THE *SUNDAY TIMES* AND *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

KALIANE BRADLEY

'The hit of the year'
GUARDIAN

The Ministry of Time

'Clever, witty and thought-provoking'
KATE MOSSE

Advance praise for *The Ministry of Time*

A 2024 literary highlight for the *Sunday Times*, BBC, *Grazia*, *Dazed*, *Sunday Express*, *GQ*, *i-D*, *Stylist*, *Bookseller* and *Literary Friction*

'With a thoroughly offbeat love story at its heart and subtly interwoven musings on the UK's imperial legacy, it's fast moving and riotously entertaining, a genre-busting blend of wit and wonder'
Observer, 10 best new novelists for 2024

'A thrilling time-travelling romance'
Sunday Times, 40 best books of 2024

'A delightfully audacious screwball comedy'
i-D, Fiction to be excited for in 2024

'One of the year's most exciting debuts'
BBC.com, 45 of 2024's most anticipated books

'Bradley's compelling debut novel asks the important question: What if the sexiest guy in the history book moved into your flat? . . . Don't start it right before bed unless you want to see the sun come up'
GQ, The best books of 2024

'An assured and fun debut . . . one of our books of the year'
Stylist, Unmissable books for 2024

'Wildly original . . . How horny can a speculative fiction novel be? Bradley's debut is at once an outrageously fun comedy while also providing keen analyses on the nature of colonialism, power and bureaucracy' *Dazed*, 10 exciting books to look out for in 2024

'Within the first couple of pages I was gripped. The novel is clever, witty and thought-provoking, asking the question of what any of us might do if we could engage live with people from the past. Kaliane Bradley is a wonderful writer and I can't wait to read what she does next' Kate Mosse, author of *The Ghost Ship*

'Holy smokes this novel is an absolute cut above! Kaliane Bradley leaps into a storytelling league of her own. This book is a deadly serious speculative fiction but it is also one of the funniest books I've read in years. It is exciting, surprising, intellectually provocative, weird, radical, tender and moving. I missed it when I was away from it. I will hurry to re-read it. Make room on your bookshelves for a new classic' Max Porter, author of *Shy*

'An outrageously brilliant debut with a premise that just gets more and more original. *The Ministry of Time* pulls off the neatest trick of speculative fiction, first estranging us from our own era, and then facilitating our immigration back into the present; but it is also a love story, exploratory, sensitive, charged with possibility, and powered by desire, reminding us that history is synonymous with human beings, and that we all have the ability to change it'
Eleanor Catton, author of *Birnam Wood*

'Smart and affecting, full of ideas plus that slow-burning love story, it's a wonderful debut' David Nicholls, author of *You Are Here*

'As electric, charming, whimsical and strange as its ripped-from-history cast. (Extremely.) I loved every second I spent wrapped up in Kaliane Bradley's stunning prose, the moments that made me laugh and those that made my heart ache. This is a book that surprises as much as it delights, and I'm already impatiently waiting for whatever Bradley concocts next' Emily Henry, author of *Happy Place*

'I haven't enjoyed a book this much for a very long time. A wonderful, joyful, intelligent and hilarious read. I underlined as I read and felt a strong sadness at finishing because I could not read it for the first time again' Daisy Johnson, author of *Everything Under*

'Funny, moving, original, intelligent, beautifully written and with a thunderous plot' Nathan Filer, author of *The Shock of the Fall*

'I gobbled this up in twenty-four hours: I simply could not stop reading it. Kaliane Bradley writes with the maximalist confidence of P. G. Wodehouse, but also with the page-turning pining of Sally Rooney. It's thought-provoking and horribly clever – but it also made me laugh out loud. And it's got a cracking plot! I loved *The Ministry of Time* and I can't wait for everyone to read it so I can talk about it more' Alice Winn, author of *In Memoriam*

'A fantastic debut: conceptually brilliant, really funny, genuinely moving, written in the most exquisite language and with a wonderful articulation of the knotty complexities of a mixed-race heritage'
Mark Haddon, author of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

'Sly and illusionless in its use of history, lovely in its sentences, warm – no, hotter than that – in its characterisation, devastating in its denouement. A weird, kind, clever, heartsick little time bomb of a book' Francis Spufford, author of *Golden Hill*

'A feast of a novel – singular, alarming and (above all) incredibly sexy. An astonishingly assured debut, offering weird and unexpected delights on every page. I will be running towards whatever Kaliane Bradley writes next'
Julia Armfield, author of *Our Wives Under the Sea*

'What a stunning and remarkable wonder! What if time-travel were run by a bureaucracy? It would give us *The Ministry of Time* – a book that takes the history of colonialism, the British Empire, Cambodian genocide, and other terrible moments of history, and reminds us we are still living with the remnants of these troubled pasts. But also, it's filled to the brim with laugh-out-loud humour, and possibly the best description of a dingy pub I've ever read in my life. There's something for everyone – world history, side-splitting humour, lusty tension, brilliant prose, and characters to root for desperately' Vanessa Chan, author of *The Storm We Made*

'There aren't many books that are as funny as they are clever as they are compelling. *The Ministry of Time* is hugely enjoyable: ingeniously constructed, beautifully written, and unexpectedly sexy. It is the rarest of creations: a boldly entertaining page-tuner that is also deeply, thoughtfully engaged with our past, present and future. A weird and tender time-travel love story. A brilliantly original debut. Your next crush is a long-dead Arctic explorer'

Joanna Quinn, author of *The Whalebone Theatre*

'Unputdownable, endearing and mind-bending . . . what more could you want out of a contemporary novel? Kaliane Bradley is a timeless talent. Whip-smart, empathetic and totally original'

Sharlene Teo, author of *Ponti*

'Fantastically fun and deadly serious, *The Ministry of Time* is an ecstatic celebration of fiction in all its vehement, ungovernable, mutinous glory' Megha Majumdar, author of *A Burning*

'Sharp, sexy and utterly self-assured, this is the rarest jewel of them all: a book you can press into the hands of everyone you know, and guarantee it will grab them firmly by the lapels. A truly compulsive debut, packed with humour, heart and heat – we are lucky to exist in the same timeline as Kaliane Bradley'

Alice Slater, author of *Death of a Bookseller*

'My favourite debut novel in a very long time – sexy, sad, funny and clever. I read it in a in absolute rush'
Jenny Colgan, author of *Little Beach Street Bakery*

'With its ingenious concept and gripping plot, *The Ministry of Time* is the most fun you could possibly ever have while engaging so seriously with history and our place in it. Bradley has a gift for locating our common humanity in people's irreducible eccentricity. This is a book to read and re-read: you'll want to fall in love with these characters over and over again' Diana Reid, author of *Love & Virtue*

'Compelling, clever, sexy and heartbreaking, *The Ministry of Time* is one of those books where you reach the end and immediately start again because it's just too hard to let go. Every single page thoroughly delights' Georgia Summers, author of *City of Stardust*

'A rare book with very good bones: sharply funny and heart wrenching, a rollicking good time about love, power, politics and time-travel'
Sarvat Hasin, author of *The Giant Dark*

'*The Ministry of Time* gave me back the joy of reading. Heady, compulsive and heartbreaking, Kaliane Bradley deftly balances humour and magic with an interrogation of colonialism, nationalism, otherness and climate fear. Simultaneously wild, irreverent and state-of-the-nation, this novel asks us to consider the histories that have led us to the present moment, in order to salvage our uncertain future'
Jessica Andrews, author of *Milk Teeth*

Kaliane Bradley is a British-Cambodian writer and editor based in London. Her short stories have appeared in *Electric Literature*, *Catapult*, *Somesuch Stories* and *The Willowherb Review*, among others. She was the winner of the 2022 *Harper's Bazaar* Short Story Prize and the 2022 V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize. *The Ministry of Time* is her first novel.

THE MINISTRY OF TIME

KALIANE BRADLEY

Sceptre

First published in Great Britain in 2024 by Sceptre
An imprint of Hodder & Stoughton
An Hachette UK company

1

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Hardback ISBN 9781399726344
Trade Paperback ISBN 9781399726351
ebook ISBN 9781399726375

Typeset in Sabon MT by
Palimpsest Book Production Ltd, Falkirk, Stirlingshire

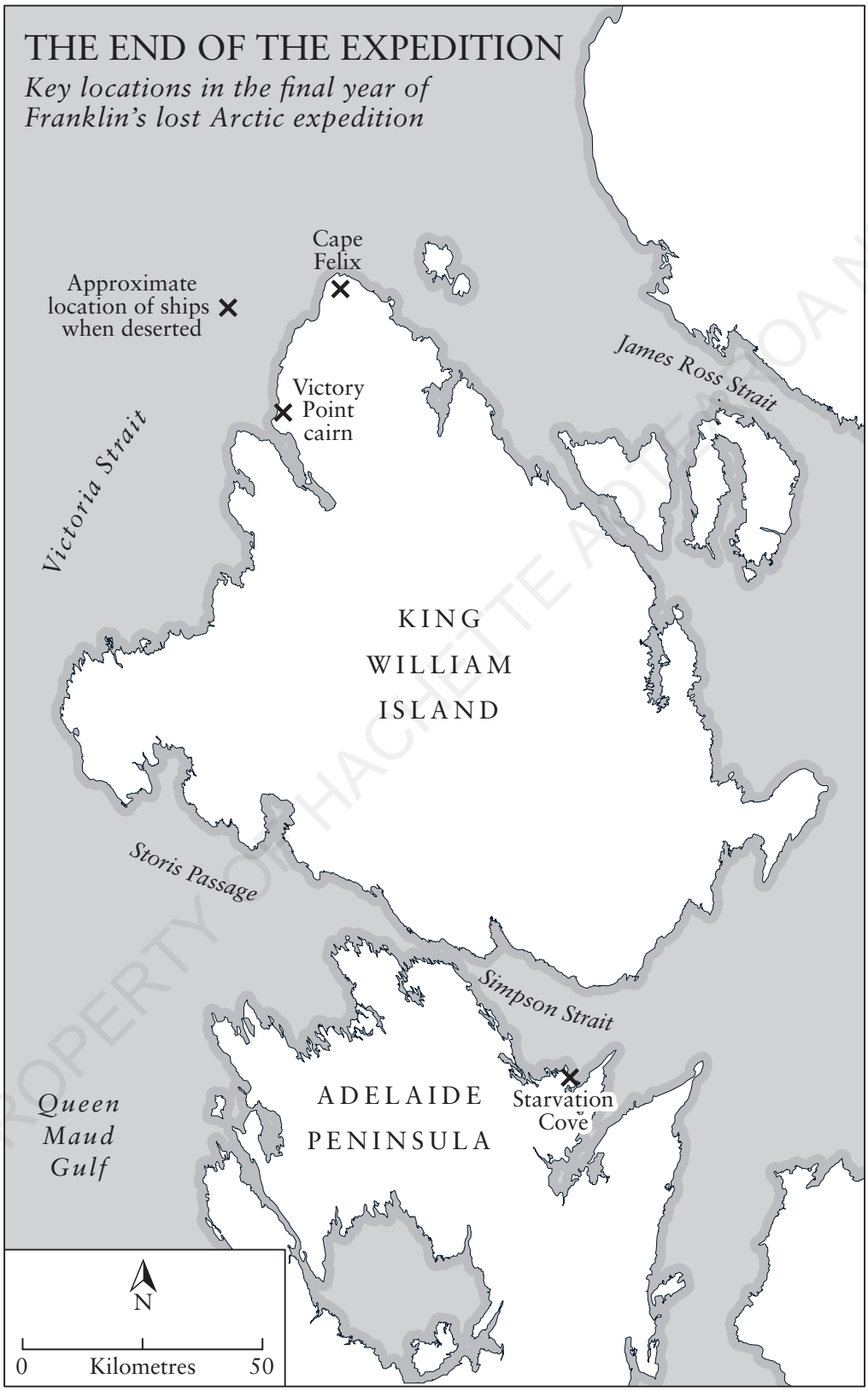
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Hodder & Stoughton policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Hodder & Stoughton Ltd
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

www.sceptrebooks.co.uk

for my parents



I

Perhaps he'll die this time.

He finds this doesn't worry him. Maybe because he's so cold he has a drunkard's grip on his mind. When thoughts come, they're translucent, free-swimming medusae. As the Arctic wind bites at his hands and feet, his thoughts slop against his skull. They'll be the last thing to freeze over.

He knows he is walking, though he can no longer feel it. The ice in front of him bounces and retreats, so he must be moving forward. He has a gun across his back, a bag across his front. Their weight is both meaningless and Sisyphean.

He is in a good mood. If his lips were not beyond sensation, he would whistle.

In the distance, he hears the boom of cannon fire. Three in a row, like a sneeze. The ship is signalling.

Chapter One

The interviewer said my name, which made my thoughts clip. I don't say my name, not even in my head. She'd said it correctly, which people generally don't.

'I'm Adela,' she said. She had an eye-patch and blonde hair the same colour and texture as hay. 'I'm the Vice-Secretary.'

'Of . . . ?'

'Have a seat.'

This was my sixth round of interviews. The job I was interviewing for was an internal posting. It had been marked 'Security Clearance Required' because it was gauche to use the Top Secret stamps on paperwork with salary bands. I'd never been cleared to this security level, hence why no one would tell me what the job was. As it paid almost triple my current salary, I was happy to taste ignorance. I'd had to produce squeaky-clean grades in first aid, Safeguarding Vulnerable People, and the Home Office's Life in the UK test to get this far. I knew that I would be working closely with a refugee or refugees of high interest status and particular needs, but I didn't know from whence they were fleeing. I'd assumed politically important defectors from Russia or China.

Adela, Vice-Secretary of God knows what, tucked a blonde strand behind her ear with an audible crunch.

‘Your mother was a refugee, wasn’t she?’ she said, which is a demented way to begin a job interview.

‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Cambodia,’ she said.

‘Yes, ma’am.’

I’d been asked this question a couple of times over the course of the interview process. Usually people asked it with an upward lilt, expecting me to correct them, because no one’s from Cambodia. You don’t *look* Cambodian, one early clown had said to me, then glowed like a pilot light because the interview was being recorded for staff monitoring and training purposes. He’d get a warning for that one. People say this to me a lot, and what they mean is: you look like one of the late-entering forms of white – Spanish maybe – and also like you’re not dragging a genocide around, which is good because that sort of thing makes people uncomfortable.

There was no genocide-adjacent follow-up. (Any family still there *understanding moue*? Do you ever visit *sympathetic smile*? Beautiful country *darkening with tears* when I visited *visible on lower lid* they were so friendly . . .) Adela just nodded. I wondered if she’d go for the rare fourth option and pronounce the country dirty.

‘She would never refer to herself as a refugee, or even a former refugee,’ I added. ‘It’s been quite weird to hear people say that.’

‘The people you will be working with are also unlikely to use the term. We prefer “expat”. In answer to your question, I’m the Vice-Secretary of Expatriation.’

‘And they are expats from . . . ?’

‘History.’

‘Sorry?’

Adela shrugged. ‘We have time-travel,’ she said, like

someone describing the coffee machine. 'Welcome to the Ministry.'

*

Anyone who has ever watched a film with time-travel, or read a book with time-travel, or dissociated on a delayed public transport vehicle considering the concept of time-travel, will know that the moment you start to think about the physics of it, you are in a crock of shit. How does it work? How *can* it work? I exist at the beginning and end of this account simultaneously, which is a kind of time-travel, and I'm here to tell you: don't worry about it. All you need to know is that in your near future, the British government developed the means to travel through time but had not yet experimented with doing it.

In order to avoid the chaos inherent in changing the course of history – if 'history' could be considered a cohesive and singular chronological narrative, another crock of shit – it was agreed that it would be necessary to extract people from historical warzones, natural disasters and epidemics. These expatriates to the twenty-first century would have died in their own timelines anyway. Removing them from the past ought not to impact the future.

No one had any idea what travelling through time might do to the human body. So the second reason that it was important to pick people who would have died in their own timelines is that they might well die in ours, like deep-sea fish brought up to the beach. Perhaps there were only so many epochs the human nervous system could stand. If they got the temporal equivalent of the bends and sluiced into grey-and-pink jelly in a Ministry laboratory, at least it wouldn't be, statistically speaking, murder.

Assuming that the 'expats' survived, that meant they would

be people, which is a complicating factor. When dealing with refugees, especially en masse, it's better not to think of them as people. It messes with the paperwork. Nevertheless, when the expats were considered from a human rights perspective, they fit the Home Office criteria for asylum seekers. It would be ethically sparse to assess nothing but the physiological effects of time-travel. To know whether they had truly adjusted to the future, the expats needed to live in it, monitored by a full-time companion, which was, it transpired, the job I'd successfully interviewed for. They called us bridges, I think because 'assistant' was below our pay grades.

Language has gone on a long walk from the nineteenth century. 'Sensible' used to mean 'sensitive'. 'Gay' used to mean 'jolly'. 'Lunatic asylum' and 'asylum seeker' both use the same basic meaning of 'asylum': an inviolable place of refuge and safety.

We were told we were bringing the expats to safety. We refused to see the blood and hair on the floor of the madhouse.

*

I was thrilled to get the job. I'd plateaued where I was, in the Languages department of the Ministry of Defence. I worked as a translator-consultant specialising in Southeast Asia, specifically Cambodia. I'd learned the languages I translated from at university. Despite my mother speaking Khmer to us at home, I hadn't retained it through my formative years. I came to my heritage as a foreigner.

I liked my Languages job well enough, but I'd wanted to become a field agent, and after failing the field exams twice I was at a bit of a loss for career trajectory. It wasn't what my parents had had in mind for me. When I was a very small child, my mother made her ambitions known. She wanted me to be

Prime Minister. As Prime Minister, I would 'do something' about British foreign policy and I would also take my parents to fancy governmental dinners. I would have a chauffeur. (My mother never learned to drive; the chauffeur was important.) Regrettably she also drilled the karmic repercussions of gossip and lying into me – the fourth Buddhist precept is unambiguous on this – and thus at the age of eight my political career was over before it began.

My younger sister was a far more skilled dissembler. I was dutiful with language and she was evasive, pugnacious with it. This is why I became a translator and she became a writer – or at least she tried to become a writer and became a copy-editor. I was paid considerably more than her and my parents understood what my job was, so I would say that karma worked in my favour. My sister would say something along the lines of: go fuck yourself. But I know she means it in a friendly way, probably.

*

Even on the very day we were to meet the expats, we were still arguing about the word 'expat'.

'If they're refugees,' said Simellia, one of the other bridges, 'then we should call them refugees. They're not moving to a summer cottage in Provence.'

'They will not necessarily think of *themselves* as refugees,' said Vice-Secretary Adela.

'Has anyone asked them what they think?'

'They see themselves as kidnap victims, mostly. Nineteen-sixteen thinks he's behind enemy lines. Sixteen-sixty-five thinks she's dead.'

'And they're being released to us *today*?'

'The Wellness team think their adjustment will be negatively

impacted if they're held on the wards any longer,' said Adela, dry as a filing system.

We – or rather, Simellia and Adela – were having this argument in one of the Ministry's interminable rooms: pebble-coloured with lights embedded in the ceiling, modular in a way that suggested opening a door would lead to another identical space, and then another, and then another. Rooms like this are designed to encourage bureaucracy.

This was supposed to be the final direct briefing of the five bridges: Simellia, Ralph, Ivan, Ed, and me. We'd all gone through a six-round interview process that put the metaphorical drill to our back teeth and bored. *Have you now, or ever, been convicted of or otherwise implicated in any activity that might undermine your security status?* Then nine months of preparation. The endless working groups and background checks. The construction of shell jobs in our old departments (Defence, Diplomatic, Home Office). Now we were here, in a room where the electricity was audible in the lightbulbs, about to make history.

'Don't you think,' said Simellia, 'that throwing them into the world when they think they're in the afterlife or on the Western Front might impede their adjustment? I ask both as a psychologist and a person with a normal level of empathy.'

Adela shrugged.

'It might. But this country has never accepted expatriates from history before. They might die of genetic mutations within the year.'

'Should we expect that?' I asked, alarmed.

'We don't know what to expect. That's why you have this job.'

*

The chamber the Ministry had prepared for the handover had an air of antique ceremony: wood panels, oil paintings, high ceiling. It had rather more éclat than the modular rooms. I think someone on the administration team with a sense of drama had arranged the move. In its style and in the particular way the windows flattened the sunlight, the room had probably remained unchanged since the nineteenth century. My handler, Quentin, was already there. He looked bilious, which is how excitement shows on some people.

Two agents led my expat through the door at the other end of the room before I'd adjusted to knowing he was coming.

He was pale, drawn. They'd clipped his hair so short that his curls were flattened. He turned his head to look around the room and I saw an imposing nose in profile, like a hothouse flower growing out of his face. It was strikingly attractive and strikingly large. He had a kind of resplendent excess of feature that made him look hyperreal.

He stood very straight and eyed my handler. Something about me had made him look and then look away.

I stepped forward and his eyeline shifted.

'Commander Gore?'

'Yes.'

'I'm your bridge.'

*

Graham Gore (Commander, RN; c.1809–c.1847) had been in the twenty-first century for five weeks, though, like the other expats, he'd only been lucid for a handful of those days. The extraction process had merited a fortnight of hospitalisation. Two of the original seven expats had died because of it, and only five remained. He'd been treated for pneumonia, for severe

frostbite, for the early stages of scurvy, and two broken toes on which he had been blithely walking. Lacerations too, from a taser – he'd shot at two of the team members who'd come to expatriate him, and a third was forced to fire.

He'd attempted to flee the Ministry wards three times and had to be sedated. After he'd stopped fighting back, he'd gone through a ground-zero orientation with the psychologists and the Victorianists. For ease of adjustment, the expats were only given immediate, applicable knowledge. He came to me knowing the basics about the electric grid, the internal combustion engine and the plumbing system. He didn't know about the World or Cold Wars, the sexual liberation of the 1960s, or the war on terror. They had started by telling him about the dismantling of the British Empire and it hadn't gone down well.

The Ministry had arranged a car to take us to the house. He knew, theoretically, about cars, but it was his first time in one. He stared through the window, pallid with what I assumed was wonder.

'If you have any questions,' I said, 'please feel free to ask. I appreciate that this is a lot to take in.'

'I am delighted to discover that, even in the future, the English have not lost the art of ironic understatement,' he said, without looking at me.

He had a mole on his throat, close to his earlobe. The only existing daguerreotype of him showed him in 1840s fashion, with a high cravat. I stared at the mole.

'This is London?' he asked, finally.

'Yes.'

'How many people live here now?'

'Nearly nine million.'

He sat back and shut his eyes.

'That's far too large a number to be real,' he murmured. 'I am going to forget that you told me.'

*

The house that the Ministry had provided was a late Victorian redbrick, originally designed for local workers. Gore would have seen them built, if he'd lived into his eighties. As it was, he was thirty-seven years old, and had not experienced crinolines, *A Tale of Two Cities* or the enfranchisement of the working classes.

He got out of the car and looked up and down the street with the weariness of a man who has travelled across the continent and is yet to find his hotel. I hopped out after him. I tried to see what he could see. He would ask questions about the cars parked on the street, perhaps, or the streetlamps.

'Do you have keys?' he asked. 'Or do doors operate by magic passwords now?'

'No, I have—'

'Open sesame,' he said darkly to the letterbox.

Inside, I told him I would make tea. He said he would like, with my permission, to look at the house. I gave it. He made a swift tour. He trod firmly, as if he expected resistance. When he came back to the kitchen-diner and leant against the doorjamb, I seized up painfully. Stage-fright, but also the shock of his impossible presence catching up with me. The more he was there – and he kept on being there – the more I felt like I was elbowing my way out of my body. A narrative-altering thing was happening to me, that I was experiencing all over, and I was trying to view myself from the outside to make sense of it. I chased a tea bag to the rim of a mug.

'We are to – co-habit?' he said.

'Yes. Every expat has a bridge for a year. We're here to help you adjust to your new life.'

He folded his arms and regarded me. His eyes were hazel, scrawled faintly with green, and thickly lashed. They were both striking and uncommunicative.

'You are an unmarried woman?' he asked.

'Yes. It's not an improper arrangement, in this century. Once you're deemed able to enter the community, outside of the Ministry or to anyone not involved in the project, you should refer to me as your housemate.'

'"Housemate",' he repeated, disdainfully. 'What does this word imply?'

'That we are two unpartnered people, sharing the cost of the rent on a house, and are not romantically involved.'

He looked relieved.

'Well, regardless of the custom, I'm not certain it's a decent arrangement,' he said. 'But if you've allowed nine million people to live here, perhaps it's a necessity.'

'Mm. Beside your elbow is a white box with a handle. It's a refrigerator – a fridge, we call it. Could you open the door and take out the milk, please?'

He opened the fridge and stared inside.

'An ice box,' he said, interested.

'Pretty much. Powered by electricity. I think electricity has been explained to you—'

'Yes. I am also aware that the earth revolves around the sun. To save you a little time.'

He opened a crisper.

'Carrots still exist, then. Cabbage too. How will I recognise milk? I'm hoping you will tell me that you still use milk from cows.'

'We do. Small bottle, top shelf, blue lid.'

He hooked his finger into the handle and brought it to me.

'Maid's got the day off?'

'No maid. No cook, either. We do most things for ourselves.'

'Ah,' he said, and paled.

*

He was introduced to the washing machine, the gas cooker, the radio, the vacuum cleaner.

'Here are your maids,' he said.

'You're not wrong.'

'Where are the thousand-league boots?'

'We don't have those yet.'

'Invisibility cloak? Sun-resistant wings of Icarus?'

'Likewise.'

He smiled. 'You have enslaved the power of lightning,' he said, 'and you've used it to avoid the tedium of hiring help.'

'Well,' I said, and I launched into a pre-planned speech about class mobility and domestic labour, touching on the minimum wage, the size of an average household, and women in the workforce. It took a full five minutes of talking and by the end I'd moved into the same tremulous liquid register I used to use for pleading with my parents for a curfew extension.

When I was finished, all he said was, 'A dramatic fall in employment following the "First" World War?'

'Ah.'

'Maybe you can explain that to me tomorrow.'

This is everything I remember about my earliest hours with him. We separated and spent the fading day bobbing shyly around one another like clots in a lava lamp. I was expecting him to have a time-travel-induced psychotic break and perhaps

chew or fold me with murderous intent. Mostly he touched things, with a compulsive brushing motion I was later to learn was because of permanent nerve damage from frostbite. He flushed the toilet fifteen times in a row, silent as a windhover while the cistern refilled, which could have been wonder or embarrassment. At hour two, we tried to sit in the same room. I looked up when he breathed in sharply through his nose to see him pulling his fingers away from a lightbulb in the lamp. He retreated to his bedroom for a while, and I went to sit on the back porch. It was a mild spring evening. Idiot-eyed wood pigeons lumbered across the lawn, belly-deep in clover.

Upstairs, I heard a cautious woodwind polonaise strike up, waver and cease. A few moments later, his tread in the kitchen. The pigeons took off, their wings making a noise like swallowed laughter.

'Did the Ministry provide the flute?' he asked the back of my head.

'Yes. I told them it might be grounding for you.'

'Oh. Thank you. You – knew I played the flute?'

'A couple of extant letters from you and referring to you mention it.'

'Did you read the letters that mentioned my mania for arson and my lurid history of backstreet goose-wrestling?'

I turned around and stared at him.

'A joke,' he supplied.

'Ah. Are there going to be a lot of those?'

'It depends on how often you spring on me such statements as "I have read your personal letters". May I join you?'

'Please.'

He sat down beside me, keeping a space of about a foot between our bodies. The neighbourhood made its noises, which all sounded like something else. The wind in the trees sounded

like rushing water. The squirrels chattered like children. Distant conversation recalled the clatter of pebbles underfoot. I felt I should have been translating them for him, as if he didn't know about trees.

He was drumming his fingers on the porch. 'I suppose,' he said carefully, 'that your era has evolved past such tasteless vices as tobacco?'

'You arrived about fifteen years too late. It's going out of fashion. I've got some good news for you though.'

I got up – he turned his head, so as not to have my bare calves in his eyeline – fetched a packet of cigarettes and a lighter from a drawer in the kitchen, and came back.

'Here. Something else I got the Ministry to lay on. Cigarettes more or less replaced cigars in the twentieth century.'

'Thank you. I'm sure I will adapt.'

He busied himself with working out how to remove the plastic film – which he put carefully away in his pocket – flicking the zippo, and frowning at the warning label. I stared at the lawn and felt like I was manually operating my lungs.

A few seconds later, he exhaled with obvious relief.

'Better?'

'It embarrasses me to convey just how much better. Hm. In my time, well-bred young ladies did not indulge in tobacco. But I note that a great deal has changed. Hemlines, for example. Do you smoke?'

'No . . .'

He smiled directly into my face for the first time. His dimples notched his cheeks like a pair of speech marks.

'What an interesting tone. Did you used to smoke?'

'Yes.'

'Did you stop because all cigarette packets carry this garish warning?'

'More or less. As I said, smoking is very out of fashion now, because we've discovered how unhealthy it is. Damn it. Could I have one, please?'

His dimples, and his smile, had vanished on 'damn'. I suppose as far as he was concerned, I might as well have said 'fuck'. I wondered what was going to happen when I did eventually say 'fuck', which I did at least five times a day. Nevertheless, he proffered the packet, and then lit my cigarette with anachronistic gallantry.

We smoked in silence for a while. At some point, he raised a finger to the sky.

'What is that?'

'That's a plane. An aeroplane, to give it its full name. It's a – well. A ship of the sky.'

'There are people in there?'

'Probably around a hundred.'

'In that little arrow?'

He watched it, squinting along the cigarette.

'How high up is it?'

'Six miles or so.'

'I thought so. Well, well. You *have* done something interesting with your enslaved lightning. It must be flying very fast.'

'Yes. A flight from London to New York takes eight hours.'

He coughed suddenly, bringing up a mouthful of smoke. 'Uh – I want you to stop telling me things for a moment, please,' he said. 'That's . . . quite enough for today.'

He ground the cigarette out on the porch. 'Eight hours,' he murmured. 'No tides in the sky, I suppose.'

*

That night, I slept with unpleasant lightness, my brain balanced on unconsciousness like an insect's foot on the meniscus of a pond. I didn't so much wake up as give up on sleep.

Outside on the landing there was a huge tongue-shaped shadow, stretching from the closed bathroom door to my bedroom. I put my foot in it and it went *squelch*.

'Commander Gore?'

'Ah,' came a muffled voice from behind the door. 'Good morning.'

The bathroom door swung open, guiltily.

Gore was already fully dressed and sitting on the edge of the bath, smoking. The bottom of the bath had a low tide mark of cigarette ash and soap scum. Two cigarettes were crushed out in the soap dish.

As I would discover, this would become his habit: rising early, bathing, ashing in the tub. He could not be persuaded to sleep in, use the shower – which he disliked and intimated was 'unhygienic' – or ash in the ashtrays I would pointedly leave on the edge of the bath. He would be embarrassed by the sight of my razor, shave with a cut-throat blade, and insist on separate soaps.

All this was to come. On that first morning, there was Gore chain-smoking and a bleeding water supply line. The toilet's cistern lay on the floor, gleaming like a slain whale. A vile smell was seeping up from the floor.

'I was trying to see how it worked,' he said diffidently.

'I see.'

'I fear I may have got carried away.'

Gore was an officer from the dusk of the Age of Sail, not an engineer. I'm sure he knew plenty about ship's rigging but he'd probably never handled an instrument more technologically complex than a sextant. Men in their right minds are not usually

overcome with a mania for pulling the plumbing apart. I suggested he might like to wash his hands at the sink downstairs, and I could, perhaps, call a plumber, and we could, potentially, take a constitutional walk on the nearby heath.

He gave this due consideration over the stub end of the cigarette.

'Yes, I would like that,' he said finally.

'We'll go downstairs and wash our hands first.'

'It was clear water,' he said, grinding out the cigarette. His face was averted from mine, but I could see the mole on his throat lay on pinkening skin.

'Well. Germs.'

'"Germs"?'

'Hm. Bacteria. Very, very tiny creatures which live in – everything, really. Only visible through a microscope. The bad ones spread disease. Cholera, typhoid, dysentery.'

I might as well have named the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the look of alarmed amazement that came over Gore's face. He looked down at his hands, and then slowly extended his arms, holding them away from his body like a pair of rabid rats.

*

He took some comfort from the phrase 'fresh air', at least, once we'd stepped out onto the heath. He was far more impressed by germ theory than he had been by electricity. By the time we'd crossed the first of the early-morning dogwalkers, I was enthusiastically describing the cause of tooth cavities, with hand motions.

'I don't think it's very polite of you to say there are germs in my mouth.'

'There are germs in *everyone's* mouths.'

'Speak for yourself.'

'There'll be germs on your shoes and under your nails. It's just how the world works. An aseptic environment is. Well. It's a dead one.'

'I won't be participating.'

'You don't have a choice!'

'I will write a strongly worded letter of complaint.'

We walked a little further. The colour was starting to return to his cheeks, though around his eyes I could see score marks of strain and insomnia. When he saw me scrutinising him, he raised his eyebrows and I tried a cautious smile.

'Careful,' he said. 'Your germs are showing.'

'Well!'

We got croissants and tea from a food truck set up by the children's park. These concepts were either familiar to him, or explicable from context, and we managed our walking breakfast with no further revelation.

'I've been told there are other, uh, expats,' he said eventually.

'Yes. There are five of you.'

'Who are they, please?'

'There's a woman from 1665, who was extracted from the Great Plague of London. Uh. A man – a lieutenant, I believe – from 1645, Battle of Naseby. He fought back harder even than you. There's an army captain – 1916. Battle of the Somme. Someone from Robespierre's Paris, 1793, she's got quite the psych profile.'

'You didn't "extract" anyone else from the expedition?'

'No.'

'May I ask why not?'

'Well, this is an experimental project. We wanted to pull individuals from across as wide a range of time periods as possible.'

'And you chose me, rather than, say, Captain Fitzjames?'

I blinked up at him, surprised. 'Yes. We had documentary evidence that you – you'd left the expedition—'

'That I'd died.'

'Uh. Yes.'

'How did I die?'

'They didn't say. You were referred to as "the late Commander Gore".'

'Who are "they"?'

'Captain Fitzjames, Captain Crozier. Co-leading the expedition after the death of Sir John Franklin.'

We'd fallen into a languid, patrolling step, and he'd gone cool.

'Captain Fitzjames spoke very highly of you,' I ventured. '"A man of great stability of character, a very good officer, and the sweetest of tempers."'

That, at last, brought his dimples out.

'He wrote his memoirs on his return, then?' Gore said, amused.

'Ah. Commander Gore.'

'Hm?'

'I think I should – could we sit down? On that bench over there.'

He pulled up the swing of his step so abruptly that I kicked myself in the ankle trying to stop.

'You are about to tell me something happened to Captain Fitzjames,' he said.

'Let's sit down. Here.'

'What happened?' he asked. The dimples had gone. Apparently I did not get them for very long.

'Something happened to – everyone.'

'What do you mean?' he asked, a touch impatiently.

'The expedition was lost.'

'Lost?'

'In the Arctic. No one returned.'

'There were 126 men in two of the most powerful ships in the Service,' he said. 'You are telling me not one returned to England? Captain Crozier? He'd been to Antarctica—'

'No one survived. I'm sorry. I thought you'd been told at the Ministry.'

He stared at me. The green rings in his eyes turned the colour of shined chestnuts when he canted his head.

'Tell me,' he said slowly, 'what happened. Once I – left.'

'So. Yes. Right. Uh. We picked you up in 1847, from Cape Felix. We knew a summer camp had existed there, but we weren't sure what it was—'

'It was a magnetic observatory. It doubled as a base for the hunting parties too.'

'Right, okay. So, we knew that the camp had been abandoned in a hurry. When the site was found in 1859, there was all this abandoned equipment. Tents. Scientific instruments. Bearskins. Historians were never sure why, but we thought—'

'Surely it was because of you,' he said, comprehension breaking on his face. 'The – flash of lightning, I thought it was. Then that – doorway of blue light.'

'Yes.'

'I saw figures in the doorway. There was an . . . enormous net . . . which hurt.'

'I'm sorry. We couldn't send people through the portal – we didn't know what would happen to them. I think the net was steel-linked? To stop you, uh, cutting yourself free.'

More staring. I hurriedly added, 'We weren't sure that we were the cause of your men abandoning the camp until we did it. It's one of the "great mysteries", ha, so we thought we might as well take our chances that it was us and—'

'Did your people kill everyone?' he asked. His voice was strangely mild, but there was a crimson rash prickling across his cheeks. 'I know my officers. Knew them. They would have come out after me. Sent a party after me.'

'I'm sure they did come after you, but the portal would have closed by then.'

'How did they die, then?'

'Well. The sea never thawed. The two ships stayed trapped in the pack ice. By winter 1847 the expedition had lost nine officers and fifteen men. I don't know how many of them died while you were still—'

'Freddy – Mr Des Voeux – and I had left a note for the Admiralty on King William Land. In a cairn at Victory Point. It contained—'

'Yes, the expedition found your note in April 1848. Crozier and Fitzjames updated it to say they'd abandoned the ships and that the whole crew were planning to march south to Back's Fish River. King William Island is, er, it's an island, by the way.'

He turned away from me and tugged the cigarette packet from his coat pocket.

'Back's Fish River was eight hundred miles away,' he said eventually.

'Yes. They didn't make it. They starved to death on the march down.'

'All of them?'

'All of them.'

'I can't imagine Captain Fitzjames dying of something so morbid as starvation. Or Harry Goodsir? He was one of the cleverest men I'd ever—'

'All of them. I'm very sorry.'

He stared out over the heath and exhaled slowly.

'It appears I was spared a wretched death,' he said.

'I'm sor— you're welcome?'

'How long did it take?'

'Inuit testimony suggests a small group of men returned to the ships and survived a fourth winter. But everyone was dead by 1850.'

'What is an "Inuit" testimony?'

'Er. You called them "Esquimaux". It's correct to call them Inuit.'

To my surprise, he flushed deeply and flinched. He looked disproportionately guilty – Victorians didn't have political correctness – but all he said was, 'The Admiralty sent no rescue parties?'

'The Admiralty sent several. Lady Franklin financed a number as well. But they all went in the wrong directions.'

He shut his eyes and blew a feather of smoke at the sky. 'The greatest expedition of our age,' he said. There was nothing in his voice – no anger, no sadness, no irony. Nothing.

*

Later that day, he said, 'I apologise for my reaction. It was – something of a shock, but one I should have borne with greater stoicism. After all, we knew what we'd signed up for. I hope you didn't feel that I was in a temper at you.'

'No. I'm only sorry you received the story so disjointedly.'

He stood back and looked at me. If he were another sort of man, I would have called this look a once-over. But there wasn't enough heat in it to be a once-over. He was simply looking at me, head to toe, for the first time.

'Why are you my bridge?' he asked. 'Why did they not assign an officer of some sort? The secrecy of this, ah, *project*, as you call it, was impressed on me at length while I was . . . recovering.'

'I suppose I *am* an officer, sort of. A professional, anyway. I worked in the Languages department as a translator-consultant. My area of expertise is mainland Southeast Asia.'

'I see,' he said. 'Actually, I don't see. What does all that mean?'

'I'm cleared to Top Secret and I've worked with – displaced people. The Ministry's original intention was to have the expats co-habiting with therapists, but in the end they felt it made more sense for you to have . . . a friend.'

He stared at me blankly and I blushed, because even to me it sounded like I was pleading. I added, 'I already knew a lot about you. I'd read about the expedition. They've written books and books about it. Roald Amundsen, the guy who discovered the North and South Pole, did it because he was obsessed with John Franklin's expedition. He—'

'You have the advantage of me,' he said.

'I do, yes.'

The dimples came out for that. Not very mirthfully, but they did come out.

'And who found the Northwest Passage?' he asked. '*That* was our original intention.'

'Robert McClure, in 1850.'

'Robbie?!'

'Yes. He found it when he came out after you on one of the search expeditions. He told the Inuit he was looking for a "lost brother". As you're the only expedition member he knew personally, I always assumed—'

'Oh,' he said.

I stopped talking. He'd said 'oh' as if I'd pushed a needle through his clothes. All these people were history to me but still felt alive to him. The queasiness of his discomposure dropped the floor out of the room. I was so embarrassed that I automat-

ically took the cigarette he offered me, even though I had, as I've said, given up smoking years beforehand.

*

The more I got to know him, the more I discovered Gore was the most entirely realised person I'd ever met. In his own time, he had liked hunting, sketching, flute-playing (he was very good at this) and the company of other people. Hunting was out of the question, and socialising was limited by order of the Ministry. By the end of the first week he was visibly going bonkers with no one but me to talk to.

'When will I meet the other expats?'

'Soon—'

'Am I to be idle for this entire year? You do still *have* a naval service?'

'We expected you would need more time to adjust—'

'Is the sea still wet? Can one still float ships upon it?'

The first thing to slow him down was the capaciousness of streaming services. Specifically, Spotify. I ran him briefly through the evolution of the phonograph – which he might have lived to see had he not perished in the 1840s – the turn-table, the cassette player, the CD, MP3s, before landing on music streaming services.

'Any music? Any performances, any time, whensoever you wish it?'

'Well, not any, but it's a very large library.'

We were sitting beside one another on the sofa, a Ministry-issue laptop on my knees. He liked the laptop, as a concept. He was cautiously interested in Google and Wikipedia, but the difficulty of finding letters on the keyboard had hobbled his curiosity. He had already remarked on how unnerving he found my ability to type at speed without looking.

'Will you please instruct the machine to play Bach's Sonata in E-flat major?'

I hit play on the first version Spotify suggested.

We settled back, if 'settle' is the right word for the stiff, wary way we offset one another's weight on the cushions. After a while, he covered his eyes with his hands.

'And one can simply . . . repeat it. Infinitely,' he mumbled.

'Yep. Would you like it again?'

'No. I don't think it's very respectful.'

'Shall I put on something else?'

'Yes,' he said, not moving. 'Instruct the machine to play something that you prefer.'

It didn't seem like it would be kind to play Kate Bush. I put on Franck's Sonata in A major.

'When was this written?'

'I'm not certain of the exact date. The 1880s, I think? After you – after your – afterwards.'

'My sister Anne would have loved this. She was a great fan of sentimental violin.'

I looked away. When the music finished, he said, in a thick voice, 'I'm going to go for a walk.'

He left and didn't return for several hours. The air turned sharp and cool. Oily clouds were piling up in the sky. A storm was coming. I was fretful and couldn't stay in one room for longer than a few minutes. It had occurred to me only after he shut the door that I wasn't allowed to let him out of my sight yet.

When he returned, he blew in like the weather. His jaw was set, which I had started to understand was a sign of enormous agitation.

'This city is so crowded,' he said, standing in the hallway in his coat and boots. 'Worse even than when I was last here.

There are buildings everywhere. No horizons. Only buildings and people as far as the eye can see, and great metal towers strung with rope. Huge grey roads, covered in metallic traffic. There's no space here. How can you breathe? Is all of England like this? The entire world?'

'London is a capital city. Of course it's crowded. There are still empty places.'

Behind my back, my fist was spasmodically clenching and releasing.

'Where? I would like to go somewhere where I don't feel as if I'm in a microscope's slide.'

'Uh. There are currently movement restrictions on all expats. You must have been told. You can't leave the boundary lines.'

He stared at me, unseeing.

'I'm going to have a bath,' he said, finally.

*

While I still worked in Languages, I'd been employed as the primary translator on a project between the trade department and a pan-ASEAN forestry commission. I'd had a gristly time translating *internally displaced person*, which, during this project, referred to people who had been forced to leave their villages because of logging work – hard to explain, because some other people, often from the same villages, had achieved economic stability and long-term employment because of the logging work. *Progress*, that was another tricky thing to translate.

I'd sat with the term *internally displaced person* until I'd broken it down semantically. I was wrestling with a ghost meaning: a person whose interiority was at odds with their exteriority, who was internally (in themselves) displaced. I was

thinking about my mother, who persistently carried her lost homeland jostling inside her like a basket of vegetables.

Gore was internally displaced in this way. I could sometimes see him regarding the modern world as if through a telescope. He stood forever on the deck of a ship somewhere in the early 1800s. He must have done it even in his own era, coming down from the ports to note with alarm that women were wearing their sleeves wide again, that some European country had declared war on another again, while he was months or years away at sea. He told me stories as if he was trying to catch himself in amber. Just like my mother, though I didn't tell him that.

I told him about the forestry commission, and he listened keenly.

'You were quite important,' he suggested.

'No need to flatter me. I was just a translator.'

'One never understands one's use but through the opinion of others. Take the Aden expedition. That was a triumph, and my captain insisted I be promoted to first luff as if I'd had a major hand in it.'

I smiled at his knuckles. We'd been briefed on *teaching moments*, where we might find the values of the expats didn't align with those of modern, multicultural Britain. For Gore, Control had identified the conquest of Aden and the Second Opium War. *Avoid confrontational or oppositional language. Avoid being drawn into conversations about personal value systems.* In January 1839, the British decided to acquire the port of Aden, which was part of the sultanate of Lahej. It was a useful port on the trade route to the Far East. So far as I understood the British Empire, other people's countries were useful or negligible but rarely conceived of as autonomous. The Empire regarded the world the way my dad regards the elastic bands

that the postman drops on his round: *This is handy, it's just lying here, now it's mine*.

'Did you have a major hand at Aden then?' I asked, like a coward.

'Modesty is a virtue and I must warn you that I am a very virtuous man.'

'I should warn you that these days, blowing up an Arabian port because you want to claim it for the Empire is generally frowned upon.'

'But intervening in the trade commission of another country, in order to increase the trade advantage of the Kingdom, is considered diplomatic.'

'Well,' I said, and I was about to protest that it had been an *environmental* intervention, even though it would mean having to explain *environmental*, when I saw that he was regarding me with something approaching admiration, and I stopped.

I should say that my face does a good impression of whiteness, late-entering or not. I didn't know how to tell Gore that I'd been tricking him, feature by feature. I wasn't sure I was ready to. He'd made, as people do, an assumption about me that left me room to manoeuvre. Later, when he found out the truth – as people do – he'd be unbalanced by his own mistake. Another person's unguardedness in that moment can be very useful, interpersonally, as long as you don't soften. There is language I could use about this if I were the melodramatic type: *behind enemy lines*, for example, or *double agent*. My sister might use these terms, or she might call me a fraud.

Besides, I'd read both of his extant letters. He'd written to his father to say that he was pleased with the outcome at Aden. A hundred and fifty Arabs died in the battle and the British didn't sustain a single casualty. It was a bloodbath.

'Your job sounds very interesting,' he said. 'How did you get it?'

*

Gore wouldn't watch television. He seemed to find it a tasteless invention.

'You can send dioramas through the ether,' he said, 'and you've used it to show people at their most wretched.'

'No one's forcing you to watch *EastEnders*.'

'Any child or unmarried woman of virtue might engage the machine and be faced with lurid examples of criminal behaviour.'

'No one's making you watch *Midsomer Murders* either.'

'Or deformed monstrosities against the will of God—'

'What?'

'*Sesame Street*,' he said. Then he had to busy himself with looking through his pockets for his cigarettes, his tongue tenting his cheek as he tried not to laugh.

Finally, at a loss for anything else to do, he began to pick over the bookshelves. I hit an early win with Arthur Conan Doyle. I tried giving him the Aubrey–Maturin series, starting with *Master and Commander*, but he found them upsettingly nostalgic. He liked *Great Expectations* but made it less than a fifth of the way through *Bleak House*. I suggested the Brontës and I might as well have told him to pick up and read a pigeon. He had no patience for Henry James but he liked Jack London. Out of curiosity, I tried him on Hemingway, which he pronounced 'shocking' and read in the bath.

One day, on a whim, I gave him *Rogue Male* by Geoffrey Household. It was the literary equivalent of playing with fire – I'd delayed my explanations of the World Wars, much less

given context about why an unnamed English crack shot and sportsman would want to try shooting a European dictator in the 1930s. But he'd complained so much about not being able to hunt that I thought the premise might entertain him.

A day or so later, I got the email that officially launched the next segment of the project.

'Commander Gore?'

'Hm?'

'I have some good news. The Ministry want us to go in next week.' He did not look up. 'Oh. You've not got very far with *Rogue Male*, then.'

'Oh,' he said, 'I finished it. And then I started it again.'

II

Gore hauls himself aboard the ship, met by the mittened hands and mufflered faces of the watch. The ship, trapped in sea ice, tilts queasily to one side where the frozen waves have shoved against the hull. Below deck – so sealed from the elements and so thick with bodies that the air is warm – Gore finds the crew in the rare, humid grip of a hurry. Captain Fitzjames has convened an emergency command meeting.

He hands off his bag to the officers' steward and insists on attending the meeting, trying to shake the ice-dementia. He knows without consulting a glass that his mouth is corpsey blue.

In sick bay, Stanley, the ship's surgeon, asks him for the date.

'Twenty-fourth July 1847,' he says, after too thick a pause.

'You want a firmness of diction,' mutters the doctor. He does not say *you're slurring*, not to an officer. Gore tries a smile. Fissures teem along his lips. But no one orders him not to attend the emergency meeting.

It is held in the Great Cabin of *Erebus*, a desperately unhaunted room. Sir John Franklin had died here, succumbing to age and the climate, more than a month before. His avuncular ghost has failed to manifest. James Fitzjames, his commander and now captain of *Erebus*, lives in the Cabin like an orphan locked in a crypt.

Captain Crozier of *Terror*, the expedition's new leader, has sent

Lieutenant Irving over to *Erebus*. He is a shy man with heavy whiskers and an unhappy habit of quoting scripture at sailors.

'I'm afraid,' says Irving, 'that it isn't good news.'

'The rations,' Fairholme cuts in. Fairholme is the third lieutenant of *Erebus*, a big bouncing man who towers over most of the other officers. Now he cringes, putting Gore in mind of a Great Dane caught stealing food.

'With yours too,' sighs Irving. 'God has seen fit to test us in our resolution. But His ways are not our ways, and the wiseness of the world is as foolishness to—'

Gore puts his palm down flat on the mahogany table. Gently, but with finality. The drone of Irving's voice bespeaks panic: that of a preacher pleading with the weather.

'James,' he says.

He means Fairholme – he wouldn't presume to address Captain Fitzjames by his Christian name in a command meeting – but it is Fitzjames who answers.

'It's the tinned rations,' Fitzjames says. 'Some of them have been found to be inedible. More so than usual,' he adds, smiling faintly. 'Rotted. On both ships, so they must have been defective when we shipped out, rather than attributable to some noxious influence on the journey.'

Gore lifts his hand. He's left a smear on the table the colour of tamarind flesh. There is a sour, steady pain in his palm that he briefly misunderstands as a taste.

'How many of the tins?' he asks.

Fitzjames doesn't answer. He is seated in Sir John's place. His curls have lost their gloss but they still flash a troubling copper.

'Was there much game, Graham?' he asks instead.

Gore considers the weight of the sack he'd carried, which had felt so meaningful. 'Three partridges,' he says, 'and a boatswain gull too far off to hit. Nothing else. Not even tracks.'

'In four and a half hours?'

'Was I gone that long?'

They fall silent again. This had once been a convivial wardroom. A story couldn't start that wasn't met with an opposing tale, like an arch bridge made of chatter. But even speaking the obvious is like massaging wax from granite these days. The persistent grieving and shrieking of the wood of the ice-locked ship robs them of sleep and silence between paragraphs; without those fallow periods, all speech is feeble.

'We don't have rations to see both ships' companies through a third year,' says Fitzjames. 'Is Captain Crozier of an accord?'

'Yes, sir,' says Irving miserably.

Fitzjames drums his fingers on the table. Like Fairholme, he is a big man, set like a cathedral, but his face is boyish when he is worried. His parentage is a mystery; he is rumoured illegitimate; presumably he spent much time worried as a child and now his face returns to it.

'Two-thirds rations?' he says.

'Captain Crozier's suggestion is that we reduce to two-thirds, yes, sir.'

At this, Stanley leans in. He is a fussy, short-tempered, handsome man who does not enjoy his job. 'I must impress upon the meeting that the *debility* that wracks those in the sick bay will doubtless find ample footholds should we reduce the men's rations.'

'And if we do not reduce the rations, the men will starve to death instead,' says Fitzjames. 'I'd like to get as many of them back to England as possible when the ice breaks up. This is the compromise we must make.'

Gore is looking at his left palm. The sour pain is still there, seeping through the bandages. So is the blood, but it seems melodramatic to observe this.

'And if the ice doesn't break up?' he asks mildly.

The ice outside shifts – the Arctic stammering its jaws as a cat

does when it sees a bird. The ship's cat died in convulsions during their second winter. Gore had liked that cat. He'd become quite attached to it, especially as his dog had died in the first spring.

Creak, crack. The ship bellows in agony.