

Tasmanian Shores

A A R O N K R E U T E R

Lynka: We had planned so much and each had brought something to the life of the other, but if this joint existence cannot be in the flesh let it be in the spirit. I ask you to live on, developing the powers which you possess, spurning the non-essentials of existence to reach that perfection which we had dreamed of for us both.

—From the journal of Critchley Parker Junior, found inside what was left of his tent. When his body was discovered by fishermen in September 1942, it was so decayed that it had begun to fuse with his sleeping bag; it was hard to tell where he began and the synthetic material ended.

March 12, 1942

Dear Lynka, thank you for the gift of this journal. It is, along with everything else you have given me—both material and otherwise—a most treasured possession. Let it chronicle this surveying mission to Tasmania as truly and beautifully as you work on behalf of your fellow man.

I dedicate this journal, as well as this adventure to find safe haven for the persecuted Jews of Europe, to you. I tingle with the thought of what we will accomplish together; me here, charting out this magnificent, uninhabited land, you in Melbourne, publicizing our cause. If Steinberg's negotiations with the governor continue apace while I am on my trek, we could very well expect the first boatload of refugees by the spring.

It is my first true night on this expedition, and I feel as if I'm on the precipice of a great new epoch. If only I had words to describe tonight's sunset to you, Lynka. Every pleasing colour known to our species caught

between the ridges of the incandescent mountains, the silver bays aflame in celebration of another day's successful opening and closing.

Tomorrow, I walk.

Critchley had spent three weeks at Charles King's cabin in Melaleuca, a tin mining camp in the sparsely populated wilderness of southwest Tasmania. It was just King and his young son Peter living in the camp, maintaining the outbuildings, mining the tin; otherwise, Melaleuca was abandoned. Critchley had not planned on spending that long there before setting off, but on the boat ride and aerodrome journey from Melbourne he had come down with a bad cold. Besides, he found himself enjoying the company of the grizzled old man. King was unlike Critchley's own father in every way possible: gruff, personable, hands worn from working the earth instead of just owning newspapers that speculated on what was in the earth. At night, by the fire, King would softly, jokingly, incessantly, try to talk Critchley out of his planned trek: not only was the bushwalking season nearly over, but Critchley seemed in no condition to undertake such a journey. But what King didn't understand is that Critchley wasn't doing this for himself; he was doing it for Lynka, for Steinberg, for the victims of the war that had the entire world in turmoil. In any case, Critchley appreciated King's concern. Another striking departure from his own father, who sent Critchley off with a pocketknife and a sharp pat on the back.

Though it was definitely true that if Critchley wanted—and as King was urging him to—he could call the whole thing off, be back safe and warm in the Melbourne suburbs within the week. He didn't have to lead this life: he chose it. Or, as he put it to himself in his more sentimental moods, it chose him. He was born into money, into the upper echelons of polite Christian Australian society. He could've done anything he wanted; he could've done nothing at all. And with his delicate constitution—which had spared him military service—nobody would have batted an eye if he sat the war out entirely, in his custom home with its porch that moved around the house on mechanical tracks from the shade to the sun so he was always breathing clean, pleasant air. But no. Critchley wanted to make a difference in the world. It was a calling. A calling that Lynka, his dear Caroline, had turned into an urgent need. Lynka and her intelligence, her passion, always leaving Critchley wanting to swim in their golden wake. And once the fiery-headed Steinberg and his mad genius joined their quest for a Jewish refuge in Tasmania, there was

absolutely no turning back. Critchley no longer trekked for pleasure; he trekked for the deepest, purest purpose: to save the lives of his fellow humans.

Critchley could have easily stayed longer at Melaleuca, exploring the tin camp by day, playing archaeologist, watching the whitecapped sea, having long conversations with King by night, making up fairy tales for young Peter, a true child of these wild shores, but the autumn was moving along, and it was time to get on with it. Thankfully, Critchley's cold, which luckily hadn't bloomed into something worse and derailed the entire expedition, had finally abated. There was, simply put, too much at stake to stay still. Every day that passed, every hour, the noose tightened in Europe.

King ferried Critchley in his Huon-pine rowboat across the bay to Port Davey. The plan was to trek the sixty or so miles of the Port Davey track northeast over the Arthur Range to the settlement of Fitzgerald, to map out the future site for the Jewish refugees that Steinberg had nearly convinced the Tasmanian government to allow to settle here. The land he'd be passing through was rugged, uninhabited, unspoilt. The journey should take a fortnight, a little longer if the conditions didn't hold. "Listen to me, son. If you run into bad weather out there, or need to be picked up for any reason at all," King said, his big arms opening and closing like denim wings with each pull of the oars, "climb up Mount Mackenzie and light two signal fires of button grass. As soon as I see them, I'll putter back to this spot to get you."

Critchley nodded, but was barely listening: they were nearly on the shore.

His trek was about to begin.

March 13, 1942

Lynka: this land is even more beautiful than I remember, than we could ever have hoped. I feel like I'm seeing with new eyes; everywhere I look I see possibility. I spent the day along a dark, tannic river which flows into the salt-water bay at the end of the ridge I'm hiking on. The Huon pines growing on the shoreline are truly massive, some thousands of years old. And the smell of the forest! Celery top, baking mud, sassafras, myrtle, all seasoned with copious heapings of salt.

Since I intend this diary to be a true record of these momentous events, here is a cataloging of the provisions I have brought: oatmeal (15 lbs); flour (6 lbs); cocoa (3/4 lbs); bacon (11 lbs); cheese (8 lbs.); dates

(2 lbs). Besides the foodstuff, I have in my pack snares, clothes, maps, sleeping bag, tent, aspirin, pocketknife, four packs of matches, and, of course, this journal. More than enough for fourteen days.

How could this experience of solo bushwalking not remind me of the trek I did in Lapland? The most strenuous adventure of my life, until today of course. Ten days in Norway's far north. My Laplander guides were knowledgeable, kind people; I highly doubt I would have made it through without them. And now here I am, in my own backyard, so to speak, relying entirely on myself. Not only are the conditions utterly different here: warm, empty, flowing, green and brown and blue (instead of cold, frozen, white), but the entire mission of this trek goes far beyond myself, beyond you and Steinberg and my father. It is urgency of the soul that compels this mission, not simple recreation for the body. The sacred desire to do something good, something meaningful as the human planet convulses, not just a restless and selfish pull to see the wild ports of the world. As I hike through thick rainforest, clamber down to the shore to refill my water skin, take in the mountains, I am full of sadness and trepidation, but also of hope. Steinberg was able to get his family out before the walls came down, but what about all the other families stuck between Germany's pincers? The tens of thousands of souls huddled close in the ghettos, while here I am, a lone traveller in a land fertile for human touch.

I have made camp in a mudflat hugging the skirts of a nameless mountain.

When was it exactly that Critchley became obsessed with the fate of the world's Jews? It's hard to say. As a sickly child, misunderstood by his parents, conditioned to be on his own, he had always had an affinity for outsiders, for minorities, for the world's unwanted. He followed the rise of the Nazis in Germany along with everybody else, poring over newspapers, watching newsreels in the theatre, was appalled by the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, the Evian Conference, that despicable moment in human history where the leaders of the western world decided to keep their doors closed to Jewish refugees, all except the Dominican Republic. At first, Critchley just read all he could: the history of antisemitism, the Nazis' platform, the Zionist writers. The push for Palestine never made much sense to him—there were already so many people there! The Arabs of Palestine had made it clear time and again that they wouldn't give up their land, and why should they? Not to

mention that the British would never cooperate; still, Weizmann and Ben-Gurion were going to fight to the last for their dream, that much was clear. Then Critchley happened upon Israel Zangwill and his Freeland League, their Territorialist mission of finding a permanent home for the Jews of Europe that was not in Palestine. He read about Zangwill leaving the Zionist congress and funding the Territorialists, of the failed near-successes in Uganda, in Angola. Critchley always had a frothy inner life, and this dream of far-flung resettlement—and of being a member of the surveying missions to these remote places—fired his imagination. Shortly after, he heard that the current leader of the Territorialists, Isaac Steinberg, was in Australia, agitating for a Jewish home in the Kimberley. The first words he had heard from Steinberg, reported in the paper, were words that would never leave Critchley: “All Jews should leave Poland and pull the very stones from the graves and bring them with them.”

At about the same time, he met Lynka at a bushwalkers’ league meeting. A Jewish journalist, Caroline spoke seven languages, had two teenaged children, moved to Australia from England after meeting her husband Arnold, twenty years her senior, and was beside herself worrying about the plight of the European Jew. The idea of opening Tasmania for Jewish settlement, after the plan for the Kimberley came to naught, originated from his father, who often fly fished in Tasmania (and wanted to keep the island white-owned), but it was Lynka, Lynka, with her connections and journalistic eye, who latched onto it: her fervour when Critchley mentioned his father’s idea to her shocked him and then moved him. “Imagine it,” she exclaimed, “we could actually do it, actually save them! Do you think?” She squeezed Critchley’s arm, began pacing in the foyer of the meeting hall. “I know some people you absolutely must meet,” she told him, already working on the problem. Before long they were meeting nightly, discussing, plotting, planning. They had much in common: both raised by nannies (it was Caroline’s nanny who gave her her nickname); both misunderstood by their families, Critchley his father, Lynka her absentee husband and elder son Peter, whom she nonetheless adored. Lynka introduced Critchley to a world he could never have accessed otherwise: those who were battling over the fate of European Jewry. It was Lynka who told Critchley about Ida Marcia Silverman, Zionist saboteuse extraordinaire, a Jewish beauty on the outside, on the inside a viper, travelling to wherever the Territorialists had a chance and doing all she could to scuttle it. Already she had sunk any hope of the Dominican Republic receiving Jewish refugees. “And now she’s here,

Critch, in Aussie!” Lynka’s flushed excitement, that world events were transpiring on their continent, was incredibly rousing. “What I would say to her, if I ever had the chance.”

Critchley Sr. had pulled some strings and arranged a meeting with Steinberg to discuss Tasmania; Steinberg, taken with the idea, was then sent to confer with Critchley and Caroline. Critchley was ready to be impressed, having read everything he could get his hands on that Steinberg wrote or that was written on him, but the great man in person was something else entirely: a true Jewish revolutionary, a prophet with red hair and deep religiosity, a fierce fighter for his people and their freedom. Steinberg was possessed of such inner cauldrons of energy, he could never stay still for long; whenever he was sitting his left leg would shake the entire room. At that first meeting, he bemusedly told Critchley and Lynka in his Yiddish-inflected English about his time as Lenin’s first commissar of justice in the USSR, a brief stint that ended with Steinberg’s vocal disillusionment with the direction Lenin was taking the revolution, for which he was gifted with a lifetime exile, his first of many. Steinberg’s politics meant he was often left stateless. An imposing, vigorous man, when Steinberg spoke, about the “messianic state fanaticism” of the Zionists, of the pressing need to secure immediate safe landing for the Jews of Europe, of the evils of capitalism and the remedies of socialism, you listened. Critchley listened.

“When the Freeland League sent me down here in ’39 to see if the Kimberly region was appropriate for Jewish settlement,” Steinberg told his audience of two, as verbosely captivating as if he was addressing a standing-room-only lecture hall, “who could have known that I would be stuck here for what, nearly two years already. Those first months were fruitful enough, in their way.” Steinberg had campaigned relentlessly, meeting with Jewish groups, Jewish industrialists, farmers and townsfolk, various strata of government; and always, Ida Marcia Silverman, who had followed Steinberg from Europe, met with the same groups, made opposing claims, clamoured for Palestine and nothing else but Palestine. “She has the entire Zionist movement behind her, but we have a just cause, the immediacy of need, the flexibility of not being tied to one strip of already-occupied land. Why she couldn’t let us just go about our business as she and the Yishuv went about theirs is beyond me: isn’t saving as many as possible, relocating as many as possible, the goal?” After a period of dead heat, Steinberg pulled ahead, convincing the Western Australian premier to approve the plan, in writing nonetheless—at last, a refuge for the hounded Jews of Europe! However, history moving like a cannonball

tumbling down a staircase these days, a week later the Nazis invaded Poland, and the plan was forgotten as the British world mobilized for war. Steinberg, once again stateless, the Gestapo looking for him, was stranded in Australia. It was all he could do to get his family out and on a ship down under before the borders closed. Steinberg banged the coffee table with his fist. “And yet, there is still a chance. As long as there is a chance, we must pursue it. Even now we can still avert the destruction that is barrelling towards us. And this Tasmanian plan has the aroma of unlikely success that I have become adept at sniffing out. So far, to no avail, though.”

Critchley and Lynka drank it in; until now, their drawing room discussions of Tasmania had been only words: with Steinberg behind the scheme, it suddenly had the salty tang of reality. The way the man put his ideas and passion into linguistic life, into big beautiful flames, and from there into action. And all the while, his leg shook. He would shake the world to reason with that leg of his. When Steinberg finished his remarks, and asked Lynka to help him connect with the appropriate Tasmanian officials, the audience of two realized they were holding hands. Flustered, Critchley red-cheeked, they quickly disentangled.

This was the stream of Jewish revolutionaries Critchley had lashed his life to. Lynka’s mission, Steinberg’s mission, became Critchley’s mission. They were going to bring down the borders, save the Jews from certain destruction, build bulwarks of human ingenuity and beauty against the hatred and the rot. He never felt more needed, more content, more belonged. Critchley was never comfortable in church, was always uncertain where he came from or where he was going, was constantly guilt-ridden with his place in the Aussie hierarchy. Now he knew for certain: he wasn’t Jewish, no, that gift was not for him, not in this lifetime. But he was a Territorialist. And with this bushwalk, this surveying trek, he would jumpstart the process, get the governor to sign on, and start bringing over the refugees as soon as the winter storms ended.

And yet, whenever he thought of the Jewish people behind their ghetto walls, what he saw now was Lynka’s face. A vein of precious metal in the beating dark.

March 15, 1942

My Darling Carolinka:

I have spent two thrilling days walking this brilliant land. Hills hugging valleys, dark-skinned rivers running out to sea, the tops of the mountains my constant companions. The celery pine growing along the mud flats. Seas

of button grass. And the birds, the birds, Lynka! Black swans (which dot the landscape like sand on a beach), orange-bellied parrots, pink robins, thornbills. Plovers and oystercatchers ply the beaches, eagles rise and fall in the skies. It was so hot this afternoon that I took my clothes off and swam in an icy stream. To say I was rejuvenated mind, body, and spirit would be putting it mildly.

It's not hard to imagine a thriving Jewish colony here. In our fevered discussions we called the settlement we were planning New Jerusalem, but how maudlin! A new name has come to me: Poynduk, after the Tasmanian Aborigine name for the area's prodigious black swans. Think of what could be accomplished here in a short time! Jewish industry would take advantage of the abundant natural resources: the fish, the mineral, the timber. They would build hydroelectric plants, canneries, start a furniture industry. Since they would be starting from scratch, they could have the best of both economic systems, the socialist and the capitalist: planned economies, thirty-five-hour work weeks, a month paid holidays. All property owned in common. There would be healthcare, playgrounds, world-worthy architecture. Highways, railroads, canals! Borders open for everybody, training schools for the Aboriginals, everybody and everyone given opportunities to live full, fulfilling lives. The Jews would host a yearly Tasmanian games, peoples and cultures convening to celebrate Jewish emancipation, Jewish success. Streets and districts named after Steinberg, Zangwill, Melekh Revitch, William Cooper, you, of course. (Myself? I'll be happy with a little laneway for my modest contributions.) There could even be a resurgence of whaling, tourist boats dispatched daily to see the ice shelves. Think of it, Lynka! French Jews would bring fashion, Dutch Jews would reclaim the land from the sea, the shtetl Jews would bring their farming and animal husbandry and religious expertise. Everybody would do their part and Poynduk would be as the Paris of Australasia, and put Tasmania on the map.

Listen to me going on! Can you tell I am feeling portentous? Well, I am. I am downright giddy with it. I am full. Full of portent. Portent at Port Davey. Maybe that is why I am here. Not to survey the coastline of Tasmania, but to survey the coastlines of possibility.

Lynka, the grandeur of this place, of my visions, leaves me wanting to make a small confession. Remember that night, one of the many we spent scheming, poring over maps, prodding ourselves into ecstasies of hope and joy, that you asked me, in your incisive, intuitive way, if I had ever "known" a woman, and I answered in the affirmative? I cringe to

remember it now, but, my sweet Caroline, my lithe Lynka, I lied to you. The only lie I've ever uttered in your presence. I was embarrassed to tell you the truth, and I knew that in a way you were also asking about Peter, recently enlisted, and I wanted you to be content.

It looks like a storm is coming in. I better batten down the hatches, as they say.

Critchley and women. Women and Critchley. It was not that Critchley had not had relationships with women, because he had. His mother, beautiful, her face beaming across a vast distance. His nanny, the only person to show him real love and affection in his first twenty-odd years. Jaska, one of the Lappish guides on his northland trek, who had struck up a friendship with him, saved extra smoked fish that they ate together in his reindeer hide tent amidst the birch and the pines. But nothing ever came from any of it. Critchley was too subdued, too inward-focused, to ever move with such intention upon the world, to reach out with his inner being across the divide of the material to connect with another's secret self. When he met Caroline it was like a revelation. Making their plans, night after night. Though she never spoke of it, he knew she was as lonely as he, her husband absent, scornful of her journalism, not willing to indulge her gusto for helping those in need. Critchley felt her true hidden spirit as surely as she felt his. When Peter got drafted and left to fight the war, Critchley and Lynka had very nearly gone to bed together, but she had stopped it at the last minute. "It's not right, Critch. Not now, when there's so much at stake."

These distracting thoughts, these damning flights of fancy! Critchley had spent too long puttering around the mountains: the fall storms had come early. He had waited too long! (A common refrain among Territorialists.) The weather turned, and did not turn back. He had barely gone a few kilometres from the rocky beach where King's rowboat had deposited him. Critchley decided he had better set up camp and wait for the storm to pass. The rain and wind pounded down, fog so thick Critchley couldn't see out of his tent. The black rivers sloshing into frothy seas.

By the third day of being tent-ridden, Critchley had packed up and was climbing Mount Mackenzie to light a signal fire for King, twelve miles across the strait in his dry kingdom of Melaleuca. Critchley was disappointed to be turning back, but had decided to be prudent; plus, the dampness was affecting his lungs. He pushed off disappointment like he

shrugged off the cold; there'd be plenty of time to deal with the fallout of the aborted trek once King came for him. He'd wait out the rest of the fall and winter warm in King's cabin, learning the fine art of tin mining, and try again in the spring (besides, Critchley reminded himself, it is Steinberg and Lynka who have the real work ahead of them). Maybe Lynka would come down for a visit, and Critchley could describe Poynduk to her in the vivid detail with which it occupied his head. If it wasn't for the image of Lynka, sitting at her writing desk, her face tense with worry, if it wasn't the simple fact that this mission was more important than his momentary embarrassment, Critchley would surely have waited out the weather, would have kept going. But obstinacy was not what was called for. Not today.

It was a hard, rigorous climb up the mountain. Critchley had to stop multiple times, bent over, breathing hard among the celery. By the time he summited he was drenched in sweat, soaked through with rain. He gathered two massive mounds of button grass, his lungs burning, his hands freezing, ripping the plentiful grass up into large bundles. Once he had deemed them large enough, it was time to light them. His hands were shaking, his breath visible in the fog, and it took six matches to get the middens to light. Even in the damp mist, the button grass caught the flame and held it. Grey smoke snaked into the sky, parallel rivers that would float Critchley to safety.

He climbed down the mountain and set up camp on the shoreline to wait for King, the twin spires of smoke clearly visible behind him. Poynduk continued to grow, taking shape inside his journal as rain lashed the tent. By the next afternoon—had an afternoon ever approached with such sloth?—King and his rowboat had not appeared. In the early evening when the smoke signals had burned out, Critchley dragged himself back up the mountain to relight them. Everything was drenched, puddled, sogged. He finished the first box of matches getting the new fires lit, the grass a deeper level of wet than yesterday; the second box, which he also had on him, were soaked through. He was about to throw them in the fire in fretful disgust when he heard Lynka's voice beseeching him to be prudent, and so he pocketed them instead.

Back at camp, Critchley stood beside his tent in the windy wet and ate a handful of dates and chocolate with some oatmeal he had made that morning. His lungs were burning; breathing was a struggle. The climbs up the mountain and the weather had taken their toll. Stopping and lighting the fires was definitely the right decision. Inside his tent, he

emptied his pack out, looking for the third and fourth match boxes. He tore through his belongings, sifting through the waterlogged oatmeal and soupy flour with his hands. Panic descended like an expected-yet-still-feared winter storm. Not knowing what else to do, fed up with being damp, he peeled his clothes off, left them in a pile near the door flaps.

Naked, he got onto his knees and—carefully, carefully—opened the remaining box of matches and laid them out on his sleeping bag. There were eight matches left: three of them seemed wet beyond repair; if only there was a momentary reprieve of dryness, an armistice of sun! If only he could hear himself think over this incessant rain! Five of the matches appeared salvageable. So: two left for one more button grass fire (if King doesn't come tomorrow), three more for cooking, for warmth. Critchley—carefully, carefully—slid the usable matches back into the pack, and placed the pack on his clothes, a crumpled signal tower atop a steaming mountain. For the first time, he felt the crushing pressure of his utter aloneness. Time to try and make a fire and cook some bacon. Time to find a better place to set up a more permanent camp.

Time to reclaim his sopping clothes.

March 18, 1942

Lynka:

I have been waiting for King to pick me up for three days now. I am going back up the mountain to light another signal fire. This is what it is to put oneself out there for a cause. What is being wet and cold compared to the horror that is transpiring in Europe?

All around me I see the splendours of the city we will build.

All my love,

Junior

Critchley couldn't believe he was back here, on the summit of Mackenzie, the wind shrieking its demands. Damp wasn't strong enough a word for what he was! He was chilled to the core, the phlegmy heat in his lungs doing nothing to warm the rest of him. The smouldering pits of the button grass fires gave off a thick, somewhat pleasing, somewhat threatening, aroma. Why hadn't he come earlier and lit the new fires off of the still-burning old ones? His mind was slipping: the chill and the hacking cough and the unending rain were working their magic. Critchley ripped and piled the grass as high as he was able—the highest yet—puttered around, fearing the next step, putting it off, putting it off.

Okay Critch, old sport, he said to himself. He had five matches (he had yet to make a fire at basecamp). The first four matches sputtered out, one fizzle after another. He paused, put the matchbox down, his heart pounding. He stood on the summit, even the rain holding its breath, and exhaled till his itchy lungs were empty sacs. This moment was a turning point in his life. Everything brought down to one match.

He struck the match. It flared into red life. Cupping the flame, he brought it to the base of the button grass. The grass lit. He used a stick to transfer the fire to the second pile.

He wanted to lie down and sleep and sleep and sleep, the wind his lullaby and blanket, but he picked himself up and descended the mountain before night came down.

March 24, 1942

King is not coming. I am out of matches. A quick, simple rescue, it would seem, is not in the cards. Did you and Steinberg put your trust in the wrong man? Or is fate just not with us? In any case, my foodstuffs dampen with each sodding minute.

It's the twelfth day since King dropped me off. I've set up a rather comfortable camp near the shores of Port Davey, somewhat blocked from the wind by a breaker of celery pine. I pray somebody will come looking for me soon. Melaleuca is only twelve miles away by boat, fifty overland. Perhaps I should have started the overland trek as soon as the weather turned. I fear I am much too weakened—it is pleurisy that ails me, I'm sure—to even consider such an undertaking. So, I wait. Something—not necessarily King—is coming, moving along the sea towards me. I feel it in my bones. The poles of the air molecules throb and jitter in anticipation.

The weather continues to worsen, as if Silverman herself is thwarting us; in any case, I bet she's having a good laugh. You will be expecting word of my successful journey shortly. What will you do when none comes?

Most of the food has gone rotten. And besides, without matches, there was nothing to make a cookfire. The thought of eating pig, weevil-infested oats, another sickly-sweet date, set Critchley's stomach to retching. If he had the energy, he'd dump it all into the river, let the oceanic life of the dark shallows do with it what it will.

Leaving his tent is now a feat beyond him.

So Critchley writes in his journal about Poynduk. He draws maps of the glorious refuge, shading in its natural borders: Port Davey in the west; Recherche Bay in the east; the Gordon River in the north, the black-blue seas of the Antarctic Ocean in the south. He makes charts, does calculations, designs neighbourhoods and civic buildings. He listens to the disgruntled weather, the very world a book getting torn up into smaller and smaller pieces. He hallucinates about food. He coughs and wriggles and retches. He shivers and shakes. He rips a page out of his journal and writes a letter to Steinberg.

Dear Dr. Steinberg (he writes): It is at Port Davey that I hope the Jewish Settlement will start not far from where I sever all earthly connection with it. I came to this magnificent harbour some weeks ago, but bad weather and my consequent failure to get in touch with my base make my fate certain. I fear my body has nearly given up; my mind is not far behind. To die in the service of so noble a cause is to me a great satisfaction, and if as I hope the settlement brings happiness to many refugees and in so doing serves the State of Tasmania, I die happy. May your abilities and those of Mrs. Isaacson bring these schemes to fruition.

Critchley gives his return address as Mount MacKenzie, Poynduk.

No Date

The days and nights sweep past like so much button grass in the gale, and here I lie, without food to light them into a signal fire to reach you, Lynka, to tell you all that I have seen these past hours of fevered vision.

For what I am seeing has changed, a new kind of storm thrown from a very great height indeed. My visions of the Jewish future of Poynduk have morphed into visions of the Jewish present of Poland. I see horrible death, Lynka. Everywhere I look, the horrible death. They are building cities of death, deranged memorials to death. As I lie here, surviving on aspirin and water, rain abusing the tent, the Jewish people we had hoped to save are being rounded up. As they are stranded there, so I am stranded here (was it folly all along? These doubts that rattle my brain as this damn damp rattles my lungs!). I can see them, the calm terrible generals, deciding their fate. Men sitting at wide tables directing the world in their hideous image. The inverse of Evian; yet they are making plans. And their plans will, I fear, come to fruition. Don't ask me how I know this, Lynka, but I see it. I see it so clearly. I see a river. A clean, blue river, meandering through a field by a gentle brown woods. In the field by

the river they are building a barracks, they are building showers, they are building chimneys; they are digging pits. The river knows death, death is part of a river's life after all, but this, this building, this preparation, is different. The river carries news of this new death out to the sea, where it falls into the currents which guide our world, and finds its way down to me here, how many ocean-spans away, in this forsaken bay of grey clouds and dark waters. The river whispers to me what it heard.

And what I hear is train tracks. Cattle cars. Human death mechanized and perfected like an ingenious mining operation detailed in one of my father's newspapers. There is no word for this mass death yet; but soon there will be. At this very moment, a man sits at a desk of oak and walnut and invents a new word. Has there ever been a more human word?

Are these visions, my dear, or are they nightmares?

Critchley has been in his tent for over thirty days now, surrounded by his jottings, maps, charts, lists; emaciated, blurry eyed, his lungs clotted wool. The dreams, the visions, the hallucinations, whatever they are, have broken through the crust between day and night, awake and asleep, downpour and make-believe respite. The shores are crashing together, weather patterns are getting muddled, I can't be sure if I'm writing this or if he's thinking it.

No Date

The land talks to me, Lynka. It let me alone for a string of horrible lidless nights, but now it is back. And what it tells me sears my very soul. No, not of the unholy proceedings unfolding in Europe. But of what happened, right here, at Poynduk. On this island. A paragraph in a history textbook brought to condemning life. I see people on the land, living as they always have, hunting, fire-tending, moving with seasons, dreaming. Making the land as the land makes them. Countrymen of the trees, descendants of the kangaroo, holders of knowledge that is not ours to take. But nonetheless, we take. I see British men huddled around a map, fingers on grassy plains. I hear the phrase "fine sheep wool." I see an armada of ships that once brought slaves across the Middle Passage now transporting convicts. I see men with guns, hunting kangaroos. I see kangaroos streaming down a green valley, a volley of gunshot.

Hunting kangaroos, hunting humans.

The land seized. Women and children abducted. Men murdered and massacred. What do the people of the kangaroo do? They fight back. They

resist. A press conference, the solicitor general at a tall lectern: “We have a duty to protect colonists, if you cannot do so without extermination then I say boldly and broadly, exterminate.” Men at a table, deciding to stop the slaughter; too much attention. All that explaining. Instead: round them up. Ship them off. Concentrate them. Easier this way. Less pressure. A developing British specialty.

In 1803, zero sheep. In 1830, a million.

The land remembers, Lynka. How wrong we were. Yes, even Steinberg, even his fiery genius was set onto the wrong tracks from the beginning. For the Jews to have a safe port to call home, for any of us, all the maps of the world need to be redrawn. We were right to wish for a society without borders, but what about the damage the borders have already done? That must be our first principle, our guiding light. The destruction of one people for the survival of another must be, has to be, anathema to our cause, no matter the years intervening. Don't you see, Lynka? It's all rivers flowing from the same headwater; it is the headwater itself that we must wage war on.

Is that why I am here? Is that why the sky blotted out my smoke signals? The river with the benign name and terrible knowledge flows out to sea, dips into the centre of the earth, the hot core, comes back up, finds me here shrivelled up in my tent. And I put it to words, Caroline. For you.

Critchley and Lynka are sitting on the flanks of a green hill. Below them a brown-limbed river spreads into the sea. Above them mountains proclaim the earth's bounty. They are having a picnic, they are eating and laughing. Below them King is rowing his boat across the bay with his outsized denim wings, Steinberg and Zangwill in the prow, the three of them talking excitedly and pointing out the features of the land. Somewhere above them, Ida Marcia Silverman sits by a fire, a look of disgust on her face for the city just out of view. But the river doesn't care about any of this. The river flows as it always has, meandering down from the peaks, catching rain and runoff and sediment and handing it off to the churn of the sea. All that sediment and rock taken into the earth, melted down, brought back up new. Plates grind and buck. Land masses come and go. Sea and glacier trade off in an unending struggle for dominance. Rocks pressed into jewels, nutrients and proteins and salts swirling through life and death, shale and leaf, heat and ice. Nothing staying put for long, everything in motion, the planet swinging joyfully

through the dark thrum of the cosmos. The great coiled limb at the centre of the earth shaking, shaking, shaking.

Autumn, 1942. The Shore.

My head breaks above the surface for a moment of laboured breathing, of clarity. I will die here. It is a surety. Death comes any day. I can feel all of my organs, the tough stubborn glue of self holding on to its tenacious illusion, slipping away. I know nothing will happen to this land, nothing will change. Such death approaches us. I die with the sigh of your face as my death bed, coffin, and final resting. Thirty-one years on this planet, each one a gift. I do not feel that there will be anything more than a gradual loss of senses and a final sinking into unconsciousness. I believed my whole life in the division between spirit and body. What a fool I was, Lynka.

In my final moments I glimpse the future. I see men making speeches at lecterns as behind them the pits are being dug. The men apologizing for the old pits, while ceaselessly behind them, new pits are carved out of the hard earth. The pits and the men rely on each other.

No more pits, no more such men.

Oh Lynka. Though our love will never be consummated, I would have done it all again. Caroline, you will outlive this part of the world's war against itself. You will hold those accountable accountable, even as Steinberg gets blotted from the record, as Silverman and her ilk get bloated on success. You will see change unlooked for and unprecedented. You will welcome the new world as you do all things, with grace and intelligence.

How do I know this?

Because behind the men and their pits, I hear the river.

Do you hear it, Lynka?

Do you hear it?

Jr.