can help no one,' I said, lamely.

'I know that,' he said. 'I don't dispute it either. But it's not enough.' He was all focus and business. A man intent. 'My problem with my work, with our project, is the absence of subjective patient insights. I cannot get them to report what the experience is like. The

moment where they move from one state to the next. They can't articulate how it feels from the inside.'

He was filling a syringe now. His white coat glowed bright against the grey wall.

'I can only observe the process and measure the outcome, not how we got there.'

He turned, the syringe was full, the liquid a dull yellow. At that moment, he looked so much the figure of the mad scientist I could have laughed. Perhaps I should have. Perhaps that would have changed everything. I was silent.

'There should be no such thing as an impossible case. We should be prepared to treat. Intervene. Develop the tools that will help us to cure. In this place,' he waved the syringe in a tight arc. 'We have too much patience, always waiting. Until what? No one ever leaves here. No one gets better. We're stuck. It's time to open a new file, calibrate differently. Shall we move the story forward. Doctor?'

He indicated that I should help him find a vein. This was the closest he could get me to place my thumb on the plunger itself. He administered the drug with no suggestion of doubt.

He caught my eye. 'He who hesitates,' he said, smiling, and started his stopwatch.

I was always quite shocked at how quickly the drug started to work. No matter what variation of dose Sneddon used, it began to affect the patient almost immediately. She showed signs of agitation. Sweating. Her brow was smooth and shiny. She seemed to come out of the sedative, breathing faster, her eyes open, moving rapidly, but with no acknowledgement that we were in the room.

'Just a moment,' said Sneddon and tied a robust bandage round her open mouth, lifting her pretty head gently, like a proper doctor. 'Protect the tongue.' He then stood back and we both watched carefully as the drug took hold.

The rapid eye movement settled to a staring, and while she never focused on us, there was no lack of consciousness. Her mouth was open on the gag, gnawing. Her limbs shuddering.

But then her body went rigid, the convulsive movement stopped, her eyes opened even further, with a look of total and complete terror. It was as if she were looking at all of her worst nightmares gathered in this bare room.

Sneddon leaned forward over the bed. His face was pale with concentration. He drew closer and closer to the patient's face. I'd seen this obsessive reaction before with Sneddon – 'Our first rule. Observe' – but his attention was now as intense as if she were a lover. This

time I noted that the crotch of his suit, through his open coat, was pressed hard against the side of the bed.

‘Look at her,’ he whispered. ‘What is going on inside her head?’

‘How much longer?’

‘Only a few more minutes, it’s a medium dose.’

The patient now closed her eyes, tight as if in extreme pain. Sneddon leaned in even closer, he was inches from her face.

Then she stopped breathing.

We did what we could. The two of us. But it was no use. The loss did not seem to register with Sneddon.

‘I suspect she’d have been another inarticulate one,’ he said.

The Italians had only been able to go so far. Sneddon was convinced they had had casualties too. It wasn’t something you put in a journal article.

I had been in this room before, of course I had. But this time I felt unable to quell my revulsion with any soothing scientific outcomes. The absolute terror in the young woman’s eyes disturbed me in a new way. It was like nothing I had seen before. Not even in France. And it hadn’t been caused by the threat of having limbs ripped off by high explosives or the prospect to dying alone in agony in a hole under the open sky. No, it had been caused by some liquid that Sneddon had cooked up. A chemical. That disturbed me almost as much the sparkle I saw in his eye as he leaned over the patient while she died.

Will this diary end up in a damp box in in some loft? Maybe this scribbling is more about the here and now? My own therapy in the absence of anyone I can talk to. Better get it out on to paper than let all this rage around in your head. This morning I decided to make a move on Sneddon’s position.

In his outer office Mrs Nicholson gave me that thin-lipped smile which makes me wonder what Sneddon says about me. I can see her stifling amusement as he repeats something I’ve said. A tiny, shared confidence to reinforce her absolute loyalty. See how I trust you? But tittle-tattle about me with the administrative staff would show just how seriously he takes my views, takes me. At least it goes no further. I cannot imagine Mrs Nicholson gossiping with Mr Nicholson. Indeed, I cannot imagine Mr Nicholson at all.

‘Please just go in, Dr Fergusson.’

Sneddon had his head down over his papers. It was satisfying to note that the area of skin towards the rear of his skull flared through his greying hair more prominently than I remembered from my last visit. The sun came through the big windows to the left. There was an intensity to it, almost warm. In our business this season is a busy time. This is when the world quickens but leaves our people behind. In Spring sunlight they have to face the fact that darkness comes from inside.

‘Just bear with me John.’ He wasn’t going to look up. Yet. ‘I don’t want to break my delicate train of thought.’

‘Indeed,’ I said.

His papers were arranged parallel to the edge of the desk, overlapped precisely to reveal the titles. His pipe, tobacco tin, pen tray, all present. A full Lee-Enfield bullet clip weighted a batch of read papers to his right. He was nearing the end of a substantial file only just constrained by a powerful bulldog clip. You can’t work in this service without learning how to read upside down. Typed across the top of each page was - ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LONG-TERM NUTRITIONAL WELFARE OF PATIENTS. This was a new level of tedium even for Sneddon. I tapped my fingers gently on the edge of his desk. Walnut. I expected that Charlotte’s dining room table would be like this. These details must be an extra torture for her. I thought about the ravaged wood of the dining area tables. Bristling with splinters. Absorbing decades of rage. We had cut her adrift from a world she could recognise under her fingers. Rough wood, rough clothing. I felt the urgency again.

‘My new patient. When you’re ready, of course.’

He shuffled his papers methodically, marked his place, his eyes flickered up at me, glanced down again at Nutritional Arrangements, and leaned back in his chair. His charcoal suit, handkerchief angled in the breast pocket like a signal, the pale gold chain across his belly and his wide, apparently open face. Some men choose to present as younger than they are. He had decided, very early, to go in the other direction. He was only a year or so older than me, but newcomers to this place guessed at a decade at least. And it had worked for him, it was why he had the sunny office and mine was next to the kitchens. He removed his glasses and folded them neatly beside his capped fountain pen.

He raised an eyebrow. ‘Settling in?’

‘No one settles here.’

‘True. It isn’t really the point is it? I meant that she may have more...’ He waved vaguely with his hand, two fingers together, a casual gesture as if inviting an invisible guest

to pull up a chair. ‘Difficulties. In transition. She’s a paying guest and we’re not the Ritz of London.’

‘You mean those who come here from Orchard House have less difficulty?’

He smiled, warmly. ‘Most of them are positively grateful. There is only beneficial work here. Therapy, not hard labour. And better food.’ He tapped the file.

‘I’m not convinced that ironing or scrubbing floors is therapeutic.’

He smiled. ‘Your sceptical nature did you no harm in the anatomy hall. And I cannot pretend that a questioning demeanour isn’t at the heart of our science. But.’ He paused and began to pack his pipe. ‘You could just let some of the little things go. Concentrate on the things that matter.’ His fingers worked at the tobacco with the same intensity as I had seen them searching for a vein in a female patient’s arm. It is the tiny factors that tip us into irrational hatred as much as the ones that are life-defining.

He stared out into the well-kept garden. There were buds on the bushes. He usually waited a few more minutes before looking beyond me. One of his games to remind me where I stood in the hierarchy. I had a strategy for this. I simply followed his gaze out through the window and waited for him to make the next move.

Miss Brown, a volunteer technically, but a key part of our troop, was clipping at a bush with her secateurs. She was as thin as the adolescent cherry trees beyond the lawns. In her puttees and with her short hair she had the air of an officer examining the other ranks as she snipped silently. Beyond her, two inmates were working toward each other across the small lawn both spearing the turf with forks. Step, step, push.

‘Your garden.’ Sneddon was on his feet now. He walked over to the window, tapped the glass lightly with the end of his pipe. Miss Brown looked across, waved as if disturbed by a fly, and turned back to the bush. The patients continued to bayonet the lawn. ‘Is a different matter. Something worth bringing back from the old days.’

‘It is a connection with natural life. So many of our people are from the country but farm labour is beyond them.’

‘Good honest work, too.’ Sneddon had a trusting belief in work.

‘For many here, good honest work is what has helped to break them in the first place.’ I didn’t disguise the edge in my voice here. Sneddon had an Edwardian view of the lower orders which the war had done nothing to dispel.

Sneddon kept his back to me, blue clouds floated above his head. He let my comment drift past.

‘That, however, is decidedly not the case with our latest admission,’ he said.

‘She is from a very comfortable background.’ I had to pick my way onto a more favourable position before I mounted an attack.

‘She may be paying a fee, but our treatment here is not based on favouritism or fortune.’ He did that irritating thing with his pipe, sharp draws on the stem – put-put-put – thickening the clouds overhead. ‘If it is good enough for one it is good enough for all. As the Politburo might say.’

I wasn’t sure if he meant the Commissioners or Stalin’s henchmen. His back was still firmly set against me, so I walked over and joined him at the window. Miss Brown was shaping the bushes into perfect cones. Order in the chaos. The impaling of the lawn was proceeding mechanically.

‘Your initial diagnosis and treatment plan? I assume that’s why you’re here.’ Sneddon adopted a brisk Superintendent tone.

‘I’d like time.’ I said.

‘We’d all like time. Come with me to Edinburgh and see how much the Commissioners like to jaw about time. And the Councillors. They are all with me. All looking for faster...’ He paused. ‘Better treatments.’

‘You’ve discussed the treatments?’

‘Not in detail. The Commissioners will need more proof. And the Councillors would never understand. But in time. When I.’ He paused again. Pipe again. ‘When *we* have more evidence.’

I was keen to separate Charlotte from this strand of the conversation: ‘Her hysteria is due to her life. Her life outside. I think what she needs most is respite, sanctuary. A sanctuary.’

‘Asylum, you mean.’ Sneddon puffed. The pipe had gone out. He couldn’t lay down a smokescreen, but it allowed him to be thin lipped and resolute, so he pulled on the dead stem anyway.

‘I think if we give her time and listen then there is every chance she will go back to her family, and soon.’

‘Exactly that. Getting back to her family is what she wants and needs. You know we have the means to shock her out of her state and back on an even keel.’ He took the pipe out of his mouth now and glanced in my direction. ‘I’ve seen the Sheriff’s report and the medical reports. I’m not sure talking is the answer.’ He looked down sadly at the extinguished bowl.

Show no weakness. Persevere. Force him to make the arguments.

‘A week, that is all that I’m asking for. Then we will speak again. Review.’

‘She was a danger to herself. Her family deserve more.’

‘Do you mean the walking?’ I said.

‘A woman out in the dead of night. Alone.’ His pipe stem was jabbing in my direction, although he continued to look out at the garden. ‘It’s not right.’

‘It brings her peace.’

‘It’s not normal. Not safe.’

Outside, the two patients had surely long since vanquished the lawn, but they continued to jab, soundless behind the glass. The symmetry of their motion seemed broken. While one continued to step, place his fork then kick down on it with his right foot, the other was burying his fork deep in the turf with one powerful arched movement. He was a gaunt fellow, but his powerful arms were raising and stabbing the heavy fork with vicious purpose.

We watched carefully, Dr Sneddon and I. This is what we were here for, observing, interpreting, making sense of the unusual, the perplexing.

‘You can talk for a day or so more, Doctor, and then we shall treat her. ‘It’s for the best,’ said Sneddon.

A day. Or so. Not enough. I was about to defend my position for a final time when the white-faced man raised his fork high over his head and brought it down on to his foot. He fell like a tree on to his back. I could see the gleam of a tine through the sole of his shoes. It wasn’t silent through the glass now, but all was muffled as if in an aquarium. The injured man bellowed, Miss Brown and the other inmate stood open-mouthed. When Miss Brown finally got around the box hedges, she held the man by the shoulders and kept his torso upright, the fork lying awkwardly along his leg. The patient’s face was now the colour of the sundial.

‘Mrs Nicholson,’ Sneddon shouted, ‘telephone the sick bay, will you, tell them to get a couple of chaps and stretcher round to the garden.’

Outside, the casualty was now hidden by a kneeling Miss Brown, the soles of her neat little boots wet and muddy. There was no roaring now.

‘I expect you should take a look too.’ This wasn’t for discussion. Events had given him the edge on me. This was how it had been between us for decades, he was always quick to take advantage of circumstances – great and small. There was no going back to our argument now. Sneddon had the initiative: ‘Plenty iodine onto the wound, do you think? It’s not High Wood but I can’t imagine the lawn affects a high standard of hygiene. We don’t want an amputation on our hands.’

He was back at his desk. He fingered the edge of his papers.

‘A day. I shall book the treatment room for Wednesday.’ A sudden shriek came from outside. ‘Better get out there before you’re reduced to a field amputation.’

In the outer office Mrs Nicholson was on the telephone and in her element, ‘Yes, I did say emergency, and I did say Dr Sneddon insists...’ A moment later and I was in the dispensary filling a syringe with morphine. When I got out on to the lawn Miss Brown was still kneeling on the grass in the sunshine, supporting the injured man. It was like a religious painting.

There was no sign of a stretcher party and the other patient was hunkered down at the far end of the lawn, staring at the grass between his feet.

Miss Brown glared up at me. ‘Thank God you are here. This man is in great pain.’

‘I think I have seen enough bayonet wounds, Miss Brown, to have established that.’

The man was so pale now he was almost blue. He was breathing fast but perfectly composed. I pulled his arm out of his canvas jacket and unbuttoned a ragged cuff. He didn’t flinch as I injected the morphine.

‘You know this routine, soldier? Just try to breathe and let this do its work.’

His lips were thin with white matter at each corner, but his voice was strong.

‘Thank you, Doctor. It was an accident.’

‘Poor fellow.’ Miss Brown held his other hand.

‘We’ll get you patched up,’ I said, but by now, having made him comfortable, I was happy to leave it to the nurses to remove the fork and clean the wound. My days of this sort of work were behind me.

‘Doctor.’ His brows were down now, I could see the pupils had narrowed already, but it wouldn’t have made much impact on the pain yet. ‘Doctor. This will get me home now, won’t it?’ And then he added, ‘I’m no coward.’

‘Lie still soldier, we’ll have you sorted in no time at all.’

‘It was an accident, Doctor, she saw it.’ His eyes moved to Miss Brown. ‘An accident. Enough to get me back home to Scotland though?’

When the two orderlies eventually arrived, I left them to it. Miss Brown and I were walking back to the main entrance and so were cushioned by distance from the shrieks as they lifted him.

‘That poor man,’ said Miss Brown. As always, I had to pick up my pace to match hers. ‘To inflict such pain. What agonies he must have.’

‘For some it never ended. We can only do what we can to provide some safety.’ I was aware of the criticism inadequately concealed in almost all of Miss Brown’s observations. As

a volunteer, she felt herself separate from our hierarchies. As a second cousin or some-such of Lord Drummond, she was always confident enough to challenge professional men. With her almost military hairstyle and masculine clothing she was unique in our community. She needed careful handling at all times. We were nearing the front entrance and I knew she was never keen to enter the main building if she could avoid it.

‘We cannot cure the incurable Miss Brown, we can only offer some comfort. Perhaps we shall think twice about who we expose to potentially dangerous garden tools.’

A life lived outdoors meant it was difficult to put an age to Miss Brown, but her eyes were the palest and purest of blues.

‘Dr Fergusson, I have a firm belief that the smell of the earth and the sound of the birds calms and soothes their demons.’

‘I could not disagree.’ I was keen to leave her on a positive note.

We were standing by the doorway now. I put a hopeful foot on the first step, a sign of how busy I was. I did not want a long debate with Miss Brown. She was a modern woman, a woman who viewed men with open suspicion, if not hostility – she was an unpredictable and unconventional ally in this tiny theatre of conflict. I was always wary.

I was ready to disengage and sprint up the steps, but I turned back.

‘I wonder, Miss Brown, if you might find a task for my new patient. She is not a self-mutilator, but a troubled woman. Dr Sneddon sees only one route for the very troubled, but I feel you and I, between us, could help her more.’

‘Is she the private patient?’

‘Yes, but that’s not why I’m asking. She is a lover of the open fields and hedges. A compulsive walker.’

‘My garden – our garden – may give her more distress. We have an estate wall that is nine feet high.’

‘The smell of the earth. The sound of the birds,’ I said.

‘I will do what I can to help.’

When I got to the hospital the fork was standing against the wall in the corridor. The blood had been carefully wiped away.

‘Ready for Miss Brown to collect,’ Madden, nurse superintendent, called over his shoulder. ‘I’m sure she doesn’t want her tools to go missing.’

I wasn’t sure if any humour was intended. I didn’t give any suggestion of a smile. Non-commissioned officers take advantage of familiarity. It often felt as if I had never left the army.

‘The patient?’ I said.

‘Quiet,’ said Madden, pulling back the sheet. ‘I haven’t dressed the wound yet, thought you might want to take a look.’ Maddon was another ex-RAMC man. They were good people to have in the sick bay, skilled in patching up. He retained something of the difficult NCO he had been in the forces. The patient was deep in morphine slumbers.

‘Bones?’

‘He seems lucky, as far as I can see he’s missed them all.’

I looked down at the swollen foot, the bruised wound seeping. The two smallest toes were missing.

‘Not his first accident.’ There was contempt in Madden’s voice.

‘Old wounds,’ I said.

‘Old lies. An old coward.’

I looked at Madden. His smirk. We didn’t need his judgements here.

‘You have no idea what is vivid in his head. Anyway, the wounds to his toes don’t look old enough to be from the war.’

‘They let us down. His like. Left us short and exposed.’

‘He is a casualty.’ I looked up at Madden again. ‘Just like all of us.’ I put the sheet back over the patient. ‘Please disinfect again and dress the wound. Dr Cunninghame or I will look in tomorrow. And send someone round with Miss Brown’s fork.’

Later that afternoon, with my office door shut firmly, I settled to complete my paperwork. Some things about the army I had hated. The play-ground hierarchies that allowed people like Sneddon to prosper. The petty cruelties and the lack of common sense. These were daily torments for me. But the rigorous focus on order, a place for everything and everything in its place, was the thing that I loved. It was what gave me comfort, security. The routine, the ordered filing cabinets, the ability to find exactly what I needed at any given moment. The absence of my wife and children and spaniel allowed me to extend that precision into what life I had outside these walls.

The alternative to order was set out clearly in France. Chaos is death. And I also observed, among the best officers – the top units, that discipline and form could be imposed at the very extremes of human experience. Bombed-out trenches were turned into training-

standard defences in a matter of hours, working field hospitals rose out of a waste of mud and rotting horses.

It is my belief that our mission – our calling – as physicians of the mind, is the imposition of an ordered understanding of the chaos that raged inside all our heads. The patterns of memories, experiences, sensations, interactions contending with each other like waves in a disturbed sea and occasionally joining into a mighty swell that overwhelmed the breakwaters. Our task is to explore, to examine, to look and listen long and hard enough to make sense of the maelstrom, find a pattern which will enable our patients to build defences that might break the surge, still the waters. Our emotions bring us joy. Even my beautifully ordered files have value to me because I have an inner surge of positive emotion when I lay my hands directly on the memo I need. But I am careful that those emotions do not get out of hand, that my pleasure I take from order does not get out of control. In France, fear was the only emotion that mattered. It preserved men and broke men. In equal measure. What made the difference was whether you understood your fear and created some order around it, or let it overwhelm. For the self-mutilator on the lawn this afternoon the fear had never been contained.

I started to work through my paperwork systematically. But I was conscious I was hurrying through the pile of nurses' reports on my patients. As the nursing staff have become more professional and more educated, we have found it valuable to make use of their more sustained contact with the patients. Their written reports are admirable, and a great help to us physicians charged with making decisions. We do not have time to sit for hours with patients, and in any case the observations of their unguarded moments provide us with insights that we would not extract from formal interviews. I intended to favour Charlotte with a disproportionate amount of my time, and not just because she was a private patient. But I was still anxious to see if there was a report on her first day with other patients.

I therefore abandoned my systematic appraisal of the reports and dug down until I saw her name at the top of the observations form.

I took in Nurse Colgan's report on Charlotte in one gulp:

I collected Mrs Raymond from her room at 7 a.m. She was dressed in her asylum clothes and washed and I would also say had fixed her hair, but her hair is a great mass of dark curls so does not need fixing. I took her to the dining hall for breakfast. She sat alone but interacted politely with the women she was sat with. She showed no great nervousness and replied to all who asked her questions. After breakfast I took her to the dayroom and sat her beside a group that I thought she would get on with. It included Alice Ogilvie who is a bit older than

Mrs Raymond but I thought would be of interest as she was a singer in the past and so they would have things to talk about. There were a couple of other quieter and more respectable ladies in the group too. I went round the groups in the dayroom, keeping an eye on my women as I generally do at this time, but I kept one eye and one ear on Mrs Raymond due to her being new. It is often a difficult time for them when first exposed to the dayroom, especially private patients. I saw that Mrs Raymond and Mrs Ogilvie were talking amicably on operas and arias and composers. Mrs Raymond did not even seem upset when Mrs Ogilvie began her story about the time she had met Mozart. She asked lots of questions about the experience and seemed amused rather than astonished. Those of us who have heard the story a few times are not usually as indulgent, but it suggested that Mrs Raymond might not be as shocked at some of our patients as I might have feared. And we have no one else with Mrs Ogilvie's knowledge of music. After a while I took Mrs Raymond to Nurse Warriston who took her to her second induction interview with Dr Fergusson.

I read the report again, slowly. How close you can feel to someone when seeing them through another's eyes. She wasn't our normal private patient. Not a bored wife of the type Professor Freud specialises in, although there will be sexual undercurrents to investigate – there always are. She's not a troublesome relative to be parked away from the family for a while. Or a victim of a vendetta. As far as we know. The circumstances of her arrival will be interesting to explore in due course.

After a third read I returned to the rest of my in-tray, working down. I drafted a number of memoranda and put them in the typing file. I had letters to write to relatives, always the most difficult, covering letters for files being sent to other institutions with transferred patients, and finally some references for several of our staff hoping to be accepted on the College's training course.

It was late by the time I finished. On nights when I slept in the building, I enjoyed the walk from my office to my room along these silent corridors. The whole building had settled for the night. It felt like a breath going out, a stillness descending. Nurses, their white uniforms reflected in the polished floors, tended to float rather than bustle. At this time I could genuinely believe that we were making a difference, that we had offered peace and calm to so many.

Later, I knew well, when there was total silence, the presence or absence of sleep would bring out the demons of the dormitory, the private rooms. No doubt in the Nurses' Home too. The waking and the part-dead alike would find their heads full of terrors, the squeals and the sobs and the names called out, the breath caught and the screams swallowed

back all the more awful because they are muffled, stifled, damped down by the power of the place to constrain and conform. Don't disturb, don't upset. Suffer, but quietly.

There is a direct way to my room, but of course I took a detour. It took me past Charlotte's room. 154. I looked at the panelled wood. The builders of the original building here had cut no corners with the fittings, it was only subsequently that we bought furniture cheaply and replaced it infrequently. The handle was brass, the keyhole too. My master-key was in my pocket. I felt the weight against my thigh.

I looked to right and to left, down the long poorly lit corridor. I put my forehead against the door, barely touching. Then hurried on to my room.

Sleep was beyond me. Increasingly that was the case when I spent a night in the building. I needed the natural night noises of the farmhouse to soothe me. Here I was under the same roof as the treatment room. Sneddon was long gone, back to the family home, on the slope above the river. The villas of Bridge of Allan matched his aspirations. But although my room was well insulated from the night noises of the asylum, doctors can visualise suffering without being exposed to it for twenty-four hours.

I sat up, smoking and reading *The Scotsman*. So many war memoirs. British and German, all in the last few years. I read the reviews, not the books. If you had been anywhere near the front the descriptions seemed so insipid. Distorted through the consciousness of the writers and the words they used. Once, when I was out on a shoot, walking up partridge in September, I noticed some tiny blue flowers growing among the dying grasses in a field. I had a solicitor, from Cupar Angus or some such, on my right. I said, 'What's these blue flowers we're walking over?' I pointed down with my gun.

'Not a clue,' he said, pausing and rubbing the toe of his boot over the grass and peering down.

'I'll look it up when I get home,' I said, 'got a book.'

'Good luck,' he said, 'I'd rather not know.' He stopped and looked down again. 'They're beautiful and delicate and knowing what they're called, all that Latin stuff, will just spoil it.'

I felt the same way regarding books about the war, but in reverse. All these words just diminished the horror, the overwhelming putrid, pus-filled, poison of it all. These public-

school boys showing off. The great roaring wastelands reduced to neat little black words marching across the page. It was a sort of sacrilege.

When I was first commissioned, I didn't have the experience to cure anyone. I could train officers in how to lance blisters, instruct soldiers in the correct use of first aid packs. That was when the planners anticipated a few hundred deaths based on engagements in the Zulu Wars. It wasn't long before those of us fresh from having to overcome the sights and smells of Professor Deacon's anatomy class were exposed to a different level of horror.

The barely competent recent graduates, too green to be given a proper surgical role, were allocated the most forward positions. The fewest skills to offer were the most expendable. I can't shape the tumble of sensations I felt then into sentences for this journal. It is impossible to separate out the different positions our battalion was in, the orders, the different sectors. The big shows, the names on battle honours, were often less terrifying than the limited sorties, the raids in the dead of night when a hundred men would be caught out by the wire, lit by flares and cut down.

The wounded were all brought to me, the officer in charge of the Regimental Aid Post, just off the line, in range of the enemy's heavy weapons. My job was as triage. I hate that word. I hear it slip into civilian chatter and flinch. I have to breathe deeply and resist the urge to take the speaker by the lapels and tell them exactly what it meant.

Those awful nights. Rain running off the canvas, oil lamps turned as high as we dared, the distant pounding and chattering. They were brought in, those ragged men, feeling their hearts fading with every beat, too fearful to look at their wounds under the flares. These were the lucky ones, hauled out of the earth and taken for judgement. The medical orderlies moved along the line with the lamp, calm, so that I, God, could look down from above and assess, choose.

Solomon's judgements. Few bullet wounds, for they were usually not worth the stretcher bearers' time. The bearers, mainly pacifists who balked at taking lives, had been sent out to the most dangerous job of all. The choices they had to make were hard too. But a bullet did such damage. The entry points were at such strange angles, for no one walks upright under fire. A crouching man, a man bent in terror would take a bullet in one shoulder, then exit through the other hip and then on through his comrade following behind. That pitiful illusion of shelter – keeping in the lee of the man in front. Bullets hitting equipment or bone became small explosions, the water-bottle, the shattered pelvis became their own projectiles. The bullet wounds rarely got as far as treatment.

We were usually presented with the outcome of shrapnel. Lumps of metal, jagged or blunt, tiny or the size of a head, always accompanied with filth. These were the wounds we saw in the Aid Post. There was no third part to our triage. The walking wounded were bundled away by the NCOs. We didn't have the time for near misses. The orderlies and I were only concerned with life and death. Black and white. After a moment's examination we gifted one soldier a future of children, grandchildren, a drink in the pub on a Friday at six, a gold watch on retirement, a knee-trembler with a prostitute, companionable decades in bed with a wife, an afternoon on the beach. To the other, we gave an hour or less in a dripping tent, some opiates if we had them, perhaps even someone to hold your hand. Then dark.

On a bad night we had thirty seconds to decide. Appearances could be deceptive. Men with half a face gone and their uniforms and bodies torn, who would live on for forty hard years. But there were times when the orderly and I would hunt with the light to finally find a hole low in an intact soldier's back. A hole a quarter of an inch long, but they would be dead by the time we turned them back over. Physicians should learn from their mistakes but not dwell on them. In France there was no time for either. We took comfort that even if we made mistakes that was better than the alternative – to be left out there to die alone.

I had many orderlies in that time. Comrades in judgement. Life. Death. The best was Albert Stoneleigh. An apprentice chemist from Nottingham. No one was cooler, more thorough, his touch on the ravaged bodies, delicate and kind. He cut his throat in the jakes of a bar in Amiens. We could send the living to Casualty Clearing, perhaps all the way home, but I was never convinced they were the lucky ones. For as they sat out their years in offices or shipyards or on a tractor, they carried with them the scenes they had witnessed out there by the wire. We could fish for the debris, sew them up, pour on antiseptic, but we couldn't extract the things they had seen and heard.

I was God for less than two years, then returned to the mental health services. Where my choices were no less dark.

Chapter 5: Saturday 15th April 1933.

Sometimes there was a beadle around. He would find jobs to do at the back of the church among the musty piles of Bibles, tracts and hymn books. Other times he would slip off and return at nine to lock up, smelling slightly of beer and tobacco.

Tonight, he was in the vestry, mopping the tiles.

‘Fine night.’ He was a man so thin that the handle of the mop seemed a natural extension of his arms, his figure in the boiler suit something that a child might make out of pipe-cleaners. And yet, Dr Macleod had told her that the beadle was Mentioned in Dispatches. One night at Ancre he had crawled close to a machine gun post and killed all the crew by throwing a bomb into their midst, allowing most of his unit to retreat. He now lived with his aged mother on a pension and his beadle wages.

‘I can forgive him his indiscretions,’ said Dr Macleod. ‘Or at least tolerate them.’

There was a faint rushing noise as she went into the high vaults of the church proper. There only if you listened hard. It was the sound of the organ filling with air, the electric motor that had finally dispensed with the manual pump. And it rendered obsolete the two youths who pulled the long wooden handles in the gloom among the pipes and valves. No longer would wisps of blue smoke waft out between the long pipes on a Sunday morning as they enjoyed a contemplative cigarette during the sermon.

As she walked between the rows of pews towards the raised altar, Frederick played with the bass notes, in slow march time, the Arrival of the Queen of Sheba. It was a joke. He looked over his shoulder. ‘All hail,’ he said.

‘Don’t be silly,’ said Lotte taking off her coat and placing it over the front pew. It wasn’t clear at this point if it was going to be warm enough to do without it.

‘I’m not being silly.’ Frederick swung his legs over the long bench and came over the carpeted altar area towards her. His black shoes caught the lights, for someone who had never been in the military he had extremely well-tended footwear.

Lotte opened her music case and took out the Handel.

‘I’ve gone over this a few times on the piano.’ She opened the manuscript book, ‘since Sunday. It isn’t any less tricky.’

He took the manuscript from her. They stood there, slim in front of the tall dark windows. Where couples stood as they were taking their vows.

‘We will come to this in a moment.’ He closed the book, looked down at its buff cover – *Saul. Handel*. In black gothic script. ‘In fact, we will be spending much time with this composer, and one or two of his countrymen.’

‘What is this?’

‘You,’ he said, ‘have a concert to prepare.’

‘Please don’t tease. Just tell me what this is.’

‘The Festival of Sacred Music. In August. We, you, will have a place on the programme.’

‘How?’ Lotte didn’t let herself respond, held back. It was too unlikely.

‘Last winter, I told you, I asked my old teacher from Edinburgh, Herbert Jones, to come to your recital. He came. But had to slip off to get his train. I didn’t want you to think that he had left early because he wasn’t impressed, so I said nothing.’

‘He came all that way?’

‘I had told him you were remarkable. Worth an hour on the train on a winter’s night. There didn’t seem to be any reason to add to all to the anxiety by telling you he might be there.’

‘But you didn’t tell me after either?’

‘No. And because I hadn’t heard from him, I thought perhaps he’d been caught up in other work, his teaching, his Ensemble. But.’

‘But what?’

‘He sent me a letter this week. He has organised the Festival almost single-handed. Choirs and soloists from all over the country, Birmingham, Cardiff, Leeds. And,’ Frederick gestured with the Handel, ‘he hopes from Germany too.’

‘So, what is our role?’ Lotte felt her excitement rising.

‘You, he said, will appear in the closing concert. On the Sunday evening. He wanted the best of local talent, and not just the people he knows in Edinburgh.’

‘But I’m not exactly fresh talent.’

‘It’s not about fresh talent. It is about talent. He loved your voice. He says in his letter – mature, strong, unique. Look,’ he reached into his dark jacket, ‘read for yourself.’

‘No.’ She stepped back down the three steps and sat on the front pew. ‘No, I don’t need to see it. I’m just not sure.’

‘Not sure?’ He followed her down the stairs. Sat beside her on the pew, twisted round to face her. His eyes took on a life she hadn’t seen there before. She saw how young he was. The mask of maturity he exuded when he sat in front of a score had dropped. She saw the, what, twenty-eight-year-old? The nervous printer’s salesman, uncertain about closing a deal, rather than the maestro she usually saw.

‘Where will it be?’

He paused; he couldn’t stop a smile breaking out. The effort of containing his excitement almost made him mispronounce: ‘The Usher Hall.’

Lotte saw the vast space, she looked up where the yellowy lights failed to penetrate in the old church, the high arches. They were lost suddenly in the vertiginous stairs and hanging balconies of the Hall. The musicians, tiny, their noise swelling up towards her. The soloists alone, distant and commanding, their voices penetrating space.

‘I couldn’t. I can’t do that.’

‘It’s just like here. But bigger.’

‘My voice isn’t big enough. I’m not trained.’

There was something in the way she said that, a hesitancy, that encouraged Frederick to push on, with greater confidence.

‘We will practice. The pieces will be second nature. And,’ he paused again, she found herself leaning forward. ‘They will be listening. Straining for the next note.’

‘Now,’ she said, ‘you’re exaggerating.’ She looked up towards the distant ceiling again. ‘Will you be there?’

‘Of course. Professor Jones, Herbert, has said that I can have access to practice on the Usher Hall organ.’ He said it with hushed reverence. ‘And we will have time to rehearse in the Hall itself.’

‘It’s hard to contemplate,’ said Lotte. ‘Hard to envisage, in my head.’ Which wasn’t true. She could see and hear it all – looking out into the darkness, her voice filling the space. ‘I need time to think about this. Discuss it. At home.’

‘No.’ Frederick had shuffled along the shiny smooth wood of the pew now. ‘No, don’t think about it too much. Just say yes.’

Frederick was an unusual man, his talent and his ambition tucked away here. He had talent beyond a part-time post and a day-job in sales. Now his eyes were wide, alive with a vision of opportunity. And she too saw a resolution to the huge yearning for something more. All her time and commitment to music would have a fitting pinnacle. This would give it all a point and purpose.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Yes. We will do this.’

She was surprised to look down and see that Fredrick had both her gloved hands in his. She looked up. He saw the glitter in her eye. But he put her hands down.

‘Lotte, you will be marvellous. You deserve that stage.’

‘And you do too.’ She hesitated. ‘I don’t need it to go further than that one night. That performance.’

‘Of course. It will be up to you.’

‘I know this is an opportunity for you. I won’t let you down.’

‘I know that. You are so sensible.’ He blushed like a boy. ‘Sorry, that makes you sound very ... mature.’

She smiled, she felt two decades older than him, not one.

‘I know what you meant.’

‘I meant you’ll work and take it in your stride.’ They were turned together now on the narrow pew. In the excitement of their shared mission they had drawn closer. He reached across the short distance and laid the back of two fingers on her cheek. They were church-cold. She didn’t move. Her heart began to race. She looked away towards the frenzy of colour in the stained glass.

‘Lotte.’ His hand touched her hair. Her curls ran through his fingers as she moved away, slowly but deliberately.

‘Lotte?’ She didn’t look back. She closed her coat, fingers working the big buttons. Then she pulled on her hat.

‘I’ll work very hard. I’m not so sure about taking it in my stride.’ Her tone dismissed the intimacy, the fingers in her hair. She picked up the Handel manuscript. ‘We must deal with Sunday first.’

‘We will,’ said Frederick, getting to his feet stiffly, ‘and then we have concert pieces to choose.’

Lotte was at the big dark side-door, she turned back, her eyes shadowed by her hat. Frederick stood there in his black suit, Lotte could still feel the cold of his fingers on her face, could sense the presence of a different life hanging there. But she said firmly, ‘I have some ideas for that,’ and closed the big door behind her.

‘Do they really use this?’

Lotte reached down between her boots and pulled at the bright green moss. When she squeezed the intricate miniature forest flat it sprang up again apparently bigger than it had been before.

Peter picked up his own piece of turf, rubbed it between thumb and finger, sniffed.

‘They say it’s better than cotton. Better than bandages. And it cleans the wounds.’

‘I’m glad you haven’t had first-hand experience of that,’ said Lotte

Peter took another sniff.

‘Some of the lads say that it smells of a woman.’ He inhaled deeply. ‘I can’t say I’m experiencing that myself.’

Lotte threw the sphagnum at his head. He ducked, and for a moment the vivid green of the moss was held suspended black in the sun, against the whole of the central plain of Scotland, the tiny winding gear, the towns, the bings, the chimneys, the flash of greenhouses, the blue haze over the factories, the coiling rope of the river, a suggestion of the faraway rail bridge and the naval ships on the Forth. Then it dropped out of sight.

‘I’ve heard this said. It coarsens lads. The army.’ Lotte shaded her eyes, looked straight at him.

‘I learned more swear words among the nice boys at the Art School.’

‘This will change you,’ said Lotte. ‘It’s bound to.’

‘Says the expert.’ Peter lay back. ‘Doctor Charlotte Candow, the eminent and distinguished lady physician, outstanding in her field.’

‘Like a scarecrow,’ said Lotte. ‘I’ll just finish the joke for you.’

‘Outstanding lady physician. Indeed, the only lady physician, today pronounced that young gentlemen exposed to the rough ways of the lower orders may find that their time in His Majesty’s forces will extend their vocabulary in previously unrecorded ways.’

‘You know what I mean.’

‘Doctor Candow also conceded that close exposure to the decapitation by high explosives of said lad’s best mates may induce the odd bad dream in future years.’

‘Have you?’ Lotte squinted at him.

‘No, of course not.’ Peter chewed a piece of dry skin from his thumb. ‘I told you. We gunners are so far from the front that we only hear a far-off rumble. Flashes at night.’

He rolled on to his elbow. Behind him Lotte could see the distant Monument, the Castle beyond. Just below the outline of the Castle, clinging to the steep slope, she could make out their home.

‘The flashes at night. The flares. It’s like nothing else. Impossible to capture. I tried in my sketchbook. Hopeless. I saw photographs in training, nothing like being there. So much material for the future. Honestly, I wouldn’t want to miss it. There aren’t many artists out there.’

Lotte pulled up another clump of sphagnum. She studied the detail. A tiny landscape, a forest in her hand, against the sweep of the land at their feet.

‘How far is far?’

‘Miles honestly. The best billet by a long shot. I’d only be safer in the stores.’

‘But if you can reach them, they can reach you.’

‘It’s all about making them keep their heads down.’ He sat up now. ‘Trying to get us is like trying to hit the Castle from here.’

They both looked out across the sun-lit land, the great hills away to the north. Lotte closed her eyes. She saw the Castle, flames shooting through the old roof, stones raining down, men shattered like the rubble that lay along the edge of the castle rock, a tall black column of smoke reaching up through the white passing clouds and beyond.

‘It could happen though?’

Peter reached into his battledress pocket, took out a tin of cigarettes, a box of matches, cupped his hands as he lit up.

‘They’d have to get lucky. We’d have to get lucky. Or unlucky. The country boys who look after the nags say the odds are longer than a three-legged horse. They couldn’t hit a barn-door or whatever that is in Hun.’ He drew the smoke down deep. ‘And if we’re honest we couldn’t hit the whole barn. You know how good I was at maths at school and yet they said I was chosen because I was good at numbers.’

Lotte pulled her knees up, pushed round so she was facing him squarely.

‘Peter. Do not get killed.’

He tipped his head back, blew smoke straight up, into the breeze.

‘I am serious,’ said Lotte. ‘I supported you. Against the aunts. Do not get killed.’

‘We don’t have that choice,’ said Peter, serious now too. ‘No one wants to.’

‘But don’t volunteer. Don’t make it worse than it is.’

‘It’s the first thing you’re told. Never volunteer. Always stand at the back. Don’t draw attention to yourself.’

‘Just don’t.’ Lotte picked at the sphagnum again.

‘Don’t think I don’t know that.’ He shuffled across the grass and moss. He mirrored her position, hands round his knees, cigarette thrown down on the grass. The soles of his boots against the soles of Lotte’s.

‘People say we’re worse than sweethearts,’ said Lotte.

‘Worse?’ Said Peter.

‘Just like.’

‘Better.’

‘How?’

‘Because.’ Peter rubbed the knuckles of his clasped hands softly up and down the knuckles of her clasped hands. ‘Because we don’t want in each other’s drawers.’ He smiled. ‘There’s lots of new words I’ve learned, Dr Candow, but you know what I mean.’

‘I can’t tell if you’re right,’ said Lotte. ‘I can’t tell what others feel, Marguerite when she’s flirting with boys, others with their sweethearts away.’

‘Can’t compare feelings.’ Peter took his hand away, leant back. ‘They’re unique to you. I just know you are the most important person in my world. And we can’t spoil that.’

Lotte felt something well within her. It was like the moment before you laugh out loud or burst into sobs. But it went on without resolution.

‘Don’t die,’ she said.

‘I’ll try,’ he said.

‘Peter.’

Over his shoulder, where he had thrown his cigarette, smoke was curling around the dried grass. There were flames too, hidden in the sunlight, but the heat turned Stirling, the Castle, the Gargunock Hills into rippling distortions.

‘Your cigarette.’

Laughing in the smoke and the ash, they stamped the fire back into the ground.

Lotte went into the upstairs dressing room. Washed and changed her clothes. Even without sleep it defined the start of a new day. After a night of walking she never felt tired. That might come later when the energy of the open night started to fade and the day itself clouded around her.

She went across the hallway into Sheila's bedroom. The child was asleep. High points of red on her cheeks, but breathing in that effortless, invisible way of children. Lotte knelt down, stroked the child's soft curls, felt the faintness of her breath on her cheek. She pulled the covers up over the chubby bare arms and kissed her lightly on the head.

Downstairs she stood at the sitting room window, one knee on the long stool. The day was almost gone. She wasn't going to hide, in her own house.

Grace was in the kitchen. This was the room where she seemed to occupy more space. The marble top of the centre table was covered with a rolled out biscuit mix. Grace had cut into it, the perfect circles clustering at one end. She pushed the cut raw biscuits out onto a baking tray with a shove of her thumb. They dropped onto the tray one after the other. But for a faint click as the cutter went through and the flop of the pastry onto the tray, the operation was almost silent. Grace's head remained bent over the work.

'She's fast asleep now,' said Lotte. She leaned back against the working surface. She looked down at Grace's tightly fixed bun as she worked.

'She will need it,' said Grace, and paused to place the edge of the next circle as close to that of the previous cutting as she could manage. 'The lamb.'

'It is not easy for me to explain why I need to go out. To walk.' Lotte said. 'I don't expect you to understand. I know it seems odd. Strange.'

Grace put the cutter down on the marble top. Leaned the heel of her hand on it and looked at Lotte for the first time.

'I'm not judging you. That isn't my place.' She looked down again, the perforated sheet of baking. 'I count you as a friend, and I couldn't be more worried about you.'

'I'm perfectly safe.' Lotte kept her voice steady. 'I don't want to be a worry to anyone. Which is why...'

'Why you don't tell your husband?'

'Which is why I slip out and back without anyone noticing.'

'Except for me? I don't count?'

'I'm totally safe. Honestly. There is no one out at that time.'

'But I know you're out. I can hear you. Your footsteps overhead. The door.'

Lotte could see Grace's eyes were wet.

'I'm the one lying and listening. Waiting for you to come back. That's how I heard Sheila. Crying for her mum.'

‘I don’t want you awake too.’ Lotte pushed herself upright, her back and legs muscles felt strong. She knew what the reference to Sheila meant. Grace the childless mother. ‘One of us awake is enough.’ She smiled. ‘Grace, please help me with this, please try to understand.’

‘I do help. I lie.’

‘I don’t ask you to lie for me.’

‘But I do lie for you. And that isn’t easy.’ Grace started to cut into the mix randomly, the circles overlapping, the doughy mix flopping back down in semi circles, crescents. ‘But I do it because the thing I don’t want is an unhappy house and unhappy children.’ She chopped on at the mix.

‘It’s like a medicine for me.’ Lotte leant forward now her hands on the wide table, the cool marble under her palms. ‘It helps me get through the next day.’

‘But on no sleep?’

‘In bed without sleep is the worst thing there is.’

‘If I’m your friend,’ said Grace, her hands still now, ‘then you must try to stop this leaving the house. Come down to talk to me in the kitchen. Or let’s both of us take a turn around the Park. Together. At dead of night. That will be the same, but safe.’

‘No, no,’ said Lotte moving round the kitchen now, taking the pots off the range hanging them in their place. ‘No that would not be the same. It isn’t company I need.’ She stopped and smiled across. ‘Not even your company. It’s being alone.’

There was no resolution. Grace took the mangled biscuit mix mashed it into an oval lump and began to roll it back out, smooth and thin.

Lotte walked round to the dresser. *The Stirling Observer* was lying, sharply folded into four at an inside page, right in the middle, with the headline –

ABANDONED BABY FOUND AT BALLENGEICH

The paper had been carefully left to expose the headline. Grace didn’t look up. ‘That’s the sort of people out and about with you in the night.’

‘I heard when I was out yesterday.’ She read quickly down the column. ‘It’s not a part of town I’d walk to,’ she lied.

‘A bad woman. Or a bad man, did that. The very worst.’ Grace lent into the mix with the rolling pin.

‘That was the view in the Golden Lion, too.’

Under the pressure of the rolling pin the mix opened into long gaps. Grace scooped the strips together and started again.

‘Women who’d leave their baby out. In April, frost the night before. Out in a graveyard. They are the dregs.’

Lotte said nothing. She pretended to keep reading. Grace wasn’t finished:

‘Who would do that? Women crave a child, would give anything for a child. And others have one and throw it away. Like rubbish out in a bin.’ She let the words hang in the floury air.

‘It was well cared for. The baby. It says here it was well dressed and properly wrapped up.’

‘Cared for.’ Grace stopped rolling.

‘This,’ said Lotte, ‘is a terrible thing. For everyone. I don’t believe a mother does that out of badness.’

‘What do they do it out of then?’ Grace held the rolling pin in one hand. ‘Kindness?’

Lotte tapped the newspaper with her fingernail.

‘It will come out. There will be more to the story. The newspapers only tell you what it looks like, not how it actually is.’ Lotte turned back to the paper. ‘The poor woman.’

‘The bad mother,’ said Grace.

Lotte kept her back to her. She felt Grace’s fury between her shoulders. They knitted together and she let her arms sag where she lent on the dresser. The tension flowed down to bunch in her fists.

‘No real mother,’ said Grace.

When Lotte turned round, Grace had the full baking tray in her hands, glaring at the pale biscuits. She opened the oven door, slid it in and banged the heavy door shut.

‘Prison is too good.’

‘It will all out in court, I dare say.’

‘It will,’ said Grace, bent over the controls. She peered in through the glass door.

‘What was Frederick’s news?’ Hunched down, she looked up suddenly at Lotte.

Lotte hesitated. ‘Nothing really. It was just a new setting he’d discovered. From his old tutor.’

Grace turned back to the cooker. ‘He’s a bit of a dramatist is he not, your Mr Thornlee?’

‘He is young and takes his music very seriously. He has a passion for it.’

‘As you do.’

‘What do you mean?’ Lotte kept her eyes on the folded newspaper.

‘I know your relationship with Mr Thornlee is very professional. That is exactly what I meant, that you share an interest. An enthusiasm.’ She paused. ‘Not everyone has that understanding though.’

‘What have you heard?’

‘Nothing. Nothing at all. I would alert you if I had. You know that. And I’d swiftly put a stop to any gossip I heard too.’ Grace was at the tap now, washing her hands. ‘But not everyone knows how deep your shared interests run.’

‘Please tell me what you are suggesting.’

Grace took two steps towards her. Her hands were in her apron pocket.

‘I’m suggesting nothing at all other than I have such regard for you, for Sam, for the children. It would break my heart if there was talk in this place about you.’ She wiped her eye with the edge of the apron. ‘And you, so fragile.’

‘Oh Grace, I’m not that fragile. There have been bad times. You know that better than anyone. But I’m getting better.’ She picked up the paper, rolled it into a baton, smacked the back of one of the chairs lightly. ‘I am better. And the walking is what helps me. And the music.’ She pointed with the paper. ‘And I’m not like this poor woman.’

Grace smiled. ‘If you see how Sheila is then we can maybe all have some lunch. If you’re in for lunch.’

‘The Golden Lion was unusual for me. Dorothy is a friend I suppose. But the rest.’ Lotte ran her nail down a stack of side plates. They made a flat little scale. ‘They’re not friends. They’re not for me Grace. I just don’t fit. I’ve never felt part of them.’

‘So why meet them? Why not spend more time here? With us.’ Grace let the question hang. The baking smell had started. There was a tick from the oven.

‘I just need to be out. In the air.’ Lotte unrolled the newspaper in her fist, carefully flattened it and smoothed it on the surface by the dresser and left the kitchen.

How did Peter get the tickets? He told her the long, complicated story. His tutor at the College of Art had known someone who was a member of the RSA. But then he and his wife had a falling-out related in some way to a female student. And so, the tutor had not felt able to go. He was heartbroken.

‘He could have thought about that before the female student,’ Lotte said.

But, unable to explain to his colleagues why he might now be able to give away two of the most difficult to obtain tickets in Scotland, he had announced that we would give both tickets to deserving young people. The next generation. Pass on the cultural torch.

Which is why Peter, in his best suit, and Lotte in a dress and hat that cost a month's wages, found themselves walking up Lothian Road to the Grand Opening Concert of the Usher Hall.

'Is that the Provost?' Up ahead, outside the new building, there was a carriage, with matching black horses like a funeral. A gold chain flashing in the low evening sun.

'A pillar of the community. An upstanding citizen.' Peter curled his lip. Around them the good burghers of the city were beginning to notice his attitude as much as their youth in this white-haired crowd.

'Peter.' Lotte whacked him on the shoulder with her clutch bag. Drawing even more attention. 'Enough.'

'Oh Lotte,' he said, as they shuffled up the steps toward the uniformed doormen, 'what on earth are we doing here?'

It was mild for early March, but the ladies of Edinburgh and some of the men were fully protected by their mink and musquash.

'More furs than an Eskimo wedding,' said Peter.

Lotte elbowed him discreetly. Or so she thought. There was muttering. She cast a critical professional eye on the hats as they shuffled along with the crowd.

'Our luck we will be sat behind that one.' Peter nodded towards a particularly extravagant creation.

The brass and the woodwork flickered in the lights. There were gasps of excitement as each audience group entered the hall. Lotte and Peter had many flights of stairs to ascend behind the slow-moving crowd before they reached their level.

'I mean, thoughtless really, he could have got us the Grand Circle. Typical. We're going to have to rough it with the riff-raff away up here.'

Lotte put her elbows to use again, but in truth she didn't care one bit, Peter's commentary on the crowd and the action was part of the excitement of being here. Peter took a programme sheet from the usherette, passed it to Lotte.

'This is your department.'

She looked down as they stood there at the top a steep flight of steps that seemed to lead right to the edge of the void.

6th March 1914

Grand Opening Concert

Usher Hall

She skimmed the first few lines, the dedication by the Moderator, the speech by the Provost, the formal opening by Mr Usher's widow. Then the music. Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Wagner. A new piece by Hamish MacCunn.

Peter looked over her shoulder.

'All your Teutonic favourites are there. And only one Scot.' Peter had picked up lots of political views at the College, including a leaning towards Home Rule. She wasn't sure where that fitted with his socialism – 'Aren't countries old fashioned now?' – but Peter could always find a way to resolve contradictions.

They moved down the stairway towards their seats. With each step the enormity of the space seemed to unfold. A vertigo, like approaching a cliff you couldn't see when descending a hill. They were two rows back from the edge of the precipice. Below, in the distance, the orchestra. Above, equally remote, the huge circular ceiling. All around, and from the great open well of the auditorium, there was a low roar, excitement contained by that Edinburgh discretion. It was unlike anything Lotte had heard before. She was familiar with concerts in the Albert Hall back in Stirling, but this was of a different scale of space and excitement.

She remembered nothing of the speeches. Not even Peter's muttered commentary. But the music stayed with her forever. The precision and passion, the mounting cadences appropriate to the space. And just as moving, the small, quiet notes, the soloists, players and singers and the way they harnessed the attention of so many people and commanded the space with a single note just as powerfully as the full orchestra and the great machine of the organ. She felt the notes deep in chest, her whole body resonated, became part of the sound.

Afterwards came the rush for the train. They were impatient with the crowd, moving slowly as if everyone wanted to hang on to this moment of history. Faces glowed in the cool air. A few overheard complaints about the 'Hun programme.' Running down the stairs at Haymarket, then the journey through the dark, the dismal stations. She said nothing, and Peter, sensitive as always, slept, or pretended to sleep. Lotte gripped the harsh fabric of the seats behind her knees, and with fierce concentration imagined her way through the five pieces she had heard. The uniqueness of the event, the excitement of the audience had all registered with her, of course. But the music was the thing. And especially the Wagner, the

Liebestod, pure emotion, rising and falling as waves through that enormous space. Over and over in her head she replayed the last note, falling into silence that was held, on and on, gaining in substance until the audience finally broke it with wild enthusiasm. Wild for Edinburgh, anyway. How much better to have left the silence. Much more appreciative to have the audience stunned into complete, quiet contemplation of the huge truth of love and death.

Her mother and Marguerite were up, her mother working on her accounts book, moving invoices and receipts around multiple separate piles on the yellow oilcloth. Marguerite flicking through a fashion magazine. Margaret and Jessie were in bed already. Her mother asked politely about the programme, the new hall.

‘How many were there?’ said Marguerite. ‘Anyone famous?’

‘Do they have catering?’ said her mother. ‘Does the Council get the profits?’

Lotte and Peter told their stories. The furs, the Provost, the great drop over the edge, the brass-work. But Lotte couldn’t tell the proper tale – of what that music on that night, in that place – had meant to her. How it had lit something inside her. She sat with it burning there, her coat still on, round that table where the aunts cooked their plans, took on the world. Burning with a deep joy and sadness. The everyday, work, couldn’t give her this. To be at the centre of silence as the last note ended. To be the cause of such deep emotional response. But there was sadness too, that despite her voice and skills she could only ever have this experience sitting in the audience, not out under the lights. Her aunts had worked miracles on this table. The sort of economic miracles that might allow her to buy tickets, perhaps put her own mink casually across the back of a front row seat. As she looked down at the programme, she knew the front row was the closest she could hope for.

The town at night drew her. The familiar was recognisable but also mysterious. Shadows and pooled light. With collar up and hat pulled down tight it gave her a sense of anonymity she never had during the day. At any other time, she felt totally exposed by her lifetime in this place. The women in her social circle, the congregation, the customers and the people who knew her as a child and young woman. All had, she supposed, their own version of her. All these fragments, joined together like the sort of paintings Peter admired, created a community version of her that sometimes seemed as real to her as the version of herself she held inside her head. As she walked the streets she carried their stories with her. Gossip was what held

this town together. She had always been around shops, those community crossroads of tales told and tales transformed. She knew how little it took to become a character in that story.

As she walked the pavements in daylight, with Grace and Sheila or with Sam, she pulled her story along behind. For better or for worse they all knew everything. She was the lucky wee bissum from the Top of the Town who got what she deserved, or otherwise.

At night, the coat, the poor streetlights brought invisibility. She was generally alone. Only once had she passed a policeman. 'Good evening Madame,' as he tapped the front of his helmet. She was certain she was marked down as a strange woman, no accounting for what notions they had. Out at all hours walking the street. No actual streetwalker would have a coat like hers. The police were well acquainted with any women who sold sex in this small town. Even the part-time amateurs who, through daring or desperation, now found that an act they had grown to devalue was given a different sort of value. She had noted the women her mother and aunts had whispered about. Or not even whispered, no words were required. There was a look they exchanged when names came up, when strange men were met on the stairs. There was judgement but not condemnation. Better shame than a dead child because doctor's bills could not be paid. And better that luxuries came out of side earnings than the household budget. Respectability was precious because it offered a chance to escape. Her mother, her aunts, always had an eye on the longer journey. But pragmatically, who knew what you needed to do to survive in the short term, to keep out of Orchard House?

The policeman would know all this as well as she did. As would any men who watched her from the vennels, from the doorways. She was not a woman to approach. Too much risk. This was the security of the small town. An irony, that it was the surveillance that protected her. These quiet night-time streets were safe in their emptiness, their silence. Drink was different. Drink she had always feared. The unpredictability of character. The cheerful old boy from the top floor, slipping her and her sister a penny on Saturdays, who squeezed the front of his trousers and lunged at you if you forgot about his regular outing on the third Friday of each month when his ferocious wife let him off the leash for a night. It was as if nothing had happened the next time you saw him. Everyone too frightened of his wife to say anything. Or maybe sorry for her. 'Harmless really.'

Maybe.

Drunks were easy to see or hear. Their cunning had drained out of them in the vennels. Hand against the wall, steadying, as the dark stream ran back between their legs and down the steep slopes. She avoided paydays, avoided the few hours between ecstasy and oblivion, the clockwork pattern where the screams and howls of closing time faded down to

the midnight solitary song, the uncertain footfall, the huddled heaps in the shop doorways reeking of sick and urine. She understood of all this. Sometimes she imagined explaining it in detail to Mrs Jenkins.

She walked on. She took in the shops at night. The windows that she knew well, dark now, drained of colour. The ghostly shapes of mannequins, the outlines of furniture, the sinister cutlery. These huge dark windows seemed to be the limits of the night world, the goods looking out rather than being looked at, the window-shopper observed. She had once asked if she could stay in the shop overnight. Sam had looked at her as if she had asked to join a circus. She loved the idea of being in there with the goods, the tall walls of drawers, the counters and tills. And out there in the streets the few night dwellers, walking, staggering. Perhaps one would stop, stare in, and she would stare out. A spectre.

Sam refused. And he held the keys.

She stood on the pavement outside the Golden Lion. The carved beasts above the door. She imagined her hand on the damp mane. Cupping an ear. She looked out across the breadth of King Street. Above the level of the yellow haze of the streetlights William Wallace shouldered his sword. She remembered the cannon displayed here in 1915. It was only a month or two after Peter had signed up. There were regular letters from his training camp. Funny and self-deprecating to his mother. They sat round the oilcloth as she read them out. The ones he sent to her, addressed to her at work, to the millinery shop, were darker. The grinding brutality of the language of the soldiers, terror held at bay by hard, unfeeling language and behaviour. He wrote that he understood this, the need for hard scar tissue, the comfort from burying sentiment. His drawings for his mother were full of fun, caricatures of his comrades. For her there were darker images in the margins. Hanging sacks, impaled on bayonets. Straw spilling on to the ground. Then, one rainy lunchtime, she and Marguerite had come upon the cannons – the chalk sign:

CAPTURED AT LOOS BY THE 7TH DIVISION SEPT 25TH 1915

Huge wheels, angular metal: it was as if Peter's sketches had come to life. Her sister flirted with the young private. 'No, I wasn't there when they captured them. We were further up the line. But I talked to a lad who did. The Huns ran so fast they left their dinner cooking by the guns...' As the soldier prattled on, Lotte walked up to the rope stretched between poles pushed between the cobbles. She was as close as she could get to the wheels, the vicious simplicity of the barrel, the oiled complexity of the levers and the breech. It was as powerful and beautiful as a steam engine. She thought of Peter's love of the intricate and functional, how he loved to draw down at the station – the precise detail of moving parts.

‘How it fits together. How it works. That is the purpose of art. What else is drawing for? To show that everything is all joined up.’

She thought of the purpose of this machine. It functioned solely to kill the enemy as efficiently and as surely as possible. It was what Peter would be facing. Perhaps was facing.

‘These Hun howitzers can lob at you from miles away.’

‘Do you hear them coming, do you get any warning?’ Her sister was wide eyed now.

‘If you hear them, then you know it’s not for you, sweetheart. You know some other poor bas... pardon me, comrade, has bought it.’ The soldier glanced across to the sergeant, stiffly at ease beside the guns, cap low over his eyes, raindrops on the bright visor.

Lotte thought of death coming out the sky, oblivion without warning. Without time to consider, to contemplate, or to even create a last image to have in your head before the darkness.

‘The Huns also use them at lower trajectory. Four feet across the ground. Hundreds of miles an hour. Until it hits something. Or someone.’

Her sister was entranced.

‘What is your name my dear, if I might ask?’ His voice was quieter now. This was going beyond his superiors’ idea of boosting civilian morale, she was sure. It looked as if this was a moment when he regretted not having a moustache to curl.

‘Marguerite.’

‘French?’ he said. ‘Here?’

‘No, my mother and father liked it. Thought it was different and would do well for me. Make me stand out. And Charlotte too.’ She made a graceful gesture towards her sister. ‘Your name is important, our mother says.’

The soldier glanced towards Lotte, caught her eye, nodded curtly to ensure she didn’t have an opening into their conversation.

‘Your older sister?’

‘No.’ There was hardly any hesitation. ‘No, she’s my younger sister, but likes to look after me.’

‘Well, Marguerite,’ he rolled the name like a man who was familiar with the language. ‘I should like to find out more about your exotic life.’

The image of a shell as wide as the barrel of the gun screaming through the smoky air of a battlefield, skimming the mud, and of Peter, walking towards it, his eye taking in the strange, tangled beauty of the wires, the colour overhead, filled Lotte’s mind. She shook it away and fixed her sister with her dark eyes.

‘Flattered I’m sure,’ said Marguerite. ‘But my little sister is anxious to be gone. I wish you the best of luck and I hope you capture more of these.’

‘I shall do my best always to engage with the enemy.’ He lowered his voice, leaned into Marguerite’s pink ear. ‘Up close, bayonet length. Safer that way. Not like the poor fellows who operate our guns. On the receiving end of these lovelies,’ he patted the barrel, wet with rain. ‘Shells dropping in on them without warning all hours of the day and night. Out there on the open. Nowhere to hide. Poor devils. With my rifle and bayonet, I’ve more chance.’

Lotte took her sister by the arm.

‘No need to bring comfort to our lads single handed,’ she said, pulling her away.

‘Oh honestly. It’s just fun.’ Marguerite looked back over her shoulder.

‘Fun?’ They were down at the bottom of the street by now. Lotte half turned and pointed up. The black full stop of the barrel pointed straight at them, the soldier now chatting to another girl in a light coat.

‘Nothing serious.’

‘Fun. With Peter out there. You heard what he said. How can you say this...these machines are fun?’

‘Trust me, I know when boys are showing off. He was just trying to impress. Peter wants us to be positive. Chin up.’ Marguerite tucked her face into her scarf. She could sulk for Scotland. ‘Least that’s what he told me. Being miserable is not his way.’

‘No,’ said Lotte.

‘Remember what he said, “If the telegram comes then that...”’

‘Then that’s the time to pull down the blinds. But not before.’ Peter finished the sentence. She was back in the dark street and he was standing behind her now, wearing his army cape. His reflection on the wet cobbles looked like a black bird testing its wings, or drying them. ‘What was the point in wasting all that time anticipating what might not happen?’

She spoke to the shadow on the road, she did not want to see his face in the streetlight glare.

‘You knew we wouldn’t listen to you. We spoke about you every night round the table. I thought about you every hour of every day, at least.’

‘That was just a waste then. All these hours you could have been thinking about something more interesting. Or you could have been singing, playing the piano, the things

that made you smile.’ He was looking for a light under his cape. As it caught the wind its reflection rippled on the wet street. Preparing for flight.

‘No. It wasn’t time wasted. When I thought about you, I was with you.’

‘But I came back.’ There was a brief cupped glow above the cape in the roadway, and then it was gone. He was gone.

Lotte looked at the broad slope of the street. She readjusted her eyes to the gloomy pools of light. To the silence. ‘Gateway to Baker Street, the road into the town.’ That was Sam’s view. She looked at the hotel, the plate-glass of the bigger shops. No. This was now the town. It had slid down the hill. Their shop was marooned in the past. She walked on along Barton Street. Heading home. This was where the future was, in these wide streets, not the narrow trenches of the old town.

Now she had one last chance to fly, to let her voice take flight through the room, touch all the people. Frederick had given her that. Something to grasp. That would be a fitting end to this part of her life. Then she could focus on Sam and the shop, and the boys and Sheila. Grace would help too.

And Peter was always there to guide her. Lift her. He didn’t have to point the way directly. She just had to listen hard to herself.

Chapter 6: Thursday 20th April 1933

‘What were you looking for? On your walks?’

‘Looking?’

‘Yes, you kept walking. Didn’t you? It wasn’t an occasional thing.’

She looked at me steadily. Her black eyes. Such a curious mix of confidence and anxiety. Not that inconsistency was a surprise. Sudden deviations from the normal defined most of our patients.

‘I loved to walk.’ She shrugged, her shoulders seemed so delicate and fragile in her plain dress. ‘It was my time.’

‘To think?’

‘To not think.’ She smiled. Quite rare in here. A proper smile. ‘It made me part of the world, I suppose.’

‘Didn’t you normally feel part of it?’ I was conscious that I was leading too much. Poor professional practice. I was over eager. Too keen to help her. I had to take my time. This was still an early conversation, and it was going to get more difficult. But the talking cure only works if it comes from deep inside the patient, not suggested by the physician.

She waited before replying. I didn’t sense that she wanted to second guess which answer might be expected, or attempt to deceive. Lies are part of our daily practice, but patients who carefully formulated the truth before they spoke were more of a challenge. Honesty and directness can be disarming in real life. Here, they are subversive.

Finally, she looked up and said, ‘I felt like I was watching the world. Commenting on it in my head. But not part of it.’

‘Commenting?’

‘Should I say there were voices?’

It was almost as if we were sharing a joke. I was thrilled.

‘Voices in our heads are what we all do to make sense of life as we live it. There is no harm in it. Unless it is a different voice. Someone else.’

‘No, it was all me. My voice. But there was no commentary when I was walking. I was living,’ she looked up at the barred window, ‘for that time, when I was out walking, I didn’t need to comment in my head because it was all there in front of me. I didn’t need to think much.’ She looked back at me again. ‘If that makes any sense?’

‘When you felt fully alive?’

She frowned. ‘No, I was alive all the time. I’m not, I wasn’t, in some kind of coma. But I felt as if I was at the centre of this huge world swirling overhead. And connected to it. I hadn’t felt that since I was small.’

‘Is that why you walked at night?’

‘You do think this is a problem, don’t you?’ She made this completely unfrontational. It was a genuine question.

‘In medicine we often suggest walking as a cure.’

‘Prescribe it?’

I felt a growing intimacy. Or was this just charm she could switch on to manage situations?

‘Well, I wouldn’t go as far as to say that. But there are clear advantages in outdoor exercise, clearing the mind, getting a perspective. But we would never suggest in the middle of the night. Not for ladies.’

She moved on the hard chair.

I didn’t want to get stuck on this topic again. I had more serious things to discuss: ‘We might come back to the walking.’

‘The music is different.’ She said this suddenly. I was going to devote a whole session to the music. It had intrigued Cunninghame in the notes as much as me. But if she wanted to talk about it now that was fine.

‘Different?’

‘It is when I do, did, feel alive. Totally involved.’

‘Of course. Intense moments of performance will give us deep emotions. Emotions that are rare in normal life.’ It seemed such an obvious thing to say. But I found my concentration drifting. Perhaps because I knew what Dr Sneddon had in store for her. Perhaps just because I was sitting in the same room as her. The professional boundaries. Again. I was as convinced as I had ever been that closeness to a patient doesn’t harm them. In fact, with someone sensitive and intelligent, it could make a positive contribution to their recovery. But it wasn’t an argument that would convince many of my peers. In fact, best not to have to make the argument at all.

‘No,’ she said. ‘It’s not that.’ Confidence, not bravado or aggression or confidence trickery, is so rare in this place that it often has the look of recovery about it. I knew that wasn’t the case here. But she was so sure of her feelings. Perhaps that was the problem. Friends and family aren’t usually ready for direct communication about feelings. I said nothing, let her tell me.

‘No. It’s not about my intense emotion. It’s about what it meant to people listening. Even a little bit, even changing them slightly for a very short while. But multiplied up by everyone in the hall...’ She let this all trail off.

‘Is that what you feel as a performer?’

She looked up again.

‘I’m not a performer. I couldn’t say that. But I’ve experienced it, the moment, just enough.’

She was not going to say anything more on that, so I let the subject drop. There was the glimmering of a narcissistic complex tucked into her words. There would be plenty more time to explore that. I hoped.

The morning light in this room drained it of even more colour than usual. She looked like a photograph. I suppose I did too. A gaunt, tired man in the middle of middle age. With the slightly ragged look of a man living without wife or housekeeper. My cuffs not quite a crisp as they should be, collar not exactly symmetrical. But I was on her side. She had given me a reason to take on Sneddon, finally.

‘I would like to talk to you about your music in detail in a future conversation. Is it something that’s been part of your life for a long time?’

‘Since I was ten.’

‘Did that mean sacrifices?’

‘Do you mean how did my family afford lessons?’

‘It is a luxury. Some would say frivolous. My background is not privileged, that is why I said sacrifices. I am from a mining village.’

‘Like Mrs Arbuthnot?’

‘Who?’

‘A friend. An acquaintance of mine from the town. She makes much of her humble roots.’

Mrs Arbuthnot and the question of roots and origins would be another avenue to explore. I didn’t take notes as we talked. I find recalling conversations in this way to be just

as accurate. The distraction of scribbling puts up barriers. I didn't want that, and besides, I could remember everything she said perfectly.

'We are all from somewhere, it doesn't have to define us,' I lied.

'My mother was on her own from when I was very small. When my father died, we had to move in with my grandfather. In Edinburgh. He wasn't wealthy but he wasn't poor. He had a business to pass on to his own sons, the ones that were left. But he said that an education was necessary if you had nothing to fall back on.'

'Very enlightened.'

'For a tradesman?'

'No, I meant very enlightened for his time.' Perhaps she had already been having conversations with our Miss Brown. I hoped this was not going to complicate matters.

'He wasn't so forward thinking. He thought we'd make better marriages if we could play the piano, speak properly.'

'Better yourselves?'

'Pass ourselves off.'

'Did you, do you, feel that's what you did?'

'I married a grocer's apprentice who had learned how to keep books and track money as a quartermaster in the army, I wasn't marrying out of my class.'

'What about your sister?'

'The same. But we married ambitious men. We could speak well, so we were helpful. It isn't that complicated, I don't think.'

'Your grandfather paid for the music lessons?'

'Initially. And for the elocution lessons.'

'The way we speak is the great indicator. I understand that myself. The judgements made,' I said.

'Every time you speak.' She was eager now. 'I see good women, and men, caught by their voices. Not what they say but how they say it.'

'But expensive, relatively.'

'An investment.'

'For your grandfather?'

'Not for that long. There was.' She hesitated. 'A falling out. And we left Edinburgh to stay with my mother's sisters, two sisters, here, or Stirling anyway. But they found new teachers for us here. They were in business, my aunts. They understood investment.'

'You said a falling out?'

‘I think so.’ The hesitation returned. ‘I was very young.’

‘And your aunts?’

‘What?’

‘They took you in, the three of you? Did they not have children too?’

‘My Aunt Margaret did, a son Peter. But Jessie, my other aunt wasn’t married.’

‘Was it not crowded. Up there?’

‘At the Top of the Town? In the slums?’

‘I’m sure it wasn’t a slum.’

‘People say it will all be pulled down someday soon.’

‘The rehousing programme is much admired.’

‘By those who don’t live there.’ There was anger again, gathering under her dark level brows. ‘We lived well; we weren’t poor. They ran a business. The house was owned and they didn’t see any point in having extra overheads.’ She had calmed down now, back to Kings Park. ‘There’s a community up there. There was business to be done and we were at the centre of it.’

‘I know,’ I said. ‘Forgive me, you will appreciate that many of the people here are from that area. It distorts my perceptions.’

‘There are people here from everywhere.’ The anger had gone. She smiled. I felt it again. Her warmth. Her family must miss her very much.

‘Quite.’ I said. ‘Do not think for a moment I am a snob, Charlotte.’ I had decided early to use her first name. Unless she objected. ‘Anything but. As I said, I have no airs and graces about my origins.’

‘Just like Mrs Arbuthnot!’ She smiled again. It was good to be on the receiving end of her gentle mockery.

‘I don’t know if Miss Brown has approached you. She is in charge of our garden. She is not strictly speaking a member of staff, but we convinced the Medical Superintendent of the benefits of gardening therapy for all. Not just men.’

‘No one has spoken to me.’

‘Would that be suitable for you?’

‘A suitable position?’

‘You did express that preference.’

‘Yes, of course,’ she said. She was staring towards the window. ‘Is it deliberate that you can’t see out these windows unless you stand up?’

‘I thought we could focus more on you, and your difficulties if we had less distractions. Rather than meeting outdoors.’ We were nearly out of time, so I continued: ‘Doctor Sneddon is the Medical Superintendent here.’ She must have heard the name. In her social circles. Or perhaps Sneddon was above trade. ‘He is a very eminent scientist. He has great ambitions to revolutionise our medical practice. To make it more...’ I wasn’t sure what the correct word was here. ‘More modern. More effective.’

She was looking puzzled for the first time, perhaps because she had noticed my nervousness.

‘He is conducting a trial. An important trial of a new treatment. It shows some promise overseas and he would like to develop it further here.’

‘A positive treatment?’

‘Yes. But in my clinical judgement it is not suitable for you. I wanted you to know that in case Dr Sneddon approaches you himself and with a view to your volunteering for his programme.’

‘Volunteering. You make this sound like the army.’

‘We are both ex-military men, Dr Sneddon and I. And this institution is not unlike the army.’

‘Because there is danger?’

‘There are always dangers in experimental medical research. Dr Sneddon will explain that. But like the army, there is a structure here, discipline. And we reserve the right to do what we think is best for patients. Ultimately,’ I hesitated, ‘we decide.’

‘So why will he ask me to volunteer?’

‘Dr Sneddon prefers enthusiastic participants.’

She shook her head, as if shaking bees or flies out of her glorious hair, as if she were already in the garden, or out on one of her walks.

‘But why are you telling me this, Doctor Fergusson? If you don’t think this is for me then you are my doctor and that’s it. My cousin, Peter, was in the army. He told me never to volunteer. He came back blinded.’

‘The point is,’ I leant across the table, the morning was now coming in through the bars in such a way that she was striped with light, one eye highlighted, sparking, the other in shadow. ‘Charlotte, Dr Sneddon can be persuasive, and he also makes the final decision on when you are cured, when you can leave. And when you can see visitors.’

Both eyes were in light now. She blinked and I could see they were wet.

I went on, I had committed myself now: ‘Ultimately he can insist on the treatment. It is very unpleasant. And the outcomes are uncertain.’

I let that sink in a bit. I didn’t want to frighten her too much. I hoped she wouldn’t ask for details.

‘But what sort of treatment doesn’t work? I don’t understand.’

‘All medicine starts with uncertain outcomes. But we vow,’ I said, ‘not to do any harm.’

‘So I can volunteer or I can be treated against my will? Is that what you’re telling me?’

By saying nothing, I answered her question.

She didn’t cry but her face paled – paled more than it was already in this bare room.

‘But,’ I said, ‘it won’t be like that. I have spoken to Dr Sneddon. He agrees that you and I can continue our programme. And assuming that goes well, then he will hold off on,’ I floundered a little, ‘your treatment.’

And there I left it. Left her. It was cruel, I know, to leave her in that room waiting for a nurse to take her back to the dayroom. But necessary. I wanted her to have time to think a bit more about Dr Sneddon’s plans. I could have shocked her to the core with what happens in the treatment room. I have learned, over the years, that with sensitive patients like Charlotte, imagination will work more effectively than anything. I felt that by our next conversation, and at this stage I was planning on daily sessions, she would put her absolute trust in me. If by saving her I would also defeat Sneddon, then all to the good.

My day included a discussion with Strang, the farm manager, about outdoor clothing for the patients he employed. I then moved to one of the teaching rooms where I addressed a group of twenty nurses for ten minutes. They had all expressed interest in registering for the Certificate course. It was a standard talk of encouragement – the value of a serious qualification, the growing status of our branch of the profession.

I noticed Nurse Clark sitting at the centre of a small pocket of younger nurses at the back of the room. She smiled every time I looked her way, and for the second time that day I regretted not employing a housekeeper, or at least sending my laundry to an external provider rather than using the asylum laundry. Encouraged by her attentiveness, I let my enthusiasm expand:

‘In twenty years’ time, mental health will be as important, or perhaps more important than the branches of our profession who delve under the skin. Treatments for physical maladies will become increasingly sophisticated. But so, too, will our interventions. As time goes by, society at large will gradually learn that the work we do has more value, extends to more citizens, and is as worthy of investment as medicine that is concerned only with matters of the flesh.’

At that point I saw Nurse Clark whisper something to her neighbour. I thought about picking her out, lobbing a question at her, but decided instead to smile warmly as if I had intended the half-joke. The nurses, the younger ones in particular, believe that we senior physicians are other-worldly, above smut. If only they knew.

Leaving the would-be students to an outline of the details of the course, I was caught by Assistant Matron Russell. She had an air of importance about her which made me worry that she had some bad news to give me, to bring me up short.

‘A visitor is in the entrance hall. They are asking for someone they can talk to. About Mrs Raymond.’

‘Is it a relative?’

‘No.’ She was now the one with the information and was going to make the most of it. ‘Normally.’ She adjusted the bib of her uniform. ‘Normally, the duty Matron would deal with un-announced visitors.’ She made me wait. ‘And that, of course, this morning, is myself. But I felt.’ I crossed my arms, she was drawing this out all the way. ‘I felt, Doctor, in view of your particular interest in the case, that you, yourself might want to deal with the enquiry.’

‘Thank you, Nurse,’ I said. ‘I will. And the relationship with the patient is?’

‘A friend. Is what she said.’

‘Friends cannot make enquires about patients.’ I was sharp now. But intrigued.

‘This I told her, Doctor. But she was determined to see someone.’ She looked down at her shiny shoes, then up. ‘In Authority.’

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘Thank you, Nurse.’

I took a long walk along the central corridor, past patients, staff, the complex patterns made on the floor by the light through the window. I walked at speed, breathing in the curious mix of bleach, polish and human beings, a constant in every institution. No matter how many summer windows were open, it never dispersed.

As I walked down the left-hand branch of the main staircase, I saw her sitting alone opposite the reception office. A woman of early middle age. Slight, in a dark coat that seemed too warm for the day. Her hair must have once been a startling red. There was a small

bag between her boots which were dusty from the driveway. Public transport only came directly to the house on specified open days or for events. Casual visitors were discouraged. She looked up as I came across the wooden floor towards her. She had that air of curiosity and fear all civilians have when they step into our world. Normally, I would have sent her packing. Or rather I would have had her sent packing. But I was keen to talk to anyone who had a connection with Charlotte.

‘Good morning,’ I said, ‘I am Deputy Medical Superintendent here.’

She stood as I approached. Curiously, she gazed beyond me, her eyes moving round the panelled walls, the stairs, the distant cupola.

‘This was a lovely house,’ she said. ‘I’ve been sitting here thinking, it’s a shame it has been reduced to this.’

She was clearly not the little tawny mouse she had appeared from further up the stairs.

She gestured back towards the doorway, the drive and the trees:

‘And a lovely park. Situation. I’m sure it’s appreciated.’

‘Oh, I can assure you it is.’ I was on the brink of being defensive. ‘In what way can I help you?’

‘Doctor...’

‘Fergusson.’

‘Sorry. Yes. I work for Mrs Raymond, who was admitted here two days ago. I’d like to ask about her condition.’ She looked above me again. The chandelier. ‘If that is in order.’

‘In principle, no, it is not at all in order,’ I said. ‘We communicate, if at all, with close relatives. A spouse. A parent.’

‘In principle?’ she said.

‘You are neither. Being,’ I said, ‘an employee.’

She lost her poise. I had a vision of long miles to get here, on the train then the omnibus, speculating on what might confront her when she arrived, and the prospect of a fruitless journey.

‘I am Charlotte’s, Mrs Raymond’s, housekeeper. And her friend. If you ask her, she will wish to see me.’

Nurses, office staff were passing through as we spoke. Visitors were rare enough to attract attention. I was conscious of steps slowing, heads turned.

‘This,’ I said, ‘is irregular. But we cannot discuss patients in an open area. Wait.’ I went through to the general office and collected a key. I led the visitor to the empty Deputy Accountant’s office.

It was a tiny corner office with a narrow faux-medieval slit for a window. Atmospheric but gloomy. She put her bag down and sat in the only chair, apart from the Deputy Accountant's wooden swivel chair. I occupied it. Precisely in the centre of the desk was a document I thought I recognised. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LONG-TERM NUTRITIONAL WELFARE OF PATIENTS. But further down the cover in smaller type I read – COSTINGS AND FEASIBILITY.

I was behind a desk. Immediately back in control. 'I'm sorry I don't think you've told me your name?'

'I'm Mrs Semple. Mrs Grace Semple.'

'And you are close to Charlotte – Mrs Raymond?'

'Very.' Behind her nervousness, there was determination about her. 'She is like a sister to me.'

'And you to her?'

'She has her family. And her own sister.'

'Not to mention her husband and children.'

Her brows narrowed. 'I can assure you I'm here after long discussions with her family. They are beside themselves with worry.'

'But thought it better that you enquired rather than they did?'

She leant forward. 'I am here to report back and let them know when they can visit themselves.'

'That won't be possible for the children.' I said it kindly. 'Not appropriate.'

'I – we – understand that Dr Fergusson. Mr Raymond, Samuel, is also very anxious to visit.'

'That is natural,' I said, building the bridges. 'And it is thoughtful of you to make the journey on his behalf.' I smiled. 'With the possibility that you may not have been able to speak to anyone about the case.'

She met me half-way. 'I'm grateful that you have the time to sit and talk to me.' She half smiled. 'You must be very busy.'

'We have much to do here. The building is full of problems that cannot be resolved out there.' I indicated the tiny slit window.

'Will her problems be resolved? Will she be cured?'

I had the conversation back into my own territory now. A matter of expertise. Professional judgement.

‘That depends.’ I said. ‘On the nature of her problem. We can only act when we understand.’

‘But you can treat her? You can make a difference to her?’

‘We can do our best.’

‘Is that all?’ It wasn’t a criticism, I realised. She was emotional.

‘If we cannot resolve, we can provide a life. Here.’

I caught some of her perfume, over the stale essence of stacked paper. Not perfume, something more, the smell of Charlotte’s home.

‘She is under our protection now, Mrs Semple. It isn’t really up to you. Or her family.’

‘Who, then?’ She was emboldened by her nervousness. ‘We wanted to do the right thing. Sending her here.’ The relatives needed that reassurance. They always felt they had done too much or too little. Rarely the right thing.

‘We will decide how much progress she makes.’

‘We?’

‘Her physicians.’

She had been with us for a couple of days. I had had three hours with her, but I already at that moment I could project to a time in the future when I would feel an empty void in my life. I imagined Mrs Semple ushering Charlotte into a quiet back room at home, hanging up her travelling coat, drawing the curtains, settling her into a leather armchair, asking about what she needed. Keeping the children shushed downstairs. While at the same time I would be here, managing the nurses, battling Sneddon with increasing viciousness on both sides, with only evening walks, the wireless and writing this journal to look forward to. On into the darkening nights of autumn. The thought unnerved me.

I wanted to hear what she could tell me about Charlotte: ‘She strikes me as a remarkable woman.’

Mrs Semple’s green eyes met mine briefly.

‘She is. Very. A great friend.’ She fiddled with her gloves, which I noticed she kept bunched in her left hand all this time. They looked to be kidskin, but so fine they could be balled into her small fist. ‘Talented, too. People wept when she sang.’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘the gifted can be over...’ I paused. ‘Sensitive?’

She looked down at the gloves, opened them out, smoothed the fingers of first one then the other against her leg as she spoke.

‘Her turns came out of the blue. We’d get no warnings. Suddenly she’d be angry.’

‘We all get angry,’ I said. ‘Usually it is suddenly.’

‘But this was more than anger. She would suddenly become a different person. Then back again as if nothing had happened.’

‘And upset?’

‘Very. So regretful.’ She left the gloves be for a moment.

‘Hysteria isn’t uncommon.’

‘I have seen hysteria,’ she said. ‘I was in service for over ten years. I have seen how life can overwhelm people. Men too. But this was more.’ She went back to the gloves. ‘We had to lock her in her room. Sometimes.’

‘We?’

‘Her husband and I.’ She stroked the glove. ‘We had to. For the sake of the children.’

‘Did you think they were in danger?’

She looked straight at me again.

‘Of course not. But it’s not right they would see her. Like that.’ The gloves again. ‘So upset.’

There was so much to interest me here I almost started to make notes on the Deputy Accountant’s paperwork.

‘And this had gone on for some time?’

‘Since her first born really. Since we stayed in Wallace Street and through the birth of the other two children. But it only became so bad when we moved.’

‘To Snowdon Place.’

‘Such a lovely house.’

‘But not good for her?’

‘I couldn’t say it was the house.’

‘No, that is our job.’ We smiled. Almost conspiratorially.

‘I thought – we thought – that the quiet would help.’

‘But it didn’t?’

‘No, that was when the walking started. Daytime first. Then night.’

This was turning into a treatment session one step removed from the patient. And yet it was difficult for me to bring it to an end.

‘These are things we will talk about with the patient herself. As part of her treatment.’

‘Can Sam and the children visit? Soon?’ She was alert, she sensed that the conversation was coming to an end. Working in service breeds an acute awareness of others, their likely reactions. It was the same with soldiers. It could lead to hyper-sensitivity, of

course, danger in every hedgerow. I had seen the same in ex-military men and former servants alike. We were over-subscribed with both groups in this institution.

‘Our treatment only works by separating patients from the familiar – home and family. It wouldn’t be suitable.’

‘Then can you give her these.’ She lifted the bag. ‘It’s some of her things. I thought she’d need them.’

‘All clothing is provided here. The clothes she came in will be carefully kept aside till she’s ready to go home.’ She put the bag down again. ‘Whenever that is.’

‘Not even these?’ She laid the kidskin gloves across both her palm as if they were an offering. ‘These are her favourite gloves and they will keep us in mind. Her family.’

‘You were wearing them?’

‘Yes.’ She held the gloves out.

I took the gloves, although I was not going to give them to Charlotte.

‘I will see that she gets them.’

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘May I come back?’

‘We have your address, of course,’ I rose. ‘We will keep her family apprised.’

‘I am her family.’

I folded the gloves, and put them carefully in my pocket before I showed her back to the main entrance and the long drive under the trees.

A firing range. Behind the lines, but not so far as to be out of earshot of the rolling boom of the heavy guns. The sandbag horizon, grasses and wildflowers along the edge, the white morning sky above. I stood with the officer. Once I’d been joined by a priest. But generally, it was just a young officer. It was felt in some quarters that this was a fine experience for an ambitious subaltern, to see discipline through to its extremity.

No one spoke beyond what was essential. Eye contact avoided. Touches of humanity made this all the more difficult. A nod, a swagger stick touching a cap visor was enough. Words would have somehow made it all more real. And the lack of reality was what made it possible to go through with the act. To turn a comrade into a target.

A boy. They all were.

I had only been here a handful of times. It was a handful too many.

Seconds later the officer and I were approaching a body hanging on a pole like something in a butcher's shop. Cut down by the Sergeant, not a job for a commissioned officer, before he marched the traumatised squad back for breakfast and rum. As if that would repair them. The corpse was left to the officer and me. The wounds round the heart, five ragged holes. Sometimes it was a neat single hole. Too small to kill, you might think. All depending on the ratio of blanks to live. Either way there was never any doubt. No need for a physician really. But process. Process.

'Always see the best marksmanship here,' said the officer. 'None of these fellows wants to make it last. Wish they'd take as much care on the front.'

We waited till the orderlies came with the stretcher. Blood soaked into the sand. The guns boomed on in the distance.

'Cigarette?' said the officer. He was a green second lieutenant. They were all young. He had a faint Welsh burr to his accent. We were late in the war by now, public school officers had been harvested already, and I came across more and more grammar schoolboys. Smarter usually, but with too much imagination for the terrible occupation they had been given.

'Thanks.' We lit up and blew smoke out over the wall of the range. The two of us standing and the third prone and still.

'Not one of mine,' he said.

'Of course not.' It was a mark of failed leadership. Another reason for shame.

'Were you at the Court?'

I had spoken to the boy twice. Once to pronounce him fit to stand trial and once to pronounce him fit to be shot. I wasn't counting my third professional pronouncement.

'Yes. Poor lad.'

He had been marched in front of the Major, upright behind the table, his leather and brass glowing in the evening sun slanting through the farmhouse windows. I sat at one side. There was no real need for me to be there. It made no difference, and no one cared. Particularly the Private under guard. My written report was enough. But I thought it was another sort of cowardice to stay away. There was a brief discussion between the Major and the army lawyer. The Major was from the Private's own Division, it seemed. Most irregular. A Field Punishment should be presided over by a senior officer from out-with the Division.

'For God's sake, man,' said the Major. 'This Private has been held for over a week. Don't you think it is in everyone's best interests to bring this to a conclusion?'

The lawyer was out ranked and out manoeuvred. He concurred.

‘Private,’ said the Major. ‘At ease.’

As if.

He was young, early twenties, fair, from the East Staffordshires. It was easy to imagine him in five years with a wife and a baby, in a village in the low hills out there, repairing tractors and quite the modern man in the ancient landscape, or in a pub in the Potteries, white from the clay on pay-day, one more light ale before home to the wife. You could imagine anyway.

‘I have here Second Lieutenant Harvey’s testimony. You were ordered to remain in support of the Lewis gun crew during a night operation, covering a raiding party on no-man’s land. You twice asked the Corporal in charge of the crew to stand down to relieve yourself. When that was refused the Corporal noted that you had slipped away. He sent another man to report this to the officer in charge of the sector – Second Lieutenant Harvey. He found you in a dugout and ordered you back to your position. This order you obeyed. But less than an hour later Second Lieutenant Harvey found you again in the same dugout and ordered you back down the line to face charges of desertion.’

The Major put down the buff sheet of typed paper. He took a drink of water. The Private had kept his eyes fixed on the edge of the table throughout. It was a beautiful old wood table. At some point it had been the pride of this prosperous farm. Elbows had rested here, Sunday lunches, a tall bottle of wine, laughter.

‘Is this an accurate account?’ The Major looked up under bushy brows already speckled with white though he would have been in his thirties.

‘Yessir.’ It was a mumble.

‘Second Lieutenant Harvey is unable to provide his own testimony here today as he went missing in action five nights ago. You are aware of that, Private?’

The Private nodded.

‘A brave officer who put himself in danger for the good of his men.’

The Major took another drink.

‘I will not lecture you soldier. You understand that you put your comrades at risk on that night. During an action every man depends on his fellow. Any weak link in the chain risks everyone.’

‘It was the flares.’ He said it all as if one word. ‘Sir,’ he added.

‘Yes,’ said the Major. ‘So I understand. Captain?’

He raised his left hand off the table. The lawyer shuffled his papers.

‘The defendant has been a loyal and effective soldier since enlistment early in 1916. He has an exemplary record, but in recent months has found his nerves under stress, particularly during night operations. He put it down to seeing two comrades badly injured while on a night raid on the enemy trench system. He has associated the images to the particular light thrown by flares. Since then he has felt himself to be unreliable during night operations.’

‘Flares, Private?’ The Major would not survive the year. I recalled seeing his name on a casualty list. He had a DSO by then. I could imagine that he would be a brave man, an officer who would rather die than display caution in front of his men. ‘Flares are harmless. You learn that in week one of basic training. And night operations are operations. When do you think we should go out on no man’s land? When the sun is blazing down and birds singing? Have you learned nothing?’

The defendant was silent. In fact, I never heard him speak another word.

‘Medical report,’ said the Major without looking up.

‘I have a written testimony and Captain Fergusson is here in person.’

He looked at me for the first time.

‘Not that you are unwelcome Captain, but your report would do.’

‘The RAMC believes in good service,’ I said. No place for humour I know, but I didn’t want a tongue lashing.

The Major looked down at my handwritten sheet. I’d had less than ten minutes with the defendant earlier that afternoon. I had asked him if he felt that he was fit for service. He said he had never felt fit for service. He worked his thumb with his other fingers as if he could wear it down to nothing. I asked him the standard question:

‘Did you seek help, from your superior officer, from the medical orderlies?’

There was a faint smile at that.

‘No.’

‘This is a very serious charge,’ I said, unnecessarily.

He nodded.

‘Do you wish to tell me anything more.’

He took an intake of breath. But just exhaled and shook his head.

‘Thank you Private.’ I said, foolishly. He was one of the first I had seen.

I left him there working his thumb on the deal table.

The Major handed the paper to the lawyer. He cleared his throat and read: ‘I have today examined No 4242 Pte Tite and find that he is physically fit.’

‘Anything to add to that, Captain?’ The Major put a curl to my rank which suggested that doctors in uniform had no right to pronounce on matter of army discipline. Even less than the lawyer in uniform to his left.

‘No,’ I said.

‘And you, Private Tite?’

There was a deep silence in the farmhouse. Dust floated in the sun.

‘Private Tite you deserted your post in the middle of action, putting all lives at risk. You will be held overnight here and will be shot at six hundred hours tomorrow morning.’

In the quiet there might have been a sob, but the Sergeant marched Tite out of the room before anything unseemly could develop.

‘Thank you, gentlemen,’ said the Major. ‘Beastly business.’ He stood and straightened his cap on his close-cropped head. ‘Beastly. I’d rather they shot themselves in a comms trench.’ He turned to me as he got to the door, or the curtain, doors were too valuable around here to remain on hinges. ‘Captain, speak to Lieutenant More about arrangements.’ He semi-saluted, his swagger stick clicked against his cap.

It wasn’t the last time I saw Tite before the firing range. I had one more task. I had to certify that he was fit to face the squad. Men often collapsed in these moments. There was a close guard over the men the night before. Attempted suicide, being able to make a last decision, was common. So too were seizures, heart failure, all the expected results of putting a human under extreme pressure.

I examined Tite. He said nothing throughout the brief procedure. Some brief, meaningless words and I left him alone to his long, sleepless night.

Did I sleep on those nights? Yes, and woke exhausted, as I always did while on active service. It was my duty. I did it to the letter. Pronouncing a man dead by firing squad is not a task I imagined carrying out. Not when training. Not when learning compassion from Dr Rivers. Not when I had first imagined I might put on a white coat, dissecting mice at school. Nor did I expect to pronounce a man fit to face a firing squad. The horrors of the front itself lie easier in my memory. There is a purity about the decisions I made there. Mistakes made all the time, but in chaos and disorder, they are acceptable. When terrified, it is easy to misdiagnose. It is more difficult to be complicit.

I sat at my desk, working down through the layers of my in-tray. I spotted Sneddon's Italian paper an inch or two down. Or at least I spotted a large buff envelope with a yellow tag. The type we use for confidential reports. I yanked it out from the pile and unwound the string closure.

The margin of the paper was marked with long broad fountain pen strokes. So many it was almost a continuous line down the side of the paper. There were two exclamation marks, and a question mark. A double question-mark.

On top, paper-clipped neatly to the original paper was a large sheet of lined foolscap. There were two lines –

Do you condone this nonsense?

This dangerous nonsense?

Then the initials, EM. Elisabeth MacKenzie. I was not alone then in my caution. Cunninghame was too early in his career to risk a confrontation. And Harris would not care to question too much either. Too disruptive to his lifestyle. But now I knew I had a potential ally in the medical staff, even if Dr MacKenzie had her own agenda.

There was a knock on the door, so I put the paper back in the envelope and placed it in the bottom drawer of my desk. I tore up the covering note and dropped it in my bin.

'Yes?' I said.

It was Assistant Matron Russell.

'Doctor.'

'Come in, sit down,' I said. She closed the door behind her and stood behind the chair.

'I won't Doctor. I am just going off shift. But before I do, I thought I should come and see you rather than send a nurse.'

'Is there a problem?'

'I hope not.' She put a hand on the back of the chair.

'Your patient, Mrs Raymond, is in great distress. And is demanding to see you. We would normally sedate. But.' She put both hands on the chair back and moved it closer to my desk. 'But I wondered.' Did she almost look over her shoulder? 'Whether you might want to speak to her.' She left that hanging.

If there was discussion about the amount of attention Charlotte was getting, even if that was among the senior nurses, then my safest course of action was to approve sedation.

'Thank you, Matron. Please send word that I will meet the patient in the consultation room in five minutes.'

She nodded but didn't immediately leave. She expected more. I would have liked to dismiss her curtly. But I said: 'It is a very complex case. And at a sensitive moment. I feel that time invested now will pay off as her treatment develops later.'

'The nurses say that she has settled surprisingly well. Up till now.'

'I'm pleased to hear it. However, this is an unstable case. And.' I said, rearranging papers needlessly to bring this conversation to an end, 'I cannot discuss a case in any more detail with you.'

She couldn't really challenge me any further.

When she left, I settled myself in the empty office for a moment. This would be a vital encounter. Composed, I set off down the corridor at a brisk pace.

Charlotte was already in the room. She was seated at the table, a nurse standing behind her. The electric light, a high overhead bulb in a yellowed shade, was on already, although the brightness of the day lingered out beyond the bars.

She didn't turn round when I entered, ignored my words with the departing nurse. I knew she would be right outside the door, standard practice with a disturbed patient.

When I took my place at the far side of the table I was opposite a changed woman. Her black hair, exotic and romantic, now seemed wild and uncontrolled. Her eyes were in shadow.

'Charlotte...' I began.

'Mrs Raymond,' she said. Her arms were folded under her breasts, her shoulder hunched forward. I could see the outline of her collar bones through the thin uniform.

'Of course...' I said.

'I need to go home.'

'And you will.'

'No,' she said. Her eyes had been moving around the room, up to the light, the window. They now settled on me. They burned with hatred. I understood so much more from that one look – about her condition, about the events that brought her here – than from all of our previous conversations. Connecting with emotion, with passion, is so vital.

'No,' she said again. 'No. No. No. I have to go now.'

'But we have discussed your treatment. The process. It will take time.'

'I must go.'

'I understand how you feel.' Did I? 'I know how strange this place seems in the first few days. But it will get better.'

'It won't, though, will it?'

‘I promise that I will look after you.’ I said it casually. Neither Charlotte, nor the nurse with her ear pressed against the door, would guess what a step it was to say that. These words took me over a professional boundary. Like the lines painted around temporary military prisons in France. Step across the mark and your sentence was doubled. Just a line across an abandoned farmyard. A promise made.

‘Will your promise save me from the room?’

‘The room?’

‘Where the experiments happen.’

‘Rumours are not to be given weight here,’ I said. Wondering suddenly if she had picked up other gossip. About me.

‘The things he does to women. With drugs.’ There was real fear now in her eyes. ‘People die of terror.’

I leant back. Body language can be a denial as much as words. No one knew that better than I did.

‘We are physicians here. Do not believe the things you hear. The patients in the dayroom are not known for their honesty. Or their moderation. We would never put patients at risk.’ I leant even further back.

When she stood up, I felt no anxiety. The tables here are wide. Deliberately so. It is hard to reach across them; even the most potentially violent patient has to make a long reach.

But she didn’t reach. She put her hands down to her side of the table and with the force of her pelvis, her hips, she pushed the table across the floor and right into my body.

It struck me below my rib cage. Adrenaline flashed into my system. My hands went to my ribs, instinctive protection for the part of me that hurt most. If she had gone for my face, my eyes, I’d have been at a disadvantage. But she made no move. She was still, all the rage seemed to be within her. Her breath came in short sharp pants that sounded like a machine drawing in air. Her face was flushed. Hyperventilation in its classic form. She sat down and so mirrored my posture, her hands cupping her rib cage on both sides. By the time the nurse came through the door she saw two people holding their own bodies, the table between them.

‘Shall I get more help, Doctor?’ I could tell she could not work out what had transpired. I wasn’t sure myself.

‘No,’ I said, gasping slightly. ‘We just had an accident with the table.’ I put my hand down to the edge of the table, to demonstrate. It was unexpectedly heavy. ‘Unsteady,’ I said.

The nurse was unconvinced but had no real cause to say anything more. This was not how incidents in consultation rooms usually ended. They could involve up to ten nurses and orderlies. We hated restraint. Unless there was no option.

‘All is fine now, Nurse. I will call you if I need to.’

Charlotte’s breathing was still loud and shallow.

‘Would you like some water?’

She didn’t answer.

‘Or would you like to end the interview now and resume when you’ve calmed down?’

This was not my preferred option. But she didn’t move. ‘Or we can continue.’ She looked up, there were sharp red points on her otherwise pale cheeks. Her breathing was still rapid. I could only imagine what her heart rate was like. She nodded. I could only hear her breathing in the bare room, her frailty after the huge energy that had filled this room. My ribs ached.

‘I will protect you.’

‘I must go home,’ she said again.

‘You will,’ I said. ‘When you are better.’

‘Has no one called for me? From home?’

‘No,’ I said. I fingered the gloves folded carefully in my pocket. ‘But we explicitly tell relatives that they must leave patients alone until they are settled.’ The gloves were soft as skin. ‘And that can take many weeks. Months.’

She wasn’t going to cry. She was as strong as she was vulnerable.

‘I won’t be drugged. Like the other women.’

‘Not all are women,’ I corrected. ‘And the treatment is at the edge of science. Dr Sneddon is highly regarded in his field. He believes that he is on the verge of an important breakthrough.’ I spoke the lies as if I believed them. Soon I wouldn’t have to.

‘They say there is screaming like no one has heard.’

‘Who says this?’

‘Nurses.’ This was more than gossip – putting us all at risk because they thought Charlotte was someone with connections, outside influences.

‘Staff will always talk. Exaggerate.’ I smiled. ‘You must know that.’

‘I won’t be drugged.’

I hesitated for a moment. I wanted her to understand how much she was going to have to depend on me.

‘Treatment here is at the discretion of the medical staff. Ultimately the Medical Superintendent.’ I let that hang in the air a little. ‘What would be the point of patients

choosing their treatment.’ Her eyes were wide now. Huge and black. I found myself sitting back further from the edge of the table. ‘We will decide.’

‘Please,’ She said. ‘They say the drugs involve creating visions. In your head.’

‘Research has shown that trauma induced by drugs can obliterate memories which may be inhibiting the progress that patients can make. Should make.’

‘No.’

‘Charlotte,’ I said, leaning across the table. ‘Trust me. Dr Sneddon’s treatment is not for all cases. I believe it will not help you. Dr Sneddon disagrees. I will persuade him.’

‘Persuade?’ Her eyes were enormous now.

‘Yes, I can change his mind. I know him very well, we have been colleagues since we were boys, since we trained together.’

‘No, I want to go home.’

‘That will not be possible.’ She thought about standing up, I saw her cheeks begin to redden. But she was an intelligent woman. There was no real option but to trust me. To cling to me.

‘Nurse,’ I called and the door opened almost before I had finished the word. We have substantial doors here; you have to put your ear very close to hope to hear anything.

As I passed Charlotte, I almost touched her shoulder. But I have learned something over the years.

‘Let’s speak again the day after tomorrow. I have a rare day off,’ I said. ‘We’ll continue the programme when you’ve had time to rest.’

The fine day had clouded, and by the time I got back to the cottage there was a steady drizzle. I made myself some pheasant sandwiches. Thin fare, but reflective of a man in my position. I switched the wireless on. Wagner. Some pretentious business about water nymphs, or suchlike. I switched off and listened to the occasional soft swish of the light rain on the window as the wind rose and fell.

I had my gun to oil and my shooting kit to look out. But first I had the paperwork I hadn’t been able to finish at the Asylum. I opened my briefcase. On top of the pile was a bundle of mail that had arrived late in the day. All official mail was opened and sorted. Only personal mail was left in the envelope. There were very few of those for me. Especially since Emily had stopped writing.

I was surprised to see a plain white envelope, address in a hand I didn't recognise, Liverpool postmark. I looked at the envelope for some time. Envelopes cannot be unopened. The contents unseen. Over such trivial actions, lives are changed. Taking a deep breath, I took my letter opener – a spent Mauser cartridge soldered on to a brass blade – and carefully slit the envelope.

I turned the page over. It was from Dr Claremont. He had been the only colleague to speak to me when I had returned to take what remained of my personal effects from my office. Effects I would have cheerfully abandoned, but my pride, and a desire to suppress gossip, meant that I was determined to show face. It was in no one's interests to have widespread discussion of my departure for Stirling. Certainly not the rest of my medical colleagues.

Dr Claremont was a brusque Ulsterman. Dedicated to the craft. No less horrified than the rest by what had happened, but someone not given to moral judgements. Perhaps because he was certain his God would deal with me ultimately in ways that were more imaginative and decisive than merely pretending you were invisible in a corridor. Or perhaps we were both members of that wide and diverse club – ex-combatants and their families – a freemasonry of misery. One day at lunch he had indicated my regimental cuff links. Pointing with his fork: 'Military man?'

'Yes, nearly the full four years,' I said.

'I lost my older brother,' he said. 'That first day. With the Ulster Division.' He didn't need to say more.

Whatever the reason, he shook me by the hand when he met me on that last day. Now he was writing to tell me that I might be interested to learn that Hazel Burton had been found dead at an address in Formby. Neighbours had smelled gas, police called, all too late. No one else involved. Because of her relatively recent release she was still classified as an out-patient and so the Asylum had been informed. He added, reassuringly, that her husband had written to the Medical Superintendent to thank all the staff for their work with her over the years she had spent with us. Clearly, the husband had said, nothing more could be done.

Indeed.

I tried to remember her husband's name. She must have spoken of him. But all I could remember was the smell of her auburn hair. The way it caught the afternoon light through the gap in her bedroom curtains. Her husband at work, the children at school. Was that the room she had been found in? Unlikely. If it was gas it would have been the kitchen,

the brass pots hanging, the range with the Dutch tiling and the view out to the back garden, the wooden table where we'd drunk her husband's red wine.

Claremont said that because she was one of my patients, I would surely wish to know what had happened. It is not an outcome we are unfamiliar with. We cannot succeed always. There is no blame attached. In normal circumstances.

Evidence and gossip are two different things. For Emily it was enough. That there should be gossip, that my reputation had any tarnish attached to it, took her and the boys away from me.

There was no question that our relationship brought Hazel back from the edge of the abyss. While what I did was wrong, it was also right. And no one would have known. No one did know. Only nurses with too much time, too little to do in the nurses' home but chatter and speculate. And allow Matrons to overhear. But Hazel had been ready to return home. Others examined her too.

How lucky I had been that Sneddon had a vacancy. And how unlucky I was that Sneddon was asked to examine her by Taylor. If he hadn't been in Liverpool that week for the Royal College seminar. Luck, fate, the delicate, pattering fall of coincidence and consequence.

What you know, and what you can prove, are different categories in science. The letter shook very slightly in my hand. This changed everything. Sneddon's generosity, his rescue was balanced by what he heard in his interview with Hazel. The great lever of power that it gave him over me. The reason I stood in my white coat and watched him torture women. His regular airy enquiries about whether I had heard from that woman in Formby. He couldn't ethically refer publicly to confidential patient consultations. At any moment, however, he could have asked the BMA to investigate, to question the patient. Now there was no one to investigate.

I took the letter over to the black fireplace. I lit a match, touched the edge and watched the words disappear. Back at the table I turned to the other correspondence. As I slipped the matchbox into my jacket pocket, I felt Lotte's gloves. I took them out, smoothed them on the table. I picked one up, the right hand, and brought it up to my face. I inhaled her deeply. Now I was one step closer to saving her.

Chapter 7: Sunday 16th April 1933.

‘No.’

Lotte didn’t respond. Her heart was racing. Sam was on his feet, pacing the rug in front of the fireplace. Behind him, on the corner table, the lamp held by the dancing, arching woman shook enough to catch the light. Lotte sat on the sofa, leaning forward, her hand clasped in her lap. Calm, calm – let him rage till he was done.

‘We’ve come all this way.’ His fists bulged in his pockets. ‘All this way. Both of us. And people say – his wife still works. They can’t be doing that well.’

‘What people say...’

‘Does matter. We’re a business, it matters what people think.’ He had stopped now, she didn’t look up but sensed him close, leaning forward. ‘And now this. On a stage in a public place. In Edinburgh.’ His speech stumbled, his anger ran ahead of his words.

‘It’s for one night, it will be less than half an hour.’ He didn’t interrupt but hung there, above her. ‘Just a final moment for me, to launch my teaching.’

‘There won’t be any music teaching.’ He turned away then. He wasn’t a violent man. She had never feared him physically, but knew his long moody withdrawals, his back turned, his moving to a separate bedroom. ‘It’s not appropriate. We aren’t struggling.’

‘Sam, it’s not about money, it’s what I want. To help you and to have something that’s mine.’

‘I’m not sure you know what you want.’ Sam hesitated, and his voice softened. ‘You put us through so much. All of us.’

‘I have got better.’ She said.

‘I don’t need your help in the shop. I want you to have a life that’s away from all that. I’ve built the shop up so far, I can manage, I think.’

She pulled her patience around her like a shawl. ‘But my aunts...’

‘The aunts did well. But that was the war. And now they’re all gone, scattered. I took on that responsibility remember.’ He stopped abruptly, sat down opposite her. ‘Lotte, don’t

take these things on. I don't want to argue. You know the last thing I want – we want – is another episode.'

She kept her rage locked down. She had no answer to that. The street was darkening outside, lights coming on in the dark evening shapes of the villas. There was that deep silence again in the house. The boys busy with homework, Grace and Shelia down in the kitchen. She felt her heart settle, there was a better way than meeting rage with rage. Sam was backing away too.

'I need to look at some invoices before tea. Let's not come back to this.'

She said nothing and he left her to the big room and the gathering dusk.

She wasn't the only one on the platform. With wartime restrictions, there were few people waiting for trains or arriving passengers in the normal, peacetime way. They tended to be men in long overcoats, bored and badgering the shrugging porters about delays. But Lotte belonged to a different gathering on the platform.

Her people were the women, maybe the odd brother or father, but this was essentially a female tribe who were too anxious to be bored. They were here at all times of the day and night. The trains were late, the day of arrival as vague as the hour. But they had to be here. They rarely spoke to each other, the air of fretful introspection didn't encourage enquiries about the weather, let alone who they were waiting for. Any joy in welcoming a returnee on leave was tempered by a trepidation. Wounds were never discussed in letters. How could you reassure in a few lines of smudged pencil?

Sometimes there was the briefest acknowledgement of the reason for their waiting. Tiny signs, signals of membership of this sisterhood. Mothers, sweethearts, sisters, they recognised a tension in the shoulders, a stance that pushed them on to the balls of their feet as if straining forward to see down the track, round the curves that caught the last of the evening light, down through England to a busy port, men shoving and jostling on a stone dock, iron bollards, high clouds over a restless sea, and then France, more rail lines stretching to a faraway point. And beyond that imaginations either failed, or projected images of unbearable horror. You could see that entire journey in their eyes as they waited.

Lotte knew some of these women. But even then, talk was reduced to a word or two.

'Billy?'

'Yes. Today. I hope. But I thought that yesterday.'

‘Is he...?’

‘As far as we know. God willing.’

And to converse further was to risk the train arriving in the middle of it all. The most intense emotion on these wartime platforms was relief. It never went beyond that. Relief tempered with the sure knowledge that in a few days you would be back to begin the cycle all over again. Unless you were faced with such devastating wreckage that they were home for good. Lotte had witnessed those moments. The shattered faces, the truncated bodies, the shaking hollow men. And they were the ones whole enough to arrive back unaided.

Each stood alone with their terrors as the evening darkened, as hopes and anxiety rose and fell with each arriving train. The smell of coal smoke trapped by the cold night air. Steam swirling. Oily air. White faces leaning forward. People came and went, but the scattered line of dark coats, hats pulled low over faces half covered in collars and scarves remained the same.

Until finally – though they would have waited for ever, perhaps would have preferred to wait forever, suspended always in expectation – it was resolved. The train doors opened, lurching figures in greatcoats, kitbags. A movement forward from the ragged line of women, each giving the others space to scan the opening doors. The search in the gloom for faces, the hope that it was one they could recognise easily.

Peter was never large. But his coat and bag diminished him further. She knew he was changed from the moment she hugged him. There was an unyielding steel to his back and shoulders; narrow, bony and rejecting.

‘How was the trip?’ she said. Foolish question.

He said nothing. All around the awkwardness of the moment was as palpable as the steam and grit. Hugging over, pairs stood, almost as if there were a reluctance to take this strangeness, this otherness indoors, into the domestic world. Enough to ensure all was well, more or less, in this brief contact and send them back on the next train without having to dig deeper, uncover hard little truths that would torture the spirit and blacken the brightest day for months, maybe years, ahead. The few mumbled words from another world beyond the experience of these wives and sweethearts and sisters.

‘Are you hungry? You must be?’

This time a smile. But Peter’s mouth seemed different too. A thinness to the lips, a paleness. His eyes, all watercolour.

‘Have you eaten anything today? Or longer? When did you leave France?’

‘France?’ He spoke the word as if it were a Pacific island, lost to the world.

‘When did you leave?’

‘Leave?’ he said. ‘That will be right.’

‘You’re home now.’ She took his arm and, as they left the steam and smoke behind, she caught a smell, a trace of hades. His was his best uniform, kept good for the journey, but it still reeked of damp soil, of clothes buried and washed and buried again. A smell she had known before. One day, Peter had dared her to go into a small stone structure built into the corner of the wall around the Snowdon Cemetery. She had edged into the gloom – tiny windows, Peter watching from the slim iron gates. A heugh, a chisel, a small hammer laid on a rough table, spades and scythes propped against the wall, clay pots. A chill of accumulated dank days and nights. Earth and worse. She hadn’t lingered, not for fear of a bearded figure looming in the doorway, but because of the smell. This is what being buried is like, she thought.

There it was again as she gripped Peter’s arm, clung on as if the arm were a stout rope. Under the streetlights outside, the greatcoat looked spotless, but still, in the cold autumn air, the scent of underground. She decided that if Peter wanted to be silent as he re-entered this strange world then she would leave him be. But the uniform attracted attention. Men nodded and muttered as they passed on the long walk up the hill.

‘Welcome back, son.’

‘Thank you. Well done.’

Bunnets touched, stepping out of the way. She could see a different reaction, though, from the women they passed. None of the undisguised contempt that had upset him in the year before he volunteered, but a wariness, as if he carried a contagion, the possibility of grief.

‘Here’s where they had the cannon,’ she said as they reached the top of King Street. There were no cars and few people now, the cobbles glistened.

‘Cannon?’ he said.

‘German guns that had been captured.’

He said nothing.

‘The soldier there was chatting up Marguerite. You know what she’s like.’

He didn’t respond.

‘He said you were safer, with the guns. You were a long way back.’

His steps seemed to falter at this point, as if his hobnails were sliding on the stone. He stumbled to a stop.

‘Is that what he said?’

They were standing side by side. She still had his arm. He didn't turn to face her, just stared up the narrowing street, towards their home.

'He didn't say how we fire for as long as we can. Dropping death miles away.'

'He didn't really know anything,' she said. 'He wasn't a gunner. He was just talking. Showing off.' She was keen to get him home, up the hill. The damp was condensing out of the air now. His coat had a mizzle of wet round the shoulders and stood-up collar.

'We're the most hated people on earth at that moment. Demons. All the effort is in finding us. Locating the flashes. Drawing the triangles. Then stamping on us like we were insects.' His feet were moving now but he wasn't walking. Stamping and twisting his boots, rasping on the pavement. 'Crushing.'

'Let's get home, it's wet now. They're all waiting.'

He started to walk.

'Lotte.'

'Yes?'

'Say nothing. To them.'

'I know. I won't.'

'You can't.' He stopped again. 'I'm not asking you to help,' he said. 'But if I need you to help. Will you?'

She tugged his arm.

'Of course I will.'

'I don't mean now. I mean later.' He looked at the street ahead. 'Just help when I ask. Not when I don't.'

'I won't ever abandon you Peter. But...'

He turned to her for the first time since the station. He put his hand to her lips. The nails clean but ragged. The smell.

'Shh.'

It was the same gesture he made at the station two days later. Just he and Lotte again – it was too much for his mother, his aunts. Fingers to her lips.

'Shh.'

‘If that gets painful at all, just let me know.’

The hairdresser wasn't the one she normally saw. Her trips here were fairly pointless. Taming her hair was beyond any advance of modern science. The usual girl, though she was by far the youngest here, seemed to understand that this was a fortnightly ritual that had symbolic rather than practical significance for Lotte. She and Lotte had an easy conspiracy that accommodated the fact that Lotte's hair never looked much different when she left compared to when she arrived. It was a fair exchange they made, complex and satisfying on both sides.

But this new woman today, older, her hair disciplined into tight furrows and coils, with a sheen that projected light rather than reflecting it, didn't understand the nature of the transaction. She took no hints from Lotte's short answers to the technical questions. A bit of heat was all that was required she had suggested, to fix the curls. Lotte knew it was a forlorn exercise but was willing to go along for some peace under the hot air.

‘Magazine?’

The options weren't exciting. *Women's Own*, *Picture Goer* or *The Listener*. She took *The Listener*, flicked through to the classical music section towards the back. The hot air stroked at the back of her neck.

She stopped abruptly. The photograph wasn't dramatic. A cluster of men, so close their dark suits made a deep continuous black border. In the centre, an older man, hard sharp features. And, with his back turned half away from the camera, and closer, so he seemed to tower above all the faces, the most famous profile in the world. She read the caption –

Maestro Karl Muck talking with Adolph Hitler during his visit to the Leipzig Gewandhaus for a concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Richard Wagner.

She gasped.

‘Shall I turn this down, madame?’

Lotte did not answer. She felt a physical pain in her breast. It was as if one of the pairs of stiletto scissors that lay around the room had been pushed through her skin and muscle, past bone into her vital organs. She couldn't have articulated this deep sense of wrong. This affront. She didn't follow politics, she had skimmed articles and absorbed headlines. She didn't need to know the detail. She recognised a bully. What hurt her was evil associating itself with music. That the conductor, the embodiment of goodness, was surrounded by the hard, gloating faces, his head bowed as he paid homage to a street tough. And all in the cause

of the memory of a musical genius. The soaring voice in the Usher Hall drowned out the hot air rushing past her ears.

If all that was good and pure could be absorbed by all that was evil, then war was closer than she thought. She had read little about Wagner, only what Frederick had told her when they'd looked at scores, scores they knew were beyond them. But he represented creative genius, something beyond politics, broken windows and bloody faces in the street. The shock was followed by a wave of fear. Fear for Douglas, that she would be waiting again at the station on another autumn night.

She stood up. Pushed the dryer away.

'Madam?'

Faces under dryers and above oilcloth capes turned. Scissors were poised, mid-cut.

She opened her purse. A girl brought her coat.

'Is there a problem?' The manageress appeared.

Lotte couldn't speak. She pushed coins into cupped hands. She was on the street before she had both arms into the coat. The past was coming again, pursuing her. She hummed the 'Liebestod.' People were turning in the street. She hummed louder, the stately march, growing in her chest. And then she was singing. Not loud, but loud enough. Later, from the look on Grace's face it was clear that word of her singing had reached home before her.

'Sit yourself,' said Grace, pulling out a chair at the head of the kitchen table. She rattled kettle and teapot, looking back over her shoulder. Lotte's head was down on her forearms, her hair a tangled mess. Her head came up suddenly.

'Where's Sheila?'

'In her bed,' said Grace. 'She gets excited some days.' She fussed over the tea. 'So excited, over nothing. Then she seems to just collapse.' She brought the tea across to the table. 'All or nothing. Like her mother.'

Lotte's head went down again.

'I'm fine. I just saw something that gave me a shock and I had to clear my head.'

'Saw? In the street?'

‘No, I was in the hairdressers. It was in a magazine.’ Calm now, she realised how ridiculous her reaction would seem to Grace. ‘There was talk of war in it. I worry about the boys.’

‘They’ve talked of it for years.’ Grace poured into the two cups. ‘We’ll never make the same mistake twice. No one wants it again.’ She looked solemn.

‘Sorry,’ said Lotte. ‘I don’t mean to bring it up.’

They sat in silence for a moment. The kettle ticked.

‘No. I don’t mean to dismiss it. And I know you must be worried. As a mother.’

‘We’re all worried. Not just mothers.’

‘If you’re not a mother you haven’t anything to lose.’

‘Grace,’ Lotte leaned forward. She was going to touch Grace’s hand, but something about the way it lay on the table, so still, made her think it might be like touching marble.

‘You lost your husband. It’s not just mothers.’

‘Mothers are different.’ She brought both hands together, clasped tight. ‘A mother’s loss is beyond anything. It’s why you can’t take it for granted.’ She looked Lotte full in the face. The depth of Grace’s judgement was plain in her eyes. Lotte bowed her head for a second, gathering herself. But when she looked up Grace was the housekeeper again, and smiling. ‘I know you take none of it for granted. Your ones. And it’s why I will always be here for you.’

‘I know that. And it is a comfort, it really is. To know you are there.’ She was going to reach for her hands again, but again she hesitated. ‘And I’m sorry that you have lied for me. To Sam. About the walking.’

‘A fib is a little thing.’

‘Not always.’

‘Oh, there’s worse. Much worse than a lie.’

‘I don’t doubt that,’ said Lotte. Relaxing now. ‘Please don’t worry about me. It’s been difficult I know, but you have protected the children when I wasn’t able to.’

‘It’s not the same,’ said Grace. ‘They need you. I am not a mother.’

‘You’re as good as.’

‘But that’s not the same. I’m not a mother. I’m not family.’

‘But Grace, you are family.’

Grace hesitated, as if she were gathering something inside her, then she said:

‘I’m not sure you understand family. Appreciate it.’ The fire rose in her voice and died away almost as quickly. ‘I’m sorry, you have been ill. That was unfair.’

Lotte tapped the kitchen tiles once with the toe of her boot. ‘No Grace, I’m the one that’s sorry. You had your own family. Mr Semple.’

‘Until that was taken.’

‘The war...’

‘Took from us all.’ There were bright red patches on Grace’s cheeks now.

‘You have us, said Lotte. ‘We are your family. We, I, won’t let you down.’

Grace looked down at the twisted towel in her hands and said: ‘I will never let you down.’

They sat there in a silence that deepened until it was broken by Sheila, calling down through the house, a rising wail.

‘Gr-aaaa-ce?’

She must have been at high school, just before she left to start work at the milliners, so maybe thirteen or fourteen. She had been in the shop with Aunt Margaret. Groceries, then. Hard work. Everything heavy, packaging filthy from the delivery journey. Even then they made their plans to move into clothing. So much cleaner.

They shut at ten. Everything brought in off the street, everything settled in the shop for the night. Slicer cleaned. Bags and boxes up off the floor. Her aunt moving round, not a wasted movement, quick, neat. The counter, the till and the shelves like an extension of her limbs. They’d had this property for over a year, but there was always one eye out for something else. They had plans, the aunts. Always have a next shop, a next project, or more than one. Things changed, times changed, people changed.

‘Won’t you be sad to leave here?’ she had asked.

‘Sad? Why?’ said her aunt. No sentiment. It was a shop, a means to an end. Moving on, getting out. Orchard House, lying at the bottom of the town, across the river, was another motivator.

‘People like us get stuck,’ Aunt Jessie had told her once. ‘They get worried about dropping back, it all going wrong. They get buried in this order, that invoice, and can’t see where they’re going, can’t get their heads up to look at the future.’

Margaret turned the lights out. The street was gloomy, a drizzly mist hanging around the lights. Few people, as it wasn’t a paynight. The four pubs they passed in the first few minutes were quiet. The men had plenty appetite for the warmth and light of the pub. Lotte

had never been inside, obviously, but the orange glow, the warm yeasty reek from the open doors was so much more inviting than the dank stairs in the older tenement blocks.

As they walked up the narrow curve of Bow Street, a noise came down the hill towards them, like the sound of the sea as you approached through the dunes. At the mouth of a vennel there was a small crowd. No more than eight, mostly men, a strange excitement animating their faces under their bunnets, a glitter in their eyes. In the middle of the ragged crowd two women, young, twenties, one barefoot, both bent at waist, both black-haired, wild, white knuckles catching the light as both fists flexed and tightened buried deep in each other's hair, scrabbling for a tighter grip. They seemed silent, but between the occasional shouts from the men there was a breathing that Lotte hadn't heard before. It was a deep, compressed rage, an anger too big to be solely for the other girl but a rage that rolled and expanded over the people watching, the street, the town, their lives, the universe. As they moved under the light, she saw the wet faces, spit and snot, the ripped blouse and exposed breast, a dark nipple at the centre of the men's attention, a bloody scratch all the way along a forearm. They were locked together, turning, feet slipping, oblivious to the watchers.

Aunt Margaret shoved her with her hip, off the pavement and across the cobbles to the opposite side of the road. 'Don't stare.'

They picked up their pace. There were faces at windows above, but this was a small commotion. The two women had not changed position, immobile with hatred, fused with a diabolical energy. No one, male or female, made a move to intervene.

'Come,' said Margaret. 'Leave them to it.'

When they were further round the curve of the street the sound receded.

'Fighting like beasts,' said Margaret, her lips a single dark line. 'What lives.'

Lotte nodded. But she could feel her body tingle with an excitement. It wasn't just the primate violence, the unexpected flesh exposed on a damp night. There was something about the fierce energy concentrated in those fists, the indifference to the eyes, the judgements. There was something in the intense struggle – futile, pointless, though it was – that rejected a submission to fate. They might mock and judge, but there was something in the fury of the women that was bigger, grander, than the staring men and indifferent women. She almost had to run to keep up with her aunt.

Why Sam? Why her? She could see all around the mystery of relationships. Marguerite, for instance. The curl of her finger was able to hook boys. She had settled on Morris, her eye on a bungalow on the Bannockburn Road. How did it happen? How did you know? Or did the music stop at a certain moment, and you sat in whatever seat you could?

The mystery of finding someone was dramatized in these concert parties. Five hundred men and her. Not just her, there were other local girls who could sing, who had songs that excited the boys more than her safe selections. But of those five hundred it was Sam who asked if he might meet her before she went home.

What did he see from his seat in the long khaki rows? A nervous black-haired girl in a white dress concentrating so hard on the music, who stood so straight on the stage that her back ached for days. He said it was her voice, that was how he knew. What made her connect with him? His intelligent gaze, his smile. And he had things to say. Peter apart, she grew up among men who had little to say and sometimes these few words were too much. Sam had plenty words, and usually they were the right ones.

He had stood in the corridor at the back of the hall. A draught blew her hair over her eyes, she pushed it back, pulled her wrap around her. This was a novelty, almost like a stage door.

‘Miss Candow, may I compliment you.’ Accents from all round the country had been common in the town for the last four years. His was hard to place. Everywhere and nowhere. She noted his Sergeant’s stripes.

‘You have a wonderful voice.’

She’d taught herself to take the compliment, not bat it back, not to self-deprecate, to resist the search for the catch, the irony, but to take it in her two hands, feel its texture and put it in her bag to take out later when the doubts arrived.

‘Thank you. It’s difficult to pick songs for men who have been through so much and are still far from home.’

‘They won’t want to go home if you come back next week to sing again.’

She cracked a little at that.

‘I think home has more to offer than a concert in a cold hall.’

He held up a finger for emphasis. It was a one of his little ticks. She didn’t know then it was a gesture she would see almost every single day for the next fifteen years.

‘I mean it, I’d cancel my de-mob for more of your voice.’

‘Does that say more about your home than my voice?’ He laughed at that. A big generous noise.

They were still standing awkwardly in the corridor, soldiers squeezing past.

‘Home is always home,’ he said. ‘No matter what it’s like.’

‘Is it far?’ she said. ‘The home you’re in no hurry to return to?’

‘Birkenhead,’ he said.

‘Liverpool?’ That was the undertow of his voice.

‘Birkenhead,’ he said again. ‘Not the same.’

‘What will you be returning to? When you get home?’

‘I’m a grocer,’ he said, ‘or will be soon. I’ve been a quartermaster for three years.

You’re laughing. Is that a funny job to do?’

‘No, no,’ she said. ‘It’s not rude, it’s just that I’ve worked there. In a grocers. My aunt had a grocer’s shop, with my mother, and her sister, too.’

‘The three sisters?’ She registered that he thought he had said something clever. ‘You know?’

‘Pardon?’

‘Macbeth. The three witches. And here we are, in Scotland?’ He tailed off.

She laughed again: ‘They can be diabolical sometimes. But the aunts aren’t witches. That is too much. You’re the educated one, then.’

‘Anyone can read a book, go to the theatre.’

‘Well,’ she said, shrugging her wrap on to her shoulders, in a deliberate way, as if she were putting on an overcoat. It was a mime for leaving. ‘It has been nice to meet you.’

‘Mister? Mister Raymond. I was just finishing your sentence.’ He was staring intently now. ‘Don’t you want to know who I am?’

‘I’m sorry, yes of course.’

‘And what about the nature of my business, why I accosted you here? I play. The piano. And I wanted to suggest that rather than taking you out, that I might be able to accompany you, on the piano, when you practice.’

‘I have an accompanist.’ She stalled.

‘I can see that. But extra practice is never wasted. I’ve got access to a piano at the Methodist church in town.’

‘You’re a Methodist?’

‘In a way,’ he said. ‘Not devout, but yes. Don’t look like that, we’re not Hindus.’

‘And we would just meet there, in a church hall, to sing?’

‘Yes. Why not? You can bring a friend if you like.’

‘I have my sister.’

‘Perfect, bring her along.’

Marguerite sat right at the back of the plainest, coldest hall Lotte had ever been in. She’d read a magazine before stepping out for a cigarette, letting the sprung door slam as loud as she could. Sam chased after her the first time she did it to make sure she went behind the hall and didn’t bring the religion into disrepute.

At first, she brought the music of her favourite songs. Then he brought his. She didn’t know where he got the sheets from. The hymns came from the church, presumably, but had he carried these song manuscripts all through the war?

‘Salonika,’ he said when the inevitable question came up.

‘That couldn’t have been nice.’ It was a reasonable thing to say but she couldn’t recall having read or heard anything about it in the last four years.

‘It was horrible. Disease kills you as easily as a bullet. But it wasn’t France. And I’m glad of that.’ His honesty was unusual.

‘My cousin was in France.’ She left it at that, and he didn’t press her for more.

He told her of his early time in Belfast. Under the cranes, the mountains close by, the rain and the drums: ‘Like something out of Kipling,’ he said. ‘The natives restless.’

He told her about Birkenhead. More cranes, terraces. The huge smoky city across the water, towers and steeples. The river full of ferries, great liners from America and Canada turning slowly with their black smoke rising all the way to the low clouds.

They were walking, Sunday afternoon, along the Back Walk, the stone bulk of the Castle rising above them, scrubby bushes sweeping away until the sheer rock took over. There were lots of other couples despite it being an overcast day, the hills like another band of cloud to the North.

‘It’s such a different place,’ she said. ‘You must miss it lots.’

‘I miss the river. And the library. Maybe the park and the running ground.’

‘That’s quite a lot.’

‘There’s a river, library and parks here too.’

‘But not your family?’ She said, probing.

‘No,’ he said, swinging his umbrella at a straggly thistle. ‘No. I don’t not miss them. But they don’t expect me to come back. Albert went long before the war. He’s in the American Coastguard now. In Hawaii. Imagine.’ He whacked another thistle. ‘I don’t want to get that far.’

‘It gives people chances, the war,’ she said. ‘My aunts say they’d never have got on if there had been the usual men running the shops. Making the decisions. It was their chance and they took it. They had to learn how to do it from scratch.’

‘Sometimes you need a shock, to do new things. It’s a bright thing that comes out of dark times.’ he said.

‘When my father died,’ said Lotte, ‘it felt like we had to learn everything from scratch too. Especially when we came here from Edinburgh.’

‘Why did you leave Edinburgh?’ He put his umbrella over his shoulder. ‘Sorry about all this talk about leaving.’

She laughed. She loved his effort, his pleasing her, engaging her. Not like the monosyllabic boys who expected you to do all the conversational work, who never listened, or even looked to see how you were responding to their grunts.

‘My mother never really explains it,’ she said. ‘She just packed up one day and the next thing we were at the station on our way to her two sisters. There were lots of us back there in Edinburgh, lots of family. My uncle and his wife and their children. Three of them. The three of us. And my grandfather. It was his place.’

‘I know about full houses. Never quiet. Never alone. I’d find corners to read and my brother would hunt me down.’

‘I missed my cousins. But my mother said we would just have to forget them as we’d not be going back.’

‘Did something happen?’

‘Things always happen.’

‘A fall out?’

‘Maybe. No one said anything, but we were small. And then we had cousins here and that was that.’

They walked on. The damp glistened on gorse bushes, tiny drops on the thorns. Sam stopped, pointed with his umbrella towards the monochrome smear of cloud and hill.

‘I love this,’ he said.

‘It’s cold and wet.’

‘It’s cold and wet everywhere. But look at that.’ He pointed to the walls above. ‘It’s all history. Hundreds of years.’

She rubbed her cheek on the collar of her coat, saw the glitter in his eye, how all this looked to him, who hadn’t grown up here.

He said: ‘I took *Kidnapped* out of the library over and over. The librarian would tip me off. “It’s back in again.” I’d read it upstairs, looking out into the street. The black bricks. I’d be here. Walking down over these hills.’ He waved the umbrella again. ‘To cross the bridge at Stirling at night. Out of the Highlands. It still seems more exciting and exotic than Greece ever did.’

‘I’ve not read that.’

‘You don’t need to,’ he said. ‘You’ve got your music. Your voice. It’s a gift. You don’t need more than that.’

She wasn’t sure what he meant. But he stopped now. And so had the rain, it was just damp condensing out of the air. She felt something was going to happen, the couples on the path, the dull sky didn’t register with her anymore, they were clearing away for something. He was very serious.

‘I don’t want to go back.’ His arms, his hands were around her shoulder, her back. ‘I want to stay here. With you.’

He kissed her. It wasn’t the first time she’d been kissed, nor the first time he’d kissed her. But it seemed different. As if setting something running. Setting something free. In the steep streets round her home boys loved to set balls going. Footballs, marbles, all types. See how far they would run by gravity alone. Some boasted they had reached the Forth. On the Back Walk between the Castle and the flat Carse and the far hills she felt something start to roll down the hill, something that would have enough momentum to carry all the way to the river.

She had to ask her mother. And her aunts. The three sisters, the aunts, would decide. Collectively. They would convene. This had been the defining image of the household. At night, the tea washed and away. She would have a book, Marguerite her *Woman and Beauty* magazine. Peter sketching down at the living end of the big room, and Jessie, Margaret and her mother would be at the kitchen table, gathered around accounts books, piles of receipts, invoices. The sharp tang of carbon paper. Scraps of pages with tall lists of figures – compared, recounted, checked, discarded and a new set of figures added and subtracted.

A low murmuring. The sisters all dark-haired, with the same sharp look across their deep-set eyes. Voices were never raised, but there was plenty of debate. Consensus was a destination. And not always reached on one night. They would come back, harry the problem,

worry at it till they had agreement. A majority never enough, Lotte had seen many vetoes. Jessie the spinster, the youngest and the most severe. But in business the risk taker, the goader, the one who suggested new territories. And the one everyone was wary of, with her Council of Women meetings and her ideas about housing. She was the one who had taken the fire and focus of the family to other, bigger enterprises, other aims.

‘The places people live in make them. Live like an animal, behave like an animal. Better housing is the start of a better society.’

Her mother was always cautious, always looking for the downside, the hidden risk. And Margaret, pragmatic – ‘Let’s get on, let’s make a start and see where it leads.’

The overhead lamp pulled down low on its chain pulleys. Curtains undrawn, the night pressing up to the window. Out beyond the high window, the Forth far below, the yellow glow of the town, the clusters of light spreading away into the night. But at the centre of it all these three heads, so close they almost touched. The aunts. From this intense little circle came their food and their shelter, the fine clothes and the furniture. Lotte had felt the jealousy swirling around them from her first day at school. This was as good a property as any in the district. Big enough to take lodgers as an extra income to tide over hard times. And it was theirs, or Margaret’s anyway. Her name on the deeds.

‘You have to own,’ she said. ‘It has to be yours. Your name on the papers.’

She had been abandoned once, left with debts, a change of clothes and the next day’s food. She wouldn’t take that risk again.

‘Not a man between us,’ Mary would say. It was true; one dead, the other – who knew where. And Jessie – ‘A man? What would I do with one?’

Lotte watched them over her Mazo de la Roche. Studied the alchemy of the aunts’ planning. Scribbles on opened-out envelopes were the starting points, the calculations that could locate a new, cheaper supplier, define the value of a new shop or create a surplus that led to new dresses for them all. Opportunities conjured out of thin air.

‘If you own one thing it can let you own another.’

They got credit on the back of property, property on the back of trust. They never missed a payment and there was always a reserve of money in the Bank of Scotland at the foot of Baker Street. She had visited with her mother to deposit money. The manager, a man with all the self-importance of her school headmaster, came out of his office: ‘Mrs Candow, so nice to see you. Who can I get to help you today?’

The black and white squares on the floor and the high roof of the bank, like a church.

‘Why does money need so much room?’ She had asked on the way back up the hill

‘It needs to breathe,’ her mother said. ‘Breathe and grow.’

They had sat at a desk with carved legs as the bag of money was counted and pieces of paper were signed. There was a handshake and the next day her mother or one of her aunts was off to Glasgow to speak to the wholesaler. With two bags. A handbag and a leather bag that held a notebook, letters, a fountain pen. It was like a school bag but infinitely more important.

And the next night the bag was opened with new papers to discuss, to pass round, more calculations.

This was how they moved into clothing.

‘Groceries are halfpenny profits.’ Jessie said. ‘We’ll never get away on that. Not in a hundred years.’

‘What do we know about clothes?’ asked her mother.

‘You’ve worked in a draper’s shop, don’t be ridiculous, of course you know about clothes.’ Jessie wasn’t used to losing arguments.

‘That’s not the same as running a clothes shop.’

‘We can put it together,’ said Margaret slowly. ‘You know the stock, I know the books, Jessie can do anything she turns her hand to.’

‘Lotte knows how to sell hats,’ said Jessie. ‘And Marguerite can decide if she wants to sew on ribbons for ever. We won’t even have to hire.’

‘What about Peter?’ said Mary.

‘Peter’s going to college,’ said Margaret. ‘He has talent.’

Lotte, Marguerite and Peter weren’t pretending to be deaf anymore.

Marguerite said. ‘Don’t include me in your plans. I’ve got prospects.’

Peter kept sketching. Lotte could see that it was the Castle, but distorted, bristling with modern-looking weapons, an airship overhead.

‘I will help in any way I can.’ Lotte said.

‘We won’t get airs,’ said Margaret. ‘We will stick to the people we know. Up here there’s been no quality to buy. They can’t afford the shops in Barnton Street. We can give them good stuff at good prices.’

‘They can’t get a buyer for the Stirling Arms, you know.’

It was notorious. Perhaps no one was brave enough to take it on. It was the best building in Baker Street. A landmark.

‘Pubs, now?’ said Mary. ‘No.’

‘No. No,’ said Jessie. ‘It’s the site, it’s perfect. Halfway up, or down the street. Halfway to town, halfway to work and home.’

‘Let’s do the sums.’

They did, and with many meetings in the bank over that first winter of the war they bought the building. A shop and two flats. And so the aunts and the three grown children stood and watched at the doorway as the workmen tore out the stinking floor and the old wood of the bar fittings polished by a million elbows. A few hours later it was a shell. But in days there were counters, shelving, and it was a shop.

A miracle. The only other shops owned by women were small affairs, enough to keep a widow alive, or entertain a bored wife. But this was ambitious. A proper business.

In the same way, they made Peter’s college place happen. The three sisters. More sums, options laid out and ticked off. They approved Marguerite’s match, too, with just a faint whiff of disappointment.

‘Your sister’s the prettiest girl in the town,’ said Peter.

Lotte stabbed him in the hand with a stick of charcoal. It left a black rash which he blew clean.

‘It runs in the family, of course. But honestly, she could do better. Don’t you think?’

It was agreed though.

And then Lotte had to take Sam before the aunts. Interrogation. Round the table. Sam in his suit. A thin sunlight coming in over the rooftops, over the Forth, the Ochils.

‘How long have you been apprenticed?’

‘Who with?’

‘Quartermaster? How many men under you?’

‘What sort of stock were you handling out there?’

‘Local? Was it shipped all the way out?’

Sam, smiling, everything thrown at him was caught, was picked out of the air.

‘Did you organise uniforms, too, for all those men?’

It was a like an interview for a position, which indeed it was. Lotte watched them nod, almost smile, even scribble in the account book, for they were soon at the point of showing him what they had done – built over that hard half-decade. Woven a fine web of trust among tough, sceptical women, a delicate net, transaction after transaction, from customers who had no time for shoddy goods or sharp practice. The aunts had respect for hard work and tight budgeting, so never cut corners with customers. Suppliers were different, of course. There was no mercy there.

‘We can find a space for you,’ said Mary. ‘Not a full role, but enough to help you and Lotte get started.’

‘For now,’ said Jessie. ‘But we can’t stand still either, we need to grow.’

‘Time for that,’ said Mary.

‘Let’s see how you settle in,’ said Margaret.

When Sam had left, they sat on for longer with Lotte. Required her to set out her plans.

‘There’s room for four of us in the business,’ said Margaret. ‘You and Sam will have one share of what we take between you. We need to look after Peter too, he is part of our calculations.’

Lotte looked out into the darkened hall and Peter’s door.

‘You best go and tell him now, too,’ said Mary.

Lotte paced up and down the living room. The boys in bed, Sam still at the shop. Grace downstairs in her room. She switched the wireless off. The clock ticked. The curtains were open. She had told Grace to leave them. She wanted to see the light fade. The road was shiny now under the streetlights. She paced. Her mind was full of the Usher Hall. This was her future – the music lessons. And music was an escape for Douglas too, away from the shop, from working till 10 o’clock. A calling not a business. He was as talented as Frederick and now they could afford university. More or less. But it would take the business to grow and flourish. She had so many ideas for that. Jessie’s way, keep looking forward, never look back, keep growing, keep expanding. They were in the wrong place. It was all about position, she could see that. She saw that every time she went out. She could feel the disaster waiting, the streets themselves could not last. In the depths of the night, when the streets were empty of people, drained of energy, it was clear the buildings were crumbling, nearly dead. Years ago, at Jessie’s Council of Women meetings, they had recognised that the area had to change. But no one listened and the decline continued. They still had customers because they were poor and didn’t feel comfortable in other shops, but that would not last for ever.

‘Move now,’ she said. Did she speak aloud?

She paced faster. That was it. Relocate. She could see. Her heart beat faster. She looked up at the mirror over the fire, Jessie’s gift when they moved here.

‘Don’t over-use it,’ she had said. ‘But never go out looking like you don’t care either.’

There were points of red on her cheeks. She put her hands to her face. Burning. As if the ideas racing in her head were boiling to the surface.

‘Walk. Walk,’ she said. Calm the runaway horse pounding in her chest.

She would walk up to the shop. Perhaps meet Sam, explain what she had worked out – for the shop, for Douglas, her music teaching. Perhaps even about the concert. There was so much. Her black times seemed remote now. This was a proper plan for the future. She looked at the room, the piano. The Collard and Collard had cost more than the car. But so much could come from it. This was a perfect room for students to learn and play. She imagined it filled with music and sunshine every day. And then at night she and Sam could discuss the business. Take the shop forward. New ideas, new lines. Lotte and Sam, heads together over the dining room table.

She went into the hall. The stair disappearing up into the gloom, the hallway through to the stairs to the kitchen. Should she call down to Grace? No. She would be back home very quickly, with Sam. She did not want a long conversation with Grace. There was no time.

She took her coat from the stand, turned the collar, checked again in the hall mirror. Had her hand on the brass doorknob when she paused. Umbrella. It was a damp night.

‘Lotte.’

Grace stood, one hand on the last flourish of the banister. She had taken off her apron. She was a thin, black austere presence in the hallway.

‘I’m going to the shop. To see Sam. I won’t be long.’

‘You can’t,’ said Grace.

‘Please Grace, I don’t want to argue with you. I’m going out for ten minutes. The night air will help clear my headache.’

‘No.’

‘Please don’t.’

‘I won’t let you go out,’ said Grace, moving three deliberate steps towards her. ‘I won’t’

‘Grace.’

‘No.’

Lotte turned away and put her hand on the doorknob again. Grace clicked across the tiles towards her and put a hand on her arm. Lotte pulled away and they stood inches apart.

‘I’ve lied and covered up for you, your night wanderings.’

‘I have to go out.’

‘You are a woman on her own.’

‘I have done this so often Grace. It is not dangerous.’

Grace stepped back: ‘You are my employer. It is not for me to tell you what to do. I shall make a supper for you both when you return.’ She turned and clipped along the hall until she disappeared into the darkness, then her steps on the stairs to the kitchen.

Lotte closed the front door behind her and stepped out swiftly across the road and along the broad streets. No umbrella. Never mind, not so wet. It was whisper-quiet here, the misty night muffling, closing in on the pools of yellow around the streetlights.

As she climbed into the town there was more noise. It was early, not quite ten, so there were plenty of people in the streets, mainly men, collars up, caps down, clustering round the pubs, elbows on the window ledges. She always wondered if the facade of bars were designed so customers could step outside and rest their elbows and back against these ledges. Their gaze was like a touch on her back. She hunched into her coat. It wasn’t a novelty, this feeling she’d got used to from girlhood. The stare that couldn’t be challenged.

When she turned up the hill into Baker Street, there was much more activity. Vans delivering late, lights on, a brewer’s dray, solid patient horses, the traffic pushing people onto the pavements. A few women went past. A different sort of look from them. What was she doing out? A woman like her. A mass of men was blocking the pavement outside the Star. She stepped off the pavement and crossed the cobbles, keeping one eye on the group, when she walked into the middle of another group of five men.

‘Excuse me,’ she said.

‘How, what have you done?’ There was laughter. They were crowded into a space between a van and a shop front.

‘It’s what she’s going to do I’m interested in.’ The accent wasn’t Stirling.

She stayed calm. It was a busy street. She wasn’t alone.

‘Brass are you?’

‘First we’ve seen.’

In the confined space the smell of alcohol was strong.

‘Gentlemen,’ she said. ‘You’ve had a fine evening I can tell, please let me past.’ Stay calm. The aunts’ advice. Never look scared because that makes it worse. And get your shoes off to run hard. You can recover from cut feet.

‘Gentlemen.’ There was more laughter. And a hand on her waist. ‘Not for you then Bertie.’

‘Too expensive by far.’

‘Not if there’s a group discount.’

Another hand was on her right arm now, hard, insistent.

‘Come.’ It was Frederick. ‘Come.’

‘Oh, here’s a lively one.’

‘Don’t you fucking barge in on us.’

‘This was our find. Fuck you.’

There was a scuffle. A hand pulled at the front of her coat. Boots kicked out. One caught her shin. She gasped. Not so much pain as surprise. Frederick was kicking back and pushing her at the same time. Into the vennel. Frederick crashing the barred gate shut. Fingers caught.

‘You fuck.’

‘Fucking get him.’

Frederick pushing her away from the gate and shoving a bar through to secure it. Fists round the bars, spitting. Then they were gone, some laughter and the wave of energy and hate fell back into the natural swaying sound of the night-time town.

‘Here.’ Frederick gave her a folded linen handkerchief. She pressed it to her lips. It was dark in the vennel. When she looked up there was only one dimly lit window, hanging. The rest was a long narrow trench of black. He was almost invisible. She could smell his soap.

‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘Why?’ he started to say, but she cut over him.

‘I’m on my way to the shop.’

‘Of course.’

‘I can’t tell you how...’

‘Lotte.’ He moved round to face her. The vennel was so narrow that he was inches from her face. The only light reflected of the wetness of his face. ‘Lotte. Don’t say anything. It is fate. Providence.’

‘Frederick.’ She put two hands flat on his overcoat. It was damp. Slippery. ‘It must be OK to go back now.’

‘No, Lotte, don’t you get it, this is fated.’ His mouth was near hers.

She pushed but he put his hand behind her head and his mouth was over hers. His tongue like a wet live thing, moving. She could go no further back. There was a hard object behind her thighs. A bin. Bins.

‘I’ve thought so much about this. All those hours.’ His hands were pulling at the belt of her coat. The knot tightened and he abandoned that and pulled the top half of her coat apart. His hand slid under her blouse, pinching, pulling.

‘I know you think it isn’t right.’ He was panting now. She twisted and turned but his weight crushed her. ‘But I know you want this for us too?’

‘Frederick, please.’ It was like using a familiar name for a stranger.

His hand reached to push her skirt up, tugging as it caught on her boot hooks. He was breathing like a beast, Lotte was bent back over the bin, her legs kicking as he thrust his fingers, jabbing. She thought strangely of his ink-stained hands.

‘I told you this. I told you about our training. Under pressure is when you need to think most.’ It was Peter. At the barred gate, framed by the streetlight at the end of the vennel. Peter.

‘There’s always something. A weapon. A spade, a stone. You or the Hun. It won’t be you.’ Frederick put both hands to his trousers. It was a moment. She started to fall to one side. She reached out her right hand to steady herself – the galvanised metal of the bin lid.

‘You see, you see,’ said Peter, calm. Slow. ‘Always something.’ Her hand gripped the handle of the lid.

‘Now,’ said Peter. ‘Vulnerable places only. You have to do this, I can’t help. You get one chance. It has to tell. Face, balls are best. But quick, Lotte. Don’t fuck about.’

She swung the bin lid. As it rose, she put her left hand behind the edge and drove it as hard as she could into Frederick’s face. His head went back. She heard it against the other wall. The sound was like an overripe apple falling on the shop floor. He gasped. But quietly. She braced herself. Wasn’t it enough?

‘Go Lotte, run. For fuck’s sake have you never listened to me?’ Peter wasn’t so calm now.

She slid off the bin. She had to step over Frederick. He was sitting upright against the wall, a dark presence, his legs on the wet flags. His hands held his face as if he were pushing it back into place and it weighed a great deal. Her instinct was to bend over him. To help.

‘Lotte, are you listening to me?’

She clipped down the vennel. She paused at the iron gate. There was no noise behind her. She settled her coat. Where was her hat? Tucked into her collar. She tugged it out. The street was quiet. She pulled the gate shut. A hard, final clang. She didn’t look back. She took out her watch. She had only left the house twenty minutes before. Twenty minutes. She’d fallen. If Sam was back before her that’s what she’d say: She’d fallen on the wet cobbles.

But Sam wasn't back before her. The living room light was off. And as she closed the front door behind her, it was Grace, standing by the hall table who took her face between her hands.

Chapter 8: Friday 21st April 1933.

Scurrying about the house, collecting my shooting kit, I felt a wave of loneliness wash over me. If I collapsed at this moment with an aneurism then, apart from some commotion at the Asylum, and, I hope, maybe a moment or two of sadness for Emily, I would disappear without trace. The boys? The boys would be upset, for a while. Emily would be wonderful with Sneddon at the funeral, The whole senior team by the open grave. And the nurses would talk about it for a few weeks – any sort of disruption was welcome.

It was why I was resolved. It is why I was focused on Lotte. It was through her that I could act, end this half-life under Sneddon's will. Give myself a new future, a different narrative. By plucking her from Sneddon's plans I would finally defy him. I'd have to put her beyond his reach. Our futures were twisted together, Lotte and I pushed together by Sneddon's ambitions. What an irony.

I put the game bag and the gun bag in the back of the car. It was a cold morning. The fine weather had gone now, as if we had slipped back a season. I felt the flask against my belly as I got in the car. A brisk breeze moving the tops of the dark firs as I drove down to join the road. The potholes here pushed the car off the level, I squirmed in my seat and felt a rush of excitement. I knew this was going to be the confrontation with Sneddon that would define both our futures.

But first I took the familiar route to the Asylum. Sneddon was going to meet me at the estate in the afternoon and I was keen to make use of the time. As I approached the main building, it was tempting to park in the space where he usually parked the Wolseley.

I had no wish to draw attention by leaving my car there as an act of petty insubordination. I drove on past the big house, round to the rear, past the orangery and on until I came to the walled garden. A party of four men was setting out wood and panes of glass along the wall. There is a piece of research, awaiting a keen junior physician, which will explore how we might diagnose our patients purely from the way they walk. The tentative-fearful, the tentative-watchful, the tentative-for-fear-of-standing-on-ordnance-or-

body-parts, the tentative-trying-to-look-bold. A whole life in a walk. No one was carrying tools. They would be delivered later.

I parked, smiling to myself at the irony of keeping such a watchful eye on sharp implements when in my unlocked car was a shotgun and fifty cartridges.

‘Gentlemen,’ I said, ‘can you direct me to Miss Brown? I believe she should be in the garden today.’

A tall, bearded man spoke from the back of the group. He raised his arm, pointed with its full length as he were a prophet consigning me to a wilderness journey.

‘Yonder,’ he said. ‘She is yonder.’ The hand fell like a railway signal and he went back to moving the planks.

He had pointed through the sun-worn door into the walled garden itself. The brass of the handle was green with use and weather, where blistered green paint had broken away a dark blue layer was revealed that probably pre-dated the Asylum. The soil within this garden had been quietly festering and nurturing long before this estate was put to therapeutic use. I pushed open the door and ducked into the sanctuary. The walled garden was the part of the Asylum that seemed to me to most redolent of our purpose. It wasn’t just the high wall, blocking out everything but the crowns of the tallest trees. It was the quiet that always nestled here. All but the loudest disruptions were held back by these old stone walls. The regular rows of vegetables, the flower beds in season, the canes painstakingly lashed together by patients to provide support for beans and peas, all set out the virtues of patience and order in a way that hours of indoor instruction could not manage. Perhaps it was the delicate balance of discipline and freedom that the garden offered.

Miss Brown was directing one of the gardeners. The Asylum staff resented her outsider status as much as her airs. But many of the patients, men who had spent their lives on estates, idolized her, perhaps her patrician tones took them back to a time of security. There was never a shortage of patients keen to work in the garden and a long stream of requests for transfers from garden to farm from the staff team.

She was bent over in her khaki jodhpurs, long laced-up boots and some sort of leather waistcoat with multiple pockets and straps. Delving among some wispy green shoots, she stood up straight as I approached, a long-handled fork in her hand like a trident. Her unruly, almost-white hair framed her face like smoke.

‘Dr Fergusson. Dressed to help, I see. Excellent.’ She pushed some unruly hair back off her face with the same sort of movement she used on the plants a moment before.

‘I would love to,’ I said. ‘But my fingers would be instant sodium chlorate on your fine...’ I pointed at the grass-like fronds.

‘Leeks. Leeks,’ she said with mock impatience. ‘Do you know nothing?’ Her freedom from the order of things was refreshing, but always carried a spark of danger. I noticed one of the garden staff, take this in – he was a boy really, smooth round face, squinting under his cap. A physician being spoken to in less than reverential terms. He looked at me with something that might develop into contempt.

‘All knowledge is equal,’ I said, turning away from the boy and his sneer. ‘It is a matter of circumstances.’

‘Then I shall hold back from making judgments on treatment if you leave me to my green vegetables.’

She looked at me shrewdly. I never felt entirely comfortable in her presence. She was of a class that I had brushed up against all my life without properly understanding. The officers who could have spent their winter days hunting, and their summer weekends sailing, who had opted for mud and squalor. Who spent their lives around ugly brick barracks while a distant wife ran a family and the servants in a yellow stone house with an orchard. Their codes and bonds as strange and elaborate as any rituals of the tribes of Borneo. And their unpredictability – the freedom of entitlement.

‘May I tear you from spring growth to discuss a confidential issue?’ I looked over at the boy. ‘Patient matters.’

She led the way towards the cluster of sheds and greenhouses at the south-east corner of the walled square. I kept up with her long stride. She opened the door in the smallest shed. She had to dip her head to enter. The lintel just brushed the top of my head. The interior was very different from the utilitarian exterior. There was a smell of earth, but all was neat and clean. A bright Persian rug, two wooden chairs, a desk. A military surplus stove which she lit with efficient ease.

‘Nerve centre of the garden,’ she said without looking at me. ‘Despite what you think, it doesn’t all just sprout out of the ground.’

There was a shelf of gardening books, so well used that some appeared to have been recently dug from the earth. And on the shelf below, hundreds of brown envelopes, all the same size, arranged like books.

‘I’m guessing, given your service record, straight tea will do?’

‘Yes.’ I pulled out one of the envelopes. It was feather light and rattled faintly.

‘More important than my bookshelf. My seed-shelf.’ She set down a tin mug. I couldn’t see to the bottom. ‘Make sure it goes back where you found it. There is a system.’

I slipped the envelope back more or less where it had come from. I hoped she wouldn’t come over to check.

‘I brought it from home.’ We settled in the two chairs. A thick diary was open on the desk and few of the seed envelopes were arranged on top, one overlapping the other. ‘And I won’t be gifting it to the Asylum, much too valuable.’

‘Your involvement is much more valuable,’ I said. It was true.

‘They hate me. The staff gardeners. I don’t blame them.’ She stirred the tea in her tin mug with some sort of small digging tool. It looked clean enough, but it was a gesture that she must have learned from the gardening squad, not something fostered in the drawing room at Strathconnell House. ‘But maybe it does you all good to have someone with a different way of looking at things.’

‘My thoughts too,’ I said. ‘I’ve worked in these places since the war.’

‘I know,’ she said, perhaps a bit too quickly. How much did she know? She wouldn’t be gossiping with the gardening men, but the nurses were a different matter.

‘And I believe we are too separate, too cut off,’ she said.

‘Dr Sneddon prides himself in his self-sufficiency.’ I was anxious not to be too critical in front of her. ‘But I agree we should have more involvement with the rest of the world. See ourselves offering temporary respite. Not a life sentence.’

‘Some of these people have been here so long they couldn’t manage to go back. Dr Sneddon, I thought, was a man of the future. Is he not supportive of reform?’

This was an interesting question. Sneddon saw himself as the future. The ability to always look ahead had served him well throughout his career. And his ability to hide failure. The consequences of his experiments had been well concealed behind a thicket of indifference. The patients chosen because they were expected to serve a full life sentence. Behind the expressions of regret from families after we informed them of the outcome of his failed experiments, there was often a faint note of relief. But these same victims were poor subjects in Sneddon’s view, lacking the ability to articulate, to give him the sort of detailed accounts of their experience that he needed to compete with the Italians. None of this had emerged beyond nurses’ gossip, easily dismissed as the sort of exaggerations you might expect behind high walls. I was wary of Miss Brown with her extensive network of connections.

‘He is indeed a visionary. And one day he will be recognized as such.’

I didn't care if she detected irony here. She certainly smiled ruefully.

'I translate visionary as ambitious.' She turned to the desk and flicked the end of one of her envelopes with a pencil. I now seemed to be in the position of penitent, come to her desk for favour. How setting changes everything. 'And were you the more promising student?'

I almost regretted not going directly to the shoot to meet Sneddon. She said it casually, without any sense of malice and for a second, I felt a flush of pride.

'Yes. That is true. Dr Sneddon has skills that flourished away from the lecture theatre.'

She looked down at a scatter of seeds from the envelope. On an empty diary page they were so small that they could have been pepper or dislodged full-stops. I went on: 'I'm intrigued that my fame has reached you. In your potting shed.'

She studied me.

'I've no interest in espionage. My brother once had Sir John Gilchrist for dinner. I told him we were working together on our project here and he said you were one of the best students ever. "Great man with a cadaver and knife," is what he said, in fact.'

'And did you tell him I'd come to a bad end as second in command of an Asylum?' I said this lightly, almost a jest.

'He was surprised you had shifted to another branch of medicine, he assumed it was something to do with the war. It usually is. And I told him you were an innovative scientist who was opening up new avenues of treatment in mental health.' She paused, smiled. 'With my help of course.'

'Thank you,' I said, 'for boosting me in front of the President of the College, but I'm sure he has his own opinions of this branch of medicine.' Of course, I should have left it there. But I plunged in despite myself: 'Was this recently?'

'No,' she said. 'Some time ago. Last year.'

'And did he...'

'Did we discuss Dr Sneddon? No. My brother and his wife were at our end of the table and they were bored witless by the Asylum chat. Not their thing. My interest is an eccentricity, as far as they are concerned. Yet another eccentricity, in fact.'

My curiosity had got the better of me, I felt as if I had pulled a curtain aside and exposed a weakness. She knew I was desperate for any information about Sneddon.

'I will tell you, Doctor Fergusson, that the Superintendent has let it be known many times that he would like to be invited to dinner.'

I didn't let a flicker cross my face.

'It's not my place to invite him, the house belongs to my brother. Socially, the President of the Royal College of Physicians is as low as he would be prepared to go.'

'Quite,' I said.

Even sitting this close in such a tiny space, her age remained a mystery. In fact, she was a mystery altogether. I tried to envisage her in that huge house with her brother and his wife and children. She had suggested before it might not be altogether harmonious. But presumably there were enough rooms, annexes even, to keep her out from under their feet. My imagination failed. I couldn't see her with a book, a drink, in front of a fire in separate room, a fire laid and tended by a servant. The image smudged like a charcoal drawing under a careless wrist.

'Anyway,' she said, 'you will have patients to see, or something.' She lightly brushed my tweeds with the tip of her boots. A movement both intimate and condescending. 'You don't seem dressed for the ward.'

'I'm going shooting,' I said. 'With Dr Sneddon.'

'He's a shot?' she said, her eyebrows, a striking feature even at rest, became animated. 'I hadn't guessed that. Anywhere interesting?'

'Cromlix.'

'Ian Gibson's place. Surely he's in London now?'

'We've never met him,' I said. 'We deal with his factor.'

'You miss nothing by dealing with the factor. Gibson's the rudest man I know.'

'It is close to Dr Sneddon's home. He likes to waste little time in travelling.'

'Efficient as well as visionary,' she said, and we traded a small smile here.

Conspirators again.

'I'd like to ask about Mrs Raymond's initial session in the garden with you. From a clinical perspective.' I said.

She looked at me. Her face quite passive, only her eyebrows fiercely quizzical. 'Is there any other perspective here? We are all engaged in the ultimate aim of better health are we not?'

'It would just be helpful, to me, to have your impressions.'

She leaned back for the first time. She opened the drawer of her desk, took out a heavy curved pipe, a soft leather tobacco pouch that looked like it might have been in her family for several centuries, and began the process of packing, igniting and tending the blaze.

'You don't mind, do you.' It wasn't a question.

‘I noticed her manner, confident, but fragile too. I noticed her eyeing the wall.’ Miss Brown gestured out the window with her pipe. ‘She told me it was like the wall she had at home, round her own garden.’

‘Did she...’

The pipe cut me off. ‘Before you say it, there was no suggestion that she felt trapped behind her garden wall. Not one bit. And she told me my wall, this wall, gave her a sense of shelter. It’s not all symbols, Dr Fergusson, sometimes walls are protective. Against wind and weather.’

I looked out at the thick veins of an apple tree, pinned to the high stone wall. Not yet in bud, they looked like an textbook diagram of the nervous system.

‘I did,’ said Miss Brown, ‘ask her why she thought she was here.’

It wasn’t a question I would ever have asked, too leading. But I did want to know:

‘And?’

‘Because she thought she was a danger to her family and to herself. So, I immediately gave her the secateurs and showed her how to prune the apples. She thinks her family has abandoned her.’

‘Our visitor policy is clear.’

‘And inhumane.’ Miss Brown rejected our professional etiquette: We never contradicted; only contested. Then sabotaged with a later memorandum. A direct disagreement was refreshing.

‘But.’ She went on, ‘she has much faith in her housekeeper. They are the backbone of this country. They will be missed when they are all gone.’

‘Grace?’

‘Yes. I told her she’d have less chance of visiting. Not even family. But she insisted she was family.’ She examined the bowl of her pipe. ‘They all think that. But it’s not true. Anyway, I told her she’d be safe here and if she let her mind fall into the rhythms of the growing plant, the sun and rain things would improve.’

‘I know you mean well, with your garden,’ I said.

Again, Miss Brown spoke over me. ‘She thinks she is in real danger here. She’s heard about Dr Sneddon’s drugs. Women in the dayroom talk about the terror drugs.’

‘The things said in the dayroom aren’t generally the most reliable.’

‘She told me that the nurses don’t contradict. That the drugs work by bringing back your worst experiences. As if you were living it again.’

Miss Brown stopped there. She held my eye for a second then leaned over to the stove and tapped out the ash in her pipe. I had been listening so intently that I hadn't noticed the air quality in the hut, the loss of visibility.

She said, 'I assume these stories about Sneddon's terror drug are the sort of mumbo-jumbo that the patients here use to fill the empty hours and that they are not discouraged by the nurses as it helps keep everyone in their place?'

'She will be safe.'

'I don't doubt it. She's an intelligent and very capable woman, I saw women like her during the war. They were often from the lower classes, running little businesses. A damn sight more useful the grand upper-middle-class wives. We'd no use for their flower arranging skills.'

'She is,' I said. Miss Brown looked at me. 'Safe, I mean.' I felt as if I was under a spotlight. I passed on quickly. 'Did she mention her cousin?'

'No. Should she?'

'If she does let me know what she says.' One eyebrow this time. 'Please.'

'Is this a Viennese thing? Cousins aren't a problem, are they? Be very few marriages in my family through the decades if cousins were off limits.'

'I'm just trying to find things that are valuable to her. Did you speak of walking?'

'Yes, we did as a matter of fact.'

'She is here partly because of her addiction to walking.'

She snorted and choked on the pipe; it was out more often than lit. 'Addiction? You can be addicted to walking now?'

'If it becomes an obsessive behaviour.'

'But if it's just something that helps? That she enjoys? Then that is a matter of investigation? I hope I'm never here as a patient and you cross-examine me on the things I enjoy doing.'

'But at night?' I didn't really want to consider what sort of patient Miss Brown would make. We can all become patients.

'What's the harm? When you can think. Feel nature.'

'Perhaps in your estate.' I hoped that didn't sound petty and envious. 'Or where I live, in the country, I might go out at night.' The idea had never crossed my mind. I couldn't imagine the terror. Alone in the dark in the woods. Wind making the whole thing alive with noises. 'And I'm a man,' I said. 'But for a woman?'

'If it's what you want. If it makes you feel alive. Isn't that worth a risk?'

‘Her family don’t see it that way.’

‘Evidently.’

‘They care.’

‘Too much?’

I sat upright in the chair. Miss Brown, for her airs, was a volunteer here. I was Deputy Superintendent. I wasn’t here to debate.

‘It is possible to care too much. Over-protection can become entrapment. There is ample case evidence in the literature on this.’ I fell back on my education. ‘But worrying and caring about a wife or daughter.’ The eyebrows again. ‘Or son,’ I added, ‘is perfectly healthy and normal.’

Miss Brown looked amused. That she had got a reaction from me. But I couldn’t detect malice. She said: ‘I told her about women’s walking groups. Suggested that might be something for her. But the attraction is the solitude, I think. Wind in her hair and no one to entertain or impress, or...’ she paused. ‘Listen to.’

‘Well, that has been very useful.’

‘I also told her she might consider the Council of Women. Turns out that one of her aunts is a member.’

‘Are they the people who consider the slums at the Top of the Town to be historic buildings?’ I rolled my eyes, inviting to join my mockery.

I saw steel flash in Miss Brown’s pale eyes. ‘They are, and they are correct, Dr Fergusson. You will see.’

‘I really must be going now. Please let me know if Mrs Raymond has anything else to tell you. I am keen to make progress.’

‘In case Dr Sneddon gets his hands on her?’ It wasn’t at all clear if that was levity.

‘As you said yourself, tall tales for long empty afternoons.’

‘Is it usual practice for you to take such interest in individual patients? How many patients live here? How many doctors? You can’t expend this much of your expertise on other individuals. Even private individuals?’

I was on my feet now. The ceiling of the hut seemed very low.

‘She is an interesting case. Like Dr Sneddon, I’m keen to take our profession forward.’

‘Make it more respectable?’

‘There is more to a profession than how it is regarded by non-professionals.’

‘The advancement of learning.’ She was smiling.

‘Thank you again, Miss Brown. I must go now.’

‘Give my regards to the coverts of Cromlix.’ She was on her feet now too. She placed the pipe back on the desk. ‘Come,’ she said, beckoning. I stepped forward a pace. I was uncomfortably close. I smelled a dull damp vegetable smell, and something sharper. Cologne? Alcohol? ‘Here,’ she said, and pulled upon the side pocket of my tweed. She pinched up some of the tiny black seeds and dropped them into the pocket. She patted the flap down three times. ‘Leave some up at Cromlix.’

‘What is it?’

‘Field horsehair,’ she said. ‘Gibson’s gardeners will be rooting it out a decade from now.’

I nodded. ‘Understood.’ She was a natural conspirator. I wondered if anyone who had spent a half hour with Miss Brown felt that they had an understanding with her. If Lotte felt she an ally.

‘And be careful. Shooting on rough ground. I might have been married one of my own cousins if he hadn’t lost the side of his face running through larch trees to get a second shot at a roe deer.’

The Wolseley was near the front of the house. I parked a distance away where the drive started to curve back out towards the gates. I didn’t want to make it easier for Sneddon to engage me when we were leaving, after I’d made my stand. There was no one in the entrance hall. Stags heads glared down at me, reproachfully. The game book lay open on a circular table in the centre of the hall. Sneddon had already written his name in it, but his was the only one under the date. Gibson ancestors frowned from the stairway. Unlucky stags and lucky great-uncles in Indian robes apart and despite where I’d come from, I felt quite at home her. This was a more comfortable version of the entrance to the Asylum. A public building with domestic accessories.

I followed the rumble of masculine voices through the hallway and down a short flight of stairs. I passed the kitchens: a smell of meat, flashes of copper, iron-work and white tiles. Sneddon and another man in tweeds were in the meat still. They were silhouetted against the light that came in the open back door, the courtyard beyond.

‘Dr Fergusson, I presume.’

‘Alan,’ I said. We weren’t at work now. ‘We did say two o’clock, didn’t we?’

‘And you are bang on time as per. I am the early one. Couldn’t stand the house any longer. You know what it’s like with the boys home from school.’

He knew that I was a very long way from my own boys.

‘I can imagine.’

‘This is Strang, the keeper.’ He waved towards the man at his side.

‘You haven’t been here long then?’ I shook Strang by the hand and moved round the room slightly to get a better look at him.

‘I’ve been employed by Mr Gibson for two months only.’ He had a familiar look about his eyes. ‘I was formerly with Lord Brougham at Comrie.’

‘Mr Strang was telling me his brother is none other than our Mr Strang.’

Of course. I nodded again. ‘Your brother is a key part of our work. The farm is at the centre of the community.’

Mr Strang’s face was still shadowed. ‘He speaks well of the place. He was unsure...’ There was a brief hesitation, ‘initially. But now would work nowhere else.’

‘Delighted to hear it,’ I said.

‘You have brought a weapon?’ Sneddon’s gun bag was propped against a chair near the back door. His game bag hung on the back.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘I left it in the car until I knew where we might be shooting.’

‘Good forward planning, as always. Strang here has plans for us, though. Better tell Dr Fergusson too.’

Strang turned his cap round and round in his hands as he spoke.

‘I thought that seeing as there is little time this afternoon and you have no dogs that you could walk up the inner fields then up the hill to the Home Wood and back to the house along the Ban Burn. You’ve both shot here before I believe?’

‘Often,’ said Sneddon. ‘Old hands. What do you have for us?’

‘Thin, as you know, at this time. But you should be able to put up some partridge, there will be the stray pheasant and hare.’

‘And the woods?’

‘Plenty of pigeon.’

‘And crow?’ said Sneddon.

‘Certainly. We’re keen to thin them out during lambing. The farmers are grateful. If you can be bothered.’

‘We’re not above crow, are we?’ He raised an eyebrow.

‘I’ll get my gun,’ I said, ‘if we are going to walk from the yard here.’

By the time I returned, Sneddon had his gun broken across his arm. The brass heads of the cartridges nestled snugly in the barrels.

‘I’ll be with you shortly,’ said Strang.

‘That won’t be necessary,’ said Sneddon. ‘We know the land here well and Dr Fergusson and I use these afternoons for some informal business discussions.’

Strang looked perturbed. This wasn’t the usual routine. Before he could say anything, Sneddon cut across him: ‘Patients. Confidential. You understand?’

‘As you wish,’ said Strang. ‘Sir.’

I was ready now. I noticed Sneddon had his older shotgun.

‘No Holland and Holland today?’

‘Ah. No. Keep that for special occasions. This is just a bit of rough shooting today. Over hill and dale, bumping through hedges and over walls. Not the place for the best weapon.’

At that Strang drew himself up a little: ‘Gentlemen. Before you leave. And I know you are experienced shots, but I would ask you to take particular care, the ground is wet. And the going rough.’

I had seen Sneddon tear a strip off staff before. I tensed.

‘I think you will find, Mr Strang, that my colleague and I have handled the odd rough shoot before. We were no strangers to heavier weapons than these in France.’ He moved his arm so that the barrel of the broken gun came up to the general region of Strang’s kneecap. But the keeper held his ground.

‘I am aware of that, and I, too, served overseas,’ he said. ‘But an unfortunate event in my former employ showed that even the most experienced shot can have a moment of inattention. Sir.’

I waited for Sneddon to spoil the afternoon entirely. And spike my plan. But he smiled.

‘Don’t you worry Mr Strang. You won’t have to report the loss of valuable customers.’ He patted Strang on the arm as he made his way towards the door.

‘Besides, we are physicians, we can patch the other up if the worst happens. Come along Dr Fergusson, the afternoon’s wasting.’

He marched out. I caught Strang’s eye. We nodded. I followed Sneddon. Our boots rang in the enclosed yard and then we were out under the ornate archway and clock and on a gravel roadway.

‘Bolshie bastard,’ said Sneddon. ‘Two Strangs. What a coincidence.’ He picked up the pace.

‘Both in rural businesses, it’s not so unusual,’ I said.

We walked on, there was a gate ahead into the field, a stand of Scots pines shaded the road and the gate. The crowns of the trees were noisy, a crow city high above. Beyond the jumble of nests several crows hung in the breeze like black broken umbrellas.

‘Let’s ruin their day,’ said Sneddon. He brought the stock of his gun up to close the breach, put the gun to his shoulder so it was pointing vertically and pulled the triggers so closely together that it was like a single blast. Twigs dropped through branches, a tattered, bloodied crow dropped heavily into bracken, another bird wheeled unsteadily until one wing stopped working and it fell away out of sight. Feathers and slimy egg fragments continued to fall as Sneddon broke the gun and dropped in two fresh cartridges.

‘Your turn.’

I shook my head. Sneddon took a few steps into the group of trees, raised the weapon and let fly with both barrels again. There was more debris but no birds this time except for two mangled fledglings. They landed on the ground together, twitching. Sneddon stepped forward and brought his boot down on them. The gunpower smell lingered in the shelter of the trees.

‘Good turn for Mr Gibson’s neighbours. Don’t you want a blast?’

I shook my head.

‘Not sporting enough for you? Might be all we get today.’ He didn’t break his gun, but propped it against a pine. He reached into his checked tweed and pulled out his flask. He held it out to me, gripping it by the heavy stopper.

‘Special reserve.’

I pointed towards the tree. ‘Break the gun?’

He kept the flask thrust in my direction. ‘I’ve shot both barrels, what do you think will happen?’ There was the old sneer at Sneddon’s mouth. At the corner of his lips. I took the flask. It was heavy, solid. I unscrewed and took a draw. Handed it back.

‘Did you have much business to attend to?’

I wasn’t surprised that he knew. But I liked the fact he was interested.

‘I was meeting Miss Brown.’

We opened the gate and walked into the field. The metallic clicks as we closed the breeches of both shotguns were alien against the cries of the birds, the wind through the fresh leaves. Away from the trees there was more light. Wind blew patterns through the early

growth grass. There was a smell of sap underfoot. Downwind the black dots of crows circled. Waiting.

‘In her garden office.’ I said.

‘Smoking that ghastly pipe, I suppose?’

We had separated, walking ten feet or so apart.

‘I’m glad of the fresh air,’ I said into the wind.

‘Dreadful affectation. Like an old time RSM. Cultured eccentricity.’

‘Her work is invaluable.’

‘We will review that against the evidence. She’s not really a Miss you know.’

‘She’s unconventional.’

‘No, not that aspect. She’s been married.’

‘Really?’

‘During the war. Unsuitable type. Parents disowned her. Not a penny. Then he went down at Jutland. She had to come crawling back to her brother and he gave her a servant room on condition she never speak of it.’

‘And she told you?’

‘No. But I have my sources.’

‘She makes a difference to the patients. She and the garden.’

‘The garden will stay,’ he said. ‘But she will have to go. The garden men hate her and I’m afraid she will corrupt the nurses, too.’

‘The gardeners did little or nothing for years, so I’m not surprised they are upset. And as for the nurses, I can’t see the danger.’

‘That’s because you can be a little blind, John. Myopic. Where ladies are concerned.’

I let this drift past me on the stiff breeze. Too early, too early. We had reached the brow of the field. The horizon had become a viewpoint. The slope dropped away to a stone wall, another field beyond, a dark conifer plantation and beyond the blue smudge of hills under bruised clouds that went all the way to the Atlantic.

I hadn’t risen to the fly he had cast for me. He went on.

‘Mackenzie, too. I’ve spoken to Baird in Edinburgh. Told him we had an excellent prospect for promotion. Just the sort of ambitious doctor he is looking for. She’s not a team player.’

Had she responded to the Italian paper? Had she asked too many questions?

‘She’s very insightful in her diagnoses.’

‘She’s not one of us, John.’ He had to bark now the wind had whipped up. ‘Not looking to the future. No interest in what we might be able to do if we escape from the old ways.’

I said, ‘We can build on the old ways, too.’

A pheasant broke from a clump of stones and dead bracken, its bulk at odds with its speed. It rose to head height and turned straight back into the wind towards us. Sneddon put the gun to his shoulder and with the same movement brought the barrel round until I was looking straight into the twin black voids. I closed my eyes but I still saw the flash, felt the concussion. The pellets flew over my head.

‘Sorry, old man,’ said Sneddon. ‘Lucky you’ve been closer to fire before.’

I said nothing. He walked back to where the pheasant had fallen. Wings outstretched, quivering. Sneddon bent over it, then walked back to me.

‘Should have let it go,’ he said. ‘No eating there. I’ll leave it for the foxes.’

We walked on, down the slope. The light seemed to fade with every step we took towards the lower ground.

‘Your business with Miss Brown wouldn’t have been about your new patient, would it?’

‘In fact, it was.’ I stepped around a clump of thistles, taking me a pace or two further away from Sneddon. ‘She has had a number of very fruitful conversations with Miss Brown, and myself. I think we will be able to make good progress and have her back with her family soon.’

Sneddon stared down the field towards the trees.

‘Back to her family. That’s the way, isn’t it? A bit of a chat, a bit of Dr Freud’s folk-tales and all will be well.’

‘She’s not going to be part of your project.’

We were approaching the wall. The ground was rougher where beasts had churned the mud between the tufts of grass. There was no gate here, or stile. I broke my gun and handed it to Sneddon. He put it over his shoulder.

‘She’s perfect. As you well know.’ His voice was even. A committee meeting voice. ‘Intelligent, articulate. Not like the others. In good health too, according to Cunninghame’s report. You’ve had time to...’ He hesitated. My back was against the dyke. He loomed large, the wide field behind. ‘Chat.’ He smiled.

‘No,’ I said and scrambled over the wall. It was loose and mossy, but I was over. I wiped my hands on the seat of my trousers.

‘I don’t think you understand what I’m saying,’ he said. ‘I’ve decided.’

He placed my broken gun over the top of the wall and began to climb.

‘Sneddon,’ I said. He was half over the wall, both feet on the field side, balanced, one hand on the stone, the other holding his shotgun. ‘Your gun.’

He looked down at it as if he hadn’t noticed. Then he looked back at me.

‘My word,’ he said. ‘Basic error.’ He grasped the barrels, swung the loaded, closed weapon on to his shoulder as if it were a spade, put a foot on the top of the wall and jumped down hard beside me. So close he bumped against me.

‘There,’ he said. ‘No harm done.’

We stood there for a second, between two fields.

‘Shall we?’ He pointed with his shotgun, and we stared across the grass. Wet underfoot. ‘All that business at Rainhill. I wasn’t going to let an old comrade. An old student comrade, face a scandal.’

‘There was no scandal.’ I closed the breech of my gun. ‘Only gossip. Unsubstantiated.’

‘Apart from my notes.’

‘Your notes?’

‘Dr Byrne asked me to speak to her. He thought a third party, objective opinion would be helpful. I interviewed her. Took all the details down. In confidence. Don’t pretend you don’t know this, John.’

‘Breaking patient confidences would be almost as bad as breaking our first rule. No harm. Remember? And who knows how a professional misconduct hearing might look at this?’ I said.

We walked on. I would bide my time.

‘Naturally,’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t say a word in breach of confidence. Just make sure she was asked back in for an interview that would go on the record.’

We were across the barren field. A stile and the woods beyond. This was the place.

‘That would be a challenge even for you. She took her life last week.’

Sneddon stopped. ‘You did harm there, Doctor. And you know it.’ He looked genuinely affronted, and not just thwarted. ‘Perhaps the war, and everything else, has taken its toll.’

‘Since we are speaking frankly, away from work,’ I said, ‘I should let you know that I have kept a detailed record of all your experiments. And I’ll take them to the College.’

He slowly and precisely broke his shotgun. Took the live cartridge out and placed it in his belt.

‘You’d kill your career just to finish me?’

‘To stop you.’ I tried not to sound too sanctimonious, I was enjoying the look in his eyes. A little of the fear I had seen in the patients’ eyes as the drugs took hold. A little of the anxiety I felt at being complicit.

‘Is this a trade?’

‘Let her go home.’

‘So you can fuck her?’

A deep flare of anger, like the flash from his shotgun through my closed eyelids.

‘I will see she’s safe.’

‘Safe?’ he barked, somewhere between a cough and laugh.

‘It won’t happen.’

‘It will,’ he said. ‘Because you know all about drugs, don’t you?’ He reached into his jacket. Took the flask out, unscrewed the top and took a long pull. He didn’t offer me. ‘I had a patient once. Very difficult case. Unsuccessful. Unsurprisingly. He was one of the very few soldiers ever reprieved on the morning of execution.’ He looked round the field. Far away the crows were returning to the site of the massacre. ‘Imagine, the long wakeful night and then in the morning the King’s pardon. Devastated him.’

The crows were tiny. Black ticks in the sky. But their sound carried clearly across the distance. I could smell the whisky from Sneddon.

‘But that wasn’t the most interesting thing we talked of. He had been sent to the guardhouse by truck from a few miles down the line. When they put him in a room, there was another soldier there. Waiting to meet the same firing squad. Different regiment. Strange one, my patient said. Gibbering like an ape. Worse and worse. Climbing the walls. My man told me that when he did get a word or two of sense from him, he told him the medic had given him something to calm him down. Seemed to have the opposite effect.’

I knew where this was going. I had plenty of time over the years to prepare how I might respond.

Sneddon went on: ‘Then he said the other bloke went funny. Very funny, breathing hard and fast and not responding when spoken to and then.’ Sneddon clicked his fingers. ‘Sparked out. Still breathing fast till he stopped breathing at all. Blue in the face. That’s what my patient told me.’ Sneddon said all this in a casual conversational way. He might have been telling me the summary of the nutritional guidelines paper.

‘My man then went a bit wild himself. Bashing on the door, screaming. He wasn’t worried about being blamed for it. Nothing to lose. But spending your last night in a room with a corpse. Not a fun night out. Or in.’ Sneddon took another pull on his flask. It was late now; the pale sky was still bright, but we were deep in shadow near the trees. There was a chill in the air.

‘Anyway. My man had more to worry about than how he ended up with a stiff. “I imagine he was killed by fright,” is what he said.’ Sneddon drank again. ‘But you know all this Fergusson, don’t you? I was intrigued. I sniffed around. It is the sort of thing officers note when supervising a firing squad. No target. A dead man in the guardhouse. They were all in different sectors, of course. And not that many. We weren’t butchers, despite what the bleeding hearts still say. But strangely, you always seemed to be in the vicinity.’

I looked at the ground. Let him talk. I was making my plans.

‘There was plenty more to worry about, wasn’t there? Who cared about some men dying of fright? Or adrenaline shock. Better than some opiate. That would have been suspicious. Condemned men don’t sleep unto death. They don’t sleep at all. Cowards in a blue funk? That’s why they were there in the first place.’ He looked away from me, across to the far away hills, still in light. ‘Not exactly the Hippocratic oath though, is it?’

When all seems lost there is a strange calm that falls on you. I felt the same way when Emily confronted me. If it is over, it’s over.

‘I betrayed that oath when I certified men fit to stand trial. Fit to be killed. I was making it easier.’

‘Oh John, of course. No one is more sympathetic than I am, but it remains that we can’t have doctors killing people.’

‘Like that girl last week? And the others?’

‘Research is inexact. A tribunal of my peers will understand that.’ He tipped the flask back. It was finished. ‘Sorry old chap. Nothing left.’

He went over the stile. Jumped down with his gun in his hand, his boots crunching on the stones of the pathway through the woods. He didn’t pause, but over his shoulder he said, ‘I’ll send a nurse for her at 11am. I expect you to assist.’

I realised then why I hated him so much. Not for what he knew about my past, but what he knew about me.

I brought the shotgun to my shoulder and clicked the safety. In the hush of the early dusk he heard it plainly and stopped but didn’t turn round. He said, ‘A tragic accident

crossing the stile. My weeping children and wife. Such a glittering career brought short, and the talented but underachieving deputy bereft. But you won't.'

With that he walked on into the twilight. And I brought the shotgun down, broke it and put the two cartridges back in my belt. I sat on the stile for a while. I watched the hills in the distance grow dark. Eventually, I heard steps on the forest path.

'Dr Fergusson.' It was Strang. I realised he couldn't see me clearly at all, it was almost completely dark.

'Just watching the light fade,' I said. Strang stayed on the other side of the stile.

'Dr Sneddon has gone, but he said you had walked on further.'

'It was good of you to look for me. Thank you.'

'I have a responsibility for guests,' he said. 'I know you can look after yourself. But still...'

We walked back to the house in silence. I was glad he didn't mention his brother again. The huge bulk of the building appeared suddenly against the sky. There was only one light, high up in a gable. We said our farewells. When I turned the car to go back down the drive I looked back at the dark house. The single light had gone out.

I passed few vehicles on the way home. On the darker stretches I wondered what it would be like to suddenly find a well-dressed woman walking the verge. How did other late-night travellers respond? The terrible dangers that a woman alone faced. Night walking was something I could no longer do. As a child in the country, I walked dark lanes all the time. A rush through the trees caused a physical reaction, the heart beating faster, skin on edge, of course. But back then, there it was only the wind. A faint gleam under roadside bushes was only the phosphorescence of some fungus. But I now knew that a rushing in the leaves was just like the pressure waves from a shell. A faint gleam – a gas canister beginning its work.

I concentrated on Lotte as I drove. I had failed her. The past had conspired against the future, as it always does. But I would not let her down. She was driven out onto the dark roads by her own past. Outside the Asylum I could cure her. As I would have done with Hazel. That was gone now. But I could still help Lotte.

While the striped signposts loomed and slipped behind me, I saw visions of Sneddon's head vaporising in the twilight under the trees. Would I have got away with it? Of course, unless Strang had been close by. It was a secluded spot. But Sneddon was right. I

couldn't have done it. Perhaps that's why I hatred him so much. Because he had such knowledge of my weaknesses. All of them.

When I had been in the Asylum for a month or two, Sneddon sent for me. He looked up from his desk. I was in his debt, but he had made no reference to the reasons for my rapid move.

'Thought I'd just have a quick chat. I'm impressed at how well you've settled in.'

'It's a welcoming team here.'

'Good. Can't have been easy. People gossip in these places, you know that.'

'What else is there to talk about, but colleagues and patients? It will pass.' I said. If only that were the case.

'Exactly! That is the attitude. Silly nurses.'

'We should give them more faith in their abilities, their professionalism,' I said. And I believed it. 'They'd gossip less if they felt more part of the decision making.'

'Precisely. Lots of ways they can feel part of it.'

'Some places have involved them in deciding on patient treatment.'

'No. That interferes with our clinical judgement. We can't make these decisions by committee, John, that's what we're trained for.' He tapped the pile of papers on his desk. 'Ultimately that's my responsibility. Of course, we can consult with the nursing staff, but they wouldn't want that level of responsibility.'

'The matrons here are very committed.'

'To a fault,' he said. 'Anyway, I wanted to say that your garden concept is a very good one. We have always had the farm. Self-sufficiency, income. All good news for the Commissioners. But the garden has been a bit of plaything till now.'

'Miss Brown has been the driving force.'

'No, no. She's all very well for weeding the borders and what not, but only you can recognise the therapeutic value.'

'Well,' I began.

'Take the compliment.'

'Thank you,' I said

'Precious few in this job.'

'Indeed.'

'And you need them, don't you?'

'We all need reinforcement. It's basic isn't it?'

‘No. I meant *you* need it. From the Gold Medal onward. You need the pat on the back.’

I wasn’t at all sure where he was going. I smiled anyway in the hope it was a light badinage. I was wrong, of course.

‘That’s why, if I may make an observation, you are the Deputy.’ He leaned back, the letter-opener under his hand. ‘You can’t advance if you need someone to tell you the work is fine. You need self-belief.’ He looked at me, his eyes narrowed, searching for a reaction. I wasn’t going to provide that. ‘Self-belief.’

‘It’s a point of view,’ I said.

‘It’s true,’ he said. He had made his point, pinned me in my place.

We chatted on but he had done his bit.

By the time I turned into the farm-track to the cottage my hands were tight at the top of the steering wheel. I switched off and listened to the stillness, the night noises. I sat in the dark as if to test myself. Then hurried indoors. Scrabbled for the switch. I hadn’t expected to be this late. I would have left a light burning.

I realised I had hardly eaten all day. In the pantry there were three eggs and a piece of bread. I cut the bread, lit the grill and made toast while I put water in a pot to poach the eggs. I sat listening to the gas hiss, sniffed the faint smell of death that lighting the stove always created. I reached into my jacket, it was too cold in the house to take it off. I thought about a glass for a second but unscrewed the top and started to drink from the flask. It burned at my mouth and throat, but I drank and drank until there was only air. I gasped, inhaled the petrol reek. My sinuses singed.

When I had eaten, I settled at the table with a tumbler full of whisky and wrote all this down. As fresh and accurate a record as I could manage. I had no leverage on Sneddon. Never had. I couldn’t get Lotte out of the Asylum. But I wasn’t going to let her fall into the hands of Sneddon and his syringe.

Chapter 9: Monday 17th April 1933.

Grace sat on the bed beside Lotte and put her hand over hers. They both stared at the muddy and torn stockings on the floor, the blouse, the boots. Her gloves were banded together like a pair of fighting sea animals. Beyond, the window was full of green.

‘Tell me what to do,’ said Grace. Lotte was silent. Grace’s hand felt cool and still. Lotte’s bare feet were bruised above the toes, her left ankle was scuffed as if drawn across a rock. ‘Dr Campbell?’

Lotte shook her head. Her hair fell forward round her face. Out on the landing the clock chimed. Ten. The chimes seemed to go on for longer, as if listening so intently added to the hours.

‘Sheila?’ said Lotte.

‘Sleeping,’ said Grace. ‘Boys at school, Sam left early for the shop. I said you’d slept badly again when he left.’

‘And who was at the door?’

‘Your friend Dorothy Wingate. She had news.’

Lotte let the silence grow into every corner of her room, the plain back-bedroom cornicing above the sombre standing wardrobe, the long mirror, the dark blue velvet curtains.

‘News?’

‘Mr Thornlee is in hospital.’ Grace’s hand tightened on the back of Lotte’s. ‘He was attacked last night at the bottom of Baker Street.’

Out, down through the window, the blossom in the orchard was shaking slightly in the breeze.

Grace went on: ‘Thugs got him in a vennel and hit him in the face with something.’ Grace touched her apron to her face. ‘They say he might lose the sight of one of his eyes.’

Lotte was silent. The stillness of the room was a comfort that she did not want to lose. If they didn’t move or say anything then the moment would stay like this forever. The furniture creaked, the house made the tiny wooden sounds she was familiar with in the dead of night when everything settled, creaked as the world turned.

‘I will say nothing,’ said Grace. ‘Never.’

‘What should I say?’ Lotte let the future into the room, began the next phase.

‘Nothing.’

‘You fought back,’ said Grace. Her hand relaxed.

‘I didn’t think,’ said Lotte. ‘If I’d thought, I wouldn’t have.’ She heard Peter laugh somewhere. Lotte wanted the silence to grow around them again. That bottomless silence she’d heard before. In the stairwell. ‘I should tell...’ Lotte gathered herself to move.

‘No. Think of the conversations you’d have to have. All the words. Say nothing. No one knows, said Grace.’

‘Frederick.’

‘Will say nothing. How can he explain? And you.’ She gathered up both of Lotte’s hands and squeezed, ‘Were here.’

They sat side by side on the bed. The morning light from the window made them both as pale as inmates.

‘I always thought there was something wrong about him,’ said Grace.

‘I was going to sing with him, in Edinburgh.’

‘Were you?’

‘I’m not sure now. I think it was a lie.’

Grace pushed up from the bed. She started to gather the clothes. ‘You go back to bed. I’ll take Sheila up to the shop and say that you are ill and can’t go today.’

‘No. No, I don’t want to be here alone.’

‘You can’t go on a merry jaunt in the car. Not today’

‘If I can’t do that, then I can’t go on. Full stop.’

Grace stood over her. The light from the window curled around her, Lotte couldn’t see her face, only the determined set of her shoulders.

‘You need to recover. You need time.’

‘I need to keep going.’ Lotte looked up into the shadowy face.

‘You need to do what you think is best. But I don’t think this afternoon is wise.’

‘I should tell the truth.’

Grace knelt down, took Lotte’s hand in hers. ‘He will say nothing. Dorothy said he has family. They will see to him. He will say nothing. He can’t.’

‘But I ...’

‘He deserved it.’

Lotte was suddenly aware of birdsong from the garden. Had that been there all morning?

Grace's face was close to hers. 'Dorothy said the streets were full of drunks last night, and any one of them might have done it.' Grace shook her head. 'And you were out there. Walking about. Foolish.' Her voice had a different edge now.

'So, it was my fault?' Lotte's lips felt dry, hard.

'This is why I pleaded with you.'

'No, no. It could have happened anywhere. The church. This house. He's been here often.'

'But it didn't. It was out in the streets in the dark.' Grace's grip on her hands was painful. 'What were you thinking of? Wandering all these nights. In the streets.'

Lotte looked straight ahead, over Grace's neat hair.

'No,' she said.

'You put yourself in danger.'

'No. I walk because I need to, because I want to.'

'It has to end now. Before worse happens.'

'The worst has happened. It won't happen again.'

'Look,' said Grace. She leaned back on her heels, dropped Lotte's hands and stood again in the light. 'Look.' She waved her arm at the space of the room, the window, the door onto the bright landing. 'Look at what you have. A wonderful husband, the boys.' Her arm dropped. 'A baby.'

Lotte smiled. 'Oh Grace, I've let you all down.'

'What is wrong? You've had help before. Why not speak to Sam?'

'I can't. I don't want to trouble him.'

'Trouble? He won't think it trouble.'

'I'll sort myself, I'm the only one who can.'

'But Dr Campbell?'

'Can't help either. Only I can.'

Grace stood, her hands in front of her in the pocket of her apron.

'Help me,' said Lotte. 'Help me by saying and doing nothing. Let me see to myself. Please.'

Lotte could see Grace's hands moving together in the apron.

'Please.'

‘I will never let you down,’ she said. She dipped down and scooped up the clothes. ‘Let me get these downstairs. Sam is going to be back at eleven.’

They waited to let a cattle float across the bridge at Doune. As it passed the driver waved. There was a smell of cow dung.

‘Pooh,’ said Sheila.

‘Poor beasts,’ said Grace. They sat together in the narrow back seat.

‘Pooh indeed.’ Sam was not a countryman. He crunched the car into gear, and they lurched forward. Lotte looked out over the stone parapet. The river ran brown and white between the black stones, the trees on the far bank bent low over the water.

Over the narrow bridge and up a curving hill. Sam looked back over his shoulder:

‘I agree, Sheila, horrible cows. Great big smelly beasts.’

Sheila giggled. Lotte looked back, too, and smiled. A large black beast, formless and oppressive, sat with her in the cramped interior as they rattled along. She shifted her feet on the metal floor and pulled her coat tighter. They were under an avenue of trees, the tracery of the branches like the Holy Rude roof. Lotte glanced down at the little mirror attached to the door. Peter was there. His helmet low over his eyes, everything in shadow. She couldn’t make out his expression. But she was comforted that he was there. He had not abandoned her.

Sam steered round a pothole. ‘Sorry ladies, didn’t think you’d want to be shaken like that.’

‘Please be careful,’ said Lotte.

‘Look at these wide empty roads. This is what we should be doing every week in the summer. What do you think?’

Lotte nodded.

‘That sounds just the thing,’ said Grace. ‘What do you think, Sheila?’

‘Yes yes yes!’

‘That’s the vote carried then.’ Sam coaxed a little more speed from the car as the road straightened. Lotte sat back in her seat, braced her feet against the metal in the footwell.

‘Take the boys with us, of course. In the holidays. They will love it. We can all squeeze in. Even more fun.’

The distant hills were not so distant anymore. This wall of rounded hills had been a part of her life for as far back as she could remember. A remote hazy presence when viewed

from high windows in Edinburgh. And in Stirling they seemed to be the furthest limits of her world. It always gave her a thrill to approach them on this road, to watch them grow and become distinct.

Sam was silent for a while then he said: 'I should tell you this before we get there.' Lotte and Grace stiffened at the same time. The car rattled and jostled. Sam looked straight ahead. 'Your friend, Mr Thornlee. He was attacked by a group of drunks last night. The devils nearly blinded him it seems. In Baker Street.'

Lotte and Grace said nothing.

'I don't know what was going on last night at all. There were gangs of men up and down the street. People saying none of them were local. All drunk.' The car shook over stones. No one else spoke. 'I thought about closing early, but it was a busy evening. I walked the whole staff down the street though. Seemed quiet by then.'

'Just awful,' said Grace.

Sam went on: 'Certainly is. Just the last thing we need for business. They weren't local, that's one thing.' They approached a slow-moving van. Sam shifted down a gear and the car shuddered in a new way. 'I'm sorry,' he said, glancing towards Lotte. 'I know he's your friend.'

Lotte glanced down at the mirror on the door.

'Absolute animals. Men and drink,' said Grace. 'Have they caught anyone?'

'You may well ask,' said Sam. 'No witnesses, they say.'

'So these vermin will get away with it?' Grace leaned forward; Lotte could feel her presence at her shoulder. She kept her eyes on the hills.

'It's the way of the world I'm afraid. Get away with murder. Almost.'

'Wicked people,' said Grace.

'I'm sorry,' said Sam. 'He was a lovely pianist.'

'Yes,' said Lotte.

'He might be able to continue,' said Sam. The van pulled over and let them past. Sam waved cheerfully out of the open window.

'Just dreadful,' said Grace.

'We'll be there shortly.' Sam was egging the car on again. 'I know it's a shock, Lotte. News like that. But you can have tea. Or water. When we get there.'

'Does he have family?' Grace was almost between them, leaning forward between the front seats.

‘In Glasgow. Mrs Wilson says they want to take him home soon as they can. So that must be the facts. She’s never mistaken.’ Sam shook his head: ‘Terrible, terrible.’ To Lotte it was like listening to a drama on the wireless. The voices talking of imaginary events. Far away problems. She felt no need to participate.

‘Are you alright? Shall I stop?’ Sam asked.

Grace squeezed her arm in a new way – a prompt. You’re on now, Lotte. Your turn.

‘I’m fine. I’m fine,’ she said. It was her new voice. Before last night and after. Two worlds.

‘We’ve plenty time.’

‘No. I’m fine. Just a shock.’

‘Can’t walk the streets in safety.’ Sam licked his lips. ‘It always comes back to drink.’

‘Not like the Methodist way,’ said Grace. It was almost a tease. A way back to a cheerful day out.

‘Religion isn’t all superstition,’ Sam said ‘There are practical things in there too.’ Sam the pragmatic, Sam the sensible. Lotte felt a surge of affection for him. And sadness for everything that sat in the car beside them.

‘Well, I hope they get them anyway,’ said Grace, with feeling.

‘Me, too,’ said Sam. ‘Trading is tough enough without people being attacked in the street.’

Vennel, thought Lotte, not street. But she kept that and everything else within her tightly buttoned coat. Grace shuffled back into the bench seat in the rear. Sheila was looking out the side window.

‘Look,’ said Grace. ‘Lambs.’

‘This?’ said Peter.

Lotte took a step back. The dark blue scarf with diagonal red flashes was wound round his neck and the lower part of his face. With the round dark glasses only part of one cheek and the bridge of his nose was visible.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Perfect.’ She reached behind his neck and pushed a safety pin through the folds of silk cloth then through his collar to hold everything in place.

‘It’s not too bright? It doesn’t draw attention?’

‘No. And it’s your regimental scarf. Your colours. You should wear it.’ She put a hand on each of his arms and gently guided him back.

‘What’s it like. Out. I heard wind all night.’

‘Windy, dry, cool.’

‘Bright?’

‘Overcast.’

‘Good,’ he said. ‘I’m less visible then. Less frightening.’

‘No one is frightened.’

‘Dogs? Small children?’

She adjusted the scarf.

‘They see a hero.’ They both almost laughed. It was one of their few jokes.

She looked round the room for his shoes. His drawings, his posters, his huge paintings based on Chinese figures were all still there. And his misty landscapes. He didn’t paint now, but his current work sat on the dressing table, wrapped in a kitchen cloth. It was a clay model – a foot, a boot, lodged in waves of mud, two hands grasping, pulling – hands and leg all broken off abruptly. No one liked to say, but Peter’s new work was much more dramatic and arresting than the old. Small knives and a spoon lay on the surface. There was a smell of still air and the half-closed curtains deepened the gloom in the corners of the room.

She found the shoes under the bed, rubbed her hands over the toes.

‘You’re not out enough,’ she said. ‘Stoor on your shoes.’

‘I can’t go with anyone else. I am not prepared to be steered around by my mother or the aunts. I haven’t given up that much.’

She tied the laces.

‘You have no reason to hide.’ She stood and took his jacket from the back of the door. ‘I will come as often as you want me to. You can be out as often as you want.’

‘You’ve got the shop.’ He stood. ‘And you’ve got Sam.’

‘I promised,’ she said. ‘And it’s no hardship.’

‘She lied.’

‘It really, really isn’t.’ She guided one arm then the next into his jacket. He felt for the buttons and did up two, pulled it down.

‘How do I look? Escaped lunatic? Experiment gone wrong?’

‘War hero,’ she said.

She put his stick in her left hand. She had bought it. Silver band, black Malacca. A work of art. She went to Glasgow for it. Tried dozens, looking for one that would look good and feel interesting under his hands.

She pointed him out into the hallway.

‘Straight on.’

‘Yes. I get this bit.’ His stick tapped the door. ‘Jailer,’ he said. ‘The keys.’

The door was always locked. Had they discussed it? Not really. It was just agreed in the way that the aunts often did. If there was no dissent, then it happened. The dissent was all Peter’s. And the response was always that he could be independent later, but currently he had to learn. Had to be accompanied, on the rare days when he could face it.

Lotte took the keys from her bag and unlocked the door. Peter stepped out onto the landing.

‘Freedom,’ he said.

Lotte stood on the edge of the silent flat for a moment. The aunts were all at the shop with Sam. She imagined how this stillness felt for Peter. Day after day. His hands in the clay. A long emptiness.

‘Right,’ she said. She put his hand on the banister. Their landing was the last. She had always, instinctively, taken the inside of the stairs. The black well, down four flights to the black and white tiles. He felt along, fingers over the brass studs until he felt the sudden angle, curving away to the left. Once on the first step he moved down the stairs quickly. Lotte followed, always anxious where the width of the tread narrowed on the corners. His hand guided his feet anticipating landings and descents as the banister curved and swooped all the way to the ground.

‘Faster every time. I should just heave a leg over and slide.’

‘That’s what the studs are for.’

‘Not that they’d do any material damage to me.’

‘Step,’ she called from behind. They were almost at the street. He paused.

‘Over the top,’ he said, and went out on to the pavement. They turned down hill, down toward town. People here were neighbours. They nodded silent greetings, forgetting, or preferring to forget, that only Lotte could see them. Others spoke. But from everyone, Lotte could pick up a note of pity and gratitude. Not mine, not me. We all have bad luck, but not that. We all suffered, but not that way.

‘Who was that?’ he would say when he thought they were out of range. As he never left the flat without covering up, the extent of his injuries was a matter of legend in the street. It wasn’t something his mother or the aunts were prepared to discuss with neighbours or

customers, so the imagined wounds were presumably graphic. But no matter, the vital detail was the loss of sight. ‘And him with such promise.’ They said, out of hearing. Within hearing some called him war hero. But he was unimpressed:

‘Tragic work-shy war hero. Seems about right. But I was good at it. What I did. Blowing people up.’

But that was on positive days. On other days he would stay in his room when they were all at home. Lotte would visit in the evenings. The atmosphere round the kitchen table crushed by the firmly shut door across the passage. By his absolute silence. With Lotte and Marguerite both married, the three aunts were his keepers, their kindness and patience unlimited. Perhaps that was the problem. They absorbed his rages. Lotte would take the rubbish downstairs and hear the clatter of broken crockery and the rattle of smashed glasses as she emptied into the dustbins. She found Jessie carefully gluing two halves of a kitchen cupboard door together.

‘Lucky it’s easy to fix,’ she said, squinting down at the join through her round glasses. ‘Good solid wood.’ Which was also a way of noting the force required to split it neatly down the centre.

‘Let’s not go down the street today,’ Peter said.

‘Shall we cut through to the Back Walk?’

‘The Snowden. The cemetery.’

Through the gates, they were immediately surrounded by birdsong. Pale angels stood around under the drooping trees. There was a strong smell of earth.

‘Ah, the reek of mortality.’

Lotte had his arm, although the smooth gravel paths were kind to him. She squeezed hard. ‘Stop it,’ she said.

‘Why? The one thing I can say I have gained from the last few years. The only thing. You’re not afraid of this anymore.’ He waved his stick at the trees and the headstones. A gardener swung his scythe in a steady rhythm, hacking at long grass in the darkness under a tree.

‘What’s that?’

‘It’s a gardener cutting weeds.’

‘Appropriate background sounds. A feast for the senses here. As it should be.’

The man nodded at them out of the gloom. He squinted at Peter and touched his cap.

‘Would the Back Walk not be better?’

‘It’s fun to try to imagine the view again, but this suits me here.’

‘You tell me where you want to go, and I will take you there.’ Lotte steered him between great Victorian sarcophagi, the solid furniture of death.

‘That’s the trouble, isn’t it?’ said Peter. He pulled a round tin of cigarettes from his jacket pocket. He stopped, hung the stick on his arm and felt for matches. She helped him to adjust the scarf, created a slit between the cloth where his mouth was. He held the cigarette in place with his fingers as she lit and shielded the match.

He said. ‘I need to get out here on my own. Make my own mistakes. Not be led.’

‘We don’t want you to come to harm.’

‘Harm? What other harm do you think I might come to?’

‘There’s not much point in making things worse for yourself. A broken leg wouldn’t cheer you up.’

‘How much do I have to lose?’

‘Steps.’ Three stone steps led upwards. He felt forward with his stick, tapped the stone, then swung it back and forward against the bottom step so hard that Lotte saw the stick flex, but not split.

She gripped his arm.

‘Hey,’ she said, ‘I went all the way to Glasgow for that and I won’t tell you how much it cost.’

He was shaking.

‘Shall we go back?’

‘Please give me the key. One day. Just let me try this myself.’

‘I can’t.’

‘You must.’

‘No.’

‘What do you all think will happen?’

Falling in the street wasn’t their worry. Of course not. There were a hundred people who would take him home. His black moods were what worried them most.

‘You all think that I’ll sniff my way to the water, don’t you?’ She was leading him back through the township of the dead, back to the iron gates. ‘All downhill, I’d find it eventually. Or listen for the trains, find the track. Get my head down on the lines so I can hear it coming?’

‘Stop it.’

‘Don’t you think if I was going to do it, I’d have found a way by now? All the long days locked up.’

‘You’re not locked up. There’s the Disabled Servicemen’s club. Wingate’s offered you a job.’

‘Counting handbills? I think that would definitely finish me off.’

Lotte thought of the way that they had scoured the flat for pulley-ropes, drawstrings of blinds, knives, belts, balls of string. Short of someone being there every day, and they did try between them all to provide company, there was no way of being completely sure. But they wanted the comfort of having done their best. They had consulted physicians, expensively. All they had been offered was drugs to restrain, or the asylum. They shuddered at the last option. Better to risk everything than that.

‘I’ll speak to your mother, my mother. We can all speak about it.’

‘No that will go round and round the garden again.’

‘I can’t.’

‘No, you *won’t*.’ He stopped in the gravel. It was cool now. She smelled the tobacco, his scarf was loosening as he became more agitated, she glimpsed raw flesh and the smooth pink of the burn-tissue in the gaps between the scarf around his mouth. ‘You promised me.’

‘I promised to look after you. And I will.’

‘Exactly that,’ he said. ‘And I’m asking you to help.’

‘Let’s all talk about it. Tonight.’

He walked away from her, across the wet grass, his head cocked, as if he were sniffing the air. There was a new grave, no headstone, but with a rectangle of turf a different shade from the rest, with a border of raw, excess earth. He knelt, sniffed again, felt along the grass till he reached the soil. Both hands delved. He pulled two fistfuls out, squeezed until the dark mud oozed between his fingers. With both hands he collected a heaped scoop of dirt, and methodically, thoroughly washed his hands in it, rubbing the soil into the palms, between his fingers, the backs, his wrists up inside his sleeves.

Lotte looked round. There was no sign of the gardener. She let Peter’s ritual continue. Eventually she came up behind him and put a hand on his shoulder. He kept rubbing, soil dropping away, his pale skin showing through – the lines and creases of his hands like black roads through the fields.

‘No one can understand this,’ he said.

‘Tell me.’ She guided him to a bench. It looked out to the Ochils, the Wallace Monument, the sweep of the hills away to the Firth.

‘My drawings were the best – angles, perspective, distance – easy for me. Usually, they sent an officer to do the spotting, identify the targets, the lads waiting for a signal, miles

back. You were a bit exposed, it's true, but, being alone for a few hours, even if alone in hell, was almost a gift, so I often volunteered.'

'You told me –'

'I know, never volunteer. But there was a sort of peace out there in the dugout. But,' he shrugged deeper into his cowl, 'you had to get there first. On your belly. If it was only the mud, that would have been fine. You could wash it away, watch it darkening the water in a bucket. There was rarely anything organic that you could recognise – bones, teeth, maybe.'

Lotte winced. He'd never spoken with this intensity before. He spoke of the war as if it was a vague, humourless joke.

'There was an oily, greasy texture to the soil, organic, meaty, and a smell that stayed with you for days. Years. That night, I was looking for the wire. The densest tangles were like a bramble forest out of a storybook. It got thrown about by the high explosive, welded by the heat, torn, and then ripped again by shrapnel. In this sector, the wire had been left in peace for half a year. It was time to open it up. I crawled out through the stench and filth. With only my sketchpad, compass and Very pistol.'

'Just a pistol?' she said.

'A flare gun,' he said. 'The last resort, if things get desperate, I could still have done my duty by bringing down mayhem. A gun to my own head.' He was laughing, quietly.

'You don't see much out there at night, on your knees. All the features are gone, just the rolling mud at eye-level. I felt the ground sloping away under my hands. It might have been a grassy meadow full of wildflowers, once.'

Lotte faced the old hills, the Monument, the river, and tried to imagine.

'And then someone put a flare up. I was caught out in the light as if they'd turned a stone over. So, I wriggled on, like an insect, until I was safe under the shadow of the black wire. As I crawled down, I could tell I was in an old trench. As it deepened, I stood up, I had to put my hands out onto each wall. Feel my way. It was that dark.'

Peter seemed to have shrunk further into his scarves, into his memory.

'I felt along the wet walls until my hand went into a void. And when another hand grabbed it, I didn't even jump. The warmth of that hand in that horrible tunnel with its barbed roof was almost welcome. It didn't feel like a threat. Not even when I had a gun in my back. What was the worst that could happen? His voice wasn't continental, but he wasn't British either.

'After a while, we came to a fire, a tiny blue flame deep in the trench. First one, then more. And new smells, paraffin, food, life. Faces over the stoves. It was like all the unit

huddles I'd ever come across. No one asked me who I was. No one was interested. It was ayeways like that. Frightened, tired men. If you weren't an immediate threat they didn't care.'

This was Peter, almost like the old, pre-war days. Telling a story.

'But what a gang that was. French uniforms with Prussian helmets. Boys with yokel Devon accents wearing field-grey jackets. White skins and dark skins, a gathering of all the clans, out there under that thick roof of wire. We'd heard tales, but no one believed it.'

'Deserters?' Lotte tried to imagine the small gas fires, the stranded souls.

'You could call them that. I gave them my last smokes, they gave me their booze.'

'Whisky?' She'd always loved this. Being part of his storytelling. Asking the question at the right moment. Picking up a strand and running off with it, so they both became the tale.

'Petrol more like. But I drank it down. You can't be unsociable.' Peter started to laugh. 'I was sociable all right.'

'You weren't tempted to stay?'

'They'd opted out. Given up on the madness. Both sides. Living out there, scavenging from the bodies. Hiding under the thickest section of wire. Friendly as you like.'

'But you didn't stay.'

'Oh no. And all the time I was sitting there, sipping their schnapps or tank fuel or whatever it was, I was thinking that this was the perfect place for a barrage. That our shells would do the most damage here. The best place to cut the line. So, I told them, thanks for the drink, but I had to go. They weren't quite so friendly then. I heard the rifles cocking in the dark all up the trench.'

Lotte held his arm. She could feel a tremor, a ripple of recalled fear and excitement.

'Oh Peter.' There wasn't much else to say. 'But you hadn't a gun.'

'Not really. But a flare shot at head height down a trench took their minds off me for a bit. I ran for it, back the way I'd come. By the time I was out in the mud the Hun trenches had opened up. There was machine gun fire, mortars, the whole fireworks. I couldn't lie down and be caught by the deserters, so I let loose the only other flare I had, the red one. It was still hanging up there, right above that awful trench when our boys let a barrage drop.'

Sun was beginning to glitter on the wet landscape, the Ochils seemed to have come closer in the brightness.

'They were on song that night. As I got up to run I saw the flashes all along that line. Saw them all blown up through the wire – like cheese wire – cutting them into bits.' He hesitated there, the rhythm faltering now. 'But there's always a stray one. Just my luck it was right in front of me. The stretchers got to me at dusk the next day. Not that I could tell.'

The excitement in his voice was gone now. The tremor Lotte could feel in his arm had gone.

‘And I see them still, hear their squeals too,’ he said. ‘All the time. Not just at night. The moment I don’t think of anything else. Sometimes even when I’m making things, it’s there. An endless film, playing.’ He raised his dirty hand to his facecloth. ‘It’s worse than this. Much.’

‘Peter, let me help.’

‘How? It’s not for you to help. You can’t stop the film playing in the dark.’ His hands were still rubbing. ‘This soil is so clean.’

‘People understand now,’ said Lotte. ‘The effect of the things you’ve seen. You can get better.’

‘That’s the thing. I’ve seen worse. Stuff I’d never tell you. And I’ve fired flares that brought down shelling that killed many more. On our own lads too – when we had to.’ He stood now, pushing down on his stick. Stumbling over his own feet, he let her help him get his balance.

‘Let’s get back.’

He made no move. ‘They were right. Braver than the rest of us. They’d found another way. And I put an end to it. Finished the hope.’

‘They tried to kill you.’

‘They’d no choice. It wasn’t their fault I found them.’

‘You couldn’t stay.’

‘No, I couldn’t. I’m not sure why, but I couldn’t.’

He shrugged her arm away and set off down the path, swinging his stick like a sabre. When the path curved left, he tripped on the neat verge and fell heavily on the wet grass. He made no attempt to cushion the fall with his hands.

When Lotte got to him his body throbbed and twitched with huge shuddering sobs.

They drove in silence until they got to the white hotel beside the Lake. As the car came to a halt, the keys rattled against the dashboard. Twenty keys or more, they hung there like a primitive weapon.

‘I should have a set of keys, too.’ Lotte said.

‘More to lose.’ Sam said.

‘It’s my shop too.’

Sam got out of the car without a word and led the way through the apparently deserted building. An older woman appeared without warning.

‘We booked teas?’

The woman peered at Sam, then the two women and then Sheila.

‘Ah yes,’ she said, as if a distant memory was now forming in her mind, perhaps something from her childhood.

‘I phoned. Yesterday?’ Sam sounded as if he could have come from anywhere in the country, until he got to that word – yesterday. Yester. Day. One bit of Birkenhead that gave the game away.

They were ushered through to the lounge. The cloud had thinned, and the lake reflected a pale sky. Between the lake and the sky, the islands were black, the ruins invisible among the trees. There was no one in sight. Tea and cakes were brought out. They huddled round the low table, held together by remarks about the freshness of the bread and the hue of the tea.

Lotte excused herself. She went to the toilet. It was lit by the late afternoon sun like a stage. Her dark eyes looked back from the long mirror. She adjusted her hat, tucked some stray jet-black curls underneath. She leaned in over the sink, closer to herself. She examined her face like a painting. Closer still, until she could pick the flecks of pure black in her dark brown eyes. Her pupils had narrowed in the brightness of the space. She rubbed at a frown line between her brows, ran a thumb along one brow then the other. She picked up her bag, left the toilet through the double swing doors and walked out into the car park. One more car had arrived after they had. She walked out onto the road. It was narrow, the solid girth of mature trees on both sides. Some cows stared in her direction from a field. Round a sharp bend she came to a boathouse and pier. The wood was bleached to pearl with an occasional plank of flaking black paint. Two open boats were tied to the pier. She walked onto the wood of the pier and looked into the boats. They were delicate and robust at the same time, spindly spars and seats across the breadth, coils of rope in the bottom. But their ribbed sides butted the rubber fenders of the pier like assertive animals testing a fence. The lake was almost flat calm.

‘Can I help you? Madam.’ The man, cap pushed back on his head, thick moustache, puffed pipe smoke into a haze around his head and shoulders. He was inside the dark of the boathouse. ‘Nae trips till the start of May.’

‘That’s a shame.’ She looked across the water. The reflections and distance made it hard to see where the shoreline of the island was. Was there a pier there too? A boathouse like this?

‘Come back in a fortnight.’ The bowl of the pipe glowed through the smoke. ‘Bring all your friends.’

She tried to make out buildings. ‘But not today?’

‘No. We’re not running. And too late in the day to see much anyway. I’m about to finish up and away home.’

She unclipped her bag and felt inside.

‘And what’s the usual fare?’ she said. ‘When you’re running?’

‘Shilling each. Sixpence bairns.’

‘And for a pound?’

‘You can take your whole street with you.’

‘Or just me? Now?’

‘It will be dark shortly, especially out on the island.’

‘I don’t want to be there for long.’

He puffed in his pipe. He wasn’t old. Maybe in his forties. The pipe made him sage-like. She imagined he’d taken up the pipe as a young man, trying to put an end to the jokes from older boatmen.

‘It doesn’t seem worth it.’

Pound and shilling.’ She said. ‘A guinea.’

He smiled at that.

‘You think we all have a price? Like beasts?’

She took a note from her bag.

‘I’m a businesswoman,’ she said. ‘I make offers.’

He was moving now, tapping the residue from his pipe in a cascade of red pinpoints. They fell onto the darkened earth floor of the boathouse and flared for a second before going dark. He disappeared into the gloom and emerged with two long slim oars, paler than the palest wood on the boathouse or boats. He stepped down into the boat nearest to the open lake. The oars went into iron pegs and he positioned both carefully, so they lay inside the boat.

‘Don’t complain if you only have a few minutes ashore when you get out there.’ He reached up. ‘Careful, now.’ She put a gloved hand in his. She noticed that every fingernail had a sharp black line underneath. ‘Funeral letters,’ her mother called them. He held her hand

until he had guided her to the seat across the back of the boat, then swiftly slipped the ropes at both ends and with one smooth movement was seated with an oar in each hand. The blades cut into the still surface of the water. He had his back to the island and at no point made any effort to look in the direction they were going – he aimed the boat by instinct. The awkwardness of sitting facing him in such a small space was solved by both looking over each other's shoulder, she at the black smudge of the island, he at a retreating point somewhere on shore.

‘Would you care for the Mary Queen of Scots story?’

She smiled. ‘No thank you. I know it.’

‘You’re paying,’ he said. ‘I felt I should offer at least.’

‘Thank you.’ They sat in silence. Only the rhythmic sound of the oars in the water. She felt she was almost in a trance, the island growing over his shoulder. The water dripping into the still water as the blades came out. The pattern only changed when the island suddenly loomed closer; one oar at rest, the other pulling deeper, as the boat turned into a tiny bay. A short stone pier, no boathouse. Trees leaned down over the still water, the shadows made the shoreline as black as night, while the open lake seemed brighter than when they had set off. He let the boat nudge up against the pier, it rocked wildly as he stood.

‘Sorry.’

He secured the boat then reached down to take her hand again. She stepped over the spars and seats; the bottom of the boat held dark pools of quivering water. She stood up onto the pier. He let her hand go. A path led into the darkness of the woods. The afternoon was fading now.

‘Do you wish a quick look at the Priory before we have to get back? There isn’t much light.’

‘No,’ she said, ‘I’d like to be on my own.’ For a moment she was aware of the vulnerability of her situation. Out here with a strange man in the near dark. But she felt only calm.

The boatman turned his back on her, stepped back on to the boat which rocked as he sat down on the stern seat she had just vacated. He took the pipe and his leather tobacco pouch from his pocket, set them on his lap, then looked up and said, ‘As you wish madam. I will be here. Don’t be more than quarter of an hour. And call if you require help. The island’s small enough, I’ll find you.’

She walked away from the pier, the miniature bay. The pathway was covered in last year’s leaves and beech mast that crackled under her boots. The undergrowth between the

trees was old growth. Bracken and grasses lay flat, bent over by rain and wind. On the trees the buds were not quite green, on the cusp of a new season. Away from the reflected light of the water it was gloomy, cool. She stumbled over roots; her toe caught on hollowed out bracken clumps.

The ruins appeared suddenly, pointed stone arches black against the fading sky. The grass and vegetation had been cut away from the remains; someone had brought a mower all this way to create small lawns around the space occupied by the building. But the stone litter and half walls still looked as if they had grown from the woods around. The bases of columns like the stumps of mighty trees. There was a deep silence here. Not even birdsong. It was easy for her to fill up the outlines sketched on the ground by these random stones with hooded monks, candles, the smell of cooking, leather on stone. A world of silence and separation from the world.

‘Don’t you believe it,’ said Peter. He swung at the stone stump with his stick. Missed. ‘I’ve been in the army, remember. Put a bunch of men in the one place. Seal them off from civilisation. Not a great outcome. Deceit, buggery and bullying.’ He laughed. There was a smell of cigarettes.

‘What happens next?’ she said.

‘Nothing.’ He was walking away now, his back hunched over his stick. He was wearing civilian clothes – the clothes he wore at art school, a long shapeless coat, almost a cloak. ‘Nothing. You did the right thing. Things will work for the best.’

‘Are you sure?’

He paused on the edge of the trees, on the shadow. He turned round. There was no scarf, but she couldn’t see his face.

‘No.’ Then he was gone.

She followed, his steps visible in the tired grass.

‘Peter. You begged me for the key. What else could I do?’ There was no sign of him now, but she kept walking. Walking, moving, this was the answer, this was her solution.

She was abruptly on the shoreline at the opposite side of the island from the small pier and the boat. Across the still water the hotel was doubled in the Lake, the white reflection as vivid as the real thing. Lights were on now. Two pinpoints, one upstairs and one downstairs in the room where she had been sitting. She walked to the edge of the water and stood on a low boulder. The Lake here was black under the shade of the trees. Her rippling reflection was indistinct, her dark coat hardly registered in the shadows, only her face floated pale in the water. She took off her right glove, knelt, reached down and put her fingers in the water. Icy.

She felt its slight sliminess between her fingers, thought about the darkening depths here where the bed sloped away towards the hotel, the weeds, mud, hanging fish, a greater silence.

A tinkling of sound bounced across the flat expanse from the hotel. Voices. There were figures out on the lawn. There was Sam, and another dark male figure, in conversation. She couldn't make out their faces, they were turned towards each other. From behind a dark blot of bushes she saw the white speck of Sheila, then Grace beside her. Grace kneeling now, the white speck became enfolded within her, so they became one dappled shape on the lawn.

The whole scene blurred. She put her wet hand back in the glove.

'What's to be done?'

'Never volunteer,' said Peter. 'Never jump.'

'Fine advice,' she said, 'from you.'

'Look where volunteering got me. Sing, play and walk.' He was behind her somewhere, in the trees. She could smell the smoke.

'And make the shop work?'

'Fuck yes. You better. They'd never forgive you.'

'What will they do? Haunt me?'

There was just the smell of smoke now and the darkening trees.

Over on the lawn there was more movement. And other man and woman had come from the hotel, there was pointing. Someone – was it Sam? – stared directly at her on the island. She remained stock still on her rock. How did the island look from where she was in the dwindling light? If she waved, would he see, would everything be alright? But then the figure moved away quickly.

'Madam.' The voice was muffled by the woodland. She turned on the boulder, careful with her footing, slipped her weight from one leg to the other. The image of the wall, with Peter, then a ridge high on a mountain flashed in her head. She stepped down on to the pebbles on the shore. They crunched under her boot – satisfying. All would be well.

'Coming,' she said.

She hugged Sheila for a full quarter of an hour, while the manager, the waiter, the waitress, the barman, Sam and Grace stood around. She had given the boatman twice his fee. She had made it as clear as she could that she had persuaded him to take her, against his better judgement.

‘Why didn’t you tell us you had gone?’ Their question asked in a dozen different ways, she answered in one way, ‘Because if I had, I couldn’t.’ They couldn’t understand and she couldn’t explain.

She held Sheila till she stopped sobbing. They went towards the car, with the emergency over and the staff preparing how they would present this story to the evening guests. Grace caught her eye. She saw something there which was more than the sadness and confusion she could see in Sam’s. Disappointment? Betrayal?

The manager saw them out to the car. It was quite dark now, with a long drive home. Sheila jumped into the back seat, and before Grace could gather her skirts, Lotte squeezed in. She and Sheila snuggled together on the leather bench seat. Grace walked all the way round the front of the car and sat in the passenger seat.

They were quickly reliant on the short yellowy cones of the headlights. When lights came towards them Sam slowed even more.

‘I hope no one is in a hurry to get home, he said. ‘This will take all night.’

After that, they sat for an hour and a half in silence.

When they got to town, they circled round the Castle rock and up to Baker Street to pick the boys up from the shop. Mrs Wilson had sat with them and their homework long after closing time. They climbed in the back beside their mother and sister. Their questions about the outing petered out in the silence of the car, and their own weariness.

At Snowdon Place, Sam left the car outside in the street.

‘I’ll take it to the garage in the morning, before I go to the shop.’

Grace made a supper which they ate together in the kitchen. When they had finished, Grace put her hand out to Sheila. ‘Come. It’s the latest you’ve ever been. And for you boys too. School tomorrow.’

Lotte was ready to sit with Sam, to explain. But he had gone to his own room. She thought to follow him, to go back to the closeness. But it was too quick. He wouldn’t understand. She didn’t want to argue about the music lessons and the shop. All that would come. She could find a way.

Back in the kitchen, all was tidy. The door to Grace’s room was firmly shut. There was a deep silence in the house, as deep as on the island. Lotte walked upstairs. She went into the sitting room. The curtains were open, the streetlight coated the room in a strange light. Against the wall the piano stood dark, the little pyramid of the metronome on top. The lid was down. She walked over and stroked the wood. Outside, the MG was a dark, solid presence in the street, like another tiny house.

‘Don’t think about it.’ Peter was beside her, arm along the top of the piano, a finger tapping the metronome case. ‘You or him. I told you. Act or it’s you.’

Then he was gone again. Lotte moved over to the window. There was a half-moon above the Castle, clouds moving. She needed a little more time with Peter, then she would be resolved. It was late now, past midnight, and the house was as still as if she were the only one there. Out in the hall she placed her boots on the tiles lightly, automatically. It didn’t make her feel furtive, this behaviour, it made her feel light, wraith-like, part of the ease with which she could move from the ordinary world to the world of outdoors and night.

She pulled her coat on, fished the gloves from her pocket, took the purse from her bag and slipped it in her pocket. She was ready to go.

Except the door was locked. She opened the drawer of the hall stand. Reached to the back of the drawer, pulled out the leather wallet that was kept there, loose change for hawkers and van-boys. She unbuttoned the change pouch. No key. She had a moment of panic. Her heart took off. She breathed in, out. Slowly. Think. She looked at the coats hanging on the five hooks behind the door. Someone will have a spare key. She went through every coat, Sam’s, the boys’, Grace’s. Nothing. Sam locked the doors every night, like a ritual. His keys would be on his dressing table upstairs. She turned. Grace was standing, one hand on the banister, one foot on the bottom step.

‘How could you.’

‘Grace, please give me the key, or tell me where I can find it. I want to go out.’

‘There are no keys. Not for you. Front or back doors.’

Lotte sighed. ‘Please, Grace, don’t turn against me.’

‘Turn against you? It’s the opposite I’m doing.’ She took two steps towards her. ‘How can you think of going out? Again. After last night?’

‘I need to clear my head.’ Lotte picked her hat off the table. ‘Exactly because of last night.’

‘You can clear your head here.’ Grace dabbed at her eye with the edge of her apron.

‘Please Grace, it’s important to me.’ Lotte’s hands were working together, her gloved fingers rubbing each other.

‘And the rest of us aren’t? Drive us all insane with worry out at that lake? Sam was nearly sick. And Sheila.’

‘I was completely safe.’ They hissed at each other in whispers.

‘No you weren’t. You are not going out. I have all the keys downstairs. Sam asked me to look after them.’

They stood there in the hall, the checked tiles, the chandelier, the old dark wood of the door. Lotte took a breath, felt her heart again as something separate, a live thing within her.

‘It isn’t for you to tell me.’

‘But it is,’ said Grace. ‘It is, I am your friend, Lotte, your sister. I will defy you to help you.’

‘Grace.’

‘Shh. Go to bed. You don’t want to wake Sam, the boys, your baby?’ Grace made as if to come to her, to hold her, but turned and walked back down the hallway. Lotte heard every one of her steps back down into the kitchen, then the soft closing of her door.

Chapter 10: Saturday 22nd April 1933.

‘Doctor Fergusson. The very man. Assemble in my office in fifteen.’

It was unrealistic to think I could avoid destiny by simply moving around the corridors. Impossible to believe that I could evade Sneddon indefinitely. In effect, he had found me within half an hour of my arriving. I was caught out in the open, on the main stairway, washed downstairs on a tide of white aprons and beached in the main reception hall where he stood, checked tweed suit, both thumbs in waistcoat pockets, his gold chain a double arc like a suspension bridge.

My calm was not superior moral fibre. There is no relationship between exposure to mortal danger in the past and present panic. In my clinical experience, past fear is the trigger of anxiety, not a way of giving it perspective. But resolve, for King and Country or otherwise, stiffens the nerves like a zero-hour measure of brandy. For further stimulus, I reached into my pocket for Lotte’s glove. Standing in front of Sneddon in that vast hall, the low sun throwing huge grids of light across the tiled floor, I could tell by his stance, legs like pillars, chest like a buttress, that he expected my surrender. But I wasn’t finished.

To the nurses swirling around us and to Mrs Nicholson hovering a few feet away, buff files cradled and clutched to her bosom, spectacles poised, we were the two most senior professionals enjoying some early morning chit-chat, the light human touch despite the weight of responsibility pressing down on both of us. We played our parts in this little fake tableau.

‘Doctor Sneddon.’ I half bowed. ‘I am, as always, at your convenience.’ I stood in front of him, full square to his stance. ‘Unless we can deal with whatever matter you have in mind right here.’

‘Doctor,’ he said, with that awful smirk. ‘Come, come. Where are your professional ethics? What example would that be to set for our nursing colleagues? Discussing our patients in open outcry?’

‘Upstanding professionals like ourselves?’

‘What would Professor Deacon say?’

‘He trained us like priests.’

‘Tougher than priests.’ Sneddon rocked back now on his heels. Teeth showing. ‘Ten minutes, Doctor Fergusson.’ He turned away.

‘Please go through, Doctor,’ said Mrs Nicholson.

Sneddon was standing over at the window. The lawns were a fresh green that was almost yellow. It was a colour brighter than you would expect from the weak sun. It would have been cheering had it not framed Sneddon’s immovable bulk.

‘You got home last night?’ He went up on his toes. ‘I mean you got home unscathed. I wasn’t suggesting you had spent the night in your car.’

I said nothing. How was he going to play this? Directly or waste our limited time on this earth by going round the byways.

‘Disappointing day. The brothers Strang are not an inspiring bunch.’ He rocked again on his feet. ‘Or competent even. Two crows and a pigmy pheasant do not a shoot make. Even at this time of the year.’

I was determined to force him out from cover. I said nothing but sat on the visitor’s chair. He seemed equally determined not to have to look at me. He stared off towards the trees.

‘Useful though, don’t you think? For us to talk. Properly.’

I made a non-committal noise.

‘Glad you’re still with me Fergusson.’ He looked over his shoulder, briefly.

‘I think we sorted out the staffing issues very efficiently. Get a proper team together.’

There was a long pause that we were both quite comfortable with. Finally, I said: ‘I’ll start making arrangements. Just as you suggested.’

He turned round. Over to his desk: the files, the letter opener, his world set out there, the edges polished by his hands and elbows. He didn’t sit down and I regretted having done so.

‘And the other business, too. I’m glad we came to an agreement on that.’

I said, ‘Did we?’

He sighed. Just a small one.

‘But there is no need to go over it all again. At least I hope not.’ He took the watch out of his waistcoat pocket, cupped it in his hand as if it weighed a great deal. Slipped it away again. ‘It’s the future, John, and you know it. She will be perfectly fine. You will be there.’

‘As fine as the last one?’

He moved behind the desk now, sat down, clasped his hands in front of him as if he needed to keep them under control.

‘You were there.’ He paused for half a beat. ‘You participated, so you know how hard we work to minimise risks.’

‘I think we’ve established that.’ I looked out the window. A party of men was walking across the far cricket pitch. Tiny figures in our huge estate. ‘We’ve established how little choice I have.’

‘Then better to take part a little more enthusiastically.’

I had no doubt that he believed it. That was the thing that made me most fearful.

‘Is that everything?’

‘If you could bring your patient to the usual treatment room at eleven. Thank you.’

‘A nurse can do that.’

‘I wish you to assist me, Doctor. And I also assumed you would like to be present. To ensure we meet all your safety criteria.’

As I closed his door behind me. Mrs Arbuthnot looked over her spectacles at me. A half-smile. I left her door open and made for the stairs. There was still time.

It was not the sort of place where you would choose to spend your last night on earth. They never were. It was the only room left from what had once been a school. The rest of the building was rubble, pulped books, the corners of desks strong enough to survive because of their beautiful mortice joints. The heart of the village. All that remained was one small room. The three long windows had been carefully boarded prior to hostilities. Perhaps the teachers had hoped to return and find some disruption, windows broken, dust and plaster on the desks, but recoverable. All it would take was a community event, with everyone mucking-in, for life to return to normal. They might even decide to leave a few bullet holes in the cornice as a reminder.

A shell, ours or theirs, had landed in the playground, the crater was still there. The Corporal and I shared the hope that there had been no children out there, playing at the time.

The once beautiful railings were so twisted and knotted by the blast that there had been no attempt to salvage. The bulk of the school was reduced to stones, and not even square stones that you could recognise as having once been part of the building.

‘Fucking playgrounds. Hate them,’ he said as we shared a cigarette. ‘Begging your pardon sir.’

‘We rarely have good experiences there,’ I said. Our combined blue smoke hung in the still of the late summer evening. One tree had survived the ruin that lay around. The leaves were turning. Despite the mayhem, autumn would arrive.

‘Girls used to gang up and capture us blokes. Get us in a corner where we wasn’t over-looked by the teachers and they’d scrape their nails across the back of our hands until they bled.’

‘Lucky you didn’t get tetanus.’

‘Lucky they didn’t think of worse things.’

‘Didn’t you boys gang up on them?’

He blew a long stream of smoke towards the west, where the sun was going down behind a pink cover of clouds.

‘Did eventually.’ He smiled. ‘That were an afternoon to remember. But no. Wasn’t manly to have to be rescued by other boys. Anyway, took me punishment like a man. They wanted to hear you cry.’ He blew more smoke. ‘Reckon some of the lads enjoyed it though.’

‘There’s no accounting for taste,’ I said. We looked at the sunset, towards home, for a moment or two longer. Both of us were conscious of the door. The one door left in the school, perhaps in the entire village. The noises of France, the evening birds, the rustle of the leaves, the far away booming and the faint buzzing of an unseen aircraft, were all subdued. It enhanced the incongruous sense of peace around us in this wasteland. And it framed the absolute silence behind the door.

‘What do you know about him?’ I waved a thumb over my shoulder.

‘Convicted two days ago,’ said the Corporal. ‘Just ran for it, they say. Couldn’t wait to squeeze down the trench, so went up and over and ran across the open ground.’

‘Goodness me,’ I said. ‘He was lucky.’

The Corporal smiled at that.

‘Up to a point. There was some Fritz response. That told against him I heard. Further endangering comrades. I don’t know if it’s true, just what I heard. He’s from the Worcs. One sector up. Dirty bastards. Never clean their shit out the trench when we’ve relieved them.’ He

stopped again. I wasn't a real officer. But, still, you had to be careful. 'Party's getting dropped off at zero five hundred to...' He stopped again.

'OK, I'll be back then as well. Sign things off.'

'Right, sir.' He was from the 31st Lancashire. He had the open face of a farm-boy, a country freshness about him that seemed so unlikely by this stage of the war. His eager good humour must have marked him out for a promotion. But he probably could not imagine it would involve this sort of responsibility.

'May I?'

'Course. Sir.' He led the way to the door. The original lock was long broken, but it was secured by a rusty chain and surprisingly shiny padlock. The Corporal took a key from the top pocket of his battledress. The door scraped on the stone floor as he pushed it into the room.

The boarding meant there was no daylight in the room at all. Even stepping from the fading twilight, it took us a moment to adjust to the candlelight. Substantial candles, two of them. Uncommonly generous of the army. One was on the boarded windowsill, the other on a card table. The man – the boy – was lit from below. Just out of his teens, I guessed, but with the pallor of a terminal patient. He was unsure whether to stand or not. What was the point in keeping on the right side of officers now? I put my cap and gloves on the table and my medical bag on the dust and pebble covered floor. He sat up a little but made no effort to move.

'Medic come to see you,' said the Corporal. The condemned man made no acknowledgement.

'That will be all, Corporal.'

He seemed reluctant to leave, but the man looked beyond any last desperate resistance. I felt awkward standing.

'You've been fed?'

He looked up, nodded.

'It's been explained about the padre? He will come and sit with you if you want.'

He shook his head.

'Not a religious man?' I offered him my tin of cigarettes. He took one. 'No,' I said, 'keep them all.' As he lit up from the candle it flared briefly.

'Don't want told about where I'm going,' he said. In these situations I found the joking felt like a reflex, rather than bravery. Life carrying on for a little longer.

'You don't have to believe to take comfort.'

‘Rather be on me tod. Not sure I’d be best company. Be frightened what I’d say.’ He paused. ‘Why are you here?’

‘I am here to ensure your fitness.’

He smiled at that.

‘And,’ I said, ‘to do what I can for you.’

‘What is that?’

‘I can give you something that might make the time pass a little easier.’

‘To knock me out?’

He was interested, but a native suspicion of doctors was still there.

‘A bit, yes, I suppose.’

‘Can’t say I have much to lose.’

I undid the straps of my bag.

‘Just let me take your pulse first.’ Why did I always do that? To ensure they were alive at this point? It was more about going through a ritual. A professional ritual. For most private soldiers the army was their first experience of doctors and medicine. His heartbeat was unexpectedly normal. But when I looked up into his eyes, I could see the terror. Men became so used to submerging their fear, holding it in. Everyone is terrified. Some are better at hiding it than others, that is all. He had been very good at it, only that brief moment of weakness, but that was enough. And he had chosen a particularly visible way of breaking, jumping out of the trench. There was no hope of a King’s pardon here. A dispatch rider arriving just before dawn. That miracle did cross my mind on occasion – how it might make me feel if the reprieve came too late. But not this time.

‘This will help.’ I picked up my bag, put it on the table beside the candle.

‘Please, Doctor.’

‘At first though, it will make you very agitated, uneasy.’

‘I am already quite uneasy Doctor.’

I smiled at that myself. ‘Quite. This will feel extreme for a moment, like being strapped to the front of a fast train. Or under shell fire. But I promise that will not last long.’

‘Please.’ There was an edge now.

‘Do I have your permission?’ He nodded. It was such a pointless question. But it made me feel my vows had not been completely abandoned.

As I prepared the syringe, I caught his eye again. This was extremis. Face to face with the abyss. In an attack or being under a long bombardment, you could hope against hope while the fates rolled their dice overhead. This was the moment the dice stopped moving.

Could I admit to a thrill? To a frisson from being in the presence of such an absolute experience? Of course. But I was also here to do good. To relieve harm.

‘Roll up your sleeve, Private.’ He was cold, his arm white and milky. There were no veins to speak of. ‘This might hurt just a bit.’ He was beyond any irony now. I rubbed his arm with a dab of antiseptic. A smaller vein would do, an artery would be too quick. I’d prefer to get back to my own shack before it acted. I could do without the guard running through the mud after me. I was careful with the needle though. Multiple punctures would look suspicious even to non-experts. But an officiating officer wasn’t going to notice one tiny mark.

‘I can’t feel anything, Doctor.’ He blinked.

‘It will take time. Maybe an hour.’ I looked at his other wrist, he did have a watch. I hoped it would make its way back to his family. ‘Think about the ones you left behind, Private. They’d want to be in your thoughts.’ He nodded. ‘Read their letters. Have you pictures?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I feel a bit giddy.’

‘That’s to be expected. I will leave you now Private. Knock on the door if you need anything from the Corporal. He’s a good man.’ I packed everything away. He had a bundle of pictures, letters in front of him. A dark-haired girl stared up at the roof beams in the gloom.

‘Thank you, Doctor.’ He was looking at the picture not at me.

‘You’re a brave man,’ I said.

Outside the Corporal was sitting on a large piece of rubble. Between his knees the letter E and the letter C were carved in the fragment. He stood up as I came out.

‘Alright, sir?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Gave him something to sleep.’

‘Sleep?’ he said. ‘That will be right. I hope he doesn’t cry all night.’

‘This isn’t a pleasant job.’

‘No kidding. And to think I volunteered. At least I can go when the party arrives.’

We both stood and thought about that for a moment.

‘I’m afraid I don’t have that option,’ I said.

‘Does it hurt much, do you think?’

‘Bullet straight to the heart? Not much. The shock helps.’

‘I caught one right here, back at Hammel.’ He tapped his upper thigh. ‘Hurt like fuck, but only after I was back at casualty clearing. Only hurt after the docs got hold of me.’ He laughed. I laughed as well. But quietly. I didn’t want the prisoner to hear.

‘Shock’s a wonderful thing, preserves us from much.’ I turned back to the door for a moment. ‘It’s more the thought of it.’

We were both quiet then.

‘I’ll leave you to it, Corporal.’ I saluted. I considered his long night outside the door. What he might find if he was diligent in his checks. But unless the prisoners called for help, wanted some human contact no matter how brusque and perfunctory, I was confident that he would only enter that horrible space when the light had fully returned.

‘I shall see you in the morning, sir.’ He casually touched the rim of his helmet.

‘Indeed,’ I said. I almost added, ‘If we’re spared.’

I walked down towards the main road. It was invisible from the school. They had built it in a prime position with long view over the fields – a fine landmark, the pinnacle of the community. Which is why it had been destroyed.

I did not have long to wait for a lift. One of the men in the cab of the truck got out to give me a proper seat up front.

‘Busy night, sir?’ Asked the driver.

‘Seeing to a condemned man,’ I said.

‘Poor devil,’ he said, searching around with for a gear with the long lever. ‘Horrible way to go, better have it all sudden, I think. Still, they deserve it. We’d all run if we stopped to think. Just as well we don’t.’

As the truck rose up a long slow incline, I looked out through the driver’s window and got a brief glimpse of the straggle of ruins at the top of the hill. The Corporal and his lonely guard duty, and the man at the card table with the adrenalin surging in his blood, about to overrun his heart long before morning.

I had to concentrate now. There was no room for errors of judgement. Or lack of resolve. In the corridor I looked for a suitable nurse. Two were coming down the main corridor towards me. Their shadows advanced towards me. I recognised one as the nurse who had assisted Sneddon last time. They stopped when I stopped.

‘Nurse...?’ I said.

‘Sinclair,’ she said.

‘Yes, indeed. We met on Doctor Sneddon’s research project.’

She said nothing. Waited for me to go on.

‘I wonder if you could find Assistant Matron Russell and ask her to find Mrs Raymond, our new patient, and send her to the consultation room?’ I had my hand in my jacket pocket. Lotte’s glove.

‘Now?’ she hesitated. ‘Sir?’

‘Yes, Nurse. Now. It is urgent.’

She said something I didn’t catch to her companion and turned on her heel and walked off. Her companion looked at me without expression and strode on past me. From these tiny moments the threat of anarchy begins to build. But it would not be my problem now.

I walked on. Shuffling patients, striding nurses. The smell that was both clean and filthy at the same time. I had time. I deliberately took a route that went by the treatment room. The door was open. As I drew level, I glanced in. No sign of Sneddon yet. Two nurses were bustling. One at a trolley, setting out a tray and sorting through a collection of bottles. All stage props for Sneddon. The other was passing long webbing belts under the mattress on the bed, she threaded them round the iron frame. A rubber sheet was folded over the end of the bed. I was too far away to pick up the inner-tube smell of the sheet.

I must have made a sound, or she sensed my eyes on her as she tucked and reached.

‘If Doctor Sneddon appears,’ I said, ‘tell him I will be back shortly.’

Lotte was already in the room when I got there. It was a bright morning, but that only served to enhance the gloom in here. I could see the cobwebs in the corners, the yellowing paint that had once been a neutral white. The promise of sunshine outdoors chilled the closed air. She had her back to me, her narrow shoulders poised as if to take a step forward, but her hair looked dishevelled now rather than wild and untamed and her head was down. She was merely standing in the light, not attempting to see out from the high window.

‘Lotte.’ It felt bittersweet to use her name, at this moment.

She turned and I saw the same look in her eye as I had seen in the eye of the boy in the ruined school. Her face was white, blank. But her eyes – pupils wide and widening as she turned back into the dusky room – showed abject terror.

‘Sit,’ I said. ‘Please.’ I pulled out the chair. She slumped into it. I nearly brought the other chair round beside her, but I diligently took up my position opposite her across the table.

‘What is happening?’

‘Please don’t worry,’ I said. ‘All will be well.’

‘No. What is going on?’ She passed a hand through her glorious hair, even here it shimmered under the bare bulb. ‘Two different nurses came for me. In the day room. One to take me to Dr Sneddon, the other to take me here.’ She stared straight at me, there was no genteel politeness about her now.

‘Everything is going to be all right.’ And I did hope it wasn’t one of my lies.

‘They argued. The nurses. One said – Doctor Sneddon is the Superintendent so I should go with her. The other one – she said, Doctor Fergusson told me it was extremely urgent.’

‘How did it resolve?’

‘One said she’d report the other directly to Doctor Sneddon and went away. The other one brought me here.’ She had been saved by Nurse Sinclair, by her willingness to get into trouble. She had been there in the treatment room before, had borne witness.

Lotte wasn’t going to be distracted by my questions:

‘Is this the experiment? Is this it?’

‘Yes.’

Her eyes grew enormous. I reached across the table and took both of her hands. She wrestled, but I hung on. Her boots kicked at me under the table. But I held on, I held her.

‘Lotte. Listen.’ She tried to stand to kick over the chair. It shot backwards and she went on to her knees. She stood and to keep my grip on her hands I had to stand too. We grappled over the table, both of us breathing as if we were making love or fighting to the death. With huge effort we reached an impasse, rigid in our determination.

‘Get me home. Get me home.’ She said it over and over. Between breaths, through breaths.

‘I will. But you must trust me,’ I said.

Finally, she stopped pulling away. I kept my hands on her wrists and guided her back to the chair.

‘Help me help you,’ I said. Her eyes were still wide. In each deep black pupil, I saw a dark looming shape against the glare of the window.

‘How? I have no one to help me here.’

‘I will get you home.’ And I meant it. My past was foolishness. I had stepped over a divide with Hazel, I had compromised the things I loved; my family, my career. I had placed myself at the mercy of Sneddon by letting my emotions run free. My imagination had led me into an iron trap. I was not going to make that mistake again. I would deliver Lotte to her family.

‘Home,’ I said, ‘and we will continue your treatment in your own environment.’ At that moment I believed this with absolute certainty. I would leave this place and all the others like it and establish myself in private practice. I would start with Lotte. As a patient. I would get to the bottom of her fixation with her cousin. Surely the source of her trouble.

‘How? How?’

‘First, you must allow the nurse to restrain you.’

‘No.’ She said this quietly, but with absolute conviction. ‘No.’

‘It is the only way. I cannot just tell Sneddon to halt his experiment. But I can demonstrate to him that you are too unwell to participate.’

She looked at me as if I had proposed an amputation without anaesthetic. She shook her head. Her black curls swept across her face like a dark cloud.

‘This will take only half an hour, I will give you something, after a period of excitement you will become unconscious.’ I said.

‘Is it dangerous?’

‘The excitement it causes will make you seem ineligible to be a subject of the experiment. When you slip into unconsciousness, I can arrange for you to be taken to the Infirmary in town. The hospital here is a glorified first-aid post.’

‘And then I will be brought back here again.’

‘No, you won’t be of interest to him then. And he won’t pursue you there anyway. Not where there are other doctors, where he has no authority.’

I brought my chair round now, round to her side of the table. I sat down and felt in my pocket. I took out her gloves.

‘Here,’ I said, ‘Here are your gloves. Your housekeeper brought them.’

‘Grace? She was here?’

‘Yes. She is concerned.’

‘No one told me.’

‘Your husband, your family. They’re all concerned.’

Her eyes were wet, but I had never seen her cry. She took the gloves, bundled them into a tiny ball in the palm of her left hand. I gripped her forearms.

‘I have no choice, do I?’

‘Please trust me,’ I said. I knew how empty these words sounded.

‘Why the restraint?’

‘For your safety.’ She almost smiled at that. ‘Honestly, and so Sneddon won’t suspect anything amiss.’ I said. ‘You will only experience some excitement, mild...’

‘Hysteria?’ she said. ‘That’s what my doctor told me I had. When we talked about my insomnia.’

‘Sneddon cannot proceed if you are having an episode. Not because of any great outbreak of kindness, but because it would invalidate his results.’

‘Why can’t you take me home now?’

‘Because,’ I said, and as I spoke I realised that there was no going back, that my time in these places really was over. ‘I don’t have the seniority for that. Doctor Sneddon has power to pursue you even if I took you away. No matter how far. But if he sees that you can’t contribute to his work then he will leave you alone.’ I could still see my face reflected in her eyes, like a pale shadow. ‘Besides, you will be in a safe, public, place at the Infirmary. And then, after, I will help you to get better. That is my job.’ I let her arms go. Her pulse, naturally, was racing.

She looked over at the bars on the window, up at the electric bulbs overhead. Finally, she looked back at me.

‘Please get me home.’

I reached into my other pocket. I took out a sheathed, wrapped and prepared syringe. When I looked at the clear liquid in the syringe, I had a brief moment of hesitation. Professor Deacon used to say that these moments, the pause before administering a drug, before breaking the skin with the knife, were the moments that made a good physician. If you did not hesitate, if you hadn’t contemplated the violence you were about to unleash upon an innocent, trusting civilian, then you didn’t deserve to take the oath.

I could see her gloves balled, still, in her hand.

‘Best put your gloves in your apron pocket. Keep them safe. You will need them when you are at home.’ I tapped the air out of the syringe. It was a tiny proportion of the dose I gave to the men in those sordid cells in France. I would have never embarked on this course of action had I not had that experience of being God already. In a funny way, all that seemed to have led directly to this moment.

I asked her for her left arm. It was smooth and white. For a second, I imagined what it might feel like under my lips, but no, no more of that. I found a vein right in the crook of her arm, where I knew from long experience a puncture would be less visible and if it bruised, then that was a consequence of the restraint.

‘You are content for me to do this?’

She looked at me. There was a yearning there, but not for me. ‘Yes,’ she said.

Her eyes narrowed as I broke the skin, but she held my gaze as I pushed the liquid into her body. I had never felt as close to her as at that moment.

‘You will be safe now,’ I whispered.

In order to calm my mind, I went back to my office, sat at my desk and made notes in the margin of the Italian paper. I tried hard to keep my watch in my pocket. As I flicked through the plausible nonsense of the tables in front of me, the tiny numbers in precise columns, the claims for variations of doses, my thoughts slipped to the progress my own drug would be making through the delicate structures of Lotte’s vascular and nervous systems.

Nurse Clark pushed the door open without knocking.

‘Doctorr Sneddon asks that you come right away to the treatment room.’ She had clearly been hurrying. Her voice a little too loud for my small room. I was expecting the call from Sneddon, and I wondered what level of rage he had reached. I glanced down at the paper from the Italians – ‘we can therefore conclude with some confidence...’

‘Please tell Doctor Sneddon that I have not forgotten about his activity this morning and will join him when I am ready.’

I looked up. Nurse Clark’s face was flushed, and her eyes were wide, there remained nothing of her pert manner.

‘No, Doctorr Fergusson.’ She had taken a step into the room. Her hands were held together in front of the crisp white of her uniform apron. They were clasped together tightly, but I could still see the tremor. ‘Please, come quickly.’

I followed her out into the corridor. This was unusual. A doctor trailing a nurse, especially a junior nurse. We had covered three corridors and two flights of stairs before I realized I hadn’t put my jacket on. Let alone my coat. I could have put a stop to this picture of panic with a sharp word to Nurse Clark and a return to my office to collect my proper clothes and my composure. But the clip of Clark’s shoes on the parquet drove me on in my shirt sleeves, with groups of nurses and auxiliaries staring at our backs as we swept by. Nearing the treatment room, I forced myself to walk more slowly, to control my breathing. Nurse Clark stopped abruptly at the door to let me enter first.

Inside, white backs were arranged around the bed. No one turned. Sneddon was bent over, his shoulders pumping rhythmically. The two nurses were alive with undirected energy,

one was wringing a cloth noisily into a dish, the other was holding a stethoscope to Lotte's chest, moving the diaphragm rapidly around the skin.

'What did you give her, Doctor Fergusson?' Sneddon spoke through his teeth. He was bearing down on Lotte with both arms. The violence of his attempts had turned his face red.

'What did *you* give her, Doctor Sneddon?' The only, terrible, sounds were Sneddon's tortured breathing and the clatter as Nurse Clarke searched for something pointless in the equipment trolley.

In the middle of all this, Lotte was still as marble. Sneddon pounded between her small breasts, but her pale face was at rest, eyes closed. Her calm seemed to settle me. I took her cool hand. I was sharply conscious of time. Not in the conventional sense that it stood still or accelerated at moments of stress, or any of that nonsense. Suddenly and absolutely, I sensed the iron resolve of time having passed. There was no going back, no recovery. I squeezed Lotte's cool hand. Sneddon's pounding seemed to lose conviction. He looked up at me. All those years we had shared, from the anatomy hall until now, connections and repulsions, were in that stare. We saw our futures in separate but equally desolate ruin. The inquests, the hearings. This would not be an incident he could keep from the Board.

Sneddon turned to the nurse, but he had given up the resuscitation even before she shook her head. She bent over Lotte and buttoned the gown back up over her white chest.

'Total cardiac arrest, before we even started. Was that your *modus operandi* in France?' Sneddon whispered. His face was shiny with sweat.

'I'm not responsible for the patient,' I said. I still had her hand in mine. 'You are Superintendent.'

'You can let her go now, Dr Fergusson. You've done enough for her. Enough.' Then he was gone.

I stood holding her hand for some time. I was alone with Nurse Clark again. I could tell by the way she replaced the equipment in the trolley that she had made her judgement. I cared just enough about that to say: 'We can only do our best Nurse.'

'Shall I get help to get her ready for the mortuary?' There was no eye contact. She turned away and I looked down at Lotte.

'We take the oath; do no harm.' But Nurse Clark had gone by then. I tucked Lotte's hand back under the sheets and returned to my office. I didn't want to stay with her alone.

I set off back to my office with a sense of purpose. I wasn't sure yet where that purpose might take me, but I knew the time had come for decisive action. The corridors had that strange electricity about them that always followed an incident. I looked straight ahead.

Lotte had gone, slipped away from me before I could begin to help her – before I even knew her. As I walked, I tried to calibrate my loss against what it would be like in that house in Snowdon Place when the letter from Sneddon arrived. Or perhaps he would stretch to a telegram for a private patient. That awful hour would only be the start. She'd slipped out of time. Beyond her own children, she wouldn't exist in anyone's memory; there would only be stories. Possibly not even that. I'd seen families erase all details of a life ended in the asylum. The only traces might be the odd photograph, and Dr Cunninghame's entry in the Admissions Book. I could only imagine her family's grief. But I could feel my own sense of loss grow with every step.

When I got behind my desk, I took two sheets of headed notepaper from the top drawer. I addressed one to Dr Sneddon. I wrote the words – *I resign* – in the centre of the sheet and signed at the bottom. It was childish and pointless but satisfying. I took more time over the other letter, I addressed to the Chair of the Commissioners, advising a full investigation into Dr Sneddon's work, making clear my own complicity. I no longer cared to protect myself or my reputation. I dropped both envelopes in the out-tray – let the system I'd lived by for so long carry my wrath into the future.

All this was a way of not thinking about Lotte. And what I'd done. I was pushing away the reality of what had just happened. The guilt would only come later when the shock had worn off – the remorse of failure. A mistake I couldn't undo. But I knew who was to blame – Sneddon and his obsession. I picked up the ammonite from its place on top of my in-tray. I stood up and felt its heft in my hand, the weight of all that time. I looked down at the delicate form of the creature set in the sandstone. It had left more of a trace than most of us. I fitted my thumb into its whorl, for grip, and I ground the rock against the desk. My intention, set in stone.

I put on my white coat and pushed my fist and the stone down into the pocket. All the corridors in my life seemed to have led into this one. The noisy University hallways with Sneddon, as we made our way to the anatomy theatre, with all of this still ahead of us. The trenches of France, and the high walkways of Rainhill, Craiglochart; they all seemed endless at the time, but now they were converging towards a destination.

I passed Dr Mackenzie's room. The door was open and she had her head down over her work. If she saw me from the corner of her eye, she didn't react. And I passed on. Dr Cunninghame's door was firmly closed. He'd clearly learned it is wise to be absent in a crisis. I turned into Sneddon's offices. Mrs Nicholson tensed as if to get up, but she registered something in my face and remained in her chair.

Sneddon was standing with his back towards me, looking out into the garden. It was lit by the first proper Spring sun of the year.

‘Close the door, would you?’ He said. ‘You’d want to keep all this quiet, I’d imagine.’ He turned, hands in pockets. ‘And don’t worry I will.’ He paused and smiled. ‘For your sake, I mean.’

‘My sake?’

‘I don’t expect you to be grateful. But this work has to go on. It’s bigger than you. And me.’ He was leaning back against the window frame now. The brightness made it difficult for me to see his face.

‘You killed a patient.’ I said.

‘No.’ He said. ‘I think you’ll find it wasn’t me who killed her.’ He put his head to one side, as if talking to a child. ‘What were you thinking of? If you felt that strongly you could have simply persuaded me to sign her papers. Or take her away with you one evening.’

‘You’d have come after her – after us.’

‘Don’t flatter yourself, or her. Neither of you are that important.’ I was never going to be able to see the thing I really wanted – that one moment of uncertainty, fear even, flicker across his eyes. He took his watch out, glanced down then replaced it in his waistcoat pocket. ‘Did you just want to have one last go? One last reminder of what it felt like? We all yearn a bit for those days. The excitement.’ He was totally relaxed now, thumb in the waistcoat pocket. He was talking to me as if I was a patient. ‘The war affected all of us in different ways. We couldn’t have gone through all that, even as doctors, even with our training, and not be disturbed in some way. I’ve always been able to tell you home truths. Does anyone know you better? Even your wife?’ His face softened, there was something approaching warmth in his eyes. ‘Stay with me here John. Help me with this work and I will protect you. This will be a place where you can be safe.’

I tightened my fingers on the rock to remind myself it was still there, a tangible reality in the face of Sneddon’s fantasy. ‘Don’t try to twist the truth. My conduct here has been exemplary.’ I noticed the beginnings of a smirk at the corner of his mouth. ‘I took whatever risks necessary to save her from your cruelty.’

He took a step forward – a reaction finally. The moment of softness had gone ‘Cruel? Is it cruel to want to make people better? To send them home? Cured.’

‘You wouldn’t give me enough time.’

‘Time? What did you think the alternative was for her? Stay here while you talked around in circles looking for the root of her problems? Meanwhile she’d become so infected by the dayroom and the bars on the windows that she’d never be fit for the world again.’

‘I’ve had successes with patients. I could have treated her away from here.’ I was tired of this endless debate, which was more about who we were than what we believed.

‘Ah yes. Your attachments. The woman in Liverpool. Was this what you wanted again? For her to be dependent on you? That episode had such a fine outcome, didn’t it? Isn’t it better to search for a cure, no matter how difficult than get so close we forget our professional values? That’s the real cruelty.’

‘I don’t believe you care about cures. It’s about you, and getting your own way. It’s an obsession.’

‘We have great power.’ There was no edge to his voice now. ‘We are as the clergy once were. This place is where we make all the rules. We can exercise that power for good, or...’ He leant back against the window frame and the detail of his face disappeared again into the brightness. ‘Or we can use it for purposes of personal vanity.’ He gestured vaguely towards his desk, the neat piles of paper. ‘This is the way.’ It was a lecture now – perhaps this *was* something that be believed in, that he would transform our profession. ‘There’s no mystery. The brain is just meat and chemicals. And electricity. All your talking, all that childhood stuff, it’s important. It’s nice for the patient, interesting for us, I understand that, but it only gets you so far.’ He moved away from the window. I almost took a step forward, to close in on him, but there was still room enough between us.

‘I’ve written to the Commissioners. It’s in the system.’

Did he falter? Hardly. ‘Mrs Nicholson will find it. I like her to keep an eye on the mails. That will save your embarrassment. The Commissioners know all about the work. They’re on the side of progress. If I have to, I can find all sorts of delays, a sympathetic investigator if it comes to the bit. Don’t worry, I’ll square it.’

‘My resignation. It’s in the mail too.’

‘That I can intercept too. If you want me to. We don’t need to be hasty. It’s been a difficult day, God knows. You can stay. We can run trials of your interventions alongside mine. Comparative studies. Proper analysis. There is no knowing what we are on the brink of here. Someday there will be surgery, the ability to cut the trauma right out. Safely, quickly. Think on that. In the meantime, we have the chemicals. And you’re good with chemicals. Mostly.’ He half smiled.

‘You’ve forgotten they are people.’ I said.

‘And you think they’re your friends. When you’re not fucking them.’ The smile had gone.

That didn’t provoke me. The anger had gone by then. It all felt controlled and inevitable, like on the Front when a barrage began to find your range. There was nowhere to hide and the outcome was out of your hands.

Sneddon took a step away again, turned his back on me and looked out into the garden. ‘You’ve always lacked ambition, commitment to your profession. Imagination too. It takes more than a gold medal.’ He rocked back on his heels and his voice softened. I was a patient again. ‘You’re a kind person, John, I know that. You didn’t have to do what you did, today, or all those times in France. We all want to intervene, do something. Sometimes we need to show off what we can do. In the name of kindness.’ He paused. ‘Well, whatever her future might have been, no matter how difficult for her and for her family, we will never know.’ He made a small gesture towards the window, towards the sunlit garden, like flicking water off his fingers.

He and I were separated by the width of his office. It was no range at all. But I threw the rock at the back of his skull with all the force I had.

Did he sense the movement through the enclosed air? Was he expecting it? He turned his head and that was enough. The stone flew on, the glass shattered, jagged sheets fell back into the room and my ammonite embed itself in the neatly aerated lawn. My rage, my resentment, my righteousness went out through the window too. There was nothing left. Sneddon’s face looked calm, but his hands were out of his pockets and I saw them shake. ‘Mrs Nicholson.’ There was a tremble in his voice too. ‘Call Madden, tell him I need him up here immediately.’ She was in the doorway already but quickly stepped away when she saw me make towards the door. As I did there was a sudden expansion, like a benign airburst, and the room inflated with cold Spring air, smelling of earth. All the papers which had been on Sneddon’s desk rose over my head, flying and fluttering until they fell like shot doves on the carpet at my feet.

Chapter 11: Tuesday 18th April 1933.

They sat at the cardinal points. To the South, Aunt Margaret, with her back to the high window. Her mother, her back to the North and to the dark hall. Aunt Jessie by the range and the West. Lotte, with her chair pushed back almost against the dresser was East. A thick silence where there were normally so many words, clashing and sparking over the yellow oilcloth. Jessie picked up her teacup and the spoon ticked on the saucer. The best china used for every-day. Jessie's philosophy: 'No one wants to find unused best sets of china when you're dead. Use them up. If we can't afford to replace them then we will do without.'

Jessie moved the teaspoon before putting her cup back down. Margaret placed her hands in front of her on the oil cloth as if assessing the smoothness, the cleanliness of the surface. But Mary spoke first: 'Marguerite will get a cash settlement.'

Lotte looked up. 'Is that fair?'

'There is going to be little that's fair here.' Margaret's right index finger made small circles on the oilcloth.

'Fair isn't the point.' Jessie was pointing at Lotte with the teaspoon. 'It's what works that matters.'

'Sam wouldn't want to be part of something that was unfair.' Lotte could find no one to make eye contact with. They all looked down at the table. Margaret's face was shadowed by the blaze of light behind her, over the Forth and the hills and the distant sea.

'What is fair is that the business keeps going,' said Jessie, 'and you and Sam are the best qualified.'

'Nothing simpler than that.' Margaret looked up at Mary opposite and at Lotte. Her face had lost its alert intensity. There was only darkness now under her eyes. 'We do what's best for the business.'

Jessie tapped her teaspoon on the table. 'We didn't work this hard to let it all go.'

Lotte looked at her mother who was focussed on a patch of sun that had reflected off the dresser on to the table.

‘You are all part of the business,’ Lotte said. ‘Everyone needs to get some benefit from it.’

With their three heads bowed, her mother and the aunts could have been praying.

Jessie looked up: ‘We take what the business can afford. As we have always done. But you and Sam will be doing the work, so it’s right you get the bulk.’ There was a hard defiance in her look. ‘Those of us who can work, can get jobs.’ She pointed to the ceiling with her spoon. ‘Margaret has here to rent.’ Margaret raised her head for the first time, as if she had been waiting for her name to be called. Jessie went on. ‘I can get a job. With that and my share of the sale I’ll be fine.’

‘It is your responsibility. You have to take this on,’ said her mother. ‘You have to take it forward. You owe us that.’

There was a long silence. It hung in the sunny air. Her responsibility.

‘Nothing will get easier.’ Her mother’s eyes held Lotte’s. It was as if she was a child again – home late and unable to explain herself. ‘Nothing.’ Her mother glanced at Aunt Margaret. ‘It was fine in the war. Three women running a big shop like that.’ She looked again at Margaret. No response. But Jessie was leaning forward now and she pointed at Lotte with the spoon.

‘In fact, we did well out of that. A sympathetic ear for all those women, left alone and terrified.’ Jessie leaned back and smiled. ‘There’s more to selling than selling.’

‘She’s right,’ her mother said. ‘We got the best of it. Now, once the rebuilding’s over there will be less money to spend. And the men won’t like the competition.’

Jessie struck the table with her spoon. ‘So, you have to be smarter. Use Sam when necessary, when you need to send a man, when they won’t speak to you. But you’ll get the last laugh. If you can’t go through them, go around them’

‘Jessie’s right. You and Sam – you’ll be a good team.’ Her mother squeezed the back of Lotte’s hand for emphasis.

‘But Marguerite,’ said Lotte.

‘Has made her future, she’s made her choice and it’s not with someone who can run a business.’ Her mother took her hand properly now. Lotte thought of Robert: one arm round her sister, the other in his jacket pocket, hat at an angle copied from the films, cigarette burning. A great man with motors. ‘You can, and so can Sam. You can make it work.’

‘You could make anything work. You could do it on your own.’ Lotte tried to cut in, but her mother had more to say. ‘Don’t say anything. Fine I know that you could do it on

your own. But like I said, sometimes it's easier if there's two of you. I want you to make the shop work well you can, for yourself and for us.'

Lotte said: 'But where will you go?'

'I'm not going far. A wee bungalow in Causewayhead. They are building there soon, so they say. I'll be fine there.'

Jessie was conducting them with her teaspoon now. 'And I've got the Council of Women, and the rebuilding plan for all this.' Jessie pointed out the window. Her plans for the town were ambitious. 'Plenty to do. Don't you worry about us.'

'We've had enough.' Her mother squeezed her hand again and stood up. She walked behind Jessie, took the kettle off the gas just before it started to squeal. As she spoke, she emptied the teapot at the sink, refreshed the pot and the air with the sharp tang of new tea. 'We've had enough.' She turned and half perched on the edge of the stove. 'You've seen us work seven days a week. The odd day away. The odd trip to Glasgow to the wholesalers. Ten o'clock, most nights.'

'But we know what you mean, the real reason, don't skirt on my account.' Aunt Margaret spoke for the first time. Her mother walked behind her, put a hand on her shoulder and then reached over to put the pot in the centre of the oilcloth.

'It's true though. We have all had enough. Exhausted.' Her mother spoke the words like plain facts.

'I, we, don't have the heart for it now,' said Margaret, so quietly that the silence that followed did not seem so abrupt. The silence was the space left in their lives. The space that Jessie and Mary would fill with a new existence in a different house; that Lotte would try to fill with Sam and a family. But Margaret would carry the emptiness with her always. Lotte felt a wave of guilt, a fierce burning that made her heart race.

Aunt Margaret turned to her. Were her feelings that obvious? They had all worked so hard to keep Peter from harm.

'Don't fret,' she said. 'We've spoken of this over and over. There was nothing for you to do. Nothing for any of us to do. We did our best for so long.' She caught her breath. There were no tears left for this anymore. 'He was always so determined. If you couldn't help him, none of the rest of us could.' Margaret hunched her shoulders, composed herself.

'I'm sorry,' said Lotte.

'I know,' said Margaret. Her mother reached for her sister's hand again. 'We know. But we have to keep moving. Me, especially.'

'What will you do?' said Lotte.

‘I’m going to Canada. Our cousin Nellie. I’ll keep this place, rent it out. That will be enough over there. To start anyway.’

‘Canada,’ said Lotte.

‘Keep the name.’ Margaret augured her finger into the table. ‘Keep the name over the door that’s all I ask. We have built something. It wasn’t easy. But people trust us. That is something you can’t buy. Don’t throw that way.’

‘Amen,’ said Jessie. ‘J. M and M. Don’t lose that.’

They sat there, the three sisters, the aunts, Jessie, Mary and Margaret, high up above the twists of the river, in the silence of the kitchen and the silence of Peter’s empty room, his unfinished clays, his drawings, they sat and Lotte imagined all the years of their struggle play like a newsreel; the money saved, the money borrowed and paid with interest, the thieves chased down the hill, the women comforted when they could no longer pay, the customers with the scarves hiding broken lips, the women who stood weeping over the counter, the War Office letter tucked in their apron, the chancers who never paid, and paupers who paid with all they had. She thought of the lives they’d built against the odds. And while they had done all this, the entire world had convulsed in war and depression until finally the pain and the fire had belatedly licked all the way up their own stairwell. And as these thoughts filled the silent room with silence, they slowly reached for each other’s hands, the aunts and Lotte, until the compass points were joined.

The locksmith had been there forever. A tiny frontage, just a door and a narrow window. Barely enough face to the street to fit the name – *Borrowman, Locksmith*. As Lotte entered, the door caught on the boards of the floor, the scrape enough to alert Mr Borrowman, who limped out of the dark at the rear of the shop. All through her childhood Lotte had been keen to run messages here. The magic wall of a thousand key blanks, from floor to ceiling, behind the counter, tinkling faintly in the draught from the door. Silver and gold, ranged by size from the smallest at the top left to the foot-long monsters at the bottom right, proof that the chaos of the world could be put into order.

‘Yes?’ said Mr Borrowman. The accent was eastern, exotic. No one knew about his background, so they had to make it up. In the community imagination he had been everything, from a white slave trader to a political refugee. What they did know for sure was that he was one of the first to volunteer in 1914. And one of the first to come back. Against

the glittering wall of keys, he appeared an asymmetrical figure. His right side – a man in late middle age, smart, dark eyes, dark skin, alert. His left side – immobile, glass eye, a face stretched out of place and then imprecisely pushed back, the pinned empty sleeve.

Lotte handed him the two keys.

‘One copy of each?’

‘Please.’ She watched as he assessed the two keys, one after the other, holding each one up to his right eye, feeling along the teeth, selecting a blank. And then the remarkable manipulation of the vice, the tools flashing, all with one hand. ‘He’ll never move to a bigger shop,’ her mother said, ‘just him on his own, taking a few pennies a day.’ Yet he was a vital part of the street. So many kicked doors, lost keys.

Why had he signed up so quickly? They said he hated the Germans. Or the Turks or the Bulgars. There was revenge for something or other. People claimed to have asked him outright what had happened to his arm, his left side.

‘It was lost,’ he would say with a crooked smile. He seemed to have no life beyond his encounters with his customers. When he came back, broken, and reopened the shop, his windows were shattered twice. There was no rage or complaint. Sympathy was accepted but there was no more discussion. As if he knew those who sympathised were as likely to have thrown the stone.

He finished the keys and held them out to her, presented between his first, second and third fingers. In the poor light of the tiny shop the brass glinted like religious relics, something precious, passed from priest to believer and back again, taking on lustre from touching alone.

Lotte took the keys and paid.

‘Is that everything that I can do for you today?’

‘Yes,’ she said, uncertainly.

‘I wish you well.’ As she opened the door to go back into the street there was the rustle of keys again, like delicate bells.

Sleep only came in sporadic bursts, otherwise she would be wide awake, her mind racing through the darkness. Never longer than thirty minutes, but enough for her body and mind to keep functioning like a normal person. That is what Dr Campbell told her. ‘You’re a normal person, it is just that you see the world a little differently.’ He had looked away as if the next

bit had to be said but was a touch distasteful for King's Park. 'A little more intensely, that's all.'

She sat on her bed. It was warm enough now to lie there, fully clothed on top of the covers. Sometimes she went under her coat, especially on the nights when she didn't go out. It was a comfort. What pressed in on her now was the inescapable fact of harm done, of problems without resolve, of locked doors. She remembered the island, smelled the lake waters, the oily, faintly vegetable air from the stillness. She shivered, lying there on the counterpane as the apple trees brightened and she felt herself slip, the coldness of the water. When it reached her heart, it set free the familiar acceleration. The pounding hooves. 'Nothing,' said Dr Campbell, 'nothing to worry about. You are a young woman still. In your prime.'

She was, she had time, but it was running away from her faster than she could walk. Doors were closing. Locks turning over. The pools of shadow under the apple trees thinned as the sun rose. She heard all the noises of the house as everyone got up, the shoes on the stairs, the boys' voices, Sam's boom. Did she detect a hesitation, a subdued tone, no one shouting? Keeping quiet because she was ill, needed to sleep, needed peace, was part of how the house worked. In Castlehill there was none of that, the noises came from outside, through the walls, up the long stairwell, there was never quiet. Here, in mid-afternoon, if Grace took Sheila out, there was a deep silence that was more profound than any night walk. Town and country were alive, stirring always, they rustled, groaned, the friction of life. But this house could manufacture silence, building up the layers like wool.

The sounds dispersed out into the street as the door thumped shut. Sam left first, then the boys. She heard Grace and Sheila, the burble of their chatter as they went down to the kitchen. The silence crept up the stairs and into the bedroom. She would find a way. All of this she could work through.

'There's only one thing that cannot be sorted.' Peter sat on the other side of the bed. This was the widest bed in the house. Sam had chosen to sleep in the front room as he said it was noisiest, looking out over the street. The street with no traffic. But it was considerate of him. Kind.

'I can't sort this,' she said. The bed wobbled as Peter changed position. She didn't turn to look, but she was aware that he was sitting crooked, twisted in a way that wasn't physically possible. She didn't have to turn round further to know why.

'One thing. Trust me.'

'I've hurt people. It's hard to live with that.'

‘It’s hard to live. Full stop.’ He breathed in. She felt a faint rattle when he did so.

‘You had no choice in the vennel. And when you’re ill, you’re ill.’

‘We always have choices,’ she said.

‘He gave you no option. You know that.’

‘But I’ve hurt my family, Grace too. And I can’t explain it to any of them. I can’t talk to them.’

‘Does that matter. Talking’s overrated.’

‘I’ve just you.’

‘Not forever.’

‘No.’ She turned. He was perched on the bed, his shirt out of his trousers, shoeless, his head angled, turned straight down towards the floor, the bright red rug.

‘You can’t keep walking. And I can’t stick with you for ever,’ he said.

‘No.’

‘Yes.’ He shifted on the bed slowly, and she turned away again. Outside the apple trees were bright, a slight breeze had picked up and the tiny new petals shimmered.

‘I know I can keep going, but I need you to tell me that,’ she said.

‘No, you don’t. You don’t need to change the world to find what you are after. The shop, your music.’ There was a muffled noise from deep in the house, it could have been crying or laughter, it was too far away to tell. ‘The family. It is all there for you. There is only one thing you can do nothing about. I just hold you back. You don’t need me now.’

She turned round, but there was only the bed, the cover slightly crumpled at the corner, and a sudden pounding on the front door. She started as if coming awake. She heard voices, men’s voices, and Grace, the front door closing again. The cool of the brass doorknob in her palm. So smooth. Appreciate, appreciate what you have here, these little details. They will see you through. She looked down at her feet, the button up boots, they had seen her through those long nocturnal miles, they had taken her to her lunches, taken her on stage. Tight on her foot, the leather seemed an extension, part of her. They would carry her forward.

She stood in the doorway, the light falling from above on the stair, the bright white paint, the dark of the banister as it curved away out of sight. She heard Grace and Sheila.

‘Why?’ said Sheila. She couldn’t hear Grace’s reply as she walked below, downstairs to the kitchen.

‘Why?’

The voices were quiet. And then Grace, by herself, her footfall on the tiles of the hallway, she was tucked away out of sight, but Lotte saw her shadow pass, reflected on the

tiles. There was something in her pace, the click of her shoes, that told Lotte that the house was about to be picked up like a toy, rattled upside down, then thrown aside.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Grace. Boots on the mat, a scuffling, then the hard metallic clicking of metal on the tiles.

‘Thank you, madam.’ The voice was deep. ‘Your assistance will be much appreciated.’

Lotte went to the banister and without thinking leant over. She could see nothing but the back of Grace’s dress, the ties of her apron. Leaning further, she could see a leather bag on the hall table. So easy. So easy to lean further, for her feet to leave the ground.

She straightened herself and walked slowly down the stairs. As she turned the corner, Grace and three sets of male boots and legs came into view. Two policemen, huge against the light from the doorway, and in front, Dr Campbell. Why was he there? Did they expect her to faint?

As she reached the tiles, Grace turned, her head to one side:

‘Lotte.’ It felt like a question.

‘Mrs...’ Dr Campbell stepped forward.

Lotte put up her hand. ‘No. No,’ she said. ‘Please do not get involved, Doctor. These men,’ she nodded towards the uniformed men, ‘are who I need to speak to.’ The lighted widow, high in the vannel. The only light, but there must have been a face there and then a story told across a police station desk.

Grace took her by the arm: ‘Lotte. No. Don’t say anything. Listen. Doctor Campbell has papers you need to see. The police are not here for you. He is here for you.’

Lotte’s focus on one reality tumbled and changed, a new reality started to form. But it formed in her mind like a damaged kaleidoscope, the new pieces fell into position but had no pattern, no meaning.

‘You need to listen to me,’ said Dr Campbell. ‘These men are here because of the law. Don’t be afraid of them.’ He stepped forward again. Lotte stepped back.

‘Law? Which law?’

Grace was close now, her arm reached round: ‘It’s for your own good, Lotte.’

She shrugged the arm away: ‘No. What is this about?’

‘It can’t go on,’ said Grace. She stood now, hands in her apron pockets, four-square in front of Lotte, the doctor behind her, the policemen mute witnesses. ‘We can’t keep you a prisoner here.’

‘Prisoner?’ Lotte swung her arm, not at anyone, it was a gesture to take back her space, her hallway. Grace and the doctor moved back a pace. The two police, bareheaded, their helmets cradled in the crooks of their arms like babies, moved forward.

‘Please, Lotte.’ Grace’s eyes were wet.

‘Where is my husband? I’m not even going to talk to any of you until he is here.’ She swung round on Grace. ‘Phone Sam at the shop and tell him. Tell him to come now.’

No one moved. The silence welled up. Lotte took a half step towards Grace.

‘Go and call him now. I can’t be plainer.’ Again, the silence, but within it the muffled sound of a child crying. Lotte turned towards the kitchen stairs. ‘Where is my child? Grace, do as I tell you.’

As Lotte made to move, Grace gripped her forearm. ‘No,’ she said. Her hand bit deeper. Dr Campbell started forward. Grace warned him away with her eyes. ‘Sheila can’t see this. You must go. Go with Doctor Campbell. You can get better and then come back to us.’

Lotte began to struggle, a fierce, focused, determined fight to break free. She struck at Grace with her free hand. The doctor raised his hand to stop the policemen moving forward. The two women gripped each other, feet shuffling on the shiny black and white tiles.

‘Please,’ said Lotte. ‘Please.’

‘You must go. We cannot help you anymore. This walking, this wandering. Look where it has ended already.’ Lotte felt the strength waning from her arms, Grace was holding her up more than holding her back now. Her will was ebbing.

‘My husband.’

‘Sam knows,’ said Grace. ‘We’ve discussed it over and over.’

‘Discussed it?’ And Lotte’s rage burned again, her heart pounded and she leapt at Grace. Dr Campbell put his hands on each shoulder and Lotte kicked him hard. She connected with his shin, he hopped back to collapse on the hall chair. The two policemen stepped forward and held her securely, an arm each. Lotte opened her mouth and Grace put two fingers to her lips.

‘Shhh. Lotte. The child. Don’t make it worse. The only good here is that she and the boys see nothing. Or hear nothing.’

Lotte stood between the two men. The solid, embarrassed officers. They now had a tale to tell, when they got home. Those big houses up the King’s Park, they don’t lead such great lives.

Dr Campbell was still sitting, rubbing his leg: 'I'd thank you not to do that again,' he said. 'I have all the papers here. You are required to read them. And you are required to come with us.' He stood and crossed to the table, opened his bag. A sudden sharp waft of ether. He had an envelope in his hand. He took out a single folded sheet and smoothed it on the table. Lotte ignored him, ignored them all. She was staring down the hallway, towards the kitchen stairs.

'Let's get your coat,' said Grace, busying.

'A bag,' said Lotte. 'A bag, I will need a bag.'

Dr Campbell looked over his glasses, the sheet of paper reflected the light back up into his chins, into the round lenses: 'No, that won't be required. They will supply everything you need when you get there. It's a good place,' he said. 'It has a very fine reputation. It is not the place you think it is. There are good people there. Professionals. They will help you. Can you read this now?' He presented the sheet to Lotte with both hands. She tried to move her arm to take it. The officer relaxed his grip. She took the paper, but the words – Authorised, Courts, Sheriff – registered without meaning.

'You understand what this means?' Said the doctor.

She nodded. The house seemed to be drifting away from her already; the boys' bedrooms upstairs, Sam's room, her bedroom, the dining room, the living room and the piano, were suddenly less real. She smelt the outdoors, the street, on the police uniforms, the hard-wearing cloth. Grace was crying now. 'Please, Lotte, I can't leave Sheila down there any longer.'

There was pressure on Lotte's right arm, a distinct squeeze. It was Peter.

'Just go, Lotte. You have to know when you're beat. Just go. You'll be back.'

'Come with me.'

'No, I can't.'

The squeeze was insistent now. The two officers started to walk her towards the door.

'Her coat,' said Grace. She had her coat over her arm, the fur collar glistened. Dr Campbell opened the door. His car was there and another vehicle, not marked as police.

'Can you let her put her coat on?' Said Grace. 'It's cold outside.'

The officers looked at each other and at Dr Campbell who nodded. They let her arms free. Grace stepped behind her to help her into the coat. As she pulled it up on to her shoulders, she said: 'I will come for you.' She leaned over her shoulder and kissed Lotte awkwardly on her cheek.

‘I can’t do anything about the uniforms, I’m afraid,’ said Dr Campbell, ‘but I did ask them to use a car that would be a little more discreet.’ He took the paper from Lotte and handed it to one of the officers. ‘I would normally have asked you to come to my surgery and then discussed all this, in a civilised way. But there was too much urgency for that.’ He glanced past Lotte at Grace. ‘You are lucky to have so many people who care about you.’

They stood there for a moment, the five of them, silent but for the sound of a van in the street, the wind in the trees and Sheila’s far off sobs.

‘Please just walk down and get in the back of the car.’ The officer spoke for the first time. Lotte heard the voice of the Top of the Town. Her people. She put her hand on the railing, it felt cold and wet. She reached into her coat pockets. There were no gloves, or purse. She looked up over the roof of the mansion opposite, the church, to the castle where clouds moved behind the great bulk of the old stonework.

She walked alone down the steps and across the pavement. She didn’t look back. She opened a rear door of the car, it was stiff, and the hinge squeaked. She perched on the scuffed leather bench seat. The door was slammed shut and the two officers climbed into the front. She stared straight ahead as they started the car and rattled off down Snowden Place.

If she hadn’t gone back perhaps it would have been different. Things you don’t see exist in the memory in different way, the imagination does its work, for good or bad. She was on the great curve of Bow Street, the wind funnelling up between the walls, shop signs squeaking and the rattle of vans on the cobbles. The pull of the slope gave her a lightness, a sense of flight almost. Giving Peter the keys was a balanced risk, and she was the only one who could take that responsibility. Not his mother, or her mother or Jessie. And to have discussed it would have taken them where? Taken him where? To the Asylum? It was a quandary not amenable to the aunts’ usual cunning and craft, the only thing that could not be solved around the kitchen table. In the bright afternoon light, she felt the exhilaration of decision. The wind caught at her coat, she nodded to neighbours, customers, at the turn of the street she saw the shop, the verticality of it, the way it stood at the corner of two hills, built on a double slope, as if it could slide in two directions at once, the delightful precariousness of it.

She heard the voice behind her. It had an edge, for a moment she hoped that it was an angry customer, a split seam, a colour run at the first washing. But there was also something about the restrained, polite urgency which triggered a coldness in her heart that worked its

way to her fingertips. The urge was to keep walking, down the hill faster and faster, to keep going.

Mrs Miller, widowed, and then her son lost from a minesweeper somewhere in the vastness of the North Sea. Her headsquare was tightly tied under her chin, like a bandage. She came close to Lotte; on the slope she was almost eye to eye.

‘Lassie, just come with me.’

Lotte nodded. She couldn’t find a word that would do. She took a glance over her shoulder, felt her collar against her face, the touch of the ordinary.

‘Come,’ said Mrs Miller. She almost took Lotte’s sleeve. But not quite. It wasn’t what you did here. The fuss was worse than the deed. ‘Come, before people gather.’

They went up the hill together. Neither spoke. What was there to say? Mrs Miller was fast on her feet, the drama of the moment gave her energy.

When they got to the dark mouth of the close a man Lotte did not recognise was blocking the way. He nodded at Mrs Miller:

‘Davie’s gone for the police. I’ve tried to keep people out.’

But there were three women on the first flight of the stairs – Mrs Connolly, Mrs Flett and Mrs Stevenson – who turned to catch her son as he ran down, turned him, and hustled him back up the stair. No one said a word. Mrs Miller looked directly at Lotte. She took her arm, her hand felt hard, unnegotiable. Mrs Miller was an expert in matters of the incontestable.

He was on his side, back to the light of the doorway, as if he might be about to push himself up onto his knees. But his head was in a position that wasn’t right even for such an awkward pose, and it had changed shape.

‘I’m a proper modernist portrait now.’ She heard his voice whispering among the stone and ironwork. She pulled her coat open to kneel behind him. She put a hand down to his face. It was uncovered. She felt the tangles of scar tissue, the spirals and ridges. Her knees were wet through her skirt and stockings. She saw for the first time the pool of blackness in the gloom like a big round rug with him lying at the centre. Looking up she saw the stairs rising, narrowing all the way to the skylights above her floor, their floor, it seemed no distance. She saw the faces, leaning over, black against the light. A hand on her shoulder, Mrs Miller, then a commotion at the close entrance and she was in her mother’s arms.

‘I know,’ she said into Lotte’s curls. ‘I know. The keys. We all knew.’

She sat upright in the back seat like a duchess. The two uniformed men in front had decided it was best not to converse with her. Occasionally, the officer in the passenger seat would turn and ask if she was all right, but otherwise they chatted between themselves: a wife's cooking, shift patterns, the new Inspector, a daytrip to Burntisland and the unreliability of corner shopkeepers.

Their helmets secured in the footwell, she examined the backs of their heads, the military haircuts. And she watched the road ahead as they left the town towards St Ninians. Churches appeared beyond crossroads, pubs with frosted windows and men sitting on the windowsills, their long brown coats. One tapped his companion on the chest as he noticed the uniforms in the front seat. Then they both looked directly at her, the real novelty, the lady in a fine coat in the unmarked car.

Open countryside now. Away on her left, beyond the fields and telegraph wires, beyond the miniature wheel and tower of a distant mine, was the long rippling line of the Ochils. She knew the river was out there too, its widening, extravagant meanders, exaggerated in Peter's landscapes, the few precious pictures, survivors of his cull. He had taken the semi-realistic, elongated watercolours and had cut them into strips and stuck the pieces down on new canvases, randomly in the darkness of his head. 'This is my landscape now,' he had said, 'this is how I remember it.'

They went through Plean. One man on a corner, a shadow under his bunnet.

'What will they do when there's work again?' said the driver.

'Wasters,' said the other.

The austere gable of the parish church and the vivid green of the graveyard, the stones tilted and shadowed. Time was moving on. The sun was still shining between moments of sudden gloom, big dark clouds lined up to the west. On they went. A long field, a tractor, cottages so close to the road the car seemed to clip the stones. Under the sun the fields sparkled, bejewelled.

The driver looked at his watch.

'We'll be in overtime by the time we get back.'

'Not far now though.'

On one side of the road there were cottages, some new-built council houses. On the other an endless grey wall, big mature trees beyond, their trunks black. Lotte studied the wall, its length and its uniformity. For what seemed like miles, there was no variation, the large irregular boulders, the rough coping stones. How high was it? Well above head height, you

couldn't see over it. Was it climbable? 'Is it climbable, Peter?' she asked. But there was no reply. She was alone in the back seat. When she spoke the two men in the front looked quickly at each other. Then, as they slowed, the driver pushed up a lever and a bright yellow indicator flipped out. It blinked weakly.

The driver nodded. 'Battery's not been charging.'

The other officer turned and looked too. 'Just don't stop the engine. We'll be fine. I'll jump out, you stay in.'

They turned in between stone posts, a low gatehouse under the trees. Stretching ahead, a long drive, and at the end, a tall red building. Above there was a small patch of blue between towering clouds.

Chapter 12: Tuesday 14th November 1939**INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF MRS CHARLOTTE RAYMOND****Presented to the General Board of Control of Scotland.****14/11/39****Background**

Mrs Charlotte Raymond, a private patient at Stirling Asylum, died on 22nd of April 1933. The cause of death was heart failure due to an underlying long-term arrhythmic heart condition. She was admitted six days earlier after a period of deteriorating mental health. The fatality occurred before a full assessment of her mental condition could be made by physicians at the Asylum, but her doctor, Dr Campbell of Stirling, reported that she had given her family cause for great concern, neglecting her children, subject to occasional hysterical episodes and obsessive nocturnal walking. The latter behaviour placing her at great risk, her husband asked Dr Campbell to initiate a formal request for emergency admission to the Asylum. She was admitted at 2.00pm on 16th April 1933.

Context

Two points should be clarified at this stage of this report.

1. Considerable time has elapsed since the events under question took place. At the family's request, Dr Sneddon, Medical Superintendent at the time led an initial investigation. This report was not available to the present enquiry. A number of files were discarded after becoming severely water damaged in the winter of 1936. It is understood that this report confirmed the cause of death but did not explore the circumstances further.
2. The elapse of time has presented complexities in contacting potential contributors to the enquiry. The present international emergency has also made communications more difficult. However, the current crisis has also given this enquiry added impetus. The Asylum is presently being re-structured to meet an

anticipated need for residential accommodation for future casualties. Men suffering both physical and mental injuries will soon be our patient. In this circumstance it is imperative to clear outstanding questions and to focus on future demands.

Testimony

The enquiry sought evidence from:

Dr Sneddon, Medical Superintendent
 Dr Fergusson, Deputy Medical Superintendent
 Dr MacKenzie
 Dr Harris
 Dr Cunninghame
 Miss Brown
 Mr Alan Strang
 Mr Samuel Raymond
 Mrs Grace Semple

It is no reflection on the efforts of the staff involved that testimony, written or verbal, was only obtained from:

Dr Harris
 Dr Cunninghame
 Mr Strang
 Mr Raymond (letter appendix 1)

The circumstances of the other potential witnesses are as follows:

Dr Sneddon was approached in his position as Director of Mental Health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He is, as the Board will be aware, at the forefront of research in our profession involving the use of electric therapy for the most severely afflicted patients. His work there continues to reflect positively on Stirling Asylum where many of his research interests were formed. A note was received from his secretary that his schedule did not allow him to devote time to events of six years previously. Moreover, he had himself thoroughly investigated the events in question and did not consider that there was any warrant for an enquiry at this date. We ensured that the best wishes of the Board were passed to Dr Sneddon and we wished him continued success in his vital work.

After a period in private practice Dr Fergusson re-enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. We approached his commanding officer, who reported that Dr Fergusson had

considerable skills and experience. This had facilitated the unusual step of a medical officer of his age being assigned to an active service unit. He was currently with his unit and likely to be deployed in France. Again, we took the decision not to pursue a physician and an officer who is serving his country. We also wrote to his wife but received no reply.

We were keen to interview Mrs Grace Semple. We believed that she would have important information about the deceased patient's mental condition before arriving at the hospital. Dr Campbell's clinical notes show that it was she who had first approached him with concerns about Mrs Raymond's behaviour and had initiated meetings between Mr Raymond, Dr Campbell and herself. Our search was unsuccessful. Mr Raymond reported that she had been dismissed from his service shortly after the death. It is understood that she went back into service with a family in a larger rural property in England, but had subsequently taken up munitions work. We did not have the resources to follow this up.

Miss Brown, who volunteered with the Asylum at the time and had contact with the patient, is now the proprietor of an independent facility offering non-mainstream treatments which concentrate on the relationship between patients and the natural environment. Board members will be aware of recent attempts to investigate the efficacy of her programme of treatment. On that occasion Board Inspectors were physically assaulted by Miss Brown when an unscheduled visit to her facility was made. We did not expect or receive a reply to our request for information. Given these circumstances, we set no great store by the trustworthiness of Miss Brown's testimony and her absence is no loss to the enquiry.

Dr Harris, now in retirement, was interviewed. He indicated that there was some friction between Drs Sneddon and Fergusson. This, in his opinion was a natural, and healthy, difference of opinion around approaches to treatment, given added edge by the fact that the doctors had studied together and so there was some scope for personal and professional rivalry.

There is further evidence of friction between Drs Sneddon and Fergusson. It came from Mr Allan Strang, Asylum Farm Manager. He stated that his brother, a gamekeeper at the time, witnessed an altercation between the physicians during a shoot at his place of work. He told his brother that voices were raised, and he had been alarmed. Both men had been drinking and firearms were involved. We could not verify this as Mr Strang's brother lost his life in a shotgun accident two years ago. However, as a vital part of the Asylum community, we have no reason to doubt Mr Alan Strang's report.

Findings

1. We conclude that the death was a natural medical episode. The Asylum is designed to specifically treat mental health conditions. We are very proud of our reputation for careful and considerate care of our patients. We cannot be cut off from the rest of humanity and our patients suffer from the same range of ailments as the rest of the general population.
2. We place an emphasis on diagnosing possible physical health conditions during the patient's time with us. The nature of their mental health conditions can make this a difficult task. But we are especially vigilant concerning the admission examinations and we carefully consider any medical notes which accompany new arrivals.
3. Dr Campbell's notes accompanying this patient concerned themselves solely with matters of mental health. There was no mention of underlying heart conditions. A history of heart palpitations and weakness was verified by Dr Campbell in a letter to the Asylum following the death.
4. Nevertheless, we would expect even a brief admission examination to note the presence of arrhythmic cardiomyopathy. The examination was carried out by Dr Gerald Cunninghame. Although the most junior doctor in the Asylum at the time, it is poor professional practice to fail to note a serious condition. We try to provide a stress-free environment for our patients. This is not always possible, and a heart condition of this type is potentially dangerous in our community. Drug therapies would have been available.
5. Accordingly, we found that Dr Cunninghame did not meet the high clinical standards we set in the Asylum and he was dismissed from our employment on 31st October 1939.
6. Dr Cunninghame subsequently joined the Royal Air Force and is currently undergoing basic flight training.

Action

1. We ask the Board to note the findings of the enquiry.
2. We ask the Board to resist any attempt to re-open the matter. It is not good use of resources in a time of national crisis.
3. Improved admission examination procedures have been in place for some time to ensure that there is no repetition of this oversight.

Conclusion and Notes

The enquiry has been properly carried out, findings established and action taken.

Dr MacKenzie, although a member or staff at the Asylum at the time, and known to all those involved, had no personal contact with the case, and as author of the enquiry report, could not, in any event, give evidence.

Thanks are due to Senior Nurse Sinclair who compiled most of the evidence for this enquiry. As a footnote it should be recorded that highly trained professional nurses now make a substantial contribution to the running of medical aspects of the Asylum. Their work is invaluable.

Signed

Dr Agnes MacKenzie. MD RMPA

Medical Superintendent.

Appendix 1:

5 Snowdon Place
Stirling
5 May 1938

Dear Chairman

Five years have passed since my wife Charlotte died while under your care. Five bitter, hard years for the entire family. For her children especially, there has been no light in their lives since she went through your gates. While Charlotte's mother has been dead for over ten years, her sister Marguerite has also lived under the pressure of the sudden loss and has faced her own difficulties as a result.

I was persuaded that the only way for her to overcome her troubles was by entrusting her to the treatments available in Stirling Asylum. I overcame my huge anxieties and believed that modern medicine had challenged the dark perceptions we all hold of these places. Your records will show that I have suggested an enquiry several times and have been provided with a range of reasons why this was not possible. My dealings with the Medical Superintendent at the time were difficult and unproductive. Furthermore, I have had promises, but no assurances, from the current Medical Superintendent that a proper investigation will be initiated.

While the current situation is peaceful, I fear that the international situation will deteriorate and the matter will become lost in great events.

My children grow older. My oldest son has recently won a scholarship to study music, and my daughter, though still very young, is something of a musical prodigy. I cannot stress enough how they have suffered from the loss of their mother.

I am not without means. I have number of retail and residential properties. My instinct has been to put the matter in the hands of lawyers. But Charlotte's aunt, a member of various local committees, has persuaded me that a final appeal to yourself, as Chair of the National Board, should be attempted before legal redress.

I trust I will not be disappointed again.

Yours faithfully

Samuel Raymond Esq.

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