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Livingstone's Cataract

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

In January 1860, the painter Thomas Baines returned to Cape Town in disgrace, having been dismissed from David Livingstone's expedition to explore the Kebrabasa rapids on the Zambesi River. *Livingstone's Cataract* is a historical novel that follows Baines's involvement with the expedition. It is written from Baines's point of view, in the first person.

The novel traces the problems that the party faced: from their struggle to find a way through the river delta to the inadequacies of their steamer; from the war that was raging between the Portuguese authorities and rebel *prazeros* to intense conflicts between the members of the expedition; from the malaria that beset them to the hostile environment that resisted their attempts to map or navigate. Underlying these troubles is the fraught relationship between Baines and Livingstone, and their ultimate falling out.

Livingstone's Cataract is based on meticulous historical research, closely following events as recorded in journals, letters, dispatches, reports, newspapers, books, maps, photographs and paintings. But it goes beyond these, filling in gaps where the historical record is scant, delving into more personal territory than Victorian history records, and serving the demands of novelistic and narrative conventions. The style follows closely the discourse of the time, and into Baines's narrative are woven words and phrases from his journal, letters and other writings. Drawing from history, the novel demonstrates the way in which the historical record is constructed, manipulated and imposed on reality.

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Livingstone's Cataract

*Being an account by Thomas Baines of his tenure
with the Expedition of Dr David Livingstone to the
Zambezi River in 1858 and 1859, to investigate the
navigability of the Kebrabasa rapids*

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*To Roddy McLennan,
for the love of stories*

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It is scarcely possible to avoid comparing the eye to a telescope. We know that this instrument has been perfected by the long-continued efforts of the highest human intellects; and we naturally infer that the eye has been formed by a somewhat analogous process. But may not this inference be presumptuous? Have we any right to assume that the Creator works by intellectual powers like those of man?

– Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 1859

When sitting one day in the hut with Sekomi he was silent for some time and at length, looking steadfastly at me, he said, addressing me by the pompous title by which I was usually addressed, 'I wish you could give me your eyes.' I asked why. 'Because,' he said, 'I like them.' He remained quiet and thoughtful again, and then abruptly said, 'You must give me medicine to change my heart, I want a heart like yours. Mine is always proud and angry, angry with people. It is very proud and very angry, always, always.'

– David Livingstone, letter to James MacLehose, 28 May 1842

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PART I

THE VOYAGE

Dear Emma

I have been busy writing and preparing a skeleton chart with latitude and longitude and the outline of Africa leaving the rest blank to lay down our work upon.

– Thomas Baines, letter to his sister Emma Elliott, 18 January 1858

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Cape Town, January 1860

Find me a man who would hear ill spoken of Dr Livingstone: there are none. Even my friends look upon me awkwardly. This is not the story they wanted to hear. It is not the story I wanted to tell.

When I was carried off the *Lynx*, the ship that brought me from the Zambesi, and me alone, Williams was there to meet me, his eyes brimming with concern but unable to meet mine. 'My friend, my friend, I came as soon as I heard...' A blanket around my shoulders, the journey into town had the quality of a dream, the liquid motion of the coach after days at sea, the strange sight of things familiar: street poles, post boxes, men in suits going about their business, and above all the flat-topped redoubt of Table Mountain, announcing to me that I was home, though there was nothing welcome in it.

At Williams's homestead, his young wife bustled me into the guestroom with an anguished expression. 'Oh Thomas, what has happened to you?' She hovered for a moment in the doorway, then left. Sleep came the instant she closed the door.

But I find no peace. Drifting between restless sleep and quivering wakefulness, for days I see them: a headless body lying before me, alligators drifting across the water, the rocks that reach out of the river and go up forever, plumed native warriors snapping their bodies in a fearsome war dance, the jeering laughter, the accusations, calling me a thief and liar.

I come to, in this little room, at all hours of the day or night. Sometimes Williams is here, his bushy eyebrows pressed together above his spectacles, sometimes his wife, humming a child's song as she mops my forehead with a wet cloth. Other faces appear at my bedside, although I'm not always sure which are real. Last night it was my mother, though she is in England, resting her hand on mine and assuring me that everything will be all right. Dr Kirk has come to me, with his medicines, though he remains on the Zambesi. Then it is Williams again, telling me to rest, to be still, that I have been shouting in my sleep.

At other times I find myself alone. And then, as I become properly awake, and my eyes begin to take in the plastered walls and the patterned ceiling and the textured cotton curtains, and my ears the sound of the city outside, it comes to me, the hard nub, the reason I am here: I have been dismissed. Dismissed from Dr Livingstone's expedition. A

thief and a liar – the voices accuse me still, and I wish to return to the nightmares and be spared from this cold, hard disgrace.

Williams has been most kind, and Mrs Williams most hospitable. They bring me dinners on a tray, and newspapers, with notices of parliamentary debates and auctions and agricultural shows. Now that I am becoming myself again, though I am still weak, I notice something that, remarkably, has escaped my attention. Mrs Williams is heavy with child. Two months, they tell me, give or take a week or two. Husband and wife stand beside each other, unable to disguise their pride, or their pity. We are the same age, Williams and I. The life of a harbour clerk seems to be doing him good.

Other friends have come to visit, speaking softly and not asking, yet, to be told what has happened. I offer no explanations, waiting, as I am, for my strength to return, or for news, perhaps, from the interior.

The newspaper beside my bed is folded in a way that shows, halfway down the page, a list of bankruptcies, three fellows whose misfortune fits into a narrow column of print, not worth much thought, but I find myself wondering, as I would not have done before, what the story is that lies behind it.

I used to think of this as the other side of the world, this Cape of Good Hope. But it's not. There was an age, long ago, when it was still wild, and dangerous, but not any more. It is impossible to imagine, like trying to think of a time before chocolate, or coffee, or the potato.

Not the Zambesi. It's not very far on the map, and only a fortnight away, by ship – but so removed. It may as well exist in a different time. It's not *connected*, as the Cape is – although that of course is what we were trying to do: to navigate the Zambesi, and open the interior to civilization. That was the plan.

Those days, at the beginning, they seem a world even more distant than that. England was ablaze with Livingstone. It was all Livingstone. Everyone was talking about his great journey; everyone had read his book. Was any man more famous than he?

To meet him, to be chosen to go on his next expedition ... The feeling I had, when I received the news – I find it impossible to describe it now. This was the most important thing that anyone could hope to do, and I was now to be a part of it. To travel with the greatest explorer of them all, Livingstone himself. To journey up a mighty river no one had known about until recently, and certainly make other discoveries along the way. And the paintings, the record of the wonders that we saw, would be by the hand of Thomas Baines.

It all seemed such a glorious prospect back then.

Men who had known me when I was a child, and many whom I didn't know, came up to me in the streets of Lynn, at the door of our house and at celebratory functions, and shook my hand, slapped me on the back, and said *Well done boy*, and *Jolly good*, and *If only your father*, and *Always saw it in you*.

What would they say now, those men? What would you say?

Two years ago – not much more than that – but a lifetime. How far away we are in this, my sick room, the window darkened by thick curtains and rattled by this pitiless wind.

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Though the modest traveller has stated in his preface that he would rather travel over Africa again than write a book, his story is here put forth in so artless, so clear, and yet so telling a manner, that I venture to say Dr. Livingstone's style will be admired by many of those who might be supposed to become his critics. It is really refreshing to turn these pages, and see how a traveller, who is bent only on speaking the plain truth to Englishmen, wins your hearts, and how he so carries you with him as to give you a full conception of the African character.

– Sir Roderick Murchison, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*,
9 November 1857

University of Cape Town

London, 9 November 1857

I stand at the mirror for a moment longer. There is a stain on the shirt, near the collar. I can imagine what Mother would say if she was here. She told me I should get a new one, and I promised her I would, but I haven't had the time. It's still strange to see myself in a suit and tie. I haven't had much occasion to dress like this in years. Not in South Africa, certainly not when I was away from the Cape, and not in Australia. Come to think of it, I haven't had much occasion to look in a mirror at all.

My eyes glare back at me. They have a look of fierce determination in them, and so they should.

Today, Thomas, you will meet Dr Livingstone. And on this day, when he is celebrated by the Society, your paintings will line the walls. What better fortune can there be than that? What better way to impress him with your qualifications for the job?

What will Dr Livingstone see, when he looks at me?

I am not a tall man. When I stand in the company of men my age, I am usually the shortest. If I stand with ladies (not that I often do), I am often not the tallest. One might notice, when I walk, a slight limp, that has been with me since the accident, though it is not very marked now. But it's true to say that I have more than compensated for any weaknesses. My face – I move close to the mirror and turn slightly so it appears as I would have it in a self-portrait. The dark hair and long beard of the Baines men, the eyes and nose of my mother's people, the skin marked with toughness and resilience, with my own experience.

And there, near the second button, the stain on the shirt. Not to worry: unless I turn my head entirely to one side, my beard will cover it. And, in any case, I wouldn't think Livingstone is the kind of man to worry about such things.

I arrive at Burlington House hours before the meeting. I need to check that my pictures have been hung correctly, and I am happy for the chance to get a sense of the place, to feel comfortable here. This is not the Society's usual meeting place. They have moved to larger premises to accommodate their growing numbers, and of course all will want to come today, not for me of course, but to hear Livingstone speak.

As I stand on the street, looking up at the façade, three stories of grey stone, set with arched Palladian windows and topped with spires, a voice addresses me.

‘May I help you, sir?’

He is a stern-looking man, the doorman, his job to turn away people who don’t belong here, and admit those who do.

‘Yes, I’m – excuse me – Thomas Baines. I’m reading a paper here later, for the Royal Geographical Society.’ I hold out my hand, and then, when he doesn’t take it, I gesture towards the interior behind him. ‘I’m exhibiting too. My paintings will already be inside.’

He looks at me for a moment longer and then stands to one side. ‘Very good, sir. Welcome to Burlington House.’

The doorman sees me into an enormous entrance hall and points me towards the great room where the Society’s meeting will be held. I walk along the passage, aware of my footfalls on the shining wood as I pass the portraits of celebrated men and sketches of great buildings and maps of faraway places. I stop before a map of Africa. The Zambesi is marked on it, as are the Victoria Falls, discovered just the year before last. This is a new map, though it still has many areas that need filling in. The world is changing quickly; a map does not remain true for very long.

With my finger I trace Livingstone’s journey: from Cape Town up to the central interior; then, westward, to Loanda on the Angolan coast. And then, the great achievement, the journey from coast to coast: all the way to Quilimane, just above the delta. It isn’t just the distance he travelled – although that is remarkable in itself: three years, four thousand miles, on foot, by canoe. It’s the fact that he was the first, and the discoveries he made. The greatest river south of the Congo, where only desert was supposed to exist. And of course the Falls – the Victoria Falls. ‘*Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight.*’

How I long to see what he has seen. Since I heard about the Falls, since I read about them in Livingstone’s book – and I read those passages again and again – I have been seized by a desire to paint them, the greatest natural wonder of the world, and tonight’s events might just make it possible.

I follow the river further downstream, until I reach the Portuguese town of Tete, a few hundred miles from the coast. Livingstone travelled most of its course, but not all of it. He missed the rapids, Kebrabasa – somewhere above there – situated in precisely that bend in the river that he’d bypassed by travelling more directly overland. He learnt about them only later, too late to turn back. Now he needs to go back there, to prove that the Zambesi is navigable, a highway into the interior.

There has been no announcement, but it is common knowledge that there will be another expedition. I wish, more than anything, to be a part of it. And perhaps, in years to

come, I will look at a map, and see a feature there, which I was the first to see, which I named.

The great hall is, as I hoped, empty. My paintings line the walls – thirty-five pictures, carefully chosen. Each of them tells a tale, captured there on canvas, but a story too that only I can remember, of the moment of composition – where I was standing or crouching, what I was thinking, whether I was comfortable, or hungry, or occasionally in danger. There are pictures illustrating all stages of the Australian expedition, and pictures too of South Africa, representing more than ten years and a range of places – a white-sailed brig battling the southeaster in Table Bay, flat-topped kopjes in the Karoo, the whitewashed buildings of Grahamstown, scenes of war on the Eastern Cape frontier.

I make my way to the front, where I will speak, and survey the space: the high ceiling, the blocks of chairs, the wooden pillars at the far end. Then I try the first phrases of my paper, in a speaking voice.

I imagine the room full of people. Apart from the seats, there is plenty of standing space; the room will take a crowd. I will have to raise my voice a little more, but I dare not do so now, for fear of being overheard. My heart is beating and my throat feels dry. I hope—

‘Dr Shaw? Is that you?’ I am startled by a man’s voice near the door. A figure stands there, but I cannot make out who it is. *‘Ah, no, who is that ... Mr Baines, is it?’*

As he approaches, I see it is Murchison himself, president of the Royal Geographical Society, striding towards me. The light is behind him, silhouetting him somewhat, but I recognize his face, his large forehead framed by dark hair that turns to white as it comes to two points on either side of his chin. He is dressed in a suit, waistcoat and bowtie.

‘Sir Roderick, yes indeed, good day. I’ve come earlier than I needed to, I know.’

‘Yes, yes, as have I. I thought I’d see if anything needed doing, in preparation for this evening’s festivities.’ He smiles at me and I feel at ease. *‘It’s very good of the University and the Royal Society to let us Geographers use their premises. Whitehall Place would be too small – today especially, although we’ve been groaning at the seams of late, with all our new members.’*

‘It is an impressive hall,’ I say.

‘But I hope people will be encouraged to go there still – our map room is filled with most interesting new acquisitions. China, the Crimea, India – quite remarkable.’

He has an almost boyish look for a man his age. But he is a powerful man, in matters exploratory, and an important ally.

‘I have no doubt they will,’ I reply. *‘I will certainly go and look at them myself.’*

‘Good, good. I’m sure they will be of particular interest to you. You’re making a name as a mapmaker yourself. Very good.’

‘I hope very much,’ I say, ‘that there are more opportunities awaiting me ... that – I mean – that I can put my energies where they will be most useful.’

He looks at me, his eyes sparkling. He knows exactly what I am talking about.

‘I’m sure you will,’ he says. ‘I’m sure you will. And we shall do whatever we can. But now, you must excuse me, I must attend to some matters.’ As he walks away he raises his voice. ‘I shall see you later.’

We shall do whatever we can. Does he mean ... that he will recommend me for the position?

In the half-hour before the meeting, the hall begins to fill. There are men in jackets and top hats, and some ladies too. Standing at the wall, I can make out phrases. There is talk about the Mutiny in India, and about the possibility of war in Europe. There is talk about the British Association and chambers of commerce; about Africa, and exploration, about resources and the ills of the slave trade, and, of course, about Livingstone.

Everyone is so smartly dressed. I hope no one notices my shirt.

After some time there is an abrupt pause in the sound of the crowd, as if everyone has drawn breath at the same moment, followed by a buzz of hushed chatter. Livingstone has arrived; there he stands on the other side of the room, in a dark blue jacket and cap. I manage only to catch glimpses, blocked by people surrounding him and others moving into position. His face is so familiar: the full moustache and sideburns, the strong chin, cheeks forming slight jowls, the stern expression, his hair parted severely to one side, forming a wave over his forehead. It is a face that everybody knows.

Murchison is by his side, gesticulating enthusiastically with one hand, the other placed on his friend’s arm as he guides him through the crowd, pausing long enough for people to greet the Doctor and then moving him along. I try to move closer, but it becomes thicker with people the closer I get. When I am almost within speaking distance, I see that Murchison has brought him to a minister in the Cabinet.

‘Marvellous,’ the minister is saying, ‘absolutely marvellous. And the country you describe there – who would have thought?’

‘It is,’ Livingstone says, ‘an exceedingly promising country. Fertile, well watered. If the natives can be taught to put their hand to agriculture, to legitimate commerce, we can save them from the strangle of the slave trade.’

Livingstone's voice is not what I expected. It is not the booming voice of an imagined 'great man'. He is confident about his views, but there is something hesitant about the way he expresses them.

'And the benefits,' Murchison adds, 'would spread to England, which would buy the goods produced in Africa.'

'I believe,' Livingstone says, 'there is potential there for growing cotton. If we can do so on any scale, we will not only benefit Africa and England – but make a dent in our reliance on cotton from America. We are, to our shame, still complicit in slavery with every thread that we purchase.'

'Wilberforce has a proper heir,' the minister says, his hand outstretched respectfully towards Livingstone.

'We all do what we are called by God to do,' says the Doctor. 'We are merely the instruments of His will, and only when we realize that do we get anything done, anything meaningful.'

'Quite right,' says the minister. 'And how fitting that God should choose Englishmen to do his most important work.'

The people around him join in laughter. Livingstone, I notice, remains stern-faced.

When I was a boy, I used to read the stories in the Bible and wonder ... what was it like to live in those times? What was it like to be in the company of ... Moses, Joshua, the prophet Daniel, the Apostles, even Jesus himself? Did they look like ordinary men, indistinguishable in a crowd, or could one perceive immediately some sign of greatness around them, the halo that painters of old placed above their heads? Or was it only when one knew about their deeds that the greatness became apparent?

'Dr Livingstone,' someone says, 'I hear some rascal has produced unauthorized copies of your book. Has he been prosecuted?'

Livingstone's response is lost to me as he moves further away and I, in turn, am drawn away by the current of the crowd. I'll have to wait to meet him later.

Near the door I see a familiar face, looking in my direction, and I signal my friend with a half-wave.

'Arrowsmith,' I say, 'John!' I shake him by the hand.

'Thomas. How good to see you. Do you know William Keble? He has done some botanical studies in India. William: Thomas Baines. He was a member of Gregory's expedition. He'll be reading a paper later.'

Here, in this grand and crowded hall, I have found my place among the most eminent men connected with science and geography in England. I have come a long way – a

sailor's son from King's Lynn, without the privileges of many of the people here. After years in the Cape, and on the frontier, and the travels beyond its borders, there is something daunting, foreign, about this great metropolis. But it is those travels, far away from civilization, that have enabled me to return to this place with knowledge and experience esteemed by the learned societies. They have given me a key to the heart of London that I would not have had if I'd remained in England. And a key to the company of men such as Livingstone.

Livingstone, of course, did not come from privilege, though he was even less fortunate than I. This is something that we share. Exploration, in remote places, has brought him back here, to be admired and celebrated.

The people in the hall take their seats. I have a place reserved in the front. I glance across at Livingstone, who sits a few seats across. Our eyes meet and I nod. He nods back faintly, and as I feel a smile begin to break out he looks away.

I hope that he recognizes something in me. The same spirit as himself, perhaps.

Murchison is reading out a list of new candidates. 'I need not tell you,' he says, 'that we are in a very flourishing condition; and I am proud to be the President of a Society that has been successful beyond all that its warmest friends could have anticipated.'

After speaking of newly acquired maps, of expeditions that are under way in various parts of the world, he comes to the real business at hand. 'I hold in my hand,' he says, raising a copy of *Missionary Travels*, 'the great geographical publication of the year, marking an epoch in geographical science. I hold in my hand the book which recounts the journeys and researches of my eminent friend Dr Livingstone in Africa.'

I look across at Livingstone again. Separating us are the backs of other men's heads, all turned towards him. Livingstone himself is looking down at his hands. I imagine for a second that I can see the halo above his head. Who else in the room would have one? Certainly not me, though perhaps one day I will become that kind of man.

Holding up a framed diploma, Murchison says: 'I hope you will accept this as a testimony of our unfeigned and sincere admiration of your conduct, and of the respect which, as geographers, we shall ever entertain towards you for having realized that which no Englishman has ever accomplished – the traverse of the great continent of South Africa.'

Amidst the thundering of applause and cheers, Livingstone rises and moves forward to receive the diploma. After Murchison has taken his seat, and the Doctor stands there, preparing to speak, a quietness falls upon the room that I would not have thought possible for such a large crowd. It feels a little unreal, now seeing those qualities made flesh, those

qualities that we admire so, contained within that man standing before us, not very large of frame, but who has realized such achievements. He stands with an unsettled stance. Although his mouth forms a smile, there remains a stern, almost fierce expression on his face.

Doctor Livingstone.

'I am in want of words,' he says at last, his eyes lowered, 'to express my gratitude and thankfulness for the very kind manner in which you have referred to my labours.' He looks up at Murchison. 'I beg to return my heartfelt thanks to you, as President of the Society, for the remarks you have made, and to the Fellows for the kind manner in which they have received those remarks.'

He has the manner of a man not used to speaking in public. His accent is strange, and if one did not know he was a Scotsman one might imagine he came from a foreign place and learnt his English later in life.

Livingstone opens his book and reads from it. *'The Zambesi at Mazarao is a magnificent river, more than half a mile wide, and without islands. The opposite bank is covered with forests of fine timber.'*

He reads on, about the fertile river basin and its prospects, about a world far removed from Piccadilly, a world that is his own, where he becomes himself. Here, among the Doric columns, the Palladian windows, the ornately carved wooden features, he seems out of place. As am I, far more so than he.

I imagine the two of us, Livingstone and I, back there, back in Africa, where we truly belong. We are camped around a fire, an expanse of savannah around us, looking at a strange fruit that he has discovered. 'You must paint it,' he says. I smile.

I am jolted back to the hall by the sound of my name. 'Mr Thomas Baines' – Murchison is speaking – 'will now read a paper about his travels in Australia.'

My heartbeat throbs in my head and my throat seems to close up. Come on, Thomas; this is your chance.

I am on my feet, making my way to the front of the hall. As I walk, I'm filled with a strange feeling, as if I am inhabiting another man's body and looking through his eyes. I turn to the audience, a forest of faces, and spread my paper on the lectern. The words seem strange to me – are they mine? I know they made sense before, so I read.

'In the beginning of March 1855,' I hear myself say, 'through the recommendation of the Council of this Society, I was appointed Artist and Storekeeper to the North Australian Expedition, and joined Mr Gregory, the commander, in Sydney on the 21st of May.'

There is a quavering in my voice. I clear my throat. The reality grips me, that this is me, standing here and addressing the Royal Geographical Society, with Livingstone in attendance. I must press on. I belong here; I do. I focus on the paper and continue reading, about my observations of Australia, Timor and Java, the topography, vegetation and animal life, about the appearance and customs of the native inhabitants.

I look up now and then, and I try to see Livingstone's reaction. Although he is not looking at me, he seems to be listening intently. His expression is difficult to read. When he looks up, I quickly turn my gaze back to my paper. Was that approval in his eyes?

'The Indian islands appeared very mountainous,' I read, 'and smoke was emitted from several volcanoes.' I go on about the hills of Java and Bali, about the boats in the seas around them. *'Their canoes and proas, under the immense triangular sails which their outriggers enable them to support, were very beautiful and picturesque, and I sketched several of them.'*

When I look up again, my attention falls on a woman near the back of the hall. Emily? It is impossible to tell exactly, because she is too far away, and I cannot allow myself more than a moment's glance, but my body jolts with recognition. My first love. My only love.

Has she come because she heard I was speaking and wants to see me again? Or is it pure coincidence that she is here? Does she – if it is her – regret her decision, all those years ago? Oh yes, she must think very differently about me now, seeing me here, like this.

I turn to the last page and continue reading.

I am contributing. I can be proud of that. I am contributing little pieces of knowledge to the great tapestry of science, and this is an audience that appreciates such an enterprise – indeed, who would sniff out a man who was doing it wrong – and they demonstrate their appreciation with warm applause.

As I return to my seat, I glance again at the woman at the back. Of course it is not Emily. She would be much older now; it was eighteen years ago.

Murchison speaks after me. 'I would like to draw your attention to the paintings on the wall, from the pencil of Mr Baines. I'm sure you will agree with me that they illustrate, in a style that has never before even been attempted, the interiors of Africa and Australia.'

I place my hand over my mouth to stifle a smile. I don't wish to appear conceited. But this is such a triumphant moment, I wish I could leap in the air and shout for joy.

Just as well it wasn't her. I must devote all my attention to Dr Livingstone.

There are other papers, after mine, but I am filled with too much excitement and anticipation to take them in. When it is over, the crowd comes to life again, and I am greeted by a series of strangers, all wanting to know more, to shake my hand, the faces a blur of smiles. And then Livingstone is standing in front of me, with Murchison at his side.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ Sir Roderick does the introductions. ‘Thomas Baines.’

His eyes are the most striking thing about him: fierce at their centre and burdened at the edges.

‘It is a great honour to meet you, sir,’ I say.

‘A pleasure,’ he says, and shakes my hand. ‘Perhaps you would show me your pictures. I would be most interested.’

We walk from painting to painting, and I say something about each of them. ‘These are native vessels, with immense triangular sails, in the Straight of Bali. This alligator – I have not exaggerated its size – we shot him several times. That’s me in the foreground, with the revolver. Humphrey, the fellow over there, fired the final shot in the alligator’s head – unfortunately disfiguring the skin for use as a specimen.’

Does this impress him, this man who has seen all this, encountered so much danger himself? He is nodding. But what is the thinking?

‘They seem ... realistic,’ he says. ‘A good record of the country.’

‘Thank you, Dr Livingstone,’ I say, and my heart halts once again. I must, surely, be in the best position possible, to be chosen as the artist for his next expedition.

Livingstone has his face close to another of my paintings, a Sydney landscape. ‘And before this expedition, Mr Baines, you have travelled in Africa?’

‘Yes, sir, I have,’ I am able to say, ‘and there are pictures of South Africa over here. I have travelled beyond the Vaal River, into the land occupied by the Boers, and I spent some time in the Eastern Cape – I was war artist under Colonel Henry Somerset.’

He nods. ‘We will need a steam boat, to transport us to the rapids, once the ship can go no further. Do you know of such matters?’

‘I have, in fact, designed many things, including boats, yes. Would you ... Should I ... try my hand ...?’

‘It would need to have a shallow draught. No more than two feet. And it needs to be built in sections, so it can be assembled on location.’

This is doubly fortunate. I could indeed design such a vessel. But before I can say anything more, a crowd is upon us. I cannot expect any more of his time.

How did he know to ask about the boat? Coincidence? Did Murchison tell him I am useful at such things? Or perhaps this is what Livingstone means when he says his path is guided by God.

I make my way outside for some air. The wintry London sky is shot through with fireworks, left over from Guy Fawkes presumably, but they seem now to have something to do with Livingstone, to add to the triumphant festivity of the occasion. As they explode high in the air, they seem to have something to do with our future.

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In respect to the person who is to combine the duties of artist and storekeeper, I have not yet fully made up my mind as to the best individual, though I am disposed to suggest the name of Mr. T. Baines of the late North Australian Expedition.

– David Livingstone, letter to Lord Clarendon, 7 January 1858

University of Cape Town

England, winter 1857/1858

It was a strange December, back home in Lynn, for the first time in years, and, like a child, waiting, hoping, hoping that Christmas would bring me the thing I wanted so dearly.

I busied myself with the design of a steam launch for Livingstone, and, once I had pleased myself with it, I started work on the model in metal. My brother Henry was often at my side, watching what I was doing and giving a hand when I needed him to.

As boys, Henry and I had been the youngest ship-builders in Lynn. We'd been the talk of the neighbourhood when we constructed a six-foot model of a two-masted brig, large enough for both of us to sit in, when we floated it on the River Ouse. It was fitting, people said – we were the sons of John Baines, master mariner, himself the son of a master mariner. Mother wouldn't have us follow the same line of work, but we remained sailors' family, and there were always stories of the sea: storms on the open ocean, deserted tropical islands, whaling as far as the coast of Greenland. There were always dozens of ships in the harbour and we knew their details by heart: their tonnage, their rigging, the number of guns.

This model needed meticulous care. If my design were deemed suitable for the Zambesi, that would stand me in even better stead with Dr Livingstone. It also gave me something to do instead of sitting around waiting, wondering, daydreaming about being accepted for the expedition. Of course I did all of that too, but I had something with which to busy my hands and my mind.

The boat would be thirty feet long, by six feet beam. I had given it two particularly inventive features of which I was rather proud. First, it was made in sections that could be taken apart. With its full crew of sixteen men (which was the number Livingstone had given me: six Englishmen and ten African assistants), each man's share, when it was taken to pieces, would not exceed fifty pounds, so she could be carried if there was an obstacle in the river. Second, some of the sections were watertight, forming reservoirs of air, so that, should the boat be swamped or become leaky, she would not sink even when filled with water.

Had I heard Livingstone correctly when he spoke to me about it? I would come to conclude that I had misunderstood his request altogether, but now I think differently.

My sister Emma and her husband Frank Elliott arrived from Norwich a few days before Christmas. It was always good to see Emma. Though she was quite a few years younger than me, she and I had always been close. She had left years before, when Frank declared that Lynn wasn't big enough for his prospects any more. Emma said the work for a schoolteacher was better there too.

We gathered in the dining room on the night they arrived.

'Where would you like me to sit, Mary Ann?' Frank said in his booming voice. 'Over here?' He was standing behind Father's place.

'No, my dear,' Mother replied, ushering him towards my brother, 'you sit here next to Henry. Thomas, *you* sit there.'

I had been in Lynn when Father died, three years earlier. Before then – the years in South Africa – I'd been away for a decade. But I was here to say goodbye to Father, and there was fortune in that. How dreadful it must be to find that one has missed the last ten years of a parent's life, to learn that your parting, so long before, was in fact the final one. It must be hard for Mother at this time of year.

'Tom,' said Emma at dinner, putting down her cutlery. 'Still no news?'

Mother had always insisted that when we wanted to talk at the table we should never do so with food in our mouths or cutlery in our hands. If we wanted to get ahead and join the ranks of the well-off, she said, we'd better start with our manners. It was a tradition that remained in the household.

'I've written to Livingstone,' I said, 'about the boat. But it's too soon to expect a response.'

'I spoke earlier to Mr Arnold at the newspaper,' said Mother. 'He says they have heard nothing about any appointments, and he thinks it very strange that it has taken so long. I wonder if he could make some investigations. He has friends in Fleet Street.'

'I suppose they'll know before anyone,' said Henry.

'Mother, I would be grateful for any news, but please don't say anything that would make it seem like I'm ... *expecting* to be a part of the expedition. It's just the sort of thing that could scupper my chances.'

'Don't worry, dear. Mr Arnold won't do anything that... He's an old friend of the family. He would love to talk to you if you do get the job, so he won't do anything to spoil things.'

'Mother, let's wait a little longer before we do anything. I think that would be best.'

It was a tone I'd seldom used with her, but I felt it was necessary in this case. I certainly couldn't complain about what Mother had done before. The publication of

paintings of mine had been entirely due to her. She went as far as approaching Prince Albert for help with the publication of *Scenery and Events*. I would never have done anything like that on my own steam. But it did strike me that this should be left to run its course.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘if Dr Livingstone knows what’s good for him, there’s nothing to worry about. You’re a fine artist and an accomplished explorer – and the best suited man for the job in all of England. My Thomas.’

‘Quite right,’ said Emma, with a wink and a smile.

Dear Emma. I missed her. She’d always been the only girl of my generation who I could talk to, really. Until I met Emily – also, like my sister, known as Em, which caused some confusion.

I’d forgotten about my ‘sighting’ of her in London, and found myself mentioning it to Emma when we were alone after dinner.

‘I thought I saw her, Em. In London. I thought I saw Emily, but ...’

‘Emily?’ said Emma, a little louder than I would have liked.

‘Who’s that?’ Mother asked as she walked past.

‘Nothing,’ said Emma, grimacing an apology.

‘Emily, did you say?’ Henry was also in earshot.

‘Tom thinks he saw her,’ Emma said softly.

‘Not *thinks*,’ I said. ‘*Thought*. At the time. For a moment.’ This was *not* a conversation I wanted to have with the whole family.

‘How is she?’ asked Henry.

‘Who?’ I heard myself say.

‘Emily. How is she?’

‘I wouldn’t know, Henry,’ I said, my teeth clenching. ‘*It wasn’t her.*’

‘Now now,’ said Mother. ‘Let’s talk about something else.’

‘Fame and glory first, Tom,’ said Henry, ‘and then you can choose the pick of the girls.’

I closed my eyes for a second and opened them again. The prospect of an evening of domestic conversation with a wife was the furthest ambition from my mind.

I followed news about the expedition keenly, in the press, in conversations with people who knew people in government, in science, in business.

This expedition was going to be different. On his previous journeys, Livingstone had travelled on his own – always with a party of natives, of course, but not with other

Englishmen, other Scotsmen. Not with fellow white men, except occasionally – there was Cotton Oswell, and Mungo Murray, but mainly he travelled only with blacks. But of course he wasn't known then: it was those journeys – alone, without any great material support – that had made him famous. This time the plan was for a larger enterprise, with the backing of the Foreign Office. In December the papers contained stories of nothing else when Parliament approved an extraordinary expenditure of five thousand pounds for the expedition.

The plan – originally, I understand – was for a much larger enterprise, with a staff of many times more, but Livingstone had refused it. He agreed to a smaller party, limited to the essential roles for an exploratory venture – navigator, engineer, geologist, botanist, surgeon, artist and storekeeper. And some of those combined in one person. A ship would be provided to transport the expedition to the Zambesi, and, of course, the steam launch, for exploring the rapids and – if they proved passable – the river beyond. In addition to this the expedition would be given provisions, an iron house, weapons, medicines, items to trade with the natives and the Portuguese, and implements for stimulating agriculture.

The wait seemed endless. Christmas and New Year passed. Then, a week into January, news came of the first appointments, although I had still heard nothing about my own application. The first name was familiar. Commander Norman Bedingfeld, of the Royal Navy: navigator and second-in-command. I'd read about him in *Missionary Travels*. He'd met Livingstone at Loanda, and offered to take him back to England then, which, of course, Livingstone had refused – and crossed all the way to the east coast instead. The others were just names. Dr John Kirk, from Edinburgh University: medical officer and economic botanist. Mr Richard Thornton, Royal School of Mines: geologist. Charles Livingstone, the Doctor's brother – how interesting that seemed to me then – would be general assistant and moral agent. But nothing about the artist and storekeeper, or the engineer. Nothing about the artist: this was good news, because it meant my position hadn't been filled by someone else. But why was it taking so long? Surely these other men would have been recruited some time before the announcement.

And then, a few days later, I was sitting in the study and Mother came in with the post. 'It's a letter from Dr Livingstone, dear,' she said, holding it out to me. I had written to him with some questions about the steamer; it was possible that he was merely responding to those. 'It's been delivered by messenger,' she added.

Mother's hand was shaking. I didn't look her in the eye as I took it from her and opened it quickly, but carefully, so as to preserve the envelope. My eyes fell upon the desired phrases among the looping of handwriting: ... *approved by Lord Clarendon* ...

sent by the Foreign Office to the Admiralty ... You are therefore appointed. ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘it has come,’ and when I looked up there were tears in Mother’s eyes.

‘Oh Thomas, Thomas ... so proud.’

I looked again at the letter, to make sure I had read it properly, to make sure there hadn’t been some misunderstanding.

I returned to that letter many times in the following days. Never had I felt such excitement, such triumph. My whole life seemed to have been guided to that point.

The whole town appeared to know of my appointment in one moment, and all of a sudden I was its most celebrated citizen. Wherever I went, people came up to me, or waved and shouted from across the street – all of them giving me their good wishes and congratulations. As I prepared to go back to London, I felt a little like a soldier being given a glorious sending-off on the way to some historic battlefield.

As the train pulled out of the station in a billow of steam, and the waving crowds shrank into the distance, I realized that I would not return the same man I was. The years ahead would change me, my prospects, my destiny. How could they not?

Livingstone was not in London when I arrived. He was travelling around the country – Cambridge, Liverpool, Manchester, and across the sea to Dublin – telling people, the influential and the interested, more about our mission into Africa, and what it hoped to achieve, and what they could do in our wake. I would have to wait for an appointment about the boat.

My letter said that my duties would include participating in the mapping of the land, and to that end I put my time to use learning to use a sextant, calculating longitude. (Latitude I had always found easy, but my longitude had never been very good. I would have to work at it.) My next contact with Livingstone was again by letter. He had instructions for me to oversee the packing and labelling of boxes at the London Docks, from where they would be sent to Birkenhead, our port of departure.

It was at that time that I met the first of my fellow travellers. I was in the map room of the RGS, having just pulled out one of the wide drawers.

‘Thomas Baines,’ someone said.

I turned around, expecting to find someone I knew, because he’d said my name in such a familiar way.

‘John Kirk.’ A wiry man stood before me, his hand outstretched. ‘We are to be companions for the next two years at least, so I reckon it’s best we become acquainted at

once.' He spoke with a lilt, and his eyes were smiling too. His hair was dark blond and curly, and he had a beard of tight coils that jutted out below his chin.

Beside him was a younger man, dark haired and clean shaven. 'Richard Thornton, geologist,' Kirk said, doing the introductions. 'Thomas Baines, artist and storekeeper. I am right, aren't I? You match the description exactly.'

'Yes,' I said. 'Thomas Baines it is. I'm very pleased to meet you both.'

'Professor Hooker at Kew tells me you're as keen a botanist as I,' Kirk said, 'and a much better painter.'

'Yes, but I'm an inferior doctor!' I laughed, with the assurance that I'd have a fine companion on the expedition.

They were both much younger than I. Kirk was twenty-five, although he looked a bit older than that. He'd graduated a few years earlier from Edinburgh University, with a degree in medicine. He had been appointed as the expedition's surgeon and economic botanist.

Thornton was just a boy, barely out of his teens. He too was a university man. He had, I soon learnt, graduated at the top of his class at the Royal School of Mines. His youth had been a concern, but Murchison, who of course was head of the school, had pushed for him to be accepted. He'd been offered a position in Australia before the expedition, but he'd taken this one instead. Who wouldn't?

I remember thinking at the time that I would have a lot to teach these two men. That when they went out into the field, and faced the challenge of a harsh environment, they would find that their university degrees counted for less than they expected.

'Neither of you have been to Africa before, have you?' I said.

'No,' Thornton replied, 'but I believe you've spent a long time there.'

'I've made South Africa my home since I was a little older than you,' I said, 'although I've spent some years back here and in Australia.'

'I've travelled a little,' Kirk said, 'in Turkey and Syria. Never to Africa, though, and nothing like your travels. Have you met Captain Bedingfeld yet? He's spent some time in Africa too.'

'In West Africa, yes. I know *of* him, of course. I haven't met him yet, but I'm due to tomorrow. I have instructions to check some stores at the London Docks, and I believe he will be there.'

Apart from being a commander in the Royal Navy, and his personal interaction with Livingstone, Bedingfeld had been recommended in particular by his knowledge of African rivers – he'd navigated the Congo, the greatest after the Nile. Bedingfeld was to

command the steam launch and take charge of navigating the Zambesi. If my design was used, we might have had a lot to do with one another.

When I found my way to the appointed place at the docks, Bedingfeld was already there, although I'd managed to get there on time. The docks were bewildering, a maze of pathways and warehouses, with cranes towering into the sky, people milling about, and the incessant noise of machinery. My first and enduring image of Bedingfeld was of a man dressed in full naval regalia, in conversation with some men, his arms waving and pointing to reinforce the directions he was giving. I thought he might have looked exactly the same two hundred years earlier, with all this metal shrunk to something much smaller made of wood.

He was not very tall – though taller than me – but he had the presence of a man used to giving orders. His hair, brushed straight across from a middle parting, formed bunches of curls on the sides. With his high collar and tasselled epaulettes, he reminded me rather of a king in a deck of playing cards.

'Captain Bedingfeld,' I said, my hands at my sides. 'I am Thomas Baines.' I found myself wanting to salute, but prevented myself from doing so. 'I'm sorry I'm late,' I added, even though I was not.

'Mr Baines, yes.' He looked at me in a way that seemed to take in my expression, my stature, my clothing – the way a commander would inspect a soldier. 'How very good to meet you.'

His voice took me aback. I had met enough people from the privileged classes recently – at meetings of the Society, and particularly since my appointment – but, more than anyone, Bedingfeld spoke with the manner of the extremely well-to-do, the kind of accent you would assume to be an exaggeration if you heard it imitated.

'Now,' he said, taking in a deep breath of air, 'I believe we have work to do.'

'Indeed, sir, we do,' I replied, falling in behind him as he made his way to the warehouse.

Livingstone had ordered sixteen hundred pounds of beads, suited to the African market. They came in four different colours – red, blue, yellow and green – and had to be packed in four cases of four hundred pounds, each case containing a quarter of each colour, so that if any were lost, we would still have the full range to trade with the natives. The cases were marked with a symbol and a number, and the words 'Dr Livingstone's Expedition'.

I made a note in the store book, as Livingstone had ordered me, and also of five bales of calico, four of them containing portions of various colours, the fifth unbleached. They were similarly labelled, though with another symbol before each number.

‘Now,’ I said to the man in charge, ‘the address. Do you have—’

‘Birkenhead,’ Bedingfeld’s voice overpowered mine. ‘These are to be sent to Mr Macgregor Laird’s stores there. Is that understood?’

‘Yes, sir, that’s the address I have.’ He held up a piece of paper to prove it.

‘See to it, sir. The salvation of Africa depends upon it.’

The man looked a little bewildered at this, but Bedingfeld’s face gave no hint whether he was jesting or not. Was he serious or did he have a wicked sense of humour? I would have to get to know him better to find out.

‘I’m hoping,’ I said, ‘that Dr Livingstone will be able to look at my model for the steam launch when I see him this weekend. But perhaps you would want to look at it too.’

He looked at me blankly.

‘If you have time?’ I added.

‘What are you talking about?’ Bedingfeld said. ‘The steamer is being manufactured in Liverpool. I’m to oversee its trials in a matter of weeks.’

There must have been some mistake, I thought. I’d have been told that my own efforts were no longer required. But I felt Bedingfeld was not the man to discuss this with.

‘Have they found an engineer yet?’ I asked.

‘I believe there are certain men being considered; one of them is still on his way back to England.’

It bothered me that I had not been told about the steamer. In light of what was to happen, it was inconsequential, but my pride took a bit of a knock, and I kept hoping that Bedingfeld was wrong. Surely I should have been kept informed one way or the other. Livingstone knew that I had been working on it. But I did my best to push the matter out of my mind. There was so much else to be excited about, and so much to do: making sure that the expedition’s stores were sent to Liverpool, as well as making my own preparations.

I still had to meet Livingstone’s brother, and hoped to do so soon. I heard too that the Doctor’s wife and young son would be joining us, although I wasn’t sure if this was true. Bedingfeld, I learned, had almost *not* been chosen on the grounds that he was married; the plan, initially, was to have no married men besides Livingstone. Bedingfeld, apparently,

had said that if he and his wife could agree to it, what could it matter to anyone else? – which seemed fair enough. Particularly because Charles Livingstone was married too, and Dr Livingstone’s wife was to join the expedition! I would wait and see what transpired.

The expedition was already opening doors to opportunity. The Doctor said in a letter that Sir Morton Peto, the great railway man, still had some of my paintings, and that the Duke of Argyll was interested in looking at them too. Livingstone hoped to find time for us to meet him together. My art, at last, was finding admiring eyes among people of means. ‘*Your pay begins on the 1st February,*’ the letter concluded, ‘*so you had better get ready for the 15th of next month. I shall be in London on Saturday.*’ And the salutation, ‘*And am, &c., David Livingstone.*’

I saw him, finally, that Saturday at the RGS. It was not a public meeting, but a few dozen people had gathered. Livingstone, as always, had an audience encircling him.

‘I go back to the Zambesi to keep a promise,’ he was saying. ‘A promise to the Makololo, the men who accompanied me on the journey across the continent. They are in Tete now, waiting for me there, waiting to be taken home. The Zambesi will provide a pathway to the highlands where they come from, and there we will find a healthy country, a fertile country, where civilization may be established.’

As I made my way towards him, and caught his eye, he called out, ‘Ah, Mr Baines.’

I approached with a feeling of immense gratification, and shook him by the hand. ‘Dr Livingstone. It is good to see you again, at last.’

A mere two months of memory had softened his features. I had forgotten quite how fierce his eyes were.

‘Have you met?’ – he gestured the man to his right, whose identity was immediately apparent – ‘my brother Charles?’

Charles Livingstone. He was younger than the Doctor; I’d been told he was about my age. His skin was softer than Livingstone’s – unravaged by the African sun – but somehow he looked more ... worn. Perhaps it is unfair to look at a man in light of a more glorious brother. His hair was fairer, and he was slightly balding. Unlike his brother he wore a beard.

‘No, I haven’t,’ I said, offering my hand, ‘and it is a great honour.’

‘I—’ Charles started saying something but then changed his mind. He nodded instead, and said, ‘Good evening.’ It was a curt greeting. Dismissive somehow, and, looking back, indicative of things to come.

‘Charles has come recently from America,’ said the Doctor, to everyone around him, ‘where he was a minister. He was there for – how long, Charles?’

‘Sixteen years,’ Charles confirmed, his response barely audible.

‘Sixteen years. As long as I’ve been in Africa – longer, in fact. And of course there he has learnt about cotton – haven’t you, Charles?’

‘I—’ Charles nodded. ‘Indeed I have.’

‘That will be very useful where we are going. I’ve seen it growing wild there, and if we can put it to cultivation – *humane* cultivation – I believe we can *break* the *inhumane* system across the Atlantic.’

‘Hear hear,’ people said in agreement.

‘Charles is also proficient in the science of photography,’ Livingstone continued, ‘and this we shall also put to use where we are going. We shall be the first expedition to have an artist’ – he pointed to me – ‘*and* a photographer.’

This was news indeed. I had, of course, had my photograph taken once or twice, and I’d asked questions, so I knew a little about the process, but I wondered how it would be possible on the move, out in the wild. It was remarkable, that an image could be taken with the uncovering of a lens and the application of chemicals – in such a mechanical manner. But it was never an image with depth, or colour (literally, but in a more profound sense too), and certainly I did not see it as a threat to my own skills.

I wanted to talk to Livingstone alone, but I realized that would be impossible. I managed to move closer so I was not merely one of many people in the circle around him.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I said, ‘I’ve been meaning to ask you—’

‘Yes, of course,’ he said, ‘what is it?’

‘You said – I mean, if there was time, of course – the Duke of Argyll – my paintings – but I know you are very busy.’

Livingstone frowned, and held up his finger, making little movements with it as if reinforcing a point in his head.

‘That’s right,’ he said. ‘I have not heard from him – but – let me...’

The crowd would not leave us alone for much longer, so I quickly added: ‘And the matter of the boat.’

‘The boat...’ he said. ‘Has no one from the Admiralty spoken to you about the boat...?’

‘The Admiralty?’ I said. ‘No, I—’

‘*Doctor!*’ A booming voice took form as an equally imposing figure, interposing itself between us in order to shake Livingstone’s hand. ‘How marvellous to have you in London again. I can assure you we will do as much as the associations in Manchester and Liverpool to support your venture.’

I did not have an opportunity to speak to him again that evening, and the next day he was off again, leaving me in limbo about the boat, with no idea when we would have a chance to talk again. I myself had to return to Lynn in a matter of days for a public meeting organized for the beginning of February.

I wished the time would come when we were finally on our way, when, apart from the crew, it would be just Livingstone and me, and the other members of the expedition, without other people making demands. I've always looked forward to the beginning of a voyage, when all of a sudden one's fate is contained in an enclosed vessel, when one's progress is the charge of a ship's captain and in the power of fire, machinery, wind and sail. But there was still much to do before then.

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I expect to find for myself no great fortune in that country, nor do I expect to explore any large portions of a new country; but I do hope to find in that part of the country which I have partially explored, a pathway by means of the river Zambesi which may lead to highlands where Europeans may form a healthful settlement, and where by opening up communication and establishing commercial intercourse with the natives of Africa they may slowly, but not the less surely, impart to the people of that country the knowledge and the inestimable blessings of Christianity.

– David Livingstone, speech at the Farewell Livingstone Festival,
London, 13 February 1858

University of Cape Town

SS Pearl, 10 March 1858

Not an hour after weighing anchor, the noises of the ship have settled into a familiar rhythm, each thump and grind and clatter beating its time, over a constant hum and rumble, the splashing of water, the creaking of metal and timber, the clanking of the turning screw. It is surprisingly quiet in the cabin – just the scratching of pens on paper. Kirk and Mrs Livingstone are writing at my table, Charles Livingstone, Mr Rae and Captain Bedingfeld at another. Livingstone has not appeared since we boarded this morning.

Kirk has put his pen down and is gazing out of the window. Poor fellow. The news came just a few days ago that his father has died. His brother came to Liverpool to tell him, but with the *Pearl* having arrived the day before, there was nothing he could do. What a heavy way to start. But he seems to have taken it as well as any man could be expected to. Never any question that he would remain behind.

‘I am so dreadfully sorry,’ I said to him, when I first heard.

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘He’d been unwell, but none of us expected... It was so sudden.’

‘At least,’ I said, after we had both been silent for some time, ‘he lived long enough to see you chosen for Livingstone’s expedition.’

Kirk nodded, but remained quiet.

As I watch him now, he blinks slowly, deep in some memory. I look down at my letter on the table.

There have been moments, since my appointment, when I have felt Father’s absence very acutely. I wish he were sitting in his rocking chair at home, right now, thinking about my progress. It would have pleased him so much. I suppose he *can* see me now, from Heaven, but I find it difficult to picture. When I think of him I see him in the rocking chair.

The heartiest congratulations came from old friends of his, who told me how proud he would be. Quite early one morning, soon after my appointment, I visited the Lynn Museum, and stopped at the display of African artefacts, most of which I had contributed, as well as paintings of mine. I expected to be alone, but old Jack Burke was there. I didn’t notice him until he spoke.

‘Your old man brought me here,’ he said with a wheeze, ‘to show me the things you had brought, the places you had been. “Jack,” he said to me, “mark my words. My Thomas is going to be someone.”’

The old man laughed, an old sea dog’s laugh.

‘He used to come here. If he wasn’t at your house or in the pub, I’d often find him here.’

Mother was the proudest of all. (She, of course, was the one behind the exhibition at the museum.) She put great effort into the celebrations in Lynn. Henry said he hadn’t seen her so busy since Emma’s wedding. I must say, I rather wished the festivities would have been left to happen spontaneously, if at all. I didn’t want people to think that I had anything to do with getting them up. But, in the end, everything was so well organized, everyone was there, and though I was at pains to stress that I hadn’t been behind it, it was most enjoyable. Mother also came down to London for the Farewell Livingstone Festival, held at the Freemasons’ Tavern. Everyone was there: all the members of the expedition – except Mr Rae the engineer, who hadn’t arrived yet – and ministers, members of Parliament, noblemen, bishops, military officers, businessmen, professors, scientists and other distinguished people. There were three or four hundred in all. Mother sat with the ladies, with Mrs Livingstone and Mrs Bedingfeld.

What a moment it was, when Sir Roderick Murchison spoke of each of us in turn. ‘Mr. Baines’ – I recall his words exactly – ‘whose previous travels in Africa and North Australia and striking sketches are well known to the public, will be there.’ And what a moment when Livingstone said how happy he was to be accompanied this time by men experienced in geology, in botany, in art, and in photography, who would be able to bring back to England reports about the geography of the place, when he’d had to attempt to do so on his own before.

I wished for a chance to introduce Mother to him, but it was impossible. She had spoken to Mrs Livingstone, though. ‘Poor Mrs Livingstone,’ she called her afterwards.

‘What do you mean, poor?’ I said. ‘She’s married to Dr Livingstone!’

‘She’s been left on her own too long,’ Mother said.

It was true, she’d been in England for three years while her husband was crossing the continent, but I don’t know what Mother meant by too long or not taking it well. She herself had been a sailor’s wife, so she knew about being left alone. Had she perceived something in Mrs Livingstone? Surely not in one evening at a crowded table. It was an irresponsible thing for Mother to say. And, in any case, Mrs Livingstone would now be accompanying her husband.

She is not what one would call a beautiful woman, not by any conventional measure. She is sitting, concentrating on her letter. Every now and then she looks up from the paper, her eyes gazing into some memory. Her features are almost manly: the strong chin; the lips a bit narrower and the nose a touch larger than one would conjure for the portrait of an imagined beauty. Her long dark hair and feminine dress seem to belong to a different picture, an inappropriate frame. Her eyebrows, almost hawkish, seem mismatched to the gentle expression in her eyes. She could be older than Livingstone, by her appearance, though I don't know if she is or no.

Her eyes flit across to me, and for an instant we look at each other, before quickly looking away. I feel embarrassed. I hope she doesn't think I've been staring at her, but this is the first chance I've had to study her features since we departed.

It was all such a rush, with all the preparations and celebrations, and then the frustration of waiting. The *Pearl* was two weeks late in coming from Glasgow, a delay which irritated Livingstone greatly. Not only would we leave after the appointed date, but when the ship arrived we now had to load her in a matter of a few days. It was tremendous work – for me especially, as storekeeper – as I had to make a note of every item received. Preserved vegetables, salted pork, biscuit, rum, cotton seeds, a plough, a harrow, household items, medical stores, scientific instruments, photographic equipment, a sugar mill, a saw mill, rifles, revolvers, cases of ammunition, boxes of beads, bales of calico, tents, sheets of corrugated iron and other pieces of the iron house, engineer's tools, and, of course, the steamer, along with spare parts for her.

My design for a boat was not used, in the end. It had been deemed too expensive. But it seemed also that there was a contract all along, with Mr McGregor Laird, shipbuilder and veteran explorer of the Niger, to provide the expedition's steamer. This would have been a disappointment if I'd not been appointed to the expedition's personnel, but it seems not to matter so much now. I'm not sure I would have had the time to give it any more attention, *and* do the work required on the stores. (If it had been a choice, of course, I would have preferred to work on a boat than on the stores, but I shall not complain!)

She was hoisted by crane in three sections; these were her elements, as it were, far fewer than mine would have had, and certainly not portable in any way. She was named the *MaRobert*, after Mrs Livingstone, following the native custom of calling a mother after her son. *MaRobert* meant *mother of Robert*, Robert being Livingstone's eldest son. Livingstone had promised his native helpers on his previous journey that he would bring his wife when he returned to them. Now he wished to say: 'I bring you not one mother of Robert, but two.'

When I awoke this morning I felt like a man possessed, so strong was my excitement that the day of our departure had finally dawned, so eager my anticipation of what lay ahead. I felt like the early explorers must have felt, leaving their familiar world and travelling to the unknown. Of course I am doing nothing of the sort: this voyage is one I have done before, its first destination is as much a home as England. But *I* shall never be the same. From now on I travel with Livingstone, and that cannot but change me and my destiny.

When we boarded, crowds had gathered at the harbour to cheer us on, some flying banners. *God speed, Dr Livingstone and Livingstone the Lion-Hearted*, that sort of thing. Livingstone stopped at the gangplank, and waved at them, and announced: 'We will bear your good wishes to the people of Africa, God bless you'; but I imagine his words only reached those as close as I, as the wind was gusting.

Now we are all aboard and on our way. We've all become acquainted during the preparations, but now that we are properly together, and will be for who knows how long, it seems we've scarcely been introduced. I've hardly spoken to Mr Rae at all, because he was appointed quite recently. All I know is that he's worked for many years on the New York passage. He is, like Kirk and the Livingstones, a Scot.

Even Livingstone, who has brought us together, is still a stranger. I've seen him more often, but our contact has been brief and to the point, as would be expected, his hands full with the preparations. He is seldom separated from his brother, but he is now. Charles is reading something, at the other table, with his back to me.

Kirk catches my eye, then turns as Thornton's dog comes in from below, soon followed by his master. The dog is a bull terrier called Crab, and he will be a member of our party.

'My brother Percy gave him to me,' Thornton told me when we first boarded, 'and I thought it best to bring him along. I think he will enjoy Africa. He will be the best-travelled dog from all of Yorkshire.'

Thornton tells the dog to sit and then turns to us. 'Dr Kirk, Mr Baines. Mrs Livingstone. I hope you won't mind if I join your table.'

'Not at all,' Kirk and I say in unison.

'I'm afraid my cabin is swimming with water,' Thornton says as he takes a seat. 'I must have left the window open yesterday, and when they were washing the deck this morning, all the dirty water ran in. And of course I'd taken out my clean linen and clothes, and it's half wet through.'

'Oh dear me!' says Mrs Livingstone.

Kirk, I notice, can't stop a slight smile from forming at the edges of his lips. 'The ship will have hands to do your washing,' he says. 'Don't know when you'll get it dry, though. But I'm sure you can borrow what you need from the rest of us.'

'It's not all bad,' Thornton says. 'There are a few changes of clothing left undamaged. But thank you.'

He takes a letter from his jacket and spreads it on the table, his pen poised above it.

'And, in any event,' he says with a smile, 'we are afloat – at last! – and that's good news.'

'Quite so,' Kirk agrees, and looks down. He must be experiencing such intensely conflicting feelings, sadness for the loss of his father and excitement for the start of our venture.

'Afloat, at last,' I say. 'It seems unbelievable, doesn't it? Mrs Livingstone, it must be familiar to you, setting off on great journeys with the Doctor, but for the rest of us – I'm sure you can imagine...'

'Oh my, indeed,' she says softly, 'it has been a long time.' Her expression is the very opposite of self-importance. 'And a long time since I travelled by sea. I do hope it's not too rough this time. I'll be happy when we get to the Cape.'

It *has* been a long time for her: six years since she came to England from the Cape, while her husband was on his great journeys.

'I'm afraid it will get rougher,' I warn, 'when we're out of the Liffey, but hopefully the weather will not change too abruptly. We've had a fine day for our departure.'

'Good thing for all those people on the pier,' says Thornton.

'Yes,' Kirk replies. 'Wasn't that a fine sending-off. I'm sure they would have been there even if it snowed.'

'They honour his work,' Mrs Livingstone says, 'my husband's work. They see the importance of it.'

'And rightly so!' I agree. 'And how honoured *we* are, to be a part of it.'

Charles Livingstone has heard me. 'Of course it's an honour!' He blurts the words out, with his eyes closed. 'My brother's work is God's work, and what could be more important than that!'

This is the first time I've heard Charles speak independently of his brother. I nod my head to signal that I agree, even though I've said what an honour it is. I must make a friend of Charles.

We return to our letters. I agree with Mrs Livingstone that arriving at the Cape is a fine prospect. It's a long time since I was there, four years, apart from a brief stop on the

way back from Australia. And how long since I first arrived there? Eighteen years! The others will be seeing it for the first time, apart from Livingstone and his wife. First view of the extraordinary mountain, its top planed flat by some demigod's tools, with arms of rock reaching forward to embrace the harbour. I'll watch their eyes when they see it. How fitting that our story starts at the place that has been *my* home.

I fold up my letter, and excuse myself. 'I think I'll go up to the deck.'

'Would you object to my company?' Kirk asks.

'Of course not,' I reply.

'I'll come with you,' Thornton says, standing up quickly. Perhaps he doesn't want to be left alone with Mrs Livingstone.

Crab raises his head and whines.

'Stay there, Crab,' Thornton says, holding up his hand.

The dog settles down again. I lead the way up the stairs and towards the deck.

'It wouldn't be out of line, would it,' Thornton asks, 'to send a note of Livingstone's with my letter? A note of mine, I mean, *from* Livingstone. I'm sure someone at home would like to have his autograph. But it wouldn't be ... bad form, in any way?'

'I'm sure no one could object,' says Kirk. 'I wouldn't even trouble the Doctor with it.'

'Nothing confidential, of course. Just a note telling me to pack glass jars for collecting rock samples. I have another from Murchison as well. I think I'll send that too.'

Out on the deck we are struck by a cold gust of wind. The ship is approaching the lighthouse at New Brighton, and the water is rougher now, taking on the character of the open sea beyond. The weather, too, is growing more wintry, and black clouds are occupying the sky. Our pilot boat is rising and dropping with the swell, and, our own position being in motion also, the little boat's movement is exaggerated madly.

There is increased activity on deck, the crew bustling about as the first mate shouts orders, the captain, Duncan, standing beside him. Duncan is a young man, younger than me, but he seems in his element now.

Thornton is looking at the heaving water with anything but welcome appreciation. His eyes are wide and his mouth appears to have stopped working.

'It helps to look at the horizon,' I tell him, 'especially when we're out at sea. Or at night a star.' I have to raise my voice for him to hear me. 'Sometimes, when it's rough, it's the best thing to do: come up here and fix your eyes on something that isn't moving – although when it's stormy the stars may be clouded over, and in big swells you can lose sight of the horizon at any time!'

He nods rapidly, and fixes the river bank with a studied stare.

'The further away the better!' I shout, and point him where we're heading, to the ocean, to the line where the sea joins the sky.

He turns his head that way, still nodding.

We're almost level with the lighthouse, the point where land gives way to open sea, and all ahead and all around is water, and sky. The true beginning of any voyage, and here I am to see it, as I've always done, since my first voyage as a boy. Each time, standing in the same position, but each with added experiences and memories and purposes, not known to the one before; but always a ship, of some sort, and a unique sweep of the same endless sea, each time a different colour.

'Look!' Kirk points. 'There goes the pilot!'

The little boat is moving in an arc away from us, pointing itself back towards Birkenhead.

As the lighthouse falls behind us, the sea becomes rougher with each wave that takes us. The cries of the first mate and the responses of the crew rise in proportion, and their activity increases in speed.

'Raise the foresail!' cries the first mate.

'Raise the foresail!' the men respond.

The men heave, ropes stretch tight, the ship booms and spray crashes over the windward rail. The foresail shuffles up from the crossbeam, flapping with a terrific slapping sound, then makes a mighty thump as the wind takes it, and the whole ship jerks, a solid jolt.

'Belay the lines!' shouts the first mate.

'Belay the lines!' cry the crew.

Whaump! A second jolt, as the mizzen snaps into rounded tension, and the ship rests motionless on the scurrying water beneath us. The mad sounds of sea and machinery are accompanied by firm, slow, patient creaking from the masts. I can feel only now how much we've been rocking, though my stomach, as always, seems to savour the unpleasantness of the memory for a little longer.

'That's better!' says Kirk.

Even Thornton manages to take a decent breath, fooled by the wind, no doubt, that it's a kind master of the swell.

'For the moment,' I reply.

'Hold firm!' comes the mate's cry.

'Aye, sir!' comes the ship's response.

The wind growls ferociously, the sails groan in submission, the masts object with a resilient moan, the ship grinds to the port-side and then, as a wave crashes into the hull and passes underneath, pitches up down again.

‘Hands aloft to take in a reef!’ cries the mate.

Thornton scuttles a few paces away from us and, leaning over the railing, makes the unmistakable sounds of seasickness.

The ship pitches again as it takes another wave. Thornton retches again.

‘I’ll be glad when we get there!’ Kirk has to shout to make himself heard. ‘I’m not made for the sea either!’

‘I’m from King’s Lynn!’ I cry. ‘But I’ll be glad too! Glad to be in Africa!’

Kirk says something to Thornton as he puts a hand on his shoulder. The boy gives him a panicked look, and nods in snatched relief.

Kirk’s words to me are lost between us, but his gesticulations say quite clearly that he’s taking the poor lad below deck. I gesture with a flat palm that I’ll join them in a moment, and down they go.

The ship rises up the side of an enormous swell and slices through the crest. A world away from the first time, this, though no great distance from the Norfolk coast. The sea that day was nothing like this, and father was beside me, and the voyage lasted only an afternoon. But if I could have seen ... this, me, now ... somehow ... would I have believed it? Or the last time, weighing anchor on the way back from Australia, not a year ago – even then it would have been impossible to suppose, to presume, *this!* I am afloat, in the company of Dr Livingstone and part of his expedition. Who knows where it will take us, what I’ll be thinking to myself on the ship that brings us back, at this same moment, this same station – what I’d say to myself, the Thomas Baines standing here now, if some kind of communion were possible with one’s earlier selves.

The wind and sea beat in union; the ship heels and straightens. The sea forms great plates the size of fields, bordered by lines of white foam, which outlive the wave crest that put them there, then dissolve themselves, leaving fresh territory to carve anew. The water is dark. Grey, and green, the green of wet moss. And black. If I were to mix it I’d use very little blue. The air is white with sleet; the weather is getting rougher; it’ll soon be time to head below. But not just yet.

I imagine the route that this ship will take: to the Cape, to the Zambesi Delta, all the way up the river to Tete, taking us all to a destiny that is greater than we could have achieved before. We are part of something important, by association with the Doctor. Livingstone has already opened my eyes, in a way. He is driven, as am I, by the passion

to explore. But he was a missionary first, and his mission remains: to eradicate slavery from Africa. All of this is part of a plan towards that end. It's not something that, before, was at the forefront of my mind, but it's difficult not to be influenced by the Doctor. The speeches he gave, at the events before we departed. Civilization, commerce and Christianity, he said, again and again. Civilization, commerce and Christianity: those are the things that will drive out slavery. And the Zambesi will be the highway, God's highway, to spread those virtues.

And, of course, none of this will be at the expense of our role as geographers; we shall be benefiting science in the process. I shall be doing this as an artist, laying down what we see, contributing to a greater understanding of the world, to science, to civilization.

Why then...? A troubling thought returns. The incident concerning my pay. I'm sure it was a mere misunderstanding. I wish I could forget it, and yet it does trouble me so. When I was offered my bill for the first half a year's salary, I was struck with shock to see the figure was a hundred pounds. Was my salary to be only two hundred pounds a year? I earned three hundred a year for the Australian expedition – how could I be paid less now?

After wondering for some time if I should simply accept it, I drummed up the courage to write to Dr Livingstone. How difficult it was: to lay a complaint, while ensuring that he was in no doubt about my loyalty, my deference, my gratitude. I told him what I had earned in Australia, and he replied that I was right to decline two hundred pounds, that I deserved three hundred. The salary of the artist, he said, was put at two hundred pounds without any reference to me. '*I shall do all I can for you,*' he wrote.

My salary was, in the end, increased to three hundred a year. And there the matter would have rested, had Mr Thornton not said what he said the other day. We were talking about the prospects of adventuring with Livingstone, and he said, 'Not bad work for three hundred and fifty pounds a year.'

He realized immediately that he'd let slip something he shouldn't have. We must have looked at each other for only a second or two, but it seemed a long embarrassed stare, before I laughed and said, 'Not bad at all.'

Three hundred and *fifty*. The boy is twenty years old, and he is earning more than me. He has been to university, yes, but I have more than a decade of experience in Africa. My artistic abilities are not the casual sketchings of the amateur. Kirk must be earning as much as Thornton, almost certainly more. Bedingfeld, of course, would earn more still. Am I the lowest-paid of the expedition? Is my contribution valued the least?

No, I must stop thinking like this. The experience is worth more than any money, and by the end of it there will be no doubt about my value.

'Mr Baines!' a voice cries. I realise I'm gripping the railing with tight, numb fingers. The spray of a breaking swell leaps up in front of me.

Captain Duncan approaches and stands beside me. 'Quite a sea we have today,' he says, after another swell batters the hull. 'You'd best get below. I'd hate to lose one of my passengers so early in the voyage.'

University of Cape Town

'Pearl,' in the Mersey, 10th March, 1858.

My Dear Tom,

We are off again, and we trust that He who rules the waves will watch over us and remain with you, to bless us and make us blessings to our fellow-men. The Lord be with you, and be very gracious to you! Avoid and hate sin, and cleave to Jesus as your Saviour from guilt. Tell grandma we are off again, and Janet will tell all about us.

– David Livingstone, letter to his son

University of Cape Town

SS Pearl, March 1858

The first days of the voyage were the worst I have ever endured at sea. The *Pearl*, whose flat bottom made her suitable for river travel, offered little resistance to the whims and swirls of the ocean. The ship listed and rolled and jerked; the walls, the deckhead above, the floor at one's feet – everything was forever moving, incessantly, towards one and away, up and down, with unpredictable snatches of calm, making the effect even worse.

When we assembled in the galley at meal times, it was a routine without reason, as none of us had any appetite. All of us, after sitting down for a while, would stand again, then sit, each to his own rhythm, so at no point were more than half of us seated at table together.

No one said very much, and no one had anything to say that was unrelated to the motion of our vessel and the conditions that were causing it. Livingstone's young son Oswell was with him. He looked unhappy, more confused than upset. Livingstone crouched down and said something to him, and the boy closed his eyes and nodded quickly. Livingstone stood up and patted him on the head.

'We'll be out of this in a few days at most,' he announced, at last finding it in him to address us all. After another mad list he spoke again. 'We'd have avoided this if we'd set off at the appointed time.'

It was true, we would get to calmer water beyond the Irish Channel, but that was several days away and little comfort at that moment.

Thornton appeared to be suffering most: no sooner did a fork of food reach his mouth than he would jump up and make for the wash basin. Dr Livingstone's brother also looked off-colour, and Mrs Livingstone was nowhere to be seen. Even the experienced Captain Bedingfeld looked uncomfortable; I could reassure myself that I was faring no worse than anyone else.

Between dinner and tea I walked on deck, holding the rail to steady myself, then headed below again when the wind and the cold got the better of me, until the queasiness drove me back up again. I found Kirk there, just after sunset, doing the same, and he jibed: 'A King's Lynn man, eh? So this is all right for you?'

I'd asked for that, of course, and it brought out a laugh from somewhere. 'This idle loafing is no good!' I replied. 'Let's get to the real work.'

Tea was little different from dinner, a routine robbed of its purpose. All of us battled to get any food down; Thornton, again, ended up with his attempts undone at the wash basin. Livingstone said nothing to the assembly.

Kirk remarked that at least we were seeing the very worst of each other at the start, so now there could be no posturing.

The night was horrible. The unending pitching and rolling, on a hard and narrow bunk: sleep appeared more distant than a dream. The air was dense with damp, and the smell of paint and chemicals, and the noise. The thumping of the screw. The straining of wood, a constant unison of low mutters and the occasional irregular squeak or boom. The wind, and the ocean, pounding and clattering.

Darkness brought little rest, and the light of morning little relief. It was a struggle to get my clothes on, and to make my way on deck. The air was wet and cold, with flurries of snow and sticky spray from the breaking waves. A solitary figure was standing against the rail, with his back to me. As I moved closer, my hope was realized. It was Livingstone, peering out at the sea.

I stood watching him for a while. I tried to imagine how it must be to look at the world through his eyes. Would it have a different shape or hue? What did he see when he looked at the great ocean, or the wilderness? Did he see guiding lines and paths of possibility that were invisible to me, to other men?

I hadn't had an opportunity to speak to him alone. I should mention to him, I thought, my voyage around the Australian coast, when I was in charge of the longboat and sailed some stormy seas, almost all the way around the continent's perimeter. I wasn't sure that he knew I had done that, and he would appreciate the story.

While I was approaching, Livingstone turned and waved. 'Aha!' he called.

As I raised my arm in acknowledgement I heard a voice behind me. 'Good morning!' It was Captain Duncan, a little way behind me. It was he who had caught the Doctor's attention.

'Yes, good morning, Captain,' Livingstone said.

'Morning, Dr Livingstone,' I said, my arm completing the wave that it had begun.

'Mr Baines,' Livingstone acknowledged with a nod, then turned to Duncan. 'Captain, how many days, do you think, before we land at Sierra Leone?'

'I'd say another two weeks, depending on the weather. Hopefully these rough seas will not last too much longer, otherwise we'll have some unhappy passengers.'

'I'm sure we will all get used to it,' I said. 'One always does, in the end.'

‘Quite right,’ Livingstone said. ‘I hope the others are all out of bed. It’ll do them no good if they just lie there.’ He took a deep breath, filling his chest. ‘Now, if you will excuse me, I will go for a walk around the ship. Physical activity. There’s no affliction in the world that can’t be beaten by vigorous activity.’

With that he turned on his heel and walked off at a brisk pace.

But the seasickness persisted among us all. There was little to do but attempt to get some food down, walk on the deck, and try to sleep when night came. The nights seemed never to end, but somehow they did, and then they came again. The days were white, cold, wet. Throughout it all, the pitching and rolling of the ship.

Thornton burst into the galley, one arm clasping a blanket and a pillow to his chest, his other hand holding a book. ‘Nowhere to rest,’ he cried. ‘If it’s not the bloody ducks, it’s the bloody waves.’

Livingstone suggested he try a raw egg in a glass of brandy. Kirk did the honours. Thornton’s face was a portrait of discomfort as he saw it made, downed it, and considered what he’d done.

‘First thing I’ve stomached in three days,’ he said.

On the fifth day the weather cleared and the sea became calmer. It was Sunday, so we had a service on deck, with Dr Livingstone officiating.

With my eyes closed, my senses concentrated on the wondrous combination of sounds: the sea and wind in the background, and, nearby, the Doctor’s voice as he concluded his prayers.

‘Lord, we pray that you will have mercy on Africa and its people. We beseech you to rid the continent of the evil of slavery. In your wisdom, oh Lord, use us as your instruments to heal this open sore of the world. Lord, in your mercy...’

‘Hear our prayer,’ we all said in vigorous reply.

We would have so many services together, led by Livingstone or his brother, occasionally someone else. But this was the first. I concentrated intensely on every word he said, thinking that this was the closest I had come to the kind of man one read about in the Bible. Everyone seemed to participate zealously. Thornton, of course, would not have, but I didn’t notice that then. What I did notice was Bedingfeld, who I think prayed the loudest and said his amens in a resounding voice.

After the service, Charles Livingstone was quickly at his brother’s side, and the two of them walked off together.

We soon settled into a routine. Prayers in the morning, and lessons in Sechuana at one o'clock, given by Doctor Livingstone. We had each been given a copy of a book, *An Analysis of the Language of the Bechuanas*, which he had written in Kuruman some years ago and which had been printed for us. Though Sechuana is not widely spoken on the Zambesi, the language of the Makololo is close to it, they being an offshoot of the Basuto, driven north by Moselekatze.

'*Metsi*,' said Livingstone, 'meaning *water*.'

'*Metsi*,' we repeated.

The point at this stage, Livingstone said, was to familiarize ourselves with the sound of the language.

After the lessons my duties took me into the hold, to look at the state of the stores, which had been packed in an awful hurry and had been thrown about by the stormy passage. It would be a task worthy of Hercules to get them into any kind of order. But I made a start, trying to work out what was where, from the marks on the boxes. Once I'd done so, I'd need to locate the breakables, to see if anything was damaged.

A few days into the voyage, there was an eclipse of the sun. Everyone gathered on the deck, looking at the sky. It was as quiet as a silence during Sunday service. The weather was cloudy, so we didn't get to see the sun changing shape, but it created an eerie twilight in the air.

'To think,' Charles said, 'that to primitive minds this is a sign of the anger of some god or another, when it is just a mechanical moving of the spheres.'

'And perfectly predictable,' Thornton added. 'No need for superstition.'

They were right, of course, but in a way I had to disagree – though inwardly, to myself. It seemed auspicious that such a rare celestial event was occurring now, to inaugurate our venture. The heavens were presenting us with an extraordinary display, and I took solace in that, even though I knew that there was also a purely scientific explanation.

I had never before seen an eclipse from a ship. The darkened sea, stretching to an indistinct horizon, filled me with a sense of how small we were – and how heroic – in the midst of a great emptiness, and at the mercy of the elements. Was Livingstone thinking the same thing, as he looked out at the ocean?

One afternoon there was some commotion in the galley. I came running in from nearby when I heard the cries. Young Oswell had cut his finger on the cook's knife. The blood

came thick, and the men around him were shouting and rushing about, but the boy was surprisingly calm. The boy's father wasn't there, nor was Mrs Livingstone – she hadn't been up for days. Charles was pacing back and forth, breathing deeply and looking extremely anxious. Kirk called for a needle and thread, and started cleaning the wound.

'We could use a little air, gentlemen!' he said, gesturing the onlookers away.

'Yes, yes, go, go!' said Charles, flapping his arms, as he backed away himself.

'Oswell, this is going to sting, but it'll go numb in a moment.'

The boy gasped as Kirk applied the alcohol, and then, curiously, Oswell laughed. The giggle of a child seeing a funny trick.

'I'm going to sew it up now,' Kirk told him, showing the boy the needle and thread. 'It'll be better if you close your eyes – it won't be a moment.'

Young Oswell kept his eyes on the operation, as Kirk joined the flaps of skin. The boy chuckled again.

'It's extraordinary,' Kirk said to me, on deck. 'The knife went right through the cartilage. The boy doesn't seem to feel pain at all.'

'He *laughs* at it,' I remarked.

'Indeed. And he seems born to accidents. The other day he came running into the cabin and then disappeared. Straight down the trapdoor into the hold. He landed in a basket of oranges, so he wasn't hurt, but that was pure luck.'

'I suppose,' I said, 'the boy has something of his father in him, in the way he resists pain. Livingstone has survived some scrapes that would have been the end of most men.'

'The lion,' Kirk said, as an example.

'The *lion!*' I agreed. It was a story everyone knew about the Doctor. He had shot a lion, but not killed it, and the beast sprang upon him, took him by the shoulder and shook him violently. Livingstone was saved when one of his men shot at the lion; he missed, but the sound distracted the animal, and it left the Doctor alone and attacked the other fellow instead, before soon dying of the wounds that the Doctor had inflicted. The other man survived, but his wounds were worse than Livingstone's. This had happened a few years before.

'Yes, remarkable,' Kirk said. 'His shoulder shows it, if you look carefully – the movement of the joint: it shows the wound's effect, if you know what to look for – but the Doctor appears to have recovered almost all use of it.'

I imagined the scene again, on my shelf at night, only this time I placed myself in it. I pointed a rifle at the lion, as it pounced on Livingstone. It was a risky shot; everything was moving and I could easily have struck the Doctor, but I was sure, and pulled the

trigger. *Crack!* The lion fell to the side; I had killed it instantly with a shot in the heart. Livingstone's eyes met mine, with the look of gratitude reserved for a man who has saved your life.

On the eighth day of our voyage we passed within sight of Tenerife. I had out my sketchbook and watercolours, and I was busy painting the scene before me: the land rising out of the sea at the edge of the horizon. The top of the peak formed a clear jagged line, but nearer the water the mist made the island almost invisible, and I rendered it the same faint colour as the sky. Into the middle distance I placed the *Pearl*, imagining the way it would look if I were on another vessel a hundred yards away. The headsails were up, and smoke billowed from the funnel, drifting and gradually dissolving behind the ship.

A few of the others had gathered to watch me paint. Kirk was there, and Thornton and Rae, as well as some of the *Pearl's* crew. I became aware of someone else after a while, and glanced back once I'd finished with a patch of blue and had to give the brush a rinse. It was Bedingfeld. I'd rather hoped it would be Livingstone. He hadn't yet seen me work on anything other than a rough sketch. But there was plenty of time for that.

By the time Livingstone appeared, Tenerife had faded into the misty distance and one of the Canaries was faintly visible in the opposite direction. He had papers in his hand, and Captain Duncan at his side, and the whole party was assembled to hear the Foreign Office instructions.

'We have been favoured with remarkably fair winds for this time of year,' he announced. 'Our expedition has begun with the advantage of a fast run, and let us trust in God that our further progress will be no less prosperous. I have no reason to doubt that you are all men of the right stamp. I trust that you will honour He who guides our path.'

I looked across at Thornton. He met my gaze and raised his eyebrows. No doubt he was thinking what I was thinking: that there had been nothing 'fair' about the weather at the beginning of our voyage.

'I have before me the Instructions from the Foreign Office, approved by Lord Clarendon, which I shall read to you now, in order that the objects we have in view might be clearly understood and everyone be induced to lend his best energies to carry them into effect.'

He held the paper before him and read. The instructions said that our main object was to extend the knowledge of the geography and resources of Eastern and Central Africa, to improve our acquaintance with the inhabitants, and engage them to apply their energies to

industrial pursuits and to the cultivation of their lands with a view to producing raw material to be exported to Britain in return for British manufactures. And thereby help eradicate the slave trade, as the natives came to discover that legitimate commerce would become a more certain source of profit than trading in people.

He set out our geographical plans: that we were to pass rapidly through the unhealthy area of the Lower Zambesi, and deposit our heavy baggage at Tete, from where we would proceed to the Kebrabasa Rapids. The iron house was then to be erected on a suitable site above the confluence of the Zambesi and the Kafue to serve as a central depot. Further exploration would be undertaken towards the source of the Zambesi and up the rivers flowing into it from the north, in order to ascertain whether the network of waters reported by the natives existed or not.

'You are distinctly to understand,' Livingstone read, *'that your services are engaged for two years, unless some unforeseen accident should happen to the Expedition, when you will be set free as soon as an opportunity is afforded for returning to England. Should I be prostrated by illness,'* he looked up from the page, then back, *'or by accident be rendered incapable of conducting the Expedition, the charge of it will devolve on Commander Bedingfeld.'* Livingstone's eyes darted across. *'If he too fail, then on Dr Kirk, and then on Mr Charles Livingstone, they being as fully authorized in that position as I am in case of any individual refusing to follow their reasonable directions.'*

Bedingfeld and Kirk gave a slight nod when their names were read out. Charles took a deep breath, and looked down at the deck.

I wondered then and many times after, why I had not been given any position. I was, after all, the only one apart from Livingstone and Bedingfeld who had any experience of Africa. I'd travelled a great deal, much more than Kirk. I consoled myself that those kinds of responsibilities were not good for an artist, that my role would be a little like my situation as war artist to Somerset's regiment in the Kafir War. I wasn't a soldier; I wasn't subject to military authority like the troops were – nor did I have to enforce it as the officers did. My job was to paint.

'Finally,' Livingstone said, *'you are enjoined to take the greatest care of your health, and when you feel drowsiness, shiverings or constipation, apply at once for medical care to Dr Kirk.'*

He nodded to Kirk, and held his gaze for a moment, before casting his eye over the whole party. Then he spoke, no longer reading from the paper.

‘My own experience, gentlemen, teaches the necessity of more than ordinary attention to the state of the alimentary canal. Constipation is almost sure to bring on fever, so if you have any tendency to it, remember the importance of timely remedial aid.’

Livingstone said that he would leave a copy of the instructions in the galley, for us to consult, and that he would write up detailed individual instructions for each of us, outlining the particular responsibilities of our stations – as navigator, engineer, botanist, geologist and artist.

I felt relief when he said this. Livingstone had seemed remote in conversation, but now he was telling us clearly what to do, what was expected of us, in the mission that lay ahead. It was not a feeling that I would experience very often.

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Although these explorations and collections are very desirable, you will understand that her Majesty's Government attach more importance to the *moral influence* which may be exerted on the minds of the natives by a well-regulated and orderly household of Europeans setting an example of consistent moral conduct to all who may congregate around the settlement, treating the people with kindness and relieving their wants, teaching them to make experiments in agriculture, explaining to them the more simple arts, imparting to them religious instruction as far as they are capable of receiving it, and inculcating peace and good will to each other.

– from the Foreign Office instructions

University of Cape Town

6

SS Pearl, March 1858

I wake up sweating. The voices have been jeering: You don't belong here. You don't belong here.

There, on the sheet, is the stain, the evidence that I have pleased myself in the night.

I thump the side of the bunk and stifle a groan.

What is wrong with you, Thomas? Here you are in the company of a man like Livingstone and you must resort to this?

I imagine God looking down on me, from such an immense distance that I cannot conceive of it. He must be shaking his head in disappointment. Or perhaps he has long turned away and no longer notices me.

At breakfast I keep looking at Livingstone. What does he see when he looks at me?

Once we have eaten and everyone disperses, Kirk appears at my side.

'Are you all right?' he asks. 'You're awfully quiet today.'

I look at his face. He has a kindly expression.

'I'm ... yes, I'm fine,' I say.

We go for a walk on the deck, and when we reach the bows we stand in silence for a while, gazing at the vast expanse of sea.

'I've been thinking about my father,' he says. 'There are mornings when I can't believe he's gone.'

'I'm sorry,' I reply.

'He did not experience pain for very long. At least there was mercy in that.'

'He was a ... minister?' I ask.

'Yes. One of the ministers who broke away from the Established Church. We experienced the schism in our very household, though of course I was too young to understand the issues surrounding it. But it affected me. By rejecting the *principle* of patronage he was also rejecting his appointment and with it the house I grew up in.'

Kirk blinks a few times. His eyes are slightly moist.

'His congregation elected him again, at least those who followed the Free Kirk. But our circumstances became far more ... modest.'

Now there is a slight smile on his lips. 'The Free Kirk. There were always jokes about that when I was growing up.'

I've been wrong about Kirk. I imagined he came from privilege.

We walk on and see Thornton and Rae, who are in conversation ahead of us. I reach them first, and Rae addresses me.

'What about you, Mr Baines? Do you have a woman back home?'

The question takes me aback, so I don't answer it directly. 'Home,' I say. 'I wonder where home is. Cape Town, I suppose, is the place where I've spent the most time in the past years, but I've not been there for a while. But it's much longer since I lived in Lynn.'

'I know what you mean,' Rae says. 'I'm on ships for long stretches, between England and America. New York, mainly. I go to Glasgow some, but I hardly ever go home.'

'And where is home?'

'Blantyre.'

'*Blantyre*? Where the Livingstones come from?'

'That's the one.'

'Well, what a coincidence.' Is it? Or was he chosen on these grounds?

'But you haven't answered my question,' he says. 'Do you have a woman ... home, or anywhere?'

If I'm honest, the closest was Emily, but that was such a long time ago.

'No,' I say. 'I don't.'

Rae grins. 'Mr Thornton here was just saying he was rather friendly with a young lady in England.'

Thornton runs his hand over his forehead and gives an embarrassed smile. 'There was,' he says. 'But it didn't come to anything.'

Rae seems to be enjoying this. 'Kirk?' he asks.

'No,' Kirk answers. 'I'll certainly start a family, but when I'm older. Too much to do now. I'm sure when I'm ready I'll find a good woman.'

'So here we are,' Rae laughs, 'the bachelors of the party.' There is something slightly uncouth about his laugh. It does not bother me: I'm used to mixing it with rough men, but I wonder if the other two are offended.

'You don't have a woman either,' says Thornton.

'No.' He grins. 'Best not to be tied down when you travel from port to port.'

After breakfast, I see on the deck, where Thornton was sitting, a small notebook. He must have left it here, so I rescue it for him. It is a black book, closed with a string, probably a

journal. There is no inscription on the cover. Better not to look inside, in case it is private. I'll give it to him later.

We are all required to keep journals. I, of course, would have done so in any event. It seems futile to travel without keeping a vivid record of where one is going, what one is seeing, rather than entrust the events to the vagaries of memory. I did so for all the years I was in South Africa, and in Australia too. Our journals are ultimately to be sent to the Royal Geographical Society, where it will be determined how useful they are. They may be summarized as papers presented to the Society, or perhaps they may be used as the basis of some larger publication. I am writing mine as an account to my mother, so that she can read and follow my experiences exactly.

Young Oswell appears on deck, followed by Charles.

'I wish you could meet your cousins, Oswell,' Charles says. 'Mary is five now, and young Charlie is almost four. They live all the way in America, but perhaps you will go there one day, or maybe they will come to England – or here to Africa.'

Oswell looks up at his uncle but says nothing.

'And your Aunt Harriette would love to meet you. She's heard so much about you.'

The boy's attention is diverted to Crab, who has appeared on deck. The dog scampers across the wood and approaches the beckoning lad.

'You live in Massachusetts,' I ask Charles, 'is that right?'

'That's right,' he replies. 'I had a parish in Plympton.'

'Will you go back there, after the expedition?'

'Oh, I don't think so. Not to the ministry.'

'Why not?' I see he looks a bit flustered, so I add, 'If you don't mind my asking.'

He shakes his head. 'Not for me. I think I can better serve God in other ways.'

He stands straight, making to leave. 'Will you excuse me?'

'Yes, of course,' I say, and he is off.

I wonder what he means. Livingstone, I know, exchanged the life of a missionary for that of an explorer, paving the way for others to set up settled stations. Is that what Charles means?

Oswell and Crab are engaged in a game of tug-o'-war with a piece of rope.

'I hope this isn't rope that's needed for the ship,' I say, making sure that my voice isn't scolding in any way.

'One of the sailors said I could have it,' Oswell replies.

The likeness is clear: he is a little Livingstone. I wonder if the Doctor looked like this when he was young.

'Does your mother know where you are, Oswell?'

He looks at me with a screwed-up face. 'Mother is sick,' he says.

'And your father? Does he know where you are?'

'Father says I mustn't go too close to the edge.'

'Quite right.'

'I shan't fall off, though,' he says, walking a little nearer.

'Don't go near the edge,' I cry. 'It's dangerous. Your father is right.'

Imagine having to explain to Livingstone that I'd watched while his son fell overboard.

'You must be proud of your father, Oswell. He is a great man.' What an odd thing to say, I think, the moment the words are out of my mouth. I suppose every son is proud of his father; every son thinks his father is famous. But does Oswell realize just how famous his father is?

'I don't see him very much,' the boy says.

Livingstone calls him *Zouga*, after the river he travelled on the way to Lake Ngami, with Cotton Oswell, after whom the boy got his Christian name.

Oswell says nothing more for a while, but stares at me in a disconcerting way, as only children can do, or people far from civilization.

I try some voices on him, American, and Indian, and he laughs – what a relief. I do a Scottish accent.

'Ha ha, you sound like father!'

'Now, Oswell,' I say, matching Livingstone's tone more closely, 'you must be a good boy. Don't walk too close to the edge. Be good, or else.'

'Or else what?' he cries, gleefully.

'Or else ... we'll send you back to England!'

He laughs some more, but I suddenly regret speaking like this. What if he tells Livingstone that I have been imitating him? He'd surely think it a sign of disrespect.

'I didn't like England very much,' he says. 'Mother was always sad, and always sick. And sometimes she'd talk in a strange way, and not sound like Mother at all...'

'I'm sure it was...' I can't think of a pacifying thought.

'I didn't have many friends there. Are you my friend, Mr Baines?'

I look around to make sure no one is in earshot. 'I will be your friend, Oswell,' I say.

In the afternoon I find Thornton sitting with a book on his lap. I can make out the words *Phillips* and *Geology* on the spine.

‘Oh, yes, that reminds me,’ I say. ‘I found your notebook on the deck this morning. You must have left it there after breakfast. It’s in my cabin.’

‘A notebook?’ he says with a frown. ‘I don’t think it’s mine. This morning, you say? I’ve just written in my journal, not an hour ago. No. Could it be someone else’s?’

But whose?

Rae is standing nearby. I call him. ‘Have you lost a book?’ I ask. ‘I found one on deck this morning. It could be a journal.’

‘No,’ he says, ‘not mine.’ He comes close to me, so I can smell his breath, slightly sour. ‘A journal, is it? What does it say?’

‘I haven’t looked inside. I thought I’d just ask whose it might be.’

‘Really.’ He smiles as if he doesn’t quite believe me.

Perhaps I will have to look inside to find the owner.

After an afternoon in the hold, looking for the rifles to make sure none have been damaged, I return to my cabin. I take the notebook and untie the string. There is no name inside, but it has been written in. ‘*We have set off at last – thanks be to God.*’ The handwriting is familiar.

Livingstone.

‘*My companions appear to be good men, but we shall see what they are made of.*’

I close the book immediately. I shouldn’t have this. But it is too late in the day now; I’ll have to give it to him tomorrow.

I lie in the darkness. Sleep seems far away, but I find myself drifting into dark imaginings. The bulkhead pressing against my shoulder, I think, what if someone’s elbow was pushing into me, and on the other side someone’s arm, the cabin – the entire deck – filled with us, lying side by side, shackled. I’ve seen the diagrams. And imagine the smell: penetrating the dank wood, the foul stink of faeces, of a dead body rotting somewhere. And the sounds: the moaning of hundreds of men, of anguish and pain and despair; would they have it in them to cry any more? *Am I not a friend and a brother?*

I get off my shelf early and make my way to the deck, hoping to find Livingstone there. But there is no sign of him. Rae is the only one up.

He looks around and then approaches me. ‘Have you looked in the book,’ he asks.

‘No,’ I tell him.

He peers at me for a moment or two. He has heavy eyelids, so it always looks like he is half-asleep, but there is a glow in his eyes now. ‘I wonder whose it is, what it says.’

‘Yes, well, who knows? It might be the Doctor’s, for all I know, and I wouldn’t want to look there without permission.’

‘No, of course not.’

By the time the Doctor appears for prayers, everyone else is already there, and there is again no opportunity to engage him before the Sechuana lesson.

Livingstone directs us to page 5 of the book.

‘*Pelu e cueu*,’ he says, ‘meaning a white heart: satisfied, or well pleased.’

‘*Pelu e cueu*,’ we repeat.

‘*Pelu e encu*, a black heart: dark, designing.’

‘*Pelu e encu*,’ we chant in reply.

And so the formations continue. *Pelu e segoe*, a noosed heart: ensnaring, swindling. *Pelu peri*, two hearts: double-hearted, two-faced. *Pelu tsari*, a she heart: tender-hearted, kind. *Go na le pelu*, to be with heart, to have heart: to be generous.

When will I give the book to him? He seldom stands around after a lesson or a service; he is always off somewhere to do something. And whenever I do find him, he is never alone. It would be best to give him the book without anyone around. He wouldn’t want anyone to think he was careless.

‘Mr Baines.’ Livingstone’s voice brings me back to the deck, the lesson. ‘Please pay attention. We are on page 6.’

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone,’ I say, and quickly turn the page. ‘My apologies.’

I need to pay attention. I’m not going to set a good example to the younger members of the party if I appear to be drifting off.

‘Now,’ Livingstone says, ‘some idea may be formed of the comparative capacities of expression of Greek, Sechuana and English, from the fact that the Septuagint version of the Pentateuch contains about 140 000 words, the Sechuana 156 000, and the English about 182 000 words. One word in Sechuana often expresses seven or eight in English.’

After the lesson it is straight to my afternoon duties in the hold. Only much later do I have an opportunity to fetch the book and give it to Livingstone. As I make my way to his cabin, there he is, in the passageway, walking towards me.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I say, ‘I have something—’

‘Not now, Mr Baines, I must attend to ...’

He disappears down the passage without finishing his sentence. I stand there, outside his cabin door, listening to his footfalls recede from earshot. I think about leaving the book there when, from inside, comes a voice – ‘Mr Baines ...’

Mrs Livingstone.

I approach the door, but stop before one would be able to see inside. 'I – I am here, ma'am ...'

'Mr Baines, will you do something for me? Please, come inside.'

It is a large cabin, with a shelf against each wall, and a small table in between. Mrs Livingstone is lying with a blanket up to her neck. Her face is pale, and her expression tired.

'Ma'am,' I say, stopping a footfall beyond the threshold.

'I am so thirsty,' she says. 'Could you bring me some water? If you're not needed elsewhere.'

'No ma'am – yes, I'll get you some from the galley.'

'Thank you. I'm ... so thirsty.'

The galley is down a flight of stairs, and along a wide passage. There are only two cooks, one cleaning the counter, the other seated on a small stool.

'Yes, sir,' says the younger man, the one standing. 'Is anything required?'

'Mrs Livingstone needs some water,' I answer. 'She isn't well. If I could have a jug.'

'The sea is no place for a woman,' says the older man. He has a deep Cornish speech. 'It's a bit rough for her, to be brought along. It's the same every time. But I suppose one has to get from A to B.'

'To Z, in her case,' the younger man says, as he hands me a pitcher. 'The Zambesi, I mean.'

'Is there anything else you'll be needing?' the Cornishman asks.

'No, thank you – yes, a glass. I don't know that Mrs Livingstone has a glass.'

Back at the cabin door, I knock softly, wondering what I will do if she doesn't answer. Wondering, also, if I shouldn't perhaps hand the book to her.

'Is that you? Mr Baines? Come inside.'

'Here you are, Mrs Livingstone, a pitcher of water, and a clean glass.'

I pour it for her, and place the pitcher on the table, not too close to the edge, in case the ship sways to the side.

'Bless you, Mr Baines. I'm sorry to be a nuisance. I've not been feeling very strong.'

'It's my pleasure, Mrs Livingstone.'

She drinks the water, almost all of it.

'You're a gentleman, Mr Baines. In the true sense. A gentleman. My husband is fortunate to have you on his expedition.'

'Thank you, ma'am. Of course I'm honoured beyond words.'

'He doesn't mean it when he comes across as stern,' she continues. 'It's his work; it's important work. He's a kind man. That's why he does what he does.'

'It's an honour, Mrs Livingstone, to travel with your husband, with Dr Livingstone. May I pour you some more?'

'You've travelled a lot in Africa – yes, thank you. You've spent a lot of time there. At the banquet – your mother was telling us about the Eastern Cape, and the Kafir Wars.'

'Did she?' I say.

'Yes, a fine lady. Of course she's proud of you – and you are a good son. You're a gentleman, Mr Baines, and you'll remain one.'

'Thank you, Mrs Livingstone,' I say, and stand up straight. She must be very tired, and I should leave her to rest.

'Thank you,' she replies, putting her head back on the pillow. 'You've been most kind.'

I leave without giving the book to Mrs Livingstone – why? – because I'd like to give it to the Doctor in person. And I'd prefer him not to know that I was there, in his cabin, when he was not. But then Mrs Livingstone will tell him, will she not? Or he'll see the pitcher there and ask who brought it. I'll have to tell him, when I give him the book. But what if Mrs Livingstone wants nothing said of the matter? What to do?

At night I lie in the darkness, turning this way and that. I still have Livingstone's book. How will he react when I give it to him? Will he be grateful or will he think I've been prying? Is he the sort of man to take offence? I don't really know him at all, do I? What does he think, when he lies in private, as I am lying now?

I light the candle and the book is open before of me. What am I doing?

'I have come all this way, for what?' I read. *'Is it to embrace what lies before me, or is it to escape what lies behind?'*

No. This is wrong. I shut the book and lie back with my eyes closed. The candlelight forms patterns on my eyelids.

When I open my eyes to blow out the candle I allow myself one last look. Perhaps he meant it to be read, I hear myself murmur.

'May God, who sees all and whose mercy is boundless, guide my path and use me for His glory.' That is all. These are the most recent words, and that is all I shall read. It is a mistake.

With a puff of breath I am back in darkness. Will he suspect that I have read the book? Will he know? Not that I have, really – only two or three glimpses, when I could have read it all – pages and pages.

The next morning I bring the notebook to morning prayers. As soon as Livingstone appears I make my way towards him and present it to him.

'Dr Livingstone,' I say, 'I found this book on the deck. I think ... I'm not sure if it ... belongs to you?'

Livingstone frowns as he takes the book and inspects its cover and spine.

'No,' he says, 'certainly not mine. Has anyone...?'

Charles is quickly at his brother's side. He reaches for the book and then withdraws his hand.

'Is it yours, Charles?' Livingstone asks.

'Yes,' says Charles, taking the book and pressing it quickly against his breast, 'it is mine. I must have lost it days ago.' He turns to me. 'How long have you had it? Have you looked inside?'

'I— I thought it was the Doctor's,' I say. 'I didn't have an opportunity to give it back to him.'

'What do you mean?' Charles snaps. 'You've seen him every day. Have you read it?'

I notice Rae looking at me. I make sure I don't catch his eye.

'No,' I say, because I haven't really. 'I haven't looked inside.'

Only a few glimpses.

Lying on my shelf, I become drowsy, but sleep eludes me. I realize after a while that I am feeling uneasy, as if some undone duty is pestering me, and I'm going to be blamed for it. Then I remember: Charles's reaction when I gave him the journal. His accusation was upsetting. I had, it was true, looked inside, but not in the way that he had accused me of doing. I'd had to, to find out whose it was. Perhaps I should have said, when everyone was gathered together: I've found a book; has anyone lost one? That would have sorted out whose it was. Why didn't I do that? Well, it is too late now. Charles's reaction seemed out of proportion. Unless, of course, he'd written something in there that he didn't want anyone to read. Well, if that were the case, I certainly hadn't read it. Though what did he mean by '*to escape what lies behind*'? I should have just left the book there, to be washed overboard or stolen by one of the crew. He should be thanking me, not calling my honesty into question.

I must make an effort to engage him as a friend. It would not pay to alienate Livingstone's brother.

Mr Baines is a trump. He does more than anyone else; if any thing is required from any case in the hold, he is down working and sweating. At leisure moments, he sketches, and now and then I take lesson in flower painting. I am sorry he is not very well, as he has caught a cold, working in the hold.

– John Kirk, journal, 11 April 1858

University of Cape Town

Off the west coast of Africa, March–April 1858

‘Pity the natives we have left behind in England,’ Livingstone said with a laugh, ‘in their miserable frost and snow.’ We were all gathered in the galley for tea, and the mood was a happy one.

It struck me then that I hadn’t heard Livingstone laugh very often. We were crossing the ocean at two hundred miles a day, and were transported in no time from the English winter to the warmth of the Tropics. We were a few days away from Sierra Leone, where we would take on coal, water and provisions, before going on to the Cape. Livingstone was visibly pleased with our progress.

He laughed, and so did we. It *is* funny, to think of Englishmen as natives, when that word is usually meant for people far more exotic. But, having lived in Africa almost as long as he, I’d vouch he’d find the faces in a London crowd more strange.

‘Sierra Leone,’ he said, looking at the ocean ahead. ‘It is some time since I was last there. A fine establishment. Freetown. But we must endeavour to make all Africa free.’

In our progress we were fooled, now and then, by the wind. It would come up, and Captain Duncan believed we had reached the Trades. The screw was lifted and the sails set, ushering in an immense silence, as the noise of machinery was replaced by the whispering of sea, wind and wood. The motion was completely different, as we were now pulled along by the air above. But within hours the wind would drop, the screw would be lowered, and we would again be propelled by the jolting, grunting screw below the water.

Whenever there was a change from screw to sail, Thornton would get sick again. His condition had improved since the first days of the voyage, but it seemed he would never get sea legs.

When he was not sick he was reading. Always reading. From one book in the morning, a different one in the afternoon, and the next day something else entirely.

‘What’s this now?’ I asked. In the morning he’d been reading Sir William Parry’s account of his journey to the Arctic.

‘*Principles of Geology*,’ he said, rubbing his finger along the spine, ‘by Lyell. It’s something of a Bible for geologists.’

‘And this?’ There was another book next to him.

'Huxley,' he said. 'T.H. Huxley. He's a – *was* a – professor of mine. Natural history – which is what he's writing about here.'

'You must've brought a library with you,' I joked. Yes, I thought, the boy might have book knowledge, but let's see how he fares when he's in the field.

In the evenings we all wrote in our journals, as we were required to do, recording our routines, our progress, and what there was to be seen.

Turtles, we discovered, appear to sleep on the surface when the sea is calm. We came up to a large number of them and tried to harpoon them, but without any success. The noise of the screw woke them up and scared them away, so Captain Duncan ordered it to be turned off. We tried shooting them with rifles, but only managed to hit one of them. Then the wind came up again, and with that the turtles went down under the surface.

A flying fish shot above our heads one evening, when we were all gathered on the quarter-deck for tea. It struck the other side of the ship and was dead. Captain Bedingfeld, who had witnessed his fair share of flying fish, said this was the largest he had ever seen. They can reach a substantial height: our heads must have been about fifteen feet above the level, and this one was higher than that.

The next morning there were flying fish on our plates for breakfast. More must have landed in the ship overnight. They taste like trout, but are a little drier.

The closer we came to Sierra Leone, the hotter it became. The mercury went up to eighty-five during the day, making it almost unbearable in our little iron ship. Our cabins were suffocating, even at night, so I started sleeping on deck, as did most of the others. When the sea was still, it was quite pleasant.

The night sky was beginning to change. 'Look,' I told Kirk, pointing near the horizon to the south.

'Oh my... is it? The Southern Cross?'

'It is. First time you've seen it?'

'Yes. But we're still some distance from the equator. I had no idea we'd see it already.'

'And look there.' I pointed to the northern horizon. 'That star – there – that's the Pole Star.'

'No longer above our heads ...'

'Soon we won't see it at all.'

'We really are going to the other side of the world,' he said.

During the day the heat took the energy out of us. Livingstone was the only one who seemed not to notice. He was at work with the saltometer, measuring the quantity of salt to the gallon as we passed the rivers, first the Senegal, then the Gambia. Though we were seventy miles from the coast, the water became fresher, its colour a little muddier, before returning to normal.

It is an amazing fact that rivers can bring the influence of the land so far into the sea, just as they can take a ship from the sea and far into a country's interior. They are the link between the elements of water and earth. In a few weeks we would come within the influence of another, one that was of immense significance to our destinies, and that of the whole African continent. But first we had to call in at an estuary that was much closer.

It was morning when we sighted land, and midday when we could make it out in any detail. Rising from the shoreline was a line of hills, and behind them even higher mountains, with a central peak that dominated the scene. Everything was covered in trees, all the way down to the water's edge. There was no earth to be seen; just trees, as if a forest was growing directly out of the sea. It was a beautiful view. I put the lines down with quick scratches of the pencil, before our movement changed the perspective. The thing that would be difficult to capture would be the colour. All those different shades of green, the sultry air bleaching the hue as one's eye moved from middle distance to background.

We entered a magnificent natural harbour, and soon I could make out the buildings of Freetown, little white blocks scattered amongst the lush vegetation. Captain Bedingfeld, who knew the place well, pointed out the principal places: the barracks, the commissariat, the cathedral.

There were perhaps twenty ships in the harbour. War steamers, colliers and store vessels. I saw the flags of England, France and America flying above them.

We anchored some way out, and, after we were boarded by the harbour master, we made our way to shore, landing at that time of day when the sun has slipped from its zenith but the heat has not yet begun to follow it down. This was to be the first experience of Africa for Kirk and Thornton, Rae and Charles. It was to be Thornton's first time on soil other than England, and he hastened to it, disembarking from the ship before the rest of us and trotting ahead up the steps. Perhaps it was eagerness to put his feet on terra firma once again, since water had proven such an inhospitable element for him.

When I reached the top of the steps a few moments later, I found him looking utterly bewildered. He had walked into a crowd of natives, some standing, most of them hunched down, sorting groundnuts and putting them in baskets. He was looking quickly from side

to side, his arms pulled up to his chest. The natives' skin was extremely dark, and many of the men were not wearing shirts, so there was plenty of it on display.

He'd seen more dark people in a moment, he said to us later, than in his whole life previous to that, which made us laugh heartily. Yes, he still had a lot more of the world to see.

'My dear boy,' I told him, 'you'd better get used to it. Where we are going the only white people you will see are the rest of us.'

Freetown had wide streets of red gravel, lined with white houses. There were crowds of people walking in every direction, dressed in bright, colourful clothing, so that you'd need a full palette to paint the scene. There were half-caste girls with long dresses, hats and parasols; there were Mahommedan men in white robes; and there were swarms of little children buzzing around, holding out open palms to beg for money, and then darting away after we had ignored them for a while.

Livingstone left us to visit the governor, taking Captains Bedingfeld and Duncan with him. Kirk and I decided to visit the gardens, which Bedingfeld had pointed to, to look for botanical specimens.

It was an interest that we shared, Kirk and I. I am an amateur, of course, but I do think that my painter's eye enables me to perceive the distinctive features of this or that species, in a manner that is closer to the vision of a scientist. Sir William Hooker would not have praised my Australian paintings the way he had if that were not the case. Kirk, of course, was the expedition's official botanist, and he had been scientifically trained.

We walked through the gardens, passing many plants that had withered in the heat, but there was plenty of interest. Cocoanut and oil palms, silk cotton trees and pawpaw trees, as well as many plants that were unfamiliar to me. I took out my sketchbook when we came to a cashew tree. Kirk watched closely.

'That's good,' he said, 'the way you bring out the vein of the leaf like that. Let me try ... if you don't mind.'

He wasn't bad at drawing, and I told him so. There was plenty I could teach him, and he would catch on in no time at all.

'Plants are easier to draw than animals,' I said. 'If you want them alive, they have the advantage of not moving.'

'Quite!'

We moved on to the next plant. It had thin branches and small leaves. It was not a plant I knew.

Kirk looked at it for a while. 'Mm,' he murmured. 'Some sort of *Pyrenacantha*.'

He cut off a branch with a few leaves and carefully placed it in his book. I watched him as he wrote on a piece of paper: *Livingstone's Exp. ... Dr Kirk Pyrenacantha ... From Free Town, Sierra Leone*. At the bottom he wrote the date and signed his initials: *J.K.*

I reached out to another branch on the tree. It had a furry texture: surprising to the touch.

'Come,' Kirk beckoned me. 'There's plenty here that's worth preserving.'

It took several days to get up provisions for the ship. We took the opportunity to explore Freetown and its surrounds, sometimes in groups, sometimes on our own. I spent most of my time sketching: the ships in the bay, the buildings of the town, and the people.

We were all, in our various ways, gathering information. Thornton noted that the soil was rich in iron, produced from the surrounding basalt. Kirk found out that the oil palm not only yielded oil from the outer part of the fruit, but was also tapped for wine, resulting in drunkenness among some of the population. From the leaves, a strong fibre was produced, which was used for fishing lines.

Most interesting to me were the people. Because of its history as a place where freed slaves had been resettled, whose ancestors had hailed from who knows where, and because people were still attracted here from afar, one could see a vast diversity of people in a few hundred yards. Kirk and I found an old Mandingo man holding something towards us, a charm of some sort.

'Come,' he beckoned. 'Come. Look.'

It was a small pouch made of red leather, three or four inches square and half an inch thick, worn by a string around the neck.

It was called a *saabie*, he explained. It had verses inside, from the Koran. The man had the black skin of an African but wore the dress of an Arab.

'Where do you come from?' I asked, taking out my sketchbook.

'Aaah,' the man cackled, and pointed eastward. 'From Sudan.'

'All that way.' I started with the outline of his head and shoulders.

'Yes.' He nodded, and drifted for a moment into some memory that was unimaginable to the two of us.

'This is fascinating,' Kirk said, more to me, and then asked the man about his prayer rituals. 'Do you start with this?' he said, and proceeded to chant something in Arabic.

The man's eyes grew large with excitement.

‘Yes, yes,’ he said, and launched into a chant of his own, with Kirk nodding and occasionally raising and dipping his finger like an orchestra conductor.

‘It is amazing,’ he said, more to me again, ‘far away in the Sudan, but the formula is the same as Syria, Turkey.’

‘You are ...’ the man pointed at Kirk ‘... Muslim?’

‘No,’ Kirk laughed. ‘I am a Christian.’

I held up my sketchbook to show the man. He squinted and then raised his eyebrows in astonishment. Then he laughed and shook his head. It was a universal reaction, from primitive people seeing an image of themselves. They always laughed.

‘You ... Christian too?’ he asked me.

‘Yes, I am.’

‘Here.’ He held out the charm with one hand and pressed the other against his heart, to indicate where it should be worn.

‘How much?’

He held out a hand and shook his head. How amazing, that we were not being charged for something.

The man then uttered some salutation in Arabic to Kirk, and Kirk – to my amazement and the old man’s – gave the response.

‘O-oh,’ the man whispered. ‘Very strange.’

‘Strange?’ said Kirk.

‘Strange, yes. You know ... the true faith, but you still ... a Christian.’

We had a laugh about that afterwards, Kirk and I. But it did impress me, that this Mandingo should say that, because it showed that Kirk knew his stuff when it came to observing people.

In the evenings we were hosted by everybody of importance in Freetown. We dined with the bishop, with the governor, and aboard the *Calcutta*, a large steamer carrying refugees from India back to England.

The governor’s residence was a large whitewashed building on the main street. The dining hall contained as many guests as could comfortably be seated at the long table. The muggy air was filled with the chatter of voices, the rattle of metal on crockery, the clinking of glasses. Bedingfeld was in conversation with the governor at the end of the table, nearest to me. They were laughing about some memory they shared.

‘But this time I am here without a ship!’ Bedingfeld said. ‘It feels very strange, let me tell you, not to have a ship in the harbour with a captain’s cabin that is mine to inhabit.’

'I'm sure it is,' the governor said, with a slight smile.

'Strange, too, to be a passenger aboard a *merchant* vessel rather than a naval one.' Bedingfeld looked at Duncan. 'Tell me, Governor, how is my friend Captain Smythe? Is he still with the Squadron?'

'The Squadron?' Thornton asked quietly.

Bedingfeld heard him. 'The West African Squadron. They patrol the west coast in search of slave ships.'

'It has been most effective,' the governor declared. 'We have captured scores of ships and freed thousands of slaves. We have made it difficult for people who would continue that odious traffic.'

'I agree, Governor,' Livingstone said. 'It is a most noble achievement. But,' he raised his finger, 'that is the western trade accounted for. Slaves are still transported from the east coast. The Arab lands are hungry for slaves. And let us not forget that it is the Africans themselves who sell their fellows into bondage, and that, ultimately, is where we must stop the rot. Christianity, civilization and commerce: that is what will root the evil out.'

'Quite right,' the governor nodded, 'and that is why all England is behind you, and none less than we.'

'That is very generous,' Livingstone said. 'It is good that people realize that by helping us they are serving God. How are the arrangements, Governor, for the men to man the steam boat?'

'The Kroomen. They are ready.'

'The who?' Thornton asked.

'Kroomen,' Bedingfeld explained. 'They are a race of men from hereabouts. From the Liberian coast. They're good sailors and fishermen. The Royal Navy often employ them when they need extra hands on their ships. It's *k-r-o-o*, not *c-r-e-w*.'

'An appropriate pun,' I chuckled.

'Quite,' Bedingfeld agreed. 'There must be enough of them on Her Majesty's vessels to fill a large town. They need a firm hand, of course, and a bit of grog now and then, but they're fine men and hard workers. I've had enough experience handling them. Governor Hill, did you tell them that it was I who would be commanding them?'

The governor closed his eyes for an instant, then quickly opened them again. 'I did mention your name, yes, and of course Dr Livingstone's.'

Livingstone, I noticed, had more of a frown than usual.

‘Yes, of course,’ Bedingfeld said. ‘Did they...? They did recognize my name, I trust?’

‘Indeed they did. You have quite a reputation in these parts. I’m sure they will serve you well.’

‘Very good,’ Bedingfeld laughed, and raised his finger. ‘If I may say—’

‘Governor,’ Livingstone interrupted, ‘there are twelve of them, is that right? And they are engaged to serve for two years?’

‘Twelve men, two years, yes. These chaps are used to long stretches of service,’ he explained to the rest of us. ‘Sometimes they go straight from their canoes to a man-of-war and don’t return for a year or two. Then they come home again and, for as long a time, they don’t do any work at all. Or they use their earnings to buy a wife. But when they are working, they work hard.’

‘May I say, I’m most impressed with the state of this place,’ Livingstone said. ‘It seems ordered and healthy.’

‘It has taken time, and effort, but, yes, I believe we have achieved something. There is little disease now, thanks to the cleaning up of Kroo town.’

Livingstone nodded his approval. ‘I have seen cotton and indigo growing here. These are promising signs. Posterity will look upon this establishment as a great fact.’

The next afternoon I got to see these Kroomen. I came back from the town to find a group of very black figures gathered on the pier. They wore short trousers of white cloth and wide-brimmed straw hats. They were not particularly tall, but they were stocky, the physique of men who were used to physical labour. Captain Bedingfeld was in conversation with one of them, with Livingstone standing close by. Some sort of bargaining was going on.

I did not want to crowd them, so once I was close enough to hear what was going on, I held back.

‘The usual arrangement,’ Bedingfeld said. ‘You will be paid in advance of each month, starting when we are out at sea. The men get one pound, eight shillings and five pence a month.’

‘Yes,’ the Krooman said. ‘It is good.’

One of them looked back in my direction. He gave a little bow. It might have been Toby, with whom I would spend all the time on the pinnacle. The memory is unclear. They were simply a row of exotic natives then.

We left Freetown after four or five days, our vessel filled with provisions, water and coal, and our personal luggage with sketches, notes, specimens and artefacts. The Kroomen had brought their canoe with them, a dugout, which had been secured on deck, near the sections of our steam launch. I'd had to find a space in the hold for them to sleep, amongst the stores from England and the goods we had acquired in Freetown. It was going to be harder, now, to find anything that we needed.

Once we were on our way, and Freetown shrank into the distance, Bedingfeld lined up the Kroomen on deck and called them to attention. They stood straight and still, chins out and eyes front. I could see they were used to naval discipline. And yet there was something in the expressions of some of them that suggested their thoughts were far away from this deck.

'Right, men,' Bedingfeld cried in a strangled voice. 'As you know, I am Royal Navy, and you will take my orders the same way you would if this were one of Her Majesty's men-of-war. Is that understood?'

The Kroomen replied with cries of 'Yes, master!'

'Mr Baines here will issue you each with a blanket. Take good care of these. Is that understood?'

'Yes, master!'

Bedingfeld dismissed them, and I went down to the hold. It was gloomy and smelt of damp and diverse chemical fumes. I set up a table on which I placed the store book. The Kroomen lined up and came to me one by one. Young Oswell came to see, accompanied by Charles.

The headman called himself Tom Jumbo. He stood beside me and told me each man's name so I could enter it in the store book.

'Tom Wilson,' he said, as the first in line took his blanket. This one, like Jumbo, was older than the rest. 'Second Krooman,' he added, and the man nodded to me.

'Tom Coffee,' said Jumbo as the next one came.

These fellows looked very different from the blacks in South Africa. Their skin was darker and their faces rougher. I wondered what they had seen, where they had travelled to, what stories they had to tell.

'Tom Will.'

This one had only one eye. He looked at me confidently with the other.

'Tom Davis.'

'Are you all called Tom?' Oswell piped up.

‘No.’ Jumbo laughed. ‘Here be Black Will. And there be Jack Sabe and Jack Williams, and there, at the back, John Grando.’

Black Will didn’t look any blacker than Tom Will, or any of the other Toms, for that matter. I wondered how he had got his name. Two Wills, I suppose, and they couldn’t both be called Tom.

Oswell let out a big sigh. ‘Mr Baines is also called Tom, aren’t you, Mr Baines?’

‘Thomas. Indeed I am.’ I smiled at Oswell but didn’t join in his laughter. I didn’t want to make the men too familiar with me.

The four who weren’t called Tom were the exceptions. There was still a Tom Toby, a Tom Peter and a Tom Walker to enter in the book.

‘Ask them if they are familiar with an *Uncle Tom*,’ said Charles, who was standing nearby.

I probably laughed a little, but the Kroomen couldn’t be expected to appreciate his humour.

‘Right,’ Bedingfeld called out to the Kroomen. ‘Time to work. The launch needs cleaning. Mr Baines, if you will get out the paint and brushes.’

The sections of the launch had got wet up on the deck during the voyage, and needed cleaning and painting lest they began to rust. This ‘homogeneous metal’ – this ‘steel’ – was a new invention, and although it was supposed to be the best material available, none of us knew from first-hand experience how it would react to the elements.

Rae was there to help. ‘The water has turned off the paint,’ he said, ‘but the metal hasn’t started to rust yet. But it might if we don’t do anything about it now.’

Bedingfeld and I oversaw the cleaning of the after section, while Mr Rae painted the midship section. We painted it inside and out with red lead as a preservative against rust.

‘Peacock’s patent,’ said Rae, a gleeful grimace on his face. ‘It’ll stop any rust from happening.’

‘And we don’t want our boat to rust,’ I said. ‘Though I have to say, I had no idea that this was the kind of painting I was employed to do!’ I made sure that Livingstone wasn’t in earshot, in case he thought I was being serious. ‘When I first arrived at the Cape I worked as a house painter. Not my calling!’

Rae had rolled up his sleeves, and I saw a glimpse of a tattoo on his arm. Rae was, in a sense, the one my fellow officers who was most like me. Kirk and Thornton had a university education to get them where they were. Rae had learnt a trade and proved himself through years and years of hard work.

‘Have you been a seaman all your life?’ I asked, once the Kroomen had got the hang of it and we had a moment to rest. Bedingfeld had gone somewhere else.

‘I spent long enough as a mechanic in Glasgow,’ he said. ‘But I’ve done the Atlantic run more times than I can count. What about you, Mr Baines? You come from King’s Lynn: you must have spent some time on the water.’

‘A fair amount,’ I said, and told him about my father, and some of the excursions I had made with him, and my own voyages on the Australian expedition.

Rae made it easy to talk, although I realized afterwards that I’d spoken so much about myself that I hadn’t learnt very much about him. But there would be plenty of time to engage him in conversation.

Two days after leaving Sierra Leone we passed the coast of Liberia, first Monrovia and then Cape Palmas, where the Kroomen came from. They stood on the deck, cheering and waving at the coastline in the distance. They were now smartly dressed in their naval slops: blue flannel shirts and white duck trousers.

‘Not far to go until we pass the Congo,’ Livingstone said. ‘What a wretched place that is – as of course you know, Commander Bedingfeld.’

‘No doubt about that. And a little further south, Loanda, where I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance.’ Bedingfeld looked at Livingstone, waiting for his response.

But Loanda had very different associations for Livingstone. He would have met a terrible fate had he proceeded directly to England from there. The mailship *Forerunner*, whose captain offered him a passage home, sank to the bottom of the sea on its voyage there. Livingstone’s journal and letters were aboard; he would have gone down with them. But he was spared.

‘I had been called to turn around and cross the continent with my Makololo,’ Livingstone recalled, ‘and so I refused the passage and was saved. I prayed for those poor souls who were not so fortunate. One must be mindful always of the severe cost of not following God’s will.’

I imagined their bloated bodies, trapped deep down there, and, floating among them, leaves of soggy paper, the ink running as it became absorbed into the seawater.

‘Thanks be to God, brother,’ said Charles. ‘The good Lord had other plans for you than to drown in the ocean.’

Livingstone nodded slowly and stared into the distance. After a few moments his attention was with us again. ‘Loanda. Best coffee in the world,’ he said, ‘certainly the best I have ever had. Captain Duncan, how long till we get there?’

'A few days ...' he paused '... before we pass Angola, but ...' he stroked his chin '... I'm afraid I have no orders to stop there. I cannot ...'

'No?' Livingstone said. 'That is a shame. A great shame. You will all have to take my word, and Commander Bedingfeld's, that the coffee is the best in the world. I would dearly have liked to get my hands on some more of it. It would have made a good present for some important people at the Cape and back in England.'

'I am sorry, Dr Livingstone, but Captain Washington did say ...'

'No, no. Do not apologize, Captain. If those are your orders, I shall not interfere.'

Duncan looked relieved. 'Thank you for understanding, Doctor,' he said, as Livingstone made his way off.

After a moment, Bedingfeld spoke in a soft voice. 'What a shame that is.' He looked at Duncan intently, blinking a few times. 'Is a little stop at Loanda really going to do any harm?'

'I'm afraid,' Duncan shook his head, 'I cannot. You were there when Washington gave me my orders. They were very clear. Without insurance ...'

'Yes, yes ... And *that*' – Bedingfeld prodded the air with his finger – 'shows the difference between a naval officer like me and a merchant sailor like you. Do you know what the difference is?'

Duncan raised his eyebrows, but didn't ask for the answer.

'*Imagination*,' Bedingfeld said.

'Oh really?'

'Really. *Imagination*. If I were commanding this vessel, and among my passengers were Dr Livingstone and an important naval officer, who had good reason to stop at Loanda ... well. No question.'

Duncan laughed. 'I hope you jest, sir. If not, I don't think what you say is worthy of a response.'

Bedingfeld shrugged. 'Make of it what you will. Captain.'

Is this where the trouble started between them? Or had it begun earlier? Was it only when we reached the river that it properly flared up?

Duncan was right, no doubt, but there was something about Bedingfeld, a maverick nature, that reminded me of the sea captains in the stories that had surrounded me as a boy. They were not ones to follow rules, apart from the law of the ship. This fascinated me about Bedingfeld. But it could make him unpleasant, and, of course, it would get him into trouble in the end.

A few days into our voyage, we entered the influence of the Trade winds, and the wind rose and the sea turned rough. It was a bad passage, through the Trades, certainly the worst of my several crossings. It's never pleasant, but the *Pearl's* shape made it worse. Her flat bottom might make her suitable for navigating rivers, but at sea that's no good at all. Offering no resistance to the ocean, she seemed if anything to join forces with it, to make the passage as uncomfortable as any of us could bear. And this time – it must have been particularly bad – some of the *Pearl's* men were knocked up: the firemen and stokers were no use at all. Only the Kroomen were unaffected – all of them, to a man – so Captain Duncan had to ask Livingstone to put them in his service. I think it's because they spend all their lives on the water, in those unsteady little canoes of theirs, so the motion of a ship doesn't seem so uncomfortable for them as it does for us.

We all got over it after a while. Charles was the last to recover. Except for Mrs Livingstone, who'd suffered seasickness ever since we'd set sail from England. I hadn't seen her since the day I'd brought her water, and the party spoke of her in hushed tones.

I sat on deck with my sketchbook on my lap in the early-morning gloom. In it were dozens of drawings that I'd started but had to abandon before they could turn into anything, pages and pages of rough lines from a view that passed and was lost before it could be laid down in enough detail to take on a separate, coherent existence here. They were all wasted.

The voyage had not been good for my art. I'd been pulled away from it by more menial labour, and there had been plenty of that. The elements had conspired against me: if it wasn't soot from the funnel landing on my palette, it was the rough motion of the vessel, which had made any activity impossible.

There was also a strange light during the day, which made it impossible to see more than a few miles from the ship. The world beyond was lost in a haze, and even when we were close to the coastline and we could see the breakers, the land itself was invisible. I'd learnt, while travelling among the islands in the Indian Ocean, that the only time for sketching was the short interval between the first dawn and sunrise.

So there I was, at first light, with my sketchbook and pencils out, the coast of Angola starting to appear on the port side.

There was some activity from the crew on deck, but none of my companions had woken up yet.

We were days away from Cape Town – less than a week, Captain Duncan had said. I felt a thrill of anticipation. I was returning home (it was practically my home) in Dr Livingstone’s company. I couldn’t resist smiling.

I felt a presence and turned, and there was Rae, standing behind me.

‘You’re up early,’ he said.

‘It’s a good time to sketch,’ I replied. ‘I didn’t notice you there.’

‘Real painting at last,’ he said.

‘Just a sketch for now, but I may turn it into a watercolour later, if I have a chance.’

Rae looked around and came closer. ‘Have you heard about Mrs Livingstone?’

‘No. What?’

He took in air through his teeth. ‘That her sickness isn’t seasickness at all? At least, not any more.’

‘Whatever do you mean?’

‘She’s pregnant.’

‘Pregnant?’

‘Yes, pregnant. Kirk told me. She’s been sick all this time, and it turns out it’s because she’s with child.’

‘Oh dear. She won’t be joining us up the Zambesi then – of course not.’

‘No. Apparently the Doctor is going to send her to Kuruman with her brother, and she will join him in two years or so. Kirk thinks it’s a good thing that she’s not coming now. He says a woman would have been an encumbrance. What do you think?’

‘I suppose he’s right. Although Livingstone must’ve known what he was doing when he planned to bring her along.’

He nodded, but said nothing.

‘Oswell will go with her of course,’ I said. ‘That leaves only two Livingstones on the journey now, instead of four.’

‘No women, no children,’ he said. ‘I’ll let you get on with your sketch, if this is such a good time.’

‘Yes. Thank you.’

I was oddly disappointed. I hadn’t seen Mrs Livingstone very much; not at all since that day when I took her water. But I felt I’d be missing something now that she wasn’t going to be with us. I felt she understood me. I’d miss Oswell too.

Looking at the land on the horizon, I wondered exactly where we were. Cape Negro, the Great Fish Bay – somewhere near to there.

Mrs Livingstone was pregnant. That meant she and Dr Livingstone had—

An image began to form but I quickly put it out of my mind.

But when? Had it been back in England, or aboard the ship, on the same shelf she'd been lying on when I brought her water? The image returned: a man's shape crouching above her, Dr Livingstone.

No, no, no. I could not allow this vision into my mind. It would anger God, not to mention Livingstone, if he could see inside me. It was disrespectful, and this was none of my business. None at all.

I concentrated my eyes on what was before me, the physical outline of the coastline in the lightening dawn, but then, my vision blurring again, I saw, with a jolt, Emily, her face, her neck, the shape of her shoulder.

'Would you paint me like that, Thomas?' she'd said.

And that look she'd given me: that we'd misunderstood one another, that I'd not understood her at all.

I banished her too, but not before thinking: If only you could see me now, see how far I've come, when you didn't think I would amount to anything. I started drawing lines across the page. There was no place on this journey for women and children. Seven men were left – a fitting number, a band of brothers, Livingstone and his six helpers, who would travel with him wherever he guided, our next stop the Cape, towards which our ship was ploughing through the water. The Cape of Good Hope.

PART II

THE LAUNCH

By-and-by he asked me whether he would do for Africa. I said I believed he would, if he would not go to an old station, but would advance to unoccupied ground, specifying the vast plain to the north, where I had sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages, where no missionary had ever been.

At last Livingstone said, 'What is the use of my waiting for the end of this abominable Opium War? I will go at once to Africa!' The Directors concurred, and Africa became his sphere.

– Robert Moffat

University of Cape Town

Cape Town, summer 1860

I have been replaced in the Williams house by an infant. I left a month or so before it was due. I could see that my friend was becoming awkward, that he was unhappily preparing to broach the subject of my tenure's end.

'You'll want to prepare the room for a nursery,' I said at breakfast one morning.

John looked at me sympathetically. 'I'm sorry, Thomas. It could be a matter of weeks.'

'No, don't apologize,' I protested. 'You've been most generous indeed. I don't know what I would have done without friends like you.'

'Are you going to be all right?'

I had, in the meantime, spoken to my old friend Frederick Logier, and he had offered me a place in his home in Dixon Street, in the Waterkant area to the east of the city. It was a much smaller house than the Williamses', and I would be living in a room among clutter: an old piano, boxes of sheet music. But in some ways I would be more comfortable. Logier and his wife were older and there were no children in the house. I wouldn't feel I was getting in anyone's way. I would have a place to stay: in that sense I could assure my friend that I would be all right. But in other, deeper senses, I would not.

The fever has left me now, but I am not free of physical affliction. Some days (not all), I awake in the morning and it takes a few moments before I remember, and then I am gripped by a tightening in my stomach and throat that remains until I am unconscious again. (It is such brief instants of relaxation that cruelly show me how much my body twists for the rest of the time.) My head pounds with disbelief, and I feel I am about to vomit, sick with insult.

And then there is the eye. There is still a twitch in my left eye; it began the last time I was struck by fever on the Zambesi and it has not left me since. I have regained some of my weight, and I am strong enough to walk short distances, but my eye is not getting better.

My friends have responded with sympathy, and concern, some of them with outrage. Some, of course, have not seen me at all, people who I thought were friends but perhaps are not. But what concerns me most are the opinions of strangers, the large mass of people who don't know me, but who feel entitled to pass judgement.

When the *Lynx* brought me from the Zambesi, it brought something else on board with it, something that landed the moment the ship docked, and spread through the settlement, like a disease. This infected cargo was the news, the news of what happened to me, told by the sailors and fellow passengers, some of whom were sympathetic to me, some of whom I could see did not believe a word spoken against the great Doctor, all of whom would have told the story to others. And, of course, there is Livingstone's own version, which would have been written in countless dispatches, and no doubt became even more distorted as the contents were whispered by gossiping tongues, as the plague passed from host to host.

From the time I was strong enough to venture outside, I saw people whispering as they passed. I saw people looking away, people about to cross the street but then stopping, when they saw me on the other side.

The letters would, of course, have gone to London too. To the halls of government. The Foreign Secretary would have sat at his desk one morning and opened a letter and read of my disgrace. Does the Prime Minister know? The Prime Minister! Does he remember my name as one of the members of the expedition, or is this the first time that he finds a shelf for it in his mind? Thomas Baines: the man who stole from Livingstone. Murchison will have been informed, and with him the whole of the RGS. Does he regret making me a Fellow, or suggesting me for the expedition? Dr Hooker: what would he say upon hearing the news? He, surely, would know that there is something untrue about it.

I had to put a stop to my ruin.

Once I had been back for a couple of weeks, and had been nursed out of the worst of the sickness, I wrote a letter, to Lord Russell, *To Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c., &c., &c.* I stated my case, in considerable detail, denying the charges against me. I complained that I had been dismissed without proper evidence against me and that I had not been given a fair hearing. I mentioned that Livingstone had not even arranged a passage back to England, to which I was entitled. Not that I was ready to go back there, even further away from where I was supposed to be. But it was shoddy treatment and worth noting.

'In conclusion,' I wrote,

I must say that I have no wish to hinder or disturb Dr. Livingstone in the prosecution of the work he is engaged in, nor have I any pecuniary advantage in view, all I wish is to have such witnesses called upon and examined as may clear me from the imputation of dishonesty. I do not impute any intentional injustice towards me to Dr.

Livingstone, I believe on the contrary that he was grieved to be under the necessity as he supposed it of dismissing me. I also believe that should he become convinced that he was wrong he would be the first to acknowledge it, and I should value such acknowledgement more highly if made voluntarily than if it had the slightest appearance of being extorted; but at the same time I cannot afford to let such assertions as I have referred to pass without contradiction.

I have, &c.

T. Baines

Sixteen pages I filled, as well as a further ten pages of copied documents. These I folded and sealed in an envelope, and sent it across the ocean. Then I waited and waited.

The move to Logier's house was the first time since my return that I saw something of the city beyond the streets around the Williams home. I travelled by cart along Buitengracht Street, passing familiar signs: Orphan, Buiten, Bloem, Pepper, Leeuwen, Dorp. We passed Riebeek Square and turned left at the burial ground into Waterkant Street.

My possessions filled two boxes: such is the sum of my worldly goods – those that I still have with me, in any case. Am I to spend my future moving from house to house, dependent on the kindness of others?

Logier was one of my first friends when I first arrived in Cape Town, all those years ago. He was the organist at St George's Church in Rondebosch, and it was he who gave me my first commission in this country, a painting of the church, which set me on my way as an artist, a path that was supposed to lead ... where? Somewhere other than this.

'Have you heard anything?' I ask.

He shakes his head, replying as he did yesterday, and the day before. 'Nothing, Thomas.'

'Still nothing,' I whisper. 'I suppose, when there is news, we shall hear it, so there is no use worrying.'

He smiles, and places his hand on my knee.

Every day I walk to the post box, looking for a reply from the Foreign Office. But there is nothing. I do not know if they are taking time to investigate the matter, if they are ignoring me, or whether my letter has gone astray.

I think about little else. I contemplate writing another. I fall asleep imagining various replies from London and how I will respond to them. Whenever someone comes to visit the house, I discuss the matter with them. Logier must have heard the story a hundred times by now.

'It is a difficult thing,' he says, his brow crinkled with distress, 'to end up on the wrong side of a man like Dr Livingstone. People *are* going to doubt you, if they don't know you. They're going to believe him.'

'That is precisely why I cannot take it lying down.'

He nods, and sighs. 'That is precisely why. But don't expect it to be easy.'

We sit for a while, the silence broken only by the ticking of the clock.

'And if I went back?' I say.

'What do you mean?'

'Back to the Zambesi. What if I found Livingstone again, and spoke to him, confronted him?'

For a moment he looks worried, as if he's listening to the rantings of a madman. But then he smiles. 'Thomas,' he says, 'just concentrate on getting your strength back.'

I look at him. He is getting old. His music lessons are not bringing in enough money; he has never been wealthy, but he seems poorer now than before. For him life has not been a glorious thing. His disappointment has come not in the dashing of a dream, but in a gradual shrinking of his achievements and ambitions. Perhaps that is easier to bear.

Back in my room, I take out my sketchbook. There are a few studies of the pandanus trees on the Kongone, a watercolour of the *MaRobert* steaming up the river.

I run my finger along the paint. It is dry and crusty, slightly rough to the touch. How different it was when the paint was still wet.

As artist of the expedition you are required to make faithful representations of the general features of the country through which we shall pass in sketches of those points which you may consider characteristic of the scenery. You will also endeavour to make drawings of wild animals and birds copying as closely as you can the natural attitudes. We shall probably see the large wild animals in circumstances more favourable than has ever fallen to the lot of an artist before and such as few others will enjoy, for by the introduction of guns they will soon be rendered wild or entirely swept away. You are expected also to delineate for the general collection of the expedition the specimens of useful and rare plants, fossils and reptiles, that may be submitted to you as a means of preserving pictorial records of things which through the influence of the climate may otherwise be lost... You are also required to draw average specimens of the different tribes we may meet with, for the purposes of ethnology and should it be possible to measure the dimensions of the heads of the individuals you may select, the measurements will be highly prized. The comelier countenances should be selected rather than the uglier as the former are always taken as the types of the European race.

– David Livingstone, instructions to Thomas Baines, 18 April 1858

Cape Town, 28 April 1858

Wet gravel crunches under my feet on the way to the Commercial Exchange. I've left early for tonight's event, and I've chosen to walk, alone, because a little clear air and solitude are welcome after the throng of the past few days, and the weeks aboard the *Pearl* before then.

It has been raining all day, but the weather is clearing. The mountain is illuminated by shafts of late-afternoon sunshine. Halfway up its face, a thin stripe of low cloud stretches across from Devil's Peak to Lion's Head, like a long brushstroke of pale grey, but above and below the view is unbroken.

How many times have I painted this scene, and in how many different conditions? It was, for a time, almost all I did, once I had made some sort of name for myself as a painter. Every few days there was someone who wanted a painting of their mountain to hang up in their living room. Soon I could draw it from memory – the green slopes of Devil's Peak, the flat-topped mountain itself, cleft down the middle, the point of Lion's Head descending to the hill slopes of Lion's Rump – but it is still something for the eye to marvel at, especially having been removed from it for so long.

A stranger is walking towards me. He greets me with a nod as he passes. He must know who I am. I am beginning to recognize that expression. It's the kind of look I would give to a man of moderate fame if I passed them in the street. A member of government, a general in the army. I return his acknowledgement and proceed.

It became tiresome after a while, painting the same scene over and over again, although it did bring enough money to support myself. There were some ridiculous commissions. One man wanted his house, which was in Rondebosch, to have the face of the mountain behind it, as if he lived in the waters of Table Bay. I said he had a perfectly good view of the side of the mountain, but he would have none of it, and told me that as long as he was paying for the painting, he would decide what views appeared in it. I would never be satisfied using my trade in that way. Not like the way I am using it now.

I turn into the Company Gardens and walk along the tree-lined avenue with manicured lawns on either side. At the other end is the Museum, and, beyond that, the bustle of the city.

I must confess I am enjoying the celebrations here in Cape Town, more than in London, more than in Lynn. This, after all, is the place where I began my life as a man,

and the people here are the ones who have known me since I started making my way in the world; and it is now true to say that I have done so successfully.

What a wondrous series of events it has been. On Monday, the presentation at the Commercial Exchange: a Testimonial of eight hundred guineas in a silver box, raised by the city's inhabitants. The governor praised Livingstone, before a large crowd, and we were swept up in his words on the Doctor's glorious accomplishments. 'Animated by the sole desire of doing good,' he had said of Livingstone.

This expedition, I have no doubt, will be similarly fuelled.

I had seen the governor, once or twice, in the time I lived in Cape Town before, but only from afar. Now I could shake his hand and I found him an engaging man. His hair was white, but his eyebrows were black, darkening his eyes and drawing one's attention towards them.

He was interested to hear about my travels in Australia – of course, since he had been governor there before. But he is preoccupied at the moment, with events in Kaffraria – how shocking they are – and with the challenge to his leadership as a result of his attempts to deal with it all. He must be relieved to have the pleasure of hosting Livingstone, to counter some good against the bad. But he also made time to see me, me alone, and showed interest in my paintings. I must remember to write to Mother that she can expect to hear from him or Lady Grey.

I am staying at Parke's Hotel in Kloof Street, with some of the others. Many friends have come to see me – Williams, Chapman, Captain Roome, Henry Hall – making the time very full, on top of the training at the Observatory with Thomas Maclear, the Astronomer Royal. But my stay here is to be short, and this is the only opportunity they have to see me, for us to see each other. Mr Essex wishes to take my photograph, but I'm not even sure if I'll be able to find time for a sitting.

Adderley Street is busier than it usually would be at this time and in such weather; there are several people who, by their dress, appear to be going to tonight's event. Many others must be hoping to catch a glimpse of Dr Livingstone when he arrives.

Instead of continuing directly, I take a different route, a small detour. I turn right into Longmarket and left into Buitenkant, which takes me to the other side of the Parade, past to the Castle, and I watch for a while as the waves bash against the sea wall, taking in the night sky and ocean air.

The lessons with Maclear have been demanding. Charles and I have been learning about magnetism, and how to measure it. The instruments and calculations will take some getting used to, but I find my mind returning again and again to the image that Maclear

created: of magnetic fields looping around the earth's circumference. Imagine if they were visible to the eye, what a wonder the sky would be.

I cross the Parade, the City Hall on my left, the mountain looming behind it, and make my way towards the Commercial Exchange. The building's imposing columns rise up before me. Once again this building will host Livingstone's expedition. It is, after all, the heart of Cape Town's merchant interests. There are people milling about outside.

In no time, someone hails me. An old friend, Henry Hall.

'I hope I didn't keep you up too late the other night,' he jokes.

'Not at all,' I say. 'I hope I didn't make too much of a dent in your whisky supply! It was—'

'Baines!' calls another voice. It's the governor.

'Henry – please you must excuse me – the governor ...'

'Yes, yes of course.' He nods rapidly. 'Good to see you again.'

Sir George is in conversation with Thornton and Mr Maclear. They are standing between two of the pillars. Thornton looks very smart in his dinner jacket, less like the boy I've come to know on the ship.

'Well, well,' says Maclear, seeing me approach. 'My diligent student. You must be an expert in magnetism now, Thomas.'

'I hope so,' I reply. 'Well, certainly not an expert. But I'm sure between us we will produce information that you'll find useful.'

'I have no doubt you will,' says Sir George. 'And Mr Thornton, how are you finding our fairest Cape?'

'Most fascinating, Governor,' Thornton says, 'and fair indeed. I've just come back from the *Pearl* at Simon's Bay, and before that I went all the way to Paarl – which, I believe, means exactly the same thing, in Dutch. An interesting place, from a geological point of view.'

Then Kirk joins us our circle, nodding to Sir George and touching me on the shoulder. We are more than acquaintances now.

'Ah, Dr Kirk.' Sir George is delighted. 'Welcome. I'm sorry you couldn't make the meeting on Monday, but I'm pleased that you have another opportunity to see our grand Commercial Exchange.'

'Very grand,' says Kirk, looking up appreciatively.

Kirk, Bedingfeld and Rae have been spending most of their time at the naval base in Simon's Town, where the *Pearl* proceeded after landing at Table Bay. Charles and I have remained in Cape Town, with trips to the Observatory, for our lessons with Maclear.

‘Mr Thornton was just telling us about his geological observations,’ says Sir George, ‘and, as a botanist, you must be enjoying our flora.’

‘I am,’ Kirk replies. ‘I must say, I feel myself more at home among the plants here than I did at Sierra Leone. Some of them are very singular, but they are more nearly allied to those with which I am familiar.’

‘I take it you’ve been to the Botanical Gardens?’

‘I have indeed. Fascinating. Mr M’Gibbon has given me seeds and cuttings which hopefully will grow where we are going.’

‘Most excellent.’

Other men have joined our group and are standing eagerly about. Others stand close by, hoping to overhear some of our conversation.

Kirk remarks on the success of the pines and oaks that have been introduced on the mountainside. ‘And the Australian trees seem to be thriving wonderfully,’ he exclaims. ‘The gum trees have sprung up and grown quite large in no time at all.’

‘Indeed, they have been a great success. Ah, look!’ Sir George turns. ‘Here is the Portuguese ambassador.’

Approaching us is the Chevalier Duprat. He is tall man, black-haired and sallow-skinned, as is his race. He is dressed in full diplomatic regalia, with a long black coat that reaches almost to the ground.

The governor takes pleasure in introducing us as ‘members of Dr Livingstone’s party’ and before I can introduce myself, the ambassador is extending his hand towards me. ‘Mr Baines,’ he says. He has dark eyes, warm eyes. ‘Mr Thornton. Dr Kirk. It is a great honour to meet the companions of so great a man as Dr Livingstone. I trust you will find the Portuguese nothing but helpful in the course of your journey. We are, after all, your oldest ally.’

We all nod and smile in unison. How satisfying it is to stand comfortably among men of such importance. What would Mother say if she could see me? I must remind myself that I am now one of them.

‘You know I was born in Portugal myself,’ the governor says. ‘Please excuse us,’ he adds, and whisks the ambassador off to talk to someone else.

Our group disperses, but a few men remain. The conversation turns to politics, to Livingstone’s appointment as consul. ‘I’m not sure how comfortable the Portuguese are about it,’ says one of the men, whose name I don’t know but who I believe is a Member of Parliament.

There has been much talk about the appointment. The Portuguese have had an interest in Mozambique for three hundred years, although they can't be said to have developed it. Allowing Dr Livingstone into their territory is an extraordinary gesture.

'With anyone less famous,' says another man, 'I'm sure they would simply have refused.'

'Well ... I don't know if you followed the goings-on with his appointment as consul. He was supposed to be consul to Quilimane, Sena and Tete, but the Portuguese refused. They said that only Quilimane is open to free trade, so his consular appointment could not apply to the other places.'

'Which rather closes off the river, doesn't it?'

'Exactly.' He is a large man, the MP, and he draws in breath with a wheeze. 'So in the end he was made consul to Quilimane and some native tribes in the interior, beyond the influence of the Portuguese. They couldn't object to that.'

'No.'

'Livingstone was supposed to go to Lisbon,' the MP adds, 'but was prevented in the end, by an outbreak of smallpox there. I wonder about that. Smallpox, really?' He looks at me and smiles, as if he expects me to know his meaning and agree with it. I return the smile, a little awkwardly.

'And,' says the other, 'how much worse if that was the truth! Imagine: an outbreak of smallpox in *London*? In this day and age?'

There is a stir in the room. Livingstone has arrived, with the Reverend Moffat beside him. I'm glad of some reason to break away from this talk about the Portuguese. I wouldn't know what to say. I don't know what is true and what is not, but I do know that the Portuguese were very generous to Livingstone on his grand journey, in Angola and in Mozambique. Moffat's laughter fills the room. What fine fortune it was, that he was in Cape Town when we landed, unexpectedly all the way down from Kuruman. Mrs Livingstone can now be escorted upcountry by her father.

He is a lively fellow, Robert Moffat, with his great white beard and his booming voice. A biblical-looking man. He and Livingstone are standing with a group of people around them, with much laughter. Such great fortune.

We are called to our seats by Mr Porter, the Attorney-General and chairman of tonight's event. I find that I am at the main table, along with the most distinguished men in the room. The dean of Cape Town, Mr Porter himself, Sir George Grey and our whole party, including Livingstone, of course. Hands are flailing, voices ringing, faces changing

from one expression to another – for a moment I feel quite dizzy. Waiters are pouring wine and carrying plates to the tables.

To think that when I first arrived at the Cape, all those years ago, I disembarked from the ship with all the other passengers, but had to return to it that night, to sleep on board. It remained my home for more than a week, courtesy of its captain, a King's Lynn man. I had arrived on the other side of the world without enough money for a room; all I had were my skills and my hands and eyes. I found employment soon enough – not that it lasted very long, or the next job – ha! – but in time I settled in. He's a good friend now, Captain Roome, after all these years. And how astonishing, to find that he has become father-in-law to another friend, Chapman, whom I met in Mooi River, in the land of the Boers.

Strange to think of that time now: living aboard the *Olivia*. Or the work painting the blank walls of other people's houses. It seems, in this grand room, like another person's life.

'Baines.' The governor's voice breaks my reverie. 'You've spent time in Kaffraria. I was just describing to your young friend the macabre turn that events have taken there.' He turns back to Thornton, who is attending to Sir George with wide eyes. 'Yes, a most despicable form of revolt. These troublemakers – and I despair when I wonder how they have done this – they have convinced their tribesmen to kill their cattle, in some ... some evil hope that this would then induce the population to rush in desperation upon the Colony.'

Sir George had informed me of these events during Monday's interview. I must say, I'm astonished, and astonished too that he was about to face a vote of no confidence in Parliament. Sensibly, yesterday's vote did not go against him, and he appears less personally embattled now.

'They've slaughtered their cattle,' Sir George continues – 'thousands, *tens* of thousands of the beasts – and burnt their fields and the stores of grain. Now, Thomas knows Kaffraria well. Their *cattle*: you know how important cattle are to the Kafirs.'

'That's right,' I say. 'Their cattle – they're not just food, they're ... everything to those people. It would be like – it's like – all the bankers and merchants in London throwing all their money onto a huge bonfire, and watching it burn – all their savings, their hard work, all their future prospects! It's madness.'

'And how – who is responsible for this?' Thornton asks.

'That's the most sinister part,' says Sir George. 'According to the intelligence that has come down to us, the command to do this came from a young girl, not yet seventeen, with

some message from the ancestral spirits, to slaughter all cattle and burn all crops and – of course it’s ridiculous: grown men would never take such orders from a girl, least of all to destroy their *cattle*. Thomas knows as well as I do: these people, for all their backwardness, are never going to listen to a *woman*! There’s some foul hand behind it, but we don’t know who.’

‘Some foul hand here in the Cape too,’ says Mr Porter, ‘trying to bring a vote against you. But Parliament has decided sensibly.’

‘The majority of parliamentarians, yes,’ the colonial secretary adds, very quietly, ‘but many did not. There are troublemakers among us, in this very room.’

The governor holds up his hand and turns to Livingstone. ‘But enough of our troubles; they are far removed from tonight’s festivities. We are here to celebrate your enterprise on the Zambesi, and all the benefits it will bring – to Africa, to England, and to us at the Cape.’

There are *hear hears* from the table.

I can see, in my mind, the landscapes of the Kafirs, the sharp-edged mountains, the soft, low domes of grass. I painted them countless times, when I travelled with General Somerset’s regiment during the war. Seven years ago, eight. There were dreadful sights: men who had fallen to the soldiers’ bullets, others with terrible wounds. Once, I remember, a cow, its leg shattered, lowing painfully, and snorting froth from its nose. I meant to sketch it doing so, but the sound troubled me too much, so I shot it, a bullet in the brain, and had to sketch it collapsed. Now, imagine, the same landscapes are littered with slaughtered cattle. It is unthinkable.

Mr Porter is standing and announcing the loyal toast. We all rise, wine glasses in hand, and Porter declares: ‘The health of Her Majesty the Queen.’

‘Her Majesty the Queen,’ echoes a host of enthusiastic voices, and loud cheers fill the hall. There must be two hundred people here.

‘Next,’ says Porter, when he can speak again, ‘I wish to propose the health of the King of Portugal, who has shown great kindness to Dr Livingstone.’

Again, there are cheers – more restrained, of course – and the Chevalier Duprat gets to his feet. His eyes take in the crowd before he begins with a florid speech. He has a piece of paper in his hand, but he does not read from it. Instead he holds the paper to his chest and looks on Livingstone with an almost pained expression. ‘I was extremely sorry,’ he intones, ‘to hear that Dr Livingstone was prevented from going to Lisbon on his way to the colony, as a hearty welcome awaited him in Portugal. Therefore it falls to the

lot of a humble individual like myself to convey to Dr Livingstone the assurances of my Sovereign's warm interest in his welfare, and the success of his expedition.'

I can see the Member of Parliament at the next table. I wonder what he thinks of that.

Warming to his speech, the ambassador continues, addressing the full crowd now: 'Dr Livingstone will find the same support, the same hearty welcome, all and everything will be done to forward the realization of his most sanguine hopes; for a nobler crusade was never undertaken by a worthier champion.'

'Quite right,' Robert Moffat says, nodding jovially at his son-in-law.

I take a quick sip of wine as the ambassador produces another piece of paper. This one he holds before the audience as if he is a magician with a square of magic cloth. 'And now,' he announces, 'with reference to the good wishes entertained by my august Sovereign regarding the success of the expedition under the direction of our guest, I cannot refrain from reading an extract from a despatch which I have just received by the *Tweedside* from my government, on the subject.'

He holds up the paper and reads out the equally florid words of the King of Portugal, who has written to assure Livingstone, and his companions of the support of the Portuguese authorities, 'especially those of the great valley of the Zambezi'.

'It is signed' says the ambassador, '*Viscount de Silva Bandeira*.' He taps the bottom of the page for emphasis before returning to his own voice. 'To these good wishes entertained for Dr Livingstone's welfare, by King Pedro V, I beg to add my own. I thank you most sincerely for the honour done to my Sovereign, the King of Portugal.'

Amidst the applause that follows, I glance at the Member of Parliament, and this time he returns my gaze, the way I'd expect a conspirator would do.

But before I can determine his meaning, the governor has taken the floor. His purpose is to introduce Livingstone: 'Our most distinguished guest, the most illustrious traveller who is present this evening ... whom every person in the colony welcomes back to this country whence he started on his first expedition, and to which he is now returned.'

There are loud cheers from the assembly. I glance at Livingstone. He sits there looking slightly uncomfortable. Of course. He is more at home out in the wild – as am I. But who can deny these accolades?

I imagine ... some occasion in the future. Might similar words be spoken of me? I am a son of the Cape, even more than the Doctor.

The governor keeps his introduction short, knowing that the crowd has little interest in him; they are here for Livingstone. 'I can tell him that he will be followed by our good wishes and by our prayers; and we hope he will leave his name a lasting influence

throughout the whole of Africa – a name to be looked back at from future times with veneration, with respect, and with regard.’

Again there are loud cheers from all around.

‘Gentlemen, I have thus tried to express what every person here feels – more I cannot do; and I will now simply ask you to join me in drinking the health of Dr Livingstone.’

The hall erupts with noise, as every man rises to his feet and cheers. ‘*To Livingstone!*’ come the cries. ‘*To Livingstone! Livingstone!*’ The applause goes on and on, and when the Doctor stands up to speak it continues for a little longer, dying down only when Livingstone clears his throat. His expression is strangely subdued.

‘Mr Chairman,’ he begins, ‘your Excellency, ladies, and gentlemen. I thank you most sincerely for the cordiality with which you have welcomed me back again to Africa.’

‘*Hear hear!*’ comes a cry from the back of the hall. One or two chairs scrape on the floor as people sit more comfortably.

Livingstone gestures for silence again, and continues: ‘A very great deal of attention has been directed to Africa since my return to England. Now I think that that interest is the work of that Higher Power we all acknowledge as the ruler of the courses of man.’

As my eyes scan the crowd, I notice a man whispering to his neighbour. He is probably saying what every man here is feeling: how fortunate they are to be witnessing something so historic as this.

‘We know that a large portion of the race to which we belong – that race which I like to call not the Anglo-Saxon but the Anglo-American race – are guilty of holding a large portion of our fellow-men in bondage. The Americans are not alone guilty. *We* are guilty; for if we did not purchase their cotton, and give them increasing prices for it, they would, long ere this, have given it up. But we encourage them, and, somehow or other, we have entangled ourselves in the system. Somehow or other, we have got so entangled as to be the mainstay of slavery.’

I notice the man again. He is whispering once more, and the fellow next to him is shaking his head. How odd.

‘We also know that it is supposed that cotton and sugar, and other tropical products, cannot be obtained in sufficient quantity except by slave labour; and a great deal of effort is put forth to get hold of slaves. England has been trying for a long time, for a great many years, to put down this slavery system’ – there is a *hear hear* from somewhere in the room – ‘but at the very time we are making these efforts in one direction, we are upholding slavery in another.’

Now the room is silent.

‘But now that we have the prospect of opening up the country, where there is abundance of labour for the production of these tropical products, I think there is a prospect of getting abundance of these things, and of getting rid of the slavery system in the world. That is one of the causes why so much interest has been excited in respect to my travels.’

The whispering starts up again. Now the other fellow is whispering back. What on earth are they saying? If I were closer I would tell them to *shhhh*. Livingstone, fortunately, cannot see them. I turn my chair slightly, so I cannot see them either.

Livingstone goes on to explain the nature of our expedition. How the heart of the continent, the unknown interior, is surrounded by impediments. The unhealthy localities on the east and west coasts, the Kalahari desert to the south. He uses his hands to demonstrate the position of the various obstructions. ‘But when Messrs Oswald, Murray, and myself succeeded in passing round that desert, then we came into a new and well-watered country beyond.’

Livingstone’s discovery of Lake Ngami. I remember, very well, the days when it was just a rumour. Ten years ago. I’d considered, seriously considered, joining my friend Angas, to go in search of it. But we weren’t prepared and I hadn’t the means. Just think if I’d put all that aside and found a way of going. Livingstone discovered it a year or two later.

Shortly afterwards, I tried the journey to Lake Ngami again, this time with McCabe. This was no longer an attempt to discover it, of course; but it was a new feature, and I hoped to sketch it, as well as engage in some hunting. We didn’t get anywhere close; the Boers wouldn’t let us through their country. Later McCabe asked me to join him for a second attempt, but I had no way of affording it. That time he was successful.

‘We proceed, first of all, up the River Zambesi, and have the full authority of the Portuguese for so doing.’ Livingstone gives a slow, deliberate nod of acknowledgement to the Chevalier Duprat; the ambassador returns the gesture, in the same slow, deliberate manner.

The river, Livingstone explains, is at its narrowest equal to the Thames at London Bridge, and it will convey us to a large coal field. ‘This,’ he declares, ‘seems to contain the elements of future civilization.’

I glance across at Thornton, who looks up and smiles at me. Part of his job will be to excavate the coal, the fuel upon which this future civilization will be founded. He can scarcely know what this means.

‘Our expedition will be a practical one,’ Livingstone says. ‘It is not like those that have been sent to the North Pole. We hope to have something to show when we come back. Our botanist is an economic botanist, and the geologist is a practical mining geologist; and the naval officer, Captain Bedingfeld, has had a great deal of experience in African rivers, and has not been deterred by the fear of suffering from African fever, any more than myself, from volunteering to go on this expedition.’

‘Quite right,’ says someone at our table. ‘Jolly good.’

Bedingfeld has drawn himself up tall and sits with a stern expression on his face.

‘He goes to examine the river system and give us correct information about the river system and its navigability.’

Livingstone turns and looks upon Charles. ‘And then we have an artist and ... a photographer, to give an idea of what is to be seen in the country.’

I feel a flush of warmth as he says this, though I am unable to find his gaze to express my pride, to assure him of my support. There is a pat on my back from the dean next to me, and *hear hears* from around the table. I look up; Charles, too, is being congratulated.

And then Livingstone is looking directly at me. ‘My companions are aware that it is very well known that, when alone, if I set out to do something, I did it. So, if we don’t do well now in this expedition, people will say, “Why, those fellows have prevented him from doing what he might!”’ At this, everyone in the room bursts into laughter. ‘They are all put on their mettle; and I have the greatest confidence in their desire to accomplish the great objects of the expedition.’

Yes, Dr Livingstone. Your confidence is not misplaced. At least not in me.

‘What I hope to effect is this: I don’t hope to send down cargos of cotton and sugar; perhaps that result will not be in my lifetime. But I hope we shall make a beginning, and get in the thin end of the wedge’ – there are cheers from the hall – ‘and that we shall open up a pathway into the interior of the country, and by getting right into the centre have a speedy passage by an open pathway, working from the centre out towards the sides.’

The thin edge of the wedge. I like that. The pioneers, very few in number, who will open the way for the many more who will follow. That is the role that suits me. I am in the right place.

Livingstone concludes by assuring the audience that we don’t mean to leave our Christianity behind us when we get to the Zambesi. ‘I think we made somewhat of a mistake – indeed, a very great mistake – in India; but where we are going – we will have no need to be ashamed of our Christianity.’

‘I have received the greatest kindness from all classes of people in the interior,’ he says. ‘I have found that only when we approach the confines of civilization, the people become worse. Such is the fact: the nearer we come to civilization, we find the people very much worse than those who never have had any contact with the white man. We hope we will be able by our conduct to recommend our religion to those with whom we come in contact.’

Now that I am sitting here, in Livingstone’s company ... At last my path seems to be guided by God. There have been so many false starts. The attempt on Lake Ngami. The trip to the Boers’ country. Even the expedition to Australia, if I am honest about it, was not a success. Not in itself, but it has brought me here. To him. Perhaps that is how the Lord works. He guides one’s feet even when one is not aware of it.

Livingstone folds the paper that he has been holding.

‘I thank you most heartily for the manner in which you have received me ... I feel most grateful to you – the instruments of His grace.’

As he takes his seat there are enthusiastic cheers and ringing applause. This great hall, in its half century or so, must never have seen anything like this.

Mr Maclear stands and raises his glass. ‘I wish to propose the health of Captain Bedingfeld and the other officers of the Zambesi expedition, and I look forward to the results of their explorations’ – now he looks to me, and to Charles – ‘particularly in regard to magnetic observations.’

Again there are loud cheers, and pats on the back for all of us.

‘Dr Livingstone has said’ – Bedingfeld is talking now – ‘that the officers of the expedition will be put on their mettle, and I hope that we shall prove that we are of the right mettle. On behalf of the officers of the expedition, I would like to express my sincere thanks for the manner in which we have been received.’

I look across at Livingstone and he meets my eye for a moment. His expression seems to say, you will need to impress me; although I might be imagining it. But so be it. I *will* impress him. With my art. By travelling hard and rough. By mapping. With my knowledge of boats. And by doing whatever it is one must do to keep the stores in order.

The Chairman is speaking again; he is introducing Robert Moffat. ‘For forty-two years, Mr Moffat has been doing the good work which was given him to do. And he has not laboured in vain.’ He goes on about Moffat’s influence among the natives, even the tyrannical Moselekatze, and about his great courage, and there are more cheers. It was good news enough that Moffat was in Cape Town waiting for Livingstone, but he brought good news with him too. He had been close to the land of the Makololo, and he had learnt

that Livingstone's Makololo had not returned there from Tete. Immediately, he'd sent word of Livingstone's imminent return, and they were likely to be there when we arrived.

As Porter continues speaking, his words become a blur of sound. Perhaps it is the wine, but I feel the present become hazy, insubstantial, as if I am not really here, or as if I am merely a memory. In this moment, who I am seems less clear than who I will be.

Imagine. Returning to England with greatness behind me rather than ahead. Perhaps it will be regrettable, that my best work is done now, but how it must feel to know that one has done it, that one's life has meant something.

Look at Thornton. His first time to Africa. I wonder if he realizes how Africa will change him, the opportunities it will give him. Look where it has brought me: into Livingstone's company, and that without the advantages that some of the others have: their moneyed backgrounds or education giving them a start. I'm more like Livingstone in that sense. His background was even poorer, to be sure, and his achievements will always be greater than mine, but we're not all that different. I too lacked privileges and had to pull myself up through hard work and determination. I think we understand each other because of that, although of course it is unspoken. I see some differences – in their manner of seeing the world – between the Doctor and Commander Bedingfeld, for example, who comes from a more privileged class.

Moffat is speaking now, about his missionary labours. 'Yes, it has given me influence even over Moselekatze, an influence which I hope to turn to good account in respect to my friend Dr Livingstone's expedition. I hope to have the pleasure, some day, of shaking hands with the Doctor and the members of his expedition in the vicinity of the Zambesi river.'

And when we return?

There will be another book, this time illustrated with my pictures, and telling the story of all of us. My pictures will again line the walls of the Royal Geographical Society, but this time they'll be part of something so much greater than on the last occasion. The map of Africa will be changed, filled in, by the work we have done, and perhaps somewhere, something – a stream, a lake, a mountain – that bears my name – or a new species, of plant, or insect, or animal.

My return to Lynn will be the best thing of all. Mother – I can see her now – will clutch me to her side, and say, 'My son, my son.'

And what will lie ahead then? I'm not as young as some of the others, but when this is over I'll be as old as Livingstone is now, and plenty more to do.

Moffat is still talking. He is an old man, but still filled with vigour, and with great achievements behind him. One day I will be as old as he, and people will say of me: Baines played a part in the opening up of Africa; Baines had something to do with extinguishing the slave trade. Baines, they will say, is the one who showed us how it looked: the landscapes and life forms of this undiscovered country. And then I shall be able to rest.

University of Cape Town

Sir

I beg to acknowledge your kindness in the receipt of the report of the Livingstone Festival and am happy to say that I have had a letter from Sierra Leone and that my son writes in excellent spirits. I feel quite satisfied that in the society and companionship of such a man as Dr Livingstone that my highest hopes will be realised that my son should be useful to his country, and add to the Honour of the English name.

– Mary Ann Baines, letter to Dr Norton Shaw, 23 April 1858

University of Cape Town

Cape Town to the Zambesi Delta, May 1858

I left Cape Town by mail cart, bound for Simon's Bay, with Kirk, Thornton, Rae and Charles. We talked excitedly as the houses of the city became sparser and then all around us was countryside and farmland.

'The navy is sending a ship with us,' Kirk said, 'to escort us to the river and help us across the bar.'

'HMS *Hermes*,' said Rae. 'She's a 716-ton sloop. Two guns. Paddle steamer. Built in 1835.'

'Commanded by Captain Gordon,' Kirk added. 'There's a British frigate in the harbour too, but she can't be spared – not with the trouble on the frontier. We've also been given the services of the marine surveyor, Lieutenant Skead, who'll be joining us aboard the *Pearl*. He's going to survey the Zambesi Delta and help us find a way in. He's a good fellow.'

'Is he also joining the expedition?' I asked. 'As one of its officers?'

'No, once the *Pearl* has dropped us off at Tete, he'll go back with her.'

The *Hermes*, the plan went, would remain near the delta to meet the *Pearl* when she came down again. While the *Pearl* continued to Ceylon, the *Hermes* would take our letters and despatches, and Mr Skead, back to the Cape.

I was relieved. One didn't want too many people for the main part of the expedition. It might become unwieldy.

Our reception in Cape Town then – it is one of the memories that torments me the most, now that I am back here. Wherever we went, we were treated like dignitaries. Because I'd lived in Cape Town before, people recognized me on the street, and would come up to me and shake my hand and say jolly well done. It was a strange feeling, one that I thought I'd have to get used to when I returned. How wrong I was.

I remember meeting Chapman the day before we left. He came to see me at the hotel, and we sat on armchairs in the living room.

'We've come a long way, Thomas, since Mooi River,' he said. 'Look at you, travelling with Livingstone. You make me realize anything is possible. Anything.'

'With just a bit of luck, I suppose. Yes, anything is.'

'I've been thinking of publishing my journal. Why was Livingstone's book so successful? Because he travelled from coast to coast! Well! Haven't I done the same?'

'Indeed!' I laughed. Chapman had travelled across the continent too, though considerably to the south of Livingstone, from Port Natal to Walvisch Bay. A shorter distance, yes, but that's the shape of the continent, and hardly Chapman's fault. 'You are welcome to use some of my sketches of the region, if that will be any help.'

'Thank you, my friend. I'm sure it would. A collaboration.'

'We shall discuss it when I return,' I said, standing up and brushing my jacket with my hand. 'And much else besides. Perhaps we will travel together again.'

'I hope so.'

'James –' I held out my hand.

'God be with you, Thomas. But of course He will be. You're travelling with Livingstone.'

I wondered, at the time: was it luck, was it God? Chapman had travelled within seventy miles of the Victoria Falls; he had come that close to discovering them before Livingstone. Was that the difference between fame and ... ordinariness? Could he really expect to get his journal published, without a great achievement, a large discovery?

Now I'm left with different thoughts: about how thin the line is between fame and failure, between celebration and disgrace.

It was a journey of several hours to the naval base, and we drifted in and out of conversation as we passed the Observatory, the vineyards of Constantia, the long sandy beach at Muizenberg, where the foam from the waves crawled all the way to the wheels beneath us.

Darkness had fallen by the time we reached Simon's Bay, where the *Pearl* was waiting for us. The *Hermes* was no longer in the harbour – she had left the day before – but, in the light of the next morning, I could see the frigate, a few Russian men-of-war, which were on their way to China, and two old sailing ships: the *Badger*, which was the first ship commanded by Lord Nelson, and the *Samarang*, which was present at the taking of the Cape.

I sketched the *Samarang* as we steamed out, with quick diagonal strokes for the rigging radiating down from her single mast, and rough squares for the cannon ports. She was a survivor from an earlier era of sea travel, before the introduction of steam and machinery, with only wood, canvas and rope to protect her from and harness the elements. It was an era that I knew well from my grandfather's stories, and it had more in

common with the great explorers of centuries earlier than it did with the technology of today.

Mr Skead was, as Kirk had said, a fine fellow. The first thing I noticed about him was his laugh; he seemed always to be laughing. The navy was in his blood. His father had served at Trafalgar, and Skead had joined up at fifteen. He was about my age now. He'd served in China and West Africa, and a few years earlier he'd spent three years on the ice as part of the expedition to search for Sir John Franklin.

'I believe you've been learning magnetism with Maclear,' he said to Charles and me. 'Good fellow, isn't he? Who would've thought that mathematics could be so entertaining?'

'He is a good teacher,' Charles agreed, 'but I'm sure you will have plenty more to teach us.'

'I hope so,' he said quietly, and then he wrung his hands together. 'Right. To this delta then.'

The *Pearl* seemed doomed to rough passages. After a day or two of fine sailing, the wind turned and blew in our faces, and heavy swells rose up at us from the sea. The stern of the ship was lifted by one wave, while her bows, heavy with coal, sunk below the crest of the succeeding one. Green masses of water were thrown on board and, when she rose, ran foaming over the anchors and other obstacles till they poured like miniature Niagaras off the forecastle onto the main deck.

The stormy conditions continued for days, and while we huddled, seasick, in the cabins, we heard talk of the damage: the jib came adrift and was nearly washed away, the headboard with the name of the ship upon it was torn off the larboard side, and the iron rail round the forecastle was broken. We had a strong current against us, so we were only making ninety miles a day. The prospect of slowly struggling against wind and sea was by no means an encouraging one.

To get into smoother water and less current, Captain Duncan took the ship closer to the shore, and we found ourselves within sight of the coast of Kaffraria, with its undulating grassy hills. At times we were within two miles of the coast, and could discern flecks of red from the aloe trees.

These were the landscapes I had travelled during the Kafir War, marching with the army, my rifle and sketchbook always at the ready.

In the afternoon we came to the mouth of the St John's River. It was an extraordinary sight: the hills sloped up to a massive flat-topped plateau, much like Table Mountain, and through this the river had cleft its way and formed a steep valley.

'It is a wonder to behold, isn't it?' said Skead.

Everyone agreed that it was.

'I should get a sketch of this,' I said, jumping up to fetch my sketchbook. 'I'll need to be quick.'

'Can we can stop for a few minutes?' Captain Duncan asked Livingstone. 'Perhaps it is worth more than a rough treatment.'

'I think we can spare ten minutes, yes,' Livingstone replied.

'Then I'll get my watercolours,' I said, and hurried to my cabin.

Everyone looked on as I painted, Livingstone included. He ran his fingers down the sides of his moustache, and I could see that his eyes were on the paper as much as on the coastline itself. The beauty of the view matched the happiness of my mood. I was particularly conscious of each brushstroke, and how my audience was seeing it. They were seeing not only a painting of mine, but also the process by which it was produced. I was doing what I'd been appointed to do, what I was good at, and I had my fellows' attention and appreciation.

There were comments from the others as I proceeded: that it was a good likeness, that they were amazed how a patch of colour changed character as another colour was added beside it. I listened for Livingstone's voice, but he didn't say anything, so when I brushed the final stroke (for now) and turned around saying, 'There,' I looked at Livingstone, for a response. He nodded, an approving nod, but still said nothing. I assumed that this meant he was not a man who praised loudly, but I was glad for the faint sign of approval I thought I'd seen.

On the shore, great clouds of smoke billowed up into the air.

'The natives are burning grass,' Livingstone said. 'They're inviting us to land and trade with them.'

Were they, I wondered. How did Livingstone know that this is what was meant by the fires?

'I wouldn't do that,' said Skead. 'This coast is treacherous. When I surveyed the bar of this river I had my boat broken to pieces by the surf. I was lucky to escape with my life.'

'Yes,' I added. 'This coast has a fearsome reputation.'

A little later the lookout spotted a ship on the horizon ahead of us. She was a warship of some sort, much larger than our vessel. Could it be the *Hermes*, I asked Captain Duncan, who was nearby.

‘She should be further ahead than this,’ he replied. ‘She left the day before us.’

‘She looks like the *Hermes*,’ said Rae. He squinted in her direction for a few moments. ‘Yes, she’s the *Hermes* all right.’

The warship wasn’t moving very quickly, and, as we drew closer, I could see her more clearly: her masts towering up from her deck, her tall funnel. It appeared that she was going in shore to anchor for the night, even though it was still light. We caught up with her just after six o’clock was struck on board.

‘Send her a signal,’ said Livingstone. ‘Ask her if there’s anything wrong.’

Flags were hoisted to signal a message to the other ship, and she answered back.

No, she said. Nothing wrong. She was going to remain there all night.

‘All night!’ Livingstone spat. ‘She’s supposed to help us, not slow us down.’

He took a few steps away, and then turned and slowly paced back.

‘Tell her, Captain,’ Livingstone instructed Duncan, ‘to send a boat. There are some packages for her to take to Quilimane.’

When the boat arrived, we learnt from the officer in charge that they had already anchored for considerable periods at Algoa Bay and East London.

‘At this rate,’ Livingstone snapped, after the boat had left, ‘how much longer will she take to reach the Zambesi? Captain Gordon is clearly unwilling to perform his duty. If he wishes to have nothing to do with us, it’s best we have nothing to do with him.’

I could see Bedingfeld’s eyes narrowing. Did he object to criticism of a fellow naval man? But he said nothing.

That evening, Livingstone was more irritable than usual. I stayed out of his way, which was never difficult. After dark, I stood at the rail with Kirk.

‘Captain Gordon has rather put the Doctor’s pipe out,’ he said. ‘I suppose we are better off without any sort of help from him.’

‘Yes, I suppose we are, especially if he puts the Doctor in that sort of mood.’

‘Look at the shore,’ Kirk said. The sea was luminous, and wherever the surf broke it gave out a flash of light. ‘It reminds me of the evening view of Princes Street, in Edinburgh.’

We arrived at the river’s delta a fortnight after leaving the Cape, in the middle of May. The first sign of it was an abrupt change in the colour of the sea – from pea green to

muddy brown – which Livingstone pointed out was proof of a great river emptying its water into the ocean. It was silty, and contained leaves, twigs and bits of reed.

I was looking at the water when I heard the cry, ‘Ship ahoy!’ I turned and saw her on the horizon, a warship, steaming towards us. It took some moments before I realized that it was the *Hermes*.

‘Well,’ said Livingstone, ‘I see Captain Gordon has decided to join us again.’

‘What should I tell him?’ Duncan asked.

‘Signal him that we are going to look for the bar, and he is welcome to follow us. If,’ he added in a more private mutter, ‘he deems his duty something worth doing now.’

Our intentions were signalled, and we set off towards the coastline, with the *Hermes* following.

She’d got here sooner than expected, I thought. She must be a fast ship. Maybe she had stopped all that time not to get too far ahead of us.

As we approached the land, the amount of wrack increased – twigs, branches, even a tree – all evidence of the river. But, on the shore itself, there was nothing. No sign of it at all. The Zambesi was invisible.

There was, of course, no sign of settlement, for the nearest Portuguese coastal base was further north, at Quilimane, and their stations on the Zambesi were upriver. But, from the deck of the *Pearl*, at no great distance, there appeared to be no river at all. The coastline was an unbroken line of trees, all the way down to the waterline. I suppose I had expected, as I’m sure the others did too, a vision of a grand river washing into the sea, and this was nothing of the sort.

Livingstone stood on the deck, his hands cupped over his eyes to shield them from the sun.

Bedingfeld was standing beside him. ‘Is this the place?’ he said.

‘The West Luabo will be somewhere here. That’s what we’re looking for.’

‘It’s the right place,’ said Mr Skead. ‘But she’s not exactly showing herself.’

‘Should I take her closer?’ Duncan asked Livingstone.

‘Yes, yes. We will find what we want there.’

Bedingfeld was peering at the shore. I watched him carefully as his eyes flicked from side to side. As an experienced sailor, with knowledge of rivers, he would be able to see what was hidden to the rest of us. Mr Skead, too, stood silently, a frown of concentration on his forehead. I could read nothing in their expressions that confirmed the Doctor’s view.

Livingstone was of course the only one of us who had seen the Zambesi before, although his travels had not extended to the delta itself, for he had broken course with the river some way up and gone directly to Quilimane, and set sail from there. But his accounts were of a majestic river, so we'd had no reason to presume that finding the entrance would present any difficulty.

How wrong we were.

'Look,' Skead said softly, 'over there.' He was pointing somewhere between our position and the shore. 'Is that...? I think I can see a line of breakers. That could be the bar.'

It was difficult to see in the choppy water, but now and then I could make out a line of white foam some distance from the shore, unmoving. It was a reef of some sort, hopefully one created by all the sand brought down by the river.

'Let's see,' said Captain Duncan. He had charts spread out on a table. Livingstone and Skead were looking closely, Bedingfeld beside them. 'Can you make sense of these, Mr Skead?'

'She's sending a boat!' cried one of the crew.

On its way from the *Hermes* was a jolly boat, looking very small and vulnerable as it bobbed up and down on the unsettled sea. I watched the oars slapping the water in unison, tugging the little boat closer. Apart from the oarsmen, there were two or three passengers.

'They're not easy to read,' said Skead. 'I've spent some time studying them. We're looking for the Luabo, which is here, and I'd say that's where we are. Although...'

'Captain Gordon coming aboard!' a voice called from below.

I moved to the rail and looked down at this Captain Gordon as he climbed quickly up the ladder. He wore a naval coat with a captain's insignia on his shoulders, showing a higher rank even than Bedingfeld. He must have been in his early forties, but in his face I could see the experience of an older man, as he paced towards the Doctor and held out his hand.

'Dr Livingstone,' he said, 'Captain Duncan.'

'Captain Gordon,' Livingstone replied, shaking his hand.

Bedingfeld and Skead stood to attention before their senior officer. Duncan, I noticed, did not.

Gordon looked towards the shore. 'This is the river mouth?' he asked the Doctor.

'It is here. The Luabo. This is the bar.' Livingstone pointed at the breakers ahead of us.

'But where the devil is the entrance?' Gordon peered at the coastline.

‘We are here.’ Livingstone dropped his finger on a point on the chart. ‘And there is the entrance. The Luabo. Not so, Lieutenant Skead?’

‘I believe we are, sir. This is Owen’s map of the coast,’ he explained to Captain Gordon, ‘and we are using Parker’s chart of the river delta. They are both rough, and they do not agree entirely.’

‘That is why we have you with us, Mr Skead,’ Livingstone said, ‘so that those who follow us will find the way more easily.’

‘I shall endeavour to do that, sir,’ Skead said with a laugh, ‘but we must pray that we are guided by God as much as by these charts. Though they differ from one another, they do agree that the river doesn’t take one single route to the sea.’

‘We *are* guided by God,’ Livingstone said. ‘Of that we can be more certain than anything. But we do have experience to rely on too. Parker went up the Luabo, as far as Mazaro. I went *down* as far as Mazaro. There our journeys meet, and I’ve seen that the Zambesi there is a great river; it will take the *Pearl*.’ He prodded the map. ‘Mazaro: I know my way from there.’

‘And this?’ said Captain Gordon, pointing something out on one of the charts. ‘Over here, is this also the Luabo?’

‘It *is* confusing,’ Skead agreed. ‘That chart gives only the Luabo; on this one there are *two* Luabos, an East and a West.’

‘And do we know which one Parker went up?’ Gordon asked. ‘Do we know that this is the one?’

‘Gentlemen.’ Livingstone had taken a step or two back from the table. I could see the frustration on his face. ‘If we debate this matter any longer, we will not get anywhere. We are here now. We have a bar before us, and evidence of fresh water pouring into the sea. The maps have brought us to this point. Now we must proceed.’

‘I don’t mean to delay you, Dr Livingstone,’ Gordon said with his hand raised. ‘You must understand that my responsibility is to make sure that Her Majesty’s vessels are not risked unnecessarily. Unless we are sure—’

‘*Captain*.’ Livingstone paused for a moment, seeming to reconsider what he was about to say. Then he spoke softly. ‘Let us proceed to the bar and see if it is safe to cross. If we can take the *Pearl* across the bar we shall do so, and investigate the coast more closely.’

‘Do you not think it wise for the *Hermes* to go on to Quilimane, and to ask the advice of the Portuguese there?’

'No I do not, sir,' Livingstone replied, very quietly, his face reddening. He seemed unable to stand still any longer; his demeanour said more eloquently than his words that he had had enough of conversation now, and that it was time for action.

I must say I agreed. It was already after three in the afternoon, and there were barely three hours left before the sun set.

Once Gordon's rowing boat started back towards the *Hermes*, everyone was quiet. After a while, Livingstone spoke.

'Shall we proceed to the bar, Captain?'

With a nod from Duncan and an instruction to the mate, the ship came alive. To the call and response of voices, and the noise of machinery, she began to plough through the water, towards the breakers ahead. I noticed some of the Kroomen standing nearby, talking among themselves. What were they thinking? Did they know what was going on?

One of the ship's men was sounding the depth, and another was signalling it to the *Hermes*.

'By the mark, two!' came the cry.

The bar extended in a semi-circle from the invisible river mouth, the only evidence that it was there at all. At its furthest point it was perhaps a mile from the land, with the sea breaking rather heavily over it.

'She's leaving!' someone shouted.

The *Hermes* was turning about.

'What now?' I said. 'Where is she going?'

'Quilimane,' said Skead, 'according to her signal. She says we must wait.'

The ship completed her arc and steamed away.

'Farewell, Captain Gordon,' said Livingstone.

'Not very helpful, is he?' said Kirk. 'Clearly we have little to expect from him.'

'Now what do we do?' Captain Duncan asked. 'Do we cross on our own? Should we send the boats to sound the bar?'

'I would think it unwise to risk it,' said Bedingfeld.

'The breakers are rather heavy for a small boat,' Skead agreed. 'They could get into some trouble.'

'The tide is starting to drop,' said Rae. 'If we don't cross soon, we'll be stuck here until tomorrow.'

'Commander?' said Livingstone.

Bedingfeld frowned, but didn't say anything.

‘It might not be a bad idea to observe at lower tide,’ said Skead, ‘to get a better sense of a route over it.’

‘That’s right,’ Bedingfeld agreed. ‘Quite right.’

Livingstone exhaled.

‘It looks clear enough,’ Duncan said, pointing, ‘right ahead of us. I can’t see that we will have any problem there.’

Livingstone smiled slightly and took a step back. ‘It’s your ship, Captain. If you believe we can proceed, I will not stand in your way.’

‘Wait for a few more waves,’ said Skead, his hand raised.

I watched as a wave broke over the bar, then another, and another. In places it rose up and crested, in other places it flattened back into the swell. I wasn’t sure exactly how to interpret it as the others were, but I knew they could read the underwater contours from the shape of the waves on the surface.

Skead nodded. ‘I do believe you’re right, Captain.’

Livingstone held up his hands as if happily relinquishing control to the ship’s captain.

‘See that clump of mangroves over there,’ Duncan pointed out to his mate. ‘Head for that. Keep that tall palm to larboard.’

‘Aye, sir,’ the mate said, and started bellowing to the crew.

The engine rumbled, steam billowed, and the screw began to turn. The ship moved forward, and soon we were in shallow water, with waves breaking all around us.

‘Hard a starboard!’ called the mate.

I looked over the side. I could see the pale sandiness of the bottom, even though the sea was frothing; it wasn’t very deep at all.

Now I wondered, was this wise? What would happen if the *Pearl* got into trouble without the *Hermes* here to help? Wasn’t she supposed to escort us across the bar?

‘Hold that course!’ cried the mate.

‘Aye, sir!’

Waves beat against the side of the ship, sending spray into the air, and forcing the mate and the crew to shout louder to make themselves heard, and then – all of a sudden – we were in still water.

‘Ha ha!’ Livingstone cheered. ‘Well done, Captain Duncan! No trouble at all. Captain Gordon’s caution was unnecessary.’

I watched to see what kind of look Livingstone would give to Bedingfeld, whose caution had proved unnecessary too. But the Doctor ignored him. Bedingfeld’s expression was inscrutable.

We were in a natural harbour now, half-lagoon, half-ocean. The waves exhausted themselves on the bar and sent mere ripples beyond it.

The *Pearl* approached the land, first bearing towards the western shore, to our left. It rose up in places to fifteen feet above the water, and was covered in mangroves, palms and other trees.

In one place there was a fold in the shoreline, and we needed to get closer to see in. It was clear, when we did, that there was no river there. The water in this vicinity was shallow, too shallow for the river mouth, so we headed in the other direction.

We rounded a long point of sand, and there before us was the entrance to the river. On the opposite bank was a long fringe of mangroves, growing directly out of the water.

The sound of the surf had receded to a gentle hiss, and we could hear the birds. The shoreline was populated by large groups of pelicans, cranes and storks. Some distance away, a hippopotamus raised the snout of its enormous head above the water, then went under again.

This, I thought, was the gateway, the beginning of a path that led all the way to the rapids Livingstone had missed, and, far beyond them, to the Falls that he had already discovered. I imagined, for a second, that I could hear their thundering sound, drifting all the way down across the water. I laughed at the thought; but I wondered: how far away *could* one hear them? When I *did* hear that sound, what distance would I have to cover before I saw the water billowing down? When would that day come?

We passed a small sandy island, and, about a mile into the river mouth, we anchored. On the banks were mangroves, as far as the eye could see. We were in.

My duties now commenced, and I immediately proceeded to get our launch out. This was a most anxious period for Dr. Livingstone; but as I had been planning during the whole voyage how we should get the launch over the ship's side, we lost no time, but at once erected a derrick, and succeeded in getting her safely into the water; and on the third day after, had steam up, and started in search of a navigable channel to the Zambesi.

– George Rae, 'Last News of Dr Livingstone', *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature*, 30 March 1861

University of Cape Town

Zambesi Delta, 17–20 May 1858

‘*Now faith,*’ Livingstone reads, his voice croaking slightly, ‘*is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.*’ He coughs and clears his throat. I look for a sign of discomfort in his eyes. But his gaze is fixed on the book before him, and he continues. ‘*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*’

It is an early service, and Livingstone is moving quickly through its stages. He does not seem quite himself. He has not been entirely well for the past day or two, and he seems a little tired and frail. It is most unusual to see him like this. It makes everything seem out of kilter, uncertain, unsafe.

A dense fog lies on the water, and the sun has not yet risen above it, creating a dull haze around us. We are all gathered on deck: the members of the expedition, the Kroomen, and, furthest from the front, the men of the *Pearl*.

‘Thanks be to God,’ Livingstone says at the end of the reading.

‘Thanks be to God,’ I reply, in unison with everyone else.

About us, though we cannot see them in the gloom, are the banks of the river. There is an immense quietness out there. Occasionally I can hear the sound of surf in the distance, or the squawk of a bird. Apart from that, just a gentle sloshing of water against the hull of the *Pearl*.

Faith. I suppose it’s a little like my knowledge that the river is here, even though the fog conceals it like a curtain. Livingstone’s certainty that the river mouth was here; his confidence that the bar could be crossed: these were acts of faith.

I hope his sickness passes soon. Kirk has been attending to him. I look at him: he doesn’t appear too concerned. Livingstone, of course, is a doctor too, so there should be nothing to worry about.

‘Let us pray,’ Livingstone says softly.

I close my eyes and concentrate as he begins his prayer.

‘Oh Lord,’ he says, ‘show us Your path. Guide us, Your humble servants, unworthy though we are, and make Your will manifest through us.’

Show us Your path ... The river: it stretches up from here, penetrating the continent, like a line on a map. Imagine being able to see it like that, from high above, as if one were

an eagle, an angel; God himself. Or a man like Livingstone. A man of faith. How I wish to begin this voyage upriver and see for myself.

I open my eyes. Thornton has his eyes open too. He raises his eyebrows and gives me a half-smile, an expression that says he is not involved in the service at all. He has never seemed particularly interested in religious matters. All the others have their eyes closed. Charles is nodding as his brother prays. Every now and then his lips move; he seems to be mouthing words spoken by the Doctor. Bedingfeld's eyes appear most tightly shut of all, as if he is willing the words into being. Now Rae opens his eyes and I quickly close mine.

'Amen,' everyone says at the end of the prayer.

With a salutation the service is over.

Livingstone addresses Captain Duncan and the members of the expedition. 'Though it is the Sabbath,' he says, 'we shall not take it as a day of rest. There is work to be done.'

This is excellent news. I couldn't bear the idea of sitting around idly when there is a boat to launch and a river to explore.

'It is work of necessity,' Livingstone adds. 'We need to get out of the unhealthy reaches as soon as possible. I doubt very much that God would frown upon it, considering the circumstance. In fact, I believe He encourages us. But if any man objects, let him come and speak to me.'

Everyone is nodding, except, I notice, Bedingfeld, who has a frown on his face. He is, I've noticed, the strictest among us about observing the Sabbath. I don't know what his beliefs are – I'm not familiar enough with him to ask. Presumably reformist. But his views on the Sabbath are clear.

Livingstone turns to Duncan. 'Captain,' he says, 'please convey this message to your men.'

Bedingfeld is standing near enough that I can hear him muttering. 'Perhaps ... *this* time.'

We are assigned our various duties. I am to remain on the *Pearl* with Rae and most of the Kroomen to assist with the launching of the *MaRobert*. The others – Bedingfeld, Kirk and Thornton – are to go with Mr Skead in the whaleboat, to determine the latitude and longitude and to begin the survey of the river mouth.

The fog has begun to thin by the time they set off. The left bank, only two hundred and fifty yards away, is visible now, covered in mangroves. I watch as the oars strike the water, the boat keeping close to the bank, back down towards the sea. What will they see? What strange animals are around here? What people?

There's increased activity on deck. The men are gathered around the pieces of the steam launch. The first one is being unbolted.

Rae is standing with Livingstone and Captain Duncan. They are pointing at the boom of the foremast.

'She'll take the weight,' Duncan is saying as I approach. 'We'll be able to hoist the two lighter sections that way.'

'Good,' says Livingstone. 'Then let us begin.'

Duncan gives an instruction to the mate, who commands the men. They scurry to their positions while chains are wrapped around the fore section and a hook fastened to it. Sailors and Kroomen line themselves along the rope. I hold on near the end, though it is hardly necessary. Livingstone, I notice, is no longer on deck.

'Heave!' cries the mate.

'Heave!' reply the men.

Metal rumbles, the rope groans, wood creaks, and the fore section lifts a foot off the deck.

'Heave!' the mate cries again.

'Heave!' we all respond.

Up she goes, another foot, swinging a little now.

A second rope is attached, from further along the boom. This will pull the load out over the water. As some of the men pull on the rope, others push the iron compartment outwards with their hands. Then, to the commands of the mate and the efforts of the men, it descends towards the surface, inching down with shuddering movements, until it touches the water and floats there.

The first piece of the vessel that will take us deep into the interior and towards adventures unimaginable. The *MaRobert*. It's a shame, though, that we are not launching my own boat. It would have been much easier to float than this one. Of course it would have been a third of the size, but, even so, it was designed with a larger number of sections, which would have been easier to take in and out of the water.

The *MaRobert*. I wonder where Mrs Livingstone is now. Is she already on her way to Kuruman with her parents? In a wagon on a dusty road, somewhere in the Karoo? Little Oswell might be resting in the back, or perhaps he is sitting up front with the driver, looking out at the flat-topped kopjes and scrubby vegetation. The wheels crackling over the stones: it is a route I remember clearly.

I can hear the words that Mrs Livingstone said to me. *You're a gentleman, Mr Baines, and you'll remain one.*

‘Baines.’ It is Rae, who has appeared without my noticing. He has a grin on his face. The freckles on his skin stand out in the sunlight. ‘Have you noticed him?’

He is pointing to the other side of the deck, where a man is standing on his own, dressed in a suit.

‘Who is that?’ I ask.

‘The *Pearl*’s engineer. Didn’t you hear?’

‘Hear what?’

Rae’s eyebrows press together and he lowers his voice. ‘He went to Livingstone this morning and said that he could not work on the Sabbath. Livingstone was not a bit pleased.’

‘I’m sure,’ I say.

‘No, not one bit. He said, “Rae, that man has never come near our worship before. Not at all since we left Liverpool.”’ Rae does Livingstone’s voice quite well. Of course: because they come from the same village. He just has to deepen the tone and talk slowly.

I wonder if the man is shirking, or if he really believes what he says. Imagine having such assurance in one’s own religious habits that one would contend with Livingstone. Livingstone the priest, but he is so much more than that. I suppose, if he felt moved to, Bedingfeld might do so.

‘Bedingfeld also seemed less than happy about working on a Sunday,’ I tell Rae. ‘But he obviously saw the necessity, and did it.’

‘Oh was he?’ Rae nods slowly.

The aft section goes the same way as the fore. This time I find a spot with a good view of it and sketch the scene, marking with quick lines of the pencil: the ropes, the hook, the men’s hands pushing hard against the metal burden.

The middle section will require different treatment. This is where the boiler and engine are, so it is much, much heavier – more than four tons – too much for the ship’s boom.

Livingstone, I see, has returned, and is standing with Duncan and Rae. I join their circle, as they discuss what to do. I’ve seen plenty of loads like this being lifted off ships in the harbour at Lynn. As boys, Henry and I made cranes for our model ships – all to perfect scale. I’ve also observed enough situations, like Australia, where makeshift apparatus was required.

‘She’ll need a large beam as a derrick,’ I say.

They all look round at me.

‘Exactly,’ Rae adds quickly. ‘And more powerful tackle and purchases.’

‘Have you anything suitable, Captain?’ Livingstone asks.

‘Of course. My men are setting up the pulleys as we speak.’

Livingstone gives a quick nod of approval.

It takes much longer to prepare the mechanism, but by late afternoon it is ready and the men are lined up long the ropes.

‘Heave!’ the mate shouts.

‘Heave!’ cry the men.

The pulley creaks and the burden lifts.

As it swings out over the edge, I notice a strange sound – a dog barking – and I look round. The boat with the surveying party is returning, Crab perched at the bows.

Sunlight ripples on the water. Scraggly mangroves stretch from the shoreline as far as the eye can see. Tall anvil-shaped clouds are building in the sky. The others have boarded and are quick to join us.

‘This is excellent progress,’ says Kirk.

Bedingfeld looks at the hoisted middle section, then at the two pieces in the water, and nods slowly. He grunts his approval – I imagine it is approval. Crab is at my legs, sniffing and licking.

‘Hello, Crab,’ I say, patting his head.

‘He’s in disgrace,’ Thornton says. ‘I had to give him the rope end for biting one of the Kroomen.’

Mr Skead, I see, is in conversation with Livingstone. He is pointing back in the direction from which they have come.

‘How were your explorations?’ I ask my friends.

‘Interesting, interesting,’ Kirk says. ‘We found several new species of plants.’

‘And we saw hippopotamuses,’ says Thornton. ‘Plenty of them.’

‘But we didn’t fire at them,’ Bedingfeld adds, ‘considering that it is Sunday.’

‘I followed one of the beasts’ tracks in the sand,’ Thornton goes on. He holds his hands apart. ‘Measured one at fourteen inches in diameter. We also saw footprints of natives, but no natives themselves.’

There is a cry from the *Pearl*’s mate, and everyone’s attention turns to the hovering mid-section of the *MaRobert*.

To the sound of straining ropes and squeaking pulleys, the heavy block of metal is lowered down towards the water, inch by inch, until it touches the surface and floats.

‘Three cheers for the *MaRobert!*’ I cry – quickly, before anyone else can get to it. I always did that as a child, whenever we saw a boat being floated. Henry would sulk because I’d beaten him to it, but the next time he’d forget again.

As we stand here shouting our huzzahs, I look at the strange sight that is to be our vessel. Her three sections have been constructed so that they can each float on their own, and that’s exactly what they are doing, enormous chunks of flotsam. Now they have to be put together.

Because the outer sections are so much lighter than the middle part, they sit much higher in the water, and they have to be crowded with men to increase the draught before we can attach them. The fore section is bolted to the middle one without much fuss before darkness falls, but the men are unable to find the box of bolts to fasten the aft section.

‘We must stop now,’ Livingstone says. ‘We will continue tomorrow. I don’t want the men working here after sunset.’

We meet in the galley to take our daily dose of quinine, which we started taking a week ago, off the coast of Natal. Kirk stirs mine in a glass. There are other things in it – a little calomel and opium – but quinine is the main ingredient.

Everyone knows about Livingstone’s discoveries against fever, although the details of medicine remain a mystic secret to me. I can, however, vouch that it makes a good glass of sherry taste foul.

‘This is especially important,’ Kirk says to us all, ‘now that we are in the unhealthy reaches of the river, the swamps.’

‘Remember to avoid exposing yourself to the night air,’ Livingstone adds. ‘This is when the malaria is released by the mud, and you will be in danger of breathing it in. Be sensible, and you will be all right.’

Thornton has just gulped down his medicine, and he meets my eye as he wipes his mouth. He has an anxious expression on his face. I smile, a smile that tells him not to worry, that he is in good company.

‘Tom Peter!’ Bedingfeld calls one of the men.

The Krooman, a young fellow with vulnerable eyes, comes quickly to the commander and stands to attention.

‘Go to my cabin,’ Bedingfeld orders him, ‘and fetch me my jacket. In the black trunk.’

‘Yes, master,’ Peter replies and turns on his heel.

‘Oh, and Peter.’

'Master?' The Krooman wheels around to face Bedingfeld again.

'I will have a mug of chocolate again before I go to bed. Don't fill it as much as you did last night.'

Livingstone, I notice, has a slightly disapproving look on his face.

'Yes, master,' Tom Peter says and hurries away to do Bedingfeld's bidding.

I have an awkward feeling about this. Kirk glances at me and then down at the ground.

'Well,' Bedingfeld says. 'I'd say we're progressing rather well. I've never failed in any of my river missions before, and I have no intention of doing so now.'

Thornton has a slight smile at the edge of his lips. Livingstone rises to his feet; he doesn't look particularly amused.

'You will excuse me,' he says, and walks off.

The others follow. Only Thornton, Duncan and Bedingfeld remain. Thornton has a book out. I am about to follow the others when Duncan speaks.

'You might show Dr Livingstone some more respect.'

I turn around. He is looking at Bedingfeld, who is wearing a rather theatrical expression of shock.

'I beg your pardon?' Bedingfeld says.

'Show him more respect. He's Dr Livingstone, and you're acting as if ...'

'As if what?' Bedingfeld's eyes have turned hot.

'As if ...' Duncan looks uncomfortable, but he stands his ground. 'As if you're the one in charge.'

'I'm not going to listen to criticism from your sort,' Bedingfeld scoffs.

'My sort?'

'You ... merchant navy types.'

'I make my living on the sea, as do you, sir,' Duncan snaps.

'Ha!' says Bedingfeld. 'Do not compare the Royal Navy with the merchant marine. We are bound by a noble code. Your type, I fear, is kept going by the bonds of commerce.'

'It's commerce what makes England the strongest country in the world,' says Duncan, with a smile that displays some teeth missing behind his upper canines.

'Half true,' says Bedingfeld. His teeth are perfect, as immaculate as his uniform.

'Problem is, you'd have no empire without the military, so that's where it all starts.'

I look at Thornton. He glances up and quickly buries his attention in his book again.

'Well then you agree that we both play a role,' Duncan says.

'Oh, well, yes, we both play a role. But you have to admit that the sea runs in the blood of naval men in a way that it doesn't in merchant sailors. My father was a ship's commander, as was my grandfather before him. Commanded a man-of-war during the Napoleonic wars.'

The two men are standing not three feet apart. Both appear to be leaning forward slightly.

'My father was a sailor too. In the Royal Navy too, as a matter of fact.'

'A naval man, was he?' Bedingfeld snorts. 'What? Seaman? Able seaman? Not, I take it, a ship's captain? Not an officer of any sort.'

'Well, that's hardly the only way to have the sea—'

'And why did you not follow a naval career like your father? You were never going to captain a ship that way, were you?'

Bedingfeld can be unpleasant, a snob. What would he say of my own father, my grandfather, the whole of Lynn? There are few naval men there, and yet the sea is the town's lifeblood. Yet in some ways he reminds me of those fellows.

'Indeed, and the merchant marine offered me an opportunity to do so. It was my father who encouraged me in the first place, though I hardly need to defend—'

'But you argue my point, sir. For those who can't pass muster in the navy there is always the merchant marine.'

There is a moment of silence and I stand up.

'Goodnight,' I say.

The two men turn towards me. They have been unaware of my presence.

As I walk out, Thornton jumps up and joins me.

While the others go to the mouth to continue their survey in the morning, Bedingfeld remains behind to oversee the rest of the assembly of the launch.

We first connect the remaining section and then get to work setting up the masts and the funnel, attaching the paddle shafts, and putting on the wheels and floats. There is no sign of Livingstone.

'Do you think Dr Livingstone is all right?' I say.

Bedingfeld looks round. 'I'm sure he will be. He's a strong man to have done everything he's done.'

Unless, I think, his previous journeys have weakened him. 'What will we do if he doesn't get better soon?'

Bedingfeld furrows his brow. 'We'll do what we would have done in any event. You don't think Livingstone is going to lead this expedition the way he led his previous one, do you? No, he's earned a different position now. Livingstone is like the admiral, who watches from afar. Is he not? We're the captains and... the able seamen who are to do his work.'

There is certainly plenty of work. With the Kroomen, I get up the paddle boxes from the hold, and, as Bedingfeld shouts orders – 'Closer! To the left! Not so much! There!' – we hoist them over the side and bolt them in their places. Then it's back in the hold to find the angle-iron frames for the deck-house, which are under piles of things that have to be moved to get at them. Bedingfeld watches carefully as I bolt them in place.

Piece by piece she is taking form, and at dinnertime, from the deck of the *Pearl*, I am able to take a proper look at our vessel. She is seventy-five feet long, eight feet broad and three feet deep. She sits two feet above the water and she has a draught of only fourteen inches, thanks to her flat bottom. In the middle is the engine, covered by a half-cylinder of black metal, like the top half of a steam train's engine, and in front of it stands the funnel, rising high above – almost twenty feet into the air – dwarfed only by the two masts, fore and aft. Just behind the engine, on either side, are the paddle wheels, each covered at the top by its semicircular paddlebox, and reaching about a man's height above the water. The area behind the aft mast will be occupied by the deck-house, apart from a little space at the stern, where there is room for a man to stand and work the tiller.

The frames of the deck-house must still be filled in with wooden planks, and we will need to put up the awnings, to create shade on deck, but there she is, our river steamer. There is something stirring about the sight of her, a strong little product of British industry that will navigate this wild river and lead the way to Tete and take us beyond.

There are showers during the day, but the temperature remains warm, even though it is winter here. I remain on deck for a few moments and watch the surface of the river, pockmarked by rain.

When the others return, they have seen more hippopotamuses and fired on them, but without success.

'Hardy beasts,' says Kirk. 'We hit them often enough, but none of them seemed inclined to be a prize.'

'We saw some natives,' Thornton adds, 'in the distance, but they fled as soon as we approached.'

I am about to take the whaleboat across to the launch, where Bedingfeld and Rae are working, when I see Livingstone clambering down from the *Pearl*. As he takes his last step he winces.

I quickly go up to him. 'Dr Livingstone, are you ... all right?'

He snorts. 'Nothing to concern yourself with, Baines. God has not called me here to wallow in sickness. It is an effect of the climate, and reason why we must get moving to the healthier reaches.'

I nod quickly. 'Right,' I say. 'Good.'

The men row us to the launch. Livingstone is quickly on board.

'What is going on here?' he says to two of the Kroomen, who are sitting on the deck.

Bedingfeld is quickly before the Doctor, as the two Kroomen get to their feet.

'Dr Livingstone,' he says.

Livingstone nods but steps past Bedingfeld. 'Mr Rae,' he says. 'Will the launch be ready for a trial trip tomorrow morning?'

'She will be,' Rae replies, 'as long as there is wood for her to burn.'

Before the sun sets, I look out at the water. Flecks of light dart about on the surface. Livingstone and Bedingfeld: they are both so strong-willed. Will they manage to get along? Bedingfeld, I think, has misread the Doctor. Livingstone will not be content to sit back and let others lead. He is too determined, too certain about his mission.

The words from yesterday's reading rise up in my mind. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*. They are words that have always intrigued me, haunted me even. And others. *Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you*. I would sit in church and wonder, and I wonder still. Is it really possible? Can a man of faith do such a thing?

What is it to truly believe? Faith. Imagine: the faith to step out onto the water and know that it will bear your weight. Just think: the feeling of the water under one's feet, wet and cold, perhaps a little slippery and unstable ... but solid. One step, and then another. Away from the boat.

But when I think of it I can only imagine myself falling in and sinking. Does that mean I lack faith?

Doubting Thomas. The boys used to call me that on the playground. Father Harding came up with the name, one day in class. It was after the time that I climbed those stairs.

Early in the morning I oversee the Kroomen as they chop wood on the deck of the *Pearl*. They work in rhythm with strange grins on their faces. Rae takes some time to get up steam.

As we make ready to depart, Bedingfeld starts shouting orders to the Kroomen.

‘Men! To your stations!’

The various Toms scurry about the deck, Jumbo pointing and instructing them in their own language.

Bedingfeld takes the tiller, and Rae watches over the engine, with Tom Coffee as his fireman. Livingstone and his brother, Kirk and I, are passengers.

‘Onward ho!’ Bedingfeld cries, a little louder than is necessary on such a small boat. I think he is happy to be in charge of his own vessel again.

The paddles begin to turn and churn the water below, and in no time we are on our way, chugging across the water.

There are cheers and smiles, as everyone is surely thinking – as I am – how exciting it is that we were now truly under way.

Tom Wilson is sounding the depth, throwing the lead line into the water and calling out the measure.

‘By the mark, two!’ he cries.

A little further the depth is the same.

‘By the mark, two!’

Livingstone nods. ‘Two fathoms. This should be sufficient for the *Pearl*.’

The banks in many places have been washed away and undermined by the tide, and fallen trees are lying along them, showing by their direction whether they gave way with the flood or the ebb tide. Other trees have had the earth partially washed away from under them and have thrown out roots from the main stem, which arch downward until they enter the ground.

Some stand in the water, making it necessary for the launch to thread a course between them and the bank.

‘Devil sticks,’ says Tom Jumbo, who is standing close to me.

‘What’s that?’ I ask.

‘Devil sticks.’ He points at the mangrove stumps.

‘Why do you call them that, Jumbo?’

‘Them no good.’ He shakes his head. ‘No good.’

Does he mean that they are an obstruction to navigation? Or that where one finds mangroves one usually finds fever?

The image is appropriate. In places the stumps look like the horns of some infernal creature, sticking above the water, although water would be a strange place for a devil.

As we proceed, I see hippopotamuses basking in the water, one of them with its jaws gaping open. Birds fly up from the surface and from the trees around us: pelicans, flamingos, wild geese.

A loud whistling sound startles me. Steam is billowing everywhere and the engine makes a terrible spluttering noise.

‘Something’s wrong!’ I hear myself shout.

‘What is it?’ cries Kirk.

‘*Fire! Fire!*’ shrieks Charles, backing away to the side of the boat.

Everyone is shouting, the Kroomen included, and leaping around the vessel. Livingstone, I see, is standing still, with all the commotion going on around him.

‘*Stop!*’ cries Rae, wiping sweat from his forehead. ‘Please. Let me look at this in some peace.’

We all become still while Rae looks at the engine. More steam billows out.

‘It’s all right; I’m letting steam out by the safety valve. There must be something wrong with the pipes. But I need quiet.’

I look back at Livingstone, who is standing with his eyes tightly closed. He breathes out a long breath and walks to the other end of the launch, where he stands in solitude.

Rae finds that the problem is with the pipes of the feed pump, causing the water to be quickly exhausted from the boiler and to generate too much steam. He tinkers with the pipes for a few minutes, until they are fit to manage the journey back to the *Pearl*, where he will work on them more thoroughly.

We proceed slowly this time, and in complete silence.

I find myself fruitful work in fitting the deck-house, helping the carpenter of the *Pearl*, a Cornish boy named Trevorrow.

‘You’re a fine hand with timber, sir,’ he says, after we have been at it for some time. ‘You could be a carpenter yourself, if you wasn’t an artist, and an explorer.’

Livingstone, unfortunately, is out of earshot, but his brother is nearby.

‘Thank you,’ I say, loudly enough. ‘One needs all sorts of skills when one is out exploring. You never know when they will come in useful.’

What a strange country, so much novelty. The vegetation, the hills & the beasts all new ... There are many beautiful new flowers. One can realize something of Adam's feelings when he first landed in Paradise but then he had doubtless an angel to tell him what the trees & flowers were or was he left to find them out himself?

– Charles Livingstone, letter to his wife Harriette, 19 May 1858

University of Cape Town

Rae soon had the *MaRobert*'s engine in some sort of working order, and we were able to proceed up the river, with the *Pearl* following.

It was an astonishing sight, an ocean-going ship making its way up a river, a little way behind us. How large she looked now, from below, when she had seemed so small on the ocean.

Quite soon, though, the *Pearl* ran aground, and it would not be the first time. She had touched a sandbank, and, as the tide rose, the men managed to get her off with ropes in little more than half an hour. Then both vessels stood in the water.

'What are we waiting for?' Kirk asked, when we were back on the *MaRobert*'s deck.

'We need the tide to drop,' Bedingfeld said. 'This low down, where the river is still under the influence of the tides, it's no good proceeding when the water is high. We go up at low tide, and if we run aground the rising tide will get us off. It's a principle of river navigation.'

Kirk nodded. 'Very sensible,' he said.

'Of course it will help if Duncan follows the signals we give him.'

Some distance up – oh, twelve miles or so – the river split into two branches, one going to the north-west, the other to the north-east, neither of which presented itself as the main stream or as the tributary.

This fork was the cause of much disagreement. Captain Duncan asked Livingstone, when we had gathered aboard the *Pearl* for tea, which way he thought we should go.

'The branch to the north-west seems to me the better one,' Livingstone said. 'It is wider.'

'I agree,' Duncan replied.

'I'm afraid I don't,' said Bedingfeld. 'The water there seems to be moving more slowly. It may be wider, but I fear it is not nearly deep enough. The northern branch is more promising. To my eye.'

Livingstone shook his head. 'I see matters the same way as Captain Duncan. Your branch is too narrow for the *Pearl*.'

'Sir, with respect,' Bedingfeld protested, 'I must remind you that I know what I am doing when it comes to—'

'You forget, Bedingfeld, that I am the only one among us who has seen the Zambesi before.'

'I appreciate that, Doctor, but please remember that I have the most experience here when it comes to *navigating* rivers. I believe that is why you appointed me.'

'I do appreciate that, Commander. *You* will appreciate, though, that the Zambesi is unlike the others you have sailed. Ah, Mr Skead, we should make use of your expertise while we have it. What do you think?'

Skead was Royal Navy, like Bedingfeld, but they were very different men. Bedingfeld was hot-headed; Skead always considered his statements.

'I think, sir, that we should send the *MaRobert* to try them both. Sound the depth, observe the conditions closely, and go up the stream that proves most promising.'

'Very well,' Livingstone said, 'that is what we shall do. We will see if the western branch is as shallow as Commander Bedingfeld imagines, and, if it is, we shall try the eastern one.'

We set off to try Livingstone's branch the next day, but, as Kirk declared when he pulled up the sounding line, it was only one fathom deep.

'What did I say?' Bedingfeld muttered. 'It's too shallow.'

When we drew alongside the *Pearl* he stood at the bows with his hands on his hips.

'One fathom!' he shouted. Then, too softly for Livingstone to hear, he added. 'May we try the other branch now?'

The other branch was narrower but deeper – with two fathoms of water. Near its entrance, on the left, was a dry sandbank, which the *MaRobert* rounded.

I looked back at the *Pearl*. She had reached the sandbank but she wasn't turning quickly enough. Oh no, she was on.

'She's stuck!' I cried.

'Oh for goodness' sake,' Bedingfeld snapped. 'What is Duncan doing? That was not a difficult obstacle.'

No one said anything for a while. Kirk broke the silence.

'We'd better go back.'

'And rescue Captain Duncan from his mistakes,' Bedingfeld muttered.

'Look, they're calling us,' I said. Even at that distance, I could see people waving from the deck.

'Back we go then,' said Bedingfeld,

Livingstone was in a fury when we returned.

‘Commander Bedingfeld, what on earth were you doing? Just sitting there, when you can clearly see we are in trouble.’

‘Sir, if Captain Duncan would follow my signals and take the turns properly—’

‘There’s nothing’ – Livingstone held a pointed finger an inch or two from Bedingfeld’s face – ‘to be solved by blaming each other. In future, if you see that the *Pearl* is in trouble, you will bring the launch back to help her immediately. Is that understood?’

‘Perfectly understood,’ Bedingfeld said softly.

‘Good. Then let us get her off.’

It took two hours to get the *Pearl* off the sandbank. I helped carry out ropes and watched as her sailors put poles beneath her keel and tried to heave her off. She was, in spite of her predicament, a beautiful sight: one could see much more of her underside, usually hidden below the waterline. The curves of her bow and keel formed the shape of an ‘S’, first concave, then convex.

Once the ship was off we anchored until afternoon, when the tide was low again. It amazed me that the tides could have an influence so far upstream. When the water had fallen sufficiently, we set off again.

It happened again the next day. The *Pearl* ran aground, this time more seriously. She was properly stuck, her stern firmly in the bank. Bedingfeld wasted no time in turning the launch back towards the ship, mindful, no doubt, of the Doctor’s previous admonition, but he made no secret of his irritation. ‘Duncan’s made a mess of it again,’ he muttered, with a shake of his head. A harsh judgement, to be true. The bends in the river were simply too tight for a 160-foot vessel to turn in them.

‘Easy, Commander,’ said Mr Skead, as if reading my thoughts. ‘Let’s be careful of assigning blame when the conditions are at fault.’

‘This is a *river*, Mr Skead,’ Bedingfeld replied, ‘not the open sea. Did anyone *consider* that when they assigned him this task? It requires quite different skills, and Duncan’s not demonstrating that he has them.’

‘And you do?’ Skead challenged him.

‘I’d say I do, sir. I’ve taken ships this size up the Congo.’

‘The Congo,’ said Skead, ‘does not present these kinds of obstacles.’

‘Oh, so you’ve seen the Congo yourself, have you?’

‘The river will widen,’ Kirk interjected. ‘We’ve all heard the Doctor’s account of how it looks further up. We just need to find our way into it.’

‘Let’s hope we do,’ Bedingfeld said, ‘and soon. At this rate we’ll be old men by the time we get to Tete.’

‘My youth spent on the Zambesi!’ Thornton cried theatrically, and this seemed to put an end to Bedingfeld’s grim mutterings.

The *MaRobert* was alongside the *Pearl* now, and there was much shouting from top to bottom and up again.

We tried to tow her off the bank, and when that proved useless, everyone on board was put to work shifting anything of weight that could be picked up, but still the ship would not move.

On the bank, I began tying a rope, when the *Pearl*’s carpenter cried out, pointing to the grass. Something was moving out there, something alive, and, hearing the boy’s cry, it changed direction, making for us quickly, rustling the grass in a quick line – *where are our weapons?* – then it leapt, jaws open, at Tom Toby, who sprang sternmost down the bank.

‘*Crab!*’ cried Thornton, and, indeed, the monster was none other than his little dog, now wagging his tail and panting happily.

The rest of the Kroomen burst into laughter, pointing at Toby, who was brushing dirt from his trousers, and looking rather sheepish. This was something they’d keep reminding him about for weeks.

‘*Crab!*’ Thornton said, patting him. ‘Where have you been? Out exploring? You silly fellow, you mustn’t go too far – you don’t know what real monsters are out there.’

The dog’s tail wagged madly.

The Kroomen were still making jokes at Toby’s expense. Jumbo told me, when I drew near: ‘Now we give new name. He is Tom Big Hunter’ – followed by renewed bouts of laughter.

It was a welcome moment of light-heartedness, after days of frustration and toil.

The next day was Sunday, and we gathered on the deck of the *Pearl* for service early in the morning. The ship was still stuck fast.

Without pause, Livingstone addressed Bedingfeld and ordered him to take the launch up the channel, to observe what conditions he found and to see if there was a way of taking the *Pearl* up. I was to join the party, along with Rae, Kirk, Thornton, Skead and a few of the Kroomen.

‘Unless,’ Livingstone said, ‘any of you have any objections to working on Sunday.’ He held the captain’s gaze as he said this.

‘We do not, sir, I’m sure,’ Bedingfeld replied through clenched teeth.

‘Very good. Then let’s not lose any more time. May God guide you.’

The men were put to work to get the steam up, and we loaded the launch with what was necessary for a short journey.

Soon the *MaRobert* was thumping and spluttering, and steam billowed from her funnel. Rae came up from below and beckoned us aboard.

‘Come! Come!’ Bedingfeld shouted at the Kroomen.

I found a place near the bows, under the yellow awning. Livingstone stood on the *Pearl*’s deck, looking at the river beyond. The paddles began turning and we slowly moved away. The sloshing of water joined the noise of the engine and Bedingfeld’s shouting. Beside us were grassy plains and palm trees. As we passed, birds leapt into the air with a squawk squawk.

I looked back at the receding *Pearl*. Livingstone was still standing there, peering out at the water from his beached ship.

The *MaRobert* was chugging along at a good speed. Bedingfeld stood at the bows, observing the water ahead and shouting directions to Tom Jumbo, who was at the tiller. Thornton was perched on one of the paddle boxes, sounding the depth with the lead line. Mr Skead was observing our course by a compass placed on a tripod on the forehatch to remove the needle from the influence of the iron in our vessel.

The stream was narrow, the banks a few dozen feet apart. The vegetation was beginning to vary – we found an abundance of mimosas, vast natural fields of long grass, and the occasional palm tree.

The banks, after keeping a tolerable distance between them for a long time, began to come closer. Our waterway had become an insignificant stream, not much more than a ditch. Rae slowed the engine, and after a moment we heard scraping from below as the launch grounded.

‘It’s low tide,’ Bedingfeld said. ‘We’ll have to wait for it to rise before we can get off.’

‘Should we take the whaleboat?’ Kirk asked the commander. ‘I saw some trees further downstream that could mark the bank of a larger river.’

I’m confusing two trips now. We went twice up this branch, in fact. The first time we left late in the morning, and couldn’t get very far. The second time we left much earlier and made it further. It was this second time that Bedingfeld and Kirk took the whaleboat, and when they returned, having found nothing, Mr Skead then took the canoe upriver. He, too, returned without promising news. The river petered out in a reedy swamp.

With some difficulty we turned the *MaRobert* around and followed the winding stream back to the ship.

The *Pearl* had got off the bank: that was good news at least. Everyone was standing on the deck to see our return – Livingstone, where he'd stood when we left, and with him Charles, Gordon, Duncan, Thornton, and it looked like all of the men.

How I wished we had different news.

'It is the wrong channel,' Livingstone said, once Bedingfeld had reported our findings. 'I said so from the beginning. The other channel must be the way. You'll leave first thing tomorrow to explore it.'

Bedingfeld made to say something, but Livingstone held up an outstretched hand between them. His eyes were strained as if looking into the sun, although of course it had already sunk below the trees.

'Let's not lose any time, Commander. You have preparation to do.'

We were to take several days' provisions. I spent the rest of the day getting up the necessary stores: arms, ammunition, food, items to trade. Bedingfeld instructed the Kroomen to chop wood.

‘[I]n the end of June, 1851, we were rewarded by the discovery of the Zambesi, in the centre of the continent. This was a most important point, for that river was not previously known to exist there at all.’

– David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, published 1857

University of Cape Town

West Luabo, 25–30 May 1858

The sun is close to the horizon now, giving us light enough to proceed.

‘Onward ho!’ Bedingfeld cries. The paddle wheels begin turning and we start moving again.

There’s a light fog on the surface of the water, giving it a beautiful, eerie quality.

We’ve been up for hours already, having set off at half past four. Poor Rae was up two hours earlier to get up steam. We went down to the fork in darkness, but now that we’ve reached unknown territory, we’ve had to wait for daybreak.

We proceed up the western branch. Thornton has a shift with the sounding line.

‘Two fathoms!’ he calls, as he pulls in the line. He wipes sweat from his forehead, as if to prove the strenuousness of hauling up the lead.

A good channel, then. This is hopeful.

The scenery has become very fine. The mangroves have given way to palms and ferns and a rich variety of other fresh-water vegetation. Further on we find stretches of fine timber, with long strings of lichen hanging from the branches. In the water there are aquatic plants, floating past us, *Pistia* predominantly.

‘Look!’ Kirk points ahead. ‘Cocoanuts. I’d say those are our first coconut trees!’

‘What’s the depth, Mr Thornton?’ Bedingfeld calls.

‘Two and a half fathoms,’ Thornton answers.

Bedingfeld nods.

‘I think we may have found our river, gentlemen,’ Kirk says to us all.

‘Too early to tell,’ Bedingfeld says. ‘But it is looking promising.’

‘Do you think so?’ I ask Kirk. ‘Do you think this leads to the Luabo?’

‘I hope so. I’d say so. It’s a good channel.’

And from there to the Zambesi. Dr Livingstone’s river. Yes, it must be. This must be the way that Parker took, and, if it is, we’ll have his map to show us where everything else is.

I hope Kirk’s right. I think he is.

‘*Over there!*’ comes a cry – Thornton, pointing ahead. ‘*Natives! Over there!*’ They’re in canoes – three canoes, or four – in the distance. It’ll take a few minutes to get to them.

Kirk comes beside me. ‘At last,’ he says. ‘What are they, do you think?’

‘Here? I’m not sure. We need to get closer.’

‘Mr Rae!’ Bedingfeld barks. ‘More steam, quick! Stoker!’ He grabs Tom Coffee by the sleeve. ‘More wood on that fire!’

Kirk is leaning over the railing to improve his view by a foot or two. ‘At last. I was beginning to think they’d deserted the area completely. Proof of them everywhere, but not a man to be seen.’

‘No!’ comes Bedingfeld’s gruff voice. ‘Good God, man. Not *that* much!’

Before we’ve halved the distance even, the canoes make for the bank, and the natives flee. We can hear their voices, although the sound is faint over the noise of the engine. When we reach the point where we think they landed, there is no sign of them, or their boats.

‘Touchy fellows,’ Kirk says. ‘Evasive. Off in a flash.’

‘Not used to white men, I suppose,’ I reply. ‘No sign of any Portuguese this low down, and these chaps probably don’t travel very far from anywhere. We must be a frightening sight to them. The launch.’

‘No doubt. And think –’ he laughs – ‘just think what they’ll make of it when we bring the *Pearl* up.’

‘Yes – ha! – no wonder those other fellows vanished the other day.’

A little further on we’re in luck. There are a few huts on a ridge. Some sort of settlement.

Bedingfeld steers the boat to land.

‘Kirk,’ he calls, ‘come. The rest of you, stay here. We don’t want to scare them off if we can help it.’

The two of them jump to the ground and make off, disappearing into the thick bush that skirts the shore.

A group of Kroomen are talking amongst themselves.

‘What do you think, Jumbo?’ I say to him, drawing near.

He shakes his head and makes a gesture with his hands that says he knows as little as I what to expect.

After a while I hear Kirk’s voice. My name.

‘*Baines!*’ he calls. ‘*Baines!* Hello!’

‘Yes!’ I shout.

He appears, a little way from the boat.

‘Biscuit!’ he cries. ‘Bring some biscuit – and pork. Come!’

I leap overboard, and reach him with the provisions in no time.

‘A village,’ he says, ‘but they’ve deserted it. The fires are cold, but there’s food on them. Look!’

There are a dozen or so huts, and patches of ground, planted with Kafir corn, and one with banana. The huts are built of poles with regular pitched roofs, and not round like those of the Kafirs.

Near the huts are some broken calabashes, and on the dead ashes of a fire is an earthen vessel with some roots in it. I hold one up to examine it. It’s similar to the *Amaryllis* or *Haemanthus*, which the Bushmen use to poison their arrows.

Bedingfeld is going from hut to hut and looking inside, in case any of them are hiding there. Kirk is gathering specimens of the things that they are growing. He’s found rice and cassava and pumpkins, as well as the Kafir corn, and some Indian hemp.

‘And, look, here’s cotton, too.’

‘No luck,’ Bedingfeld announces, joining us. ‘Not a soul here. Have you found all you want, Dr Kirk?’

‘Plenty,’ says Kirk, and then points me to a flat rock. ‘Here – we’ll leave the things for them here. We won’t be able to teach them about free trade if they think we’re thieves.’

‘Not all of that,’ Bedingfeld tells me. ‘There – yes – that much.’

I take back a portion of the provisions, and set off with Kirk after Bedingfeld.

As we start upriver again, the captain hoists the White Ensign.

‘Time to accustom them to the English colours,’ he says.

Ahead I can see more canoes. Generally there are two natives in each, and some of them appear to be loaded with wood. More natives show themselves on the bank ahead, and Rae slows the engine when we are level with them. We wave our hands, and hold up a red handkerchief for them to see. A group of them are bold enough to come to the edge of the bush and answer us. Five of them, naked, but for a small loincloth. When we draw level they walk to keep alongside, deeming the distance safe enough.

Bedingfeld calls Jumbo. The Kroomen’s canoe is not very different from those of the natives, so it’s calculated to alarm them the least. Jumbo drifts closer to the bank, and calls out in a friendly voice, though they won’t understand his words, and he waves the red handkerchief, which soon tempts one of them down to the bank.

Jumbo says something more, and pulls his sleeve up to the elbow to expose his forearm, showing them that he is black like themselves. The native on the bank mimics the gesture, striking his wrist, but he seems not to have understood Jumbo’s meaning. The fellows behind him do the same, with a great deal of chattering, making, by their motions,

some particular reference to their wrists: ornaments that are worn there, perhaps, or as likely the shackles applied to those who are made slaves.

I quickly sketch the scene. This is an important moment. Our first contact with the natives of Zambesia.

When we begin moving again, a canoe with two natives comes near, and Bedingfeld turns to the steward, who is preparing food. 'Here! Davis, bring me some of that soup.'

Tom Davis comes with a bowl of soup.

'There. Hold it out for them,' Bedingfeld says, standing back himself. 'And the spoon.'

The Kroomen call out, sounding like some sort of jovial chorus, and the canoe comes closer, one of the natives standing up, the other paddling. Soon they're right alongside. Our chaps hold out the bowl, and the native who is standing peers at it, while the other one paddles away to keep them level. There's much gesturing and chatter, apparently involving the soup, and the spoon, which the fellow seems to have learnt to use with great propriety in no time at all, and feeds himself with no thought for his companion, who keeps at it with the paddle. Bedingfeld has moved closer and is in some sort of conversation with the soup-eater; he appears to understand something of what this fellow is saying. I'm too far away to hear anything.

'He speaks some words of Portuguese,' Bedingfeld explains to us afterwards. He points upstream, where the canoe is now going, at some speed. 'They know of Sena and Tete, and they say ... the *Zamboi*, that's how he said it ... he says the *Zamboi* is ahead of us.'

'Well that's accurate enough,' Thornton chirps. 'Near enough to *Zambesi*; especially when you consider it's a native saying it.'

'More steam!' Bedingfeld orders Rae. 'Keep up with them!'

The canoe is some distance ahead now, but they seem to have slowed down to wait for us.

'Did they say how far?' I ask the commander. 'How far to the *Zambesi*?'

'No,' he snorts, 'of course not. You want *distances* from these people? Even if we *could* understand more than snatches of what they're trying to say...'

The stream is what one would expect: deep, and wide enough, with a constant current of fresh water. The canoe keeps ahead for quite some time, then it slows down, and the fellows wave at us as they drop astern, shouting words that none of us can understand, but they sound encouraging. They must have tired themselves out, or they probably feel they've taken us far enough and we can do the last bit ourselves.

We go on and on, without any significant change in the stream. It remains as before: not very wide, but fresh, and deep – two fathoms, most of the time, according to the soundings. But the landscape has altered considerably. The ground must be almost perfectly flat, because on both sides the land has given way to water, probably no deeper than a foot or two, with tall grass, several feet high, growing directly out of it. Occasionally there are Myrtaceous trees, but for the rest only the grass. It extends as far as the eye can see, surrounding us endlessly, an immense plain of green, as a field would look in a world of giants. This wouldn't be at all out of place in *Gulliver's Travels*.

The channel would be hard to spot if we weren't already in it, with all this water around. It's a little disconcerting, having no place in view where one might find a firm footing if one needed to. Something like being at sea, but infinitely more strange, seeing as there's a meadow growing out of it, and the ship's paddles are brushing against the grass and reeds with an incessant rustle. A myrtle tree goes by so close that we are able to pluck leaves from it.

'All this water,' Kirk remarks. 'It has to come from somewhere.'

'The river,' Thornton nods, and shapes a funnel with his hands, 'when it reaches the delta it's forced to spread out – because it's flat – that's what all of this is.'

'And the *volume* of it,' I add. 'This *must* indicate a large stream ahead. This *has* to go into the Zambesi.'

A mile further we experience a significant jolt. One of the paddles has become clogged with grass. The Kroomen get to work, and after some hacking the wheel starts turning more freely. A moment later the same happens on the other side. For some distance ahead, the water is dense with the stuff. We might be able to push the *MaRobert* through, but if the water drops any, there's a danger we won't be able to get her back. What now?

Bedingfeld sends Jumbo and Tom Peter in a canoe, and once they've disappeared from view, we hear the sound of their sloshing oars for a while, before it fades into the hot, ringing sound of insects around us.

'So we wait.' Bedingfeld's voice.

No one says anything. Everyone seems lost in their thoughts – about how, if they are thinking as I am, they wish that this could be the stream into the river, but that it seems less and less likely to be. How I wish I could see through the eyes of that bird up there, circling, and look down on this labyrinth and see where we are to go. I wonder how we look, to that bird. It would make an interesting picture.

There's nothing better to do than take out my sketchbook. A few scratches with my pencil and I begin to make some sense of the bank, the water, the reeds.

'If the *MaRobert* can get through this,' Kirk says, 'and the *Pearl* cannot, what then? Do the two ships take different paths, and meet in the river?'

'I wouldn't know,' Bedingfeld mutters. 'I'd need the Doctor to take me into his plans. Or I'd need to develop some skill at mind-reading.'

I keep my eye on my sketch.

After a while I stroll to the bows and look at the water. I hear someone approach and turn to see it is Bedingfeld. He too stands and peers at the water for some time.

'Are you a religious man, Baines?' he asks after a while.

I am taken aback by the question. Bedingfeld has always remained remote. Why is he asking me about my beliefs?

'I am – I – yes, I am a Christian, as are you.' I know he has very strict views on certain things, and I'm sure I fall short of many of his rules.

'Somewhere here ...' he talks softly, as if to himself, and points vaguely to the northwest. 'Somewhere here ... the lost tribes of Israel.'

'What – whatever do you mean?'

He looks at me, reading my face for a while. Then he answers. 'There are stories – they are more than stories – history records it. The lost tribes of Israel came here. Their descendents will be living here.'

'Fairy stories,' says a voice. It is Thornton, who has approached without our realizing.

Bedingfeld is undaunted. 'You can scoff all you want, Mr Thornton, but you'll be red-faced on judgement day.'

He turns and makes his way to the cabin.

'Fairy stories,' Thornton repeats his opinion. 'The kind of superstition that science is driving out.'

Thornton is the least religious of all of us. I challenge him gently. 'But you think science should drive out all religion.'

He shrugs. 'Perhaps it will.'

I gaze out at the water again. Imagine if there is some truth in what Bedingfeld says. That descendents of the Jews journeyed all the way down here? It would be a marvellous story.

The Kroomen must have been gone for an hour when the chatter of their voices announces their return. Their canoe appears, drifting towards us. Jumbo is waving his arms.

‘Ah ... no good!’ he cries. ‘No good!’

There are similar obstacles ahead, they tell us, though the water in between is clear. The same dense patches of grass. The last of these, they tell us, is impassable.

‘So much for our fine river,’ Kirk mutters. ‘It is all up a tree in this quarter.’

‘Blast!’ says Bedingfeld, and turns away. ‘This river is ... *blast!* I *knew* Livingstone was wrong about this.’

‘We’ll have to sleep here,’ says Kirk. ‘It’s too late to turn back.’

‘Quite right, Dr Kirk, quite right,’ says the commander, pacing to the bows. ‘I had a commission waiting for me,’ he shouts at the landscape, ‘in charge of a man-of-war! Instead I have this! This ... bucket of bolts!’

There’s a sound on the river. An alligator slips into the water, then another. My body shivers, even though it is warm. Horrible creatures.

As the light withdraws, the air becomes filled with sound, a cacophony of frogs and insects. It is as if the jungle, every inch of it, is crying out into the dusk. Then comes the ringing hum of mosquitoes. Bedingfeld and Kirk have already rigged their nets, but I’ve not had time to hang mine, so I settle on the cabin floor, as the lockers are too narrow. I cover myself with a blanket, letting the edges touch the floor all around me, and baulk the little vermin for the night. Thornton keeps us awake with yelps called forth by the little pests.

In the morning we see that Rae has been most horribly bitten. Both his eyes are completely closed up. Kirk, examining his skin in the morning light, says he has never seen a man so marked with anything before, with the exception of smallpox.

I have to say that in Australia it was even worse. Here at least the nights are cool and we can wrap our blankets round us and defy them. The heat in Victoria obliged us to throw off everything and expose ourselves almost naked to their stings. And here we don’t have the horrible plague of flies, swarming into our eyes, mouths and noses, and into every open sore. The work might be hard at present, but the climate is agreeable. I’d say we’re in better health now than we were aboard the *Pearl*. But how frustrating that we have not found the entrance to the Zambesi, after all this time.

We set off at daylight and, once we have passed through the narrow reach and find the wide river again, we come down the stream gloriously.

‘Look,’ says Bedingfeld, as we approach the village that we visited yesterday. There are natives lined on the bank, waving as we pass. ‘See what a bit of bread and pork can do. Not so frightened any more, are they?’

Further down, Kirk points to something on the bank. ‘Look at that palm. *That* is a new species – I’m sure of it. Captain Bedingfeld, can we stop?’

‘No,’ Bedingfeld barks. ‘We have no time for that, Dr Kirk. We need to find a way into this river, and then we can worry about such luxuries.’

‘*Luxuries*,’ Kirk mouths at me in indignation.

I shake my head, discreetly.

Further down, Kirk again sees something worth collecting, but again Bedingfeld won’t stop for it. After a while, Kirk stops asking, even when we pass what looks like a new species of myrtle tree.

‘He’s no lover of science,’ Kirk mutters to me. ‘He’s a fine skipper, and I daresay he manages the Kroomen well, but if we were to find the very key to nature’s mysteries before us, he’d not let us stop to take it on board.’

Hopefully when Livingstone is with us, he’ll insist that Bedingfeld allow us to proceed with our scientific mission, but neither of us has the stomach to challenge the captain now.

And so we make our way back with no way in *and* no new species.

What will we do now? This stream is no good even for the launch. We’ll have to try another mouth entirely, which will be easy enough for the *Pearl*, but what about the *MaRobert*?

The *Pearl* has worked her way down the other channel and is waiting near the junction, the same welcoming committee standing on the deck. Bedingfeld shakes his head, and we must be close enough for them to see, because Livingstone turns away and disappears from view.

Livingstone boards the *MaRobert* in the morning. He talks to Rae about the engine, and is in some sort of conversation with the Kroomen. His reaction to the report of our journey has been surprising. When we boarded the *Pearl* last evening and Bedingfeld told him the stream was impassable, Livingstone said nothing and withdrew to his cabin. But later he asked us more questions about what we had seen, and did not seem at all discouraged.

‘You say the water flowed fresh and sweet, even where you were forced to return,’ he said, nodding his head and not meeting anyone’s gaze.

‘Indeed,’ said Bedingfeld. ‘It was.’

‘Remarkable.’ Livingstone now seemed to be speaking to himself. ‘A good harbour of refuge. Wood and water in abundance. This would be invaluable in the Cape Colony.’

With that he left our company. This morning he seems in a better mood than I have seen him in for some time. He seems to have shaken off his sickness.

At breakfast a canoe arrives, bearing a strange-looking fellow, a half-caste, with half a dozen blacks paddling him towards us. He’s a shrivelled little fellow, with coffee-coloured skin, which, by his demeanour, he supposes fair enough to confer a degree of importance upon him. He wears a grin, when it comes into view, that says he is not threatened by us but not in any way hostile.

Livingstone stands up to address him. ‘*You are welcome,*’ he says, in an unusual voice, though not unlike the tone he uses for the last quarter of a sermon. ‘*We welcome you, son of the Zambesi, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Empress of India.*’ He adds something in Portuguese, but it’s too short to be a translation, though the tone is consistent.

‘Ah!’ the fellow responds, and then he goes on for quite a while. It has the sound of Portuguese, and Livingstone appears to understand him; I make out the word *água*, meaning water, and *carne*, which is meat.

With a clucking sound, which I do not take to be articulations of language (like that of the Kafirs), he presents us with a quantity of wild meat. ‘*Presente,*’ he says to Livingstone.

The Doctor reciprocates with a half-pint of powder and a bottle of wine, which the fellow receives with a smile that displays his imperfect teeth and blackened gums. He has the air of a man who possesses some piece of crucial intelligence which he will deign to impart to those who need it only if they impress him to his satisfaction. The powder and wine seem to have done the trick. There follows a conversation of some duration, Livingstone asking questions of him, and the half-caste making some reply, accompanied by gesticulations towards the stream that we have just come down.

After much further ceremony, the half-caste departs, and Livingstone addresses us. In fact he speaks more to Charles, but the rest of us can hear.

‘He says that this river is called Luawe, and higher up the Zamgue, but no pathway exists between it and the Luabo.’

Kirk catches my eye; he has an ironic smile. How useful this fellow’s information is now. If only he had come to tell us about the channel before we’d spent days and days exploring it.

'Mr Rae,' Livingstone says, 'do we have steam?'

'Aye, sir,' Rae replies.

'Then let us return to the mouth.'

We anchor within sight of the bar, and Captain Duncan comes aboard. He and Livingstone are looking at a map spread out on the deck.

'*Captain!*' comes a cry from behind. '*Dr Livingstone!*' It is Mr Skead. '*Look! The Hermes is here!*'

The ship has appeared just beyond the breakers.

'Well,' Livingstone says. 'Captain Gordon has returned. Well I never.'

'She's signalling something!'

'What is it?' Livingstone asks Duncan. 'What's she saying?'

'*Important – information,*' the captain interprets. 'She says she has some important information to communicate.'

'Yes? Well, what is it?' Livingstone says. 'Ask her. Send a signal back. Ask them what it is.'

All eyes are on the *Hermes*, but she's silent. The waves break over the bar between us like ticks of a clock.

'Ask them again,' Livingstone commands, and Duncan repeats the signal, but again there is no response from the ship.

'What do you suppose it is?' Thornton says quietly, having come closer to Kirk and me.

'No idea,' Kirk replies. 'Maybe they've found the channel. Who knows?'

Livingstone is in conference with Duncan and Charles. He calls Bedingfeld towards them. Rae, who was standing with Bedingfeld, approaches us.

'What's all this?' he says. 'Any idea?'

We all shake our heads. 'Not a clue,' whispers Thornton, and no one has anything else to add.

Livingstone is addressing Bedingfeld, and his gestures seem to indicate that the commander must remain with the launch while the rest of them go off elsewhere. After some discussion, Bedingfeld takes his leave of them.

'Well,' says Rae, 'it's best we're not seen to cluster like this,' and off he saunters, in the commander's direction.

Kirk chuckles. 'No point wearing ourselves out wondering. We'll find out soon enough.'

He takes his leave, saying he has his journal to attend to, and makes directly for the deckhouse though this takes him quite close to Livingstone and his conference. The Doctor beckons him, and for a while Kirk stands with them, before being sent off again, to where he was going.

‘Well,’ says Thornton, ‘*he* found out soon enough. Just you and me, left in the dark.’

Livingstone and his brother return to the *Pearl*, with Captain Duncan, and steam nearer the bar before stopping for the night. ‘Well,’ says Charles, before departing, ‘on to the next stage of the adventure! I hope this is easier than it has been so far.’ The rest of us will remain on the launch, with Bedingfeld.

Kirk has learnt little more than can be easily assumed: that Livingstone will board the *Hermes* to speak to Captain Gordon in person, and then all will become clear.

Bedingfeld is in a temper, which is preserved in full the next morning; the night has done nothing to diminish it. He’s full of complaints about Livingstone’s manner of leadership, and about Captain Duncan’s abilities, and about the concerns he’s raised himself, without them being taken seriously. He takes the whaleboat, and goes across for orders.

‘Testy fellow,’ Kirk says. ‘He’ll be much happier when we get where we’ve planned to be.’

‘Won’t we all,’ I reply, though I wouldn’t say I’m unhappy now. ‘But you’re right: he does seem a little testy. He takes offence at the Doctor most easily. I suppose he’s used to being in charge himself.’

In the afternoon I’m sent word from Bedingfeld to bring the launch over. I’m excited to captain the vessel, even if just for brief moment. ‘Give us steam, Mr Rae,’ I say, with a laugh. In no time we draw alongside the *Pearl*. There’s some excitement on board. There’s a new signal from the *Hermes*. I’m in time to make out the last of it, for it’s been repeated, Charles tells me, three times now.

Portuguese – driven – from – all – stations – up – the – Zambesi.

What does this mean? I look at Livingstone. He has his consul’s hat in his hands, his fingers playing with the gold band around the rim.

‘What does it mean, brother?’ Charles speaks.

‘They’re losing their grip,’ Livingstone says softly. ‘They’re being driven out. There must be some rebellion against the Portuguese, and the rebels must be too strong for them ... if this is what is meant –’ his voice is louder now – ‘by this intelligence.’

‘Is this good news?’ Captain Duncan asks him. ‘A war against white men, precisely at the time of our arrival. It may be unsafe.’

‘If it is a war,’ Livingstone answers, ‘it is a war against the Portuguese. We are Englishmen, Captain, and our business in Africa is very different.’

‘As long as *they* know that,’ Captain Duncan says. ‘In their eyes a white skin might be enough to provoke the same sort of hostility.’

‘Captain,’ Livingstone replies to him. ‘I have travelled long enough in Africa to know how to make my intentions clear to men such as these, and to know that I can do so once more. We shall travel under the English colours, and by our actions we shall give them no reason to doubt – not for an instant – what those colours mean.’

The Doctor seems taller as he says these words; his tone leaves one in little doubt indeed. His voice has the sound of experience – of one who has travelled with natives to Loanda, and then the mighty journey to Quilimane. And before that through the Kalahari desert to Lake Ngami.

‘There is Providence in the timing of it,’ he says. ‘The time of the Portuguese is over. The time is soon when the slave trade will be driven out of Africa, the time of its ultimate extinction. And here we are, precisely at such a time. This is an act of Providence; only a fool would doubt it.’

I’m a little confused. Livingstone has relied on the Portuguese before, and has been full of praise for them.

‘And it is fortuitous,’ Livingstone adds, ‘that this began before we entered the river. Otherwise the blame would have been laid to our account.’

Is this true? I would think it would cause us much trouble to keep the peace with two contending parties, either of whom, reversing the divine saying, might think: ‘He that is not for us is against us.’ What is this war? Livingstone has been in situations like this before – has he not? He must know how best to negotiate our way through it.

The *Pearl* is to go to *Hermes* to consult, and will then try the next mouth. I am to remain on the launch with Bedingfeld, Kirk and Rae, and to gather provisions.

‘And what then?’ Bedingfeld asks.

‘Then,’ Livingstone says, ‘you will *await your orders!*’

How happy we will all be when we find our way into this river. Hopefully it will bring this bickering to an end.

The next morning Bedingfeld, Rae, Kirk and I land on the west bank to cut wood and, having set the Kroomen to work upon the dead trees that have been washed in long lines

along the beach, we strike into the country in hope of finding something to shoot. Livingstone took a walk here yesterday and reported an abundance of game. But, after a long trudge through bog and over sand, we find nothing. I do see the spoor of buck and hippopotamus, but not even a glimpse of the animals themselves.

Kirk and I have broken away from the others, and after a while we set out on our own. I cross a reedy swamp half a mile broad with beautiful water lilies growing in it, and press on to a range of sandhills near the beach. Some distance away I can see some baboons. They appear to be gathering shell-fish on the beach. I watch them for a while. These are not the regular ursine baboon of the Cape but something between them and the monkey.

On my way back towards the launch, I see more of them, and eventually come to what must be the whole herd, more than a hundred in number. They take to the bush and peep out over the edge of the bank at me, the little ones holding up their black hands and the larger ones standing out and scrutinizing me with most impertinent curiosity.

I have my rifle pointed just under the shoulder of the closest one, not ten yards away. My finger touches the trigger, but I pause before pulling it. I stare at the brute's face, and it stares back at mine, and so we stand, for more than half a minute. Its look is so human and so utterly unconscious of danger from the deadly tube that I cannot bring myself to fire. I lower the weapon and walk away.

The others have been as unsuccessful as I. There is nothing for the pot, so we have to make do with salted pork again.

Kirk is paging through his journal when he says to everyone, 'We've made a mistake! It's not Saturday; it's Sunday!'

'What?' Bedingfeld is on his feet. He looks flustered. 'What do you mean?'

'Look. There's my entry from the day before yesterday – Friday – so yesterday was Saturday and today is Sunday.'

'You mean today was the Sabbath?'

'Yes. Today was Sunday.'

'That must be a mistake.'

I consult my own journal. Kirk is right. Today would be Sunday 30 May, 1858. 'No, the mistake is that we thought today was Saturday,' I say.

Bedingfeld is not happy. 'How is this possible?'

'Should we observe tomorrow as the Sabbath,' Kirk suggests, 'in lieu of the one we have missed?'

'Yes, that is a good idea. Tomorrow will be the Sabbath.'

How strange this is. What is it about this place that makes one lose track of the days of the week?

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On two occasions the success of the expedition depended on the critical position of the launch. The first of these was the hoisting of her out of the Pearl. The other was her passage of the bar, in order to find another channel into the Zambesi, on the failure of the attempt just narrated. The testimony of other officers goes to make it plain that Captain Bedingfeld shewed consummate ability in performing this difficult service. Hear his account of it. 'I had to choose between two evils (in consequence of the boat of the Pearl not coming to shew the way), that of keeping the launch outside all night, where, if it should come on to blow, she would in all probability have filled and gone down, or running in and taking my chance of finding the channel. The latter I thought involved less risk, and Captain Gordon went with me in his boat to the back of the breakers to point out the channel as far as he was able. Unfortunately the *Hermes* was anchored a little too far to the westward, so that the sun being full in our faces we mistook the channel. I knew I was safe if I could only keep her before the breakers; we had however no sooner got amongst them than I found we were not in the channel, and that I must either haul up to weather a sand-bank on my right, or go a-shore. This was an anxious moment, for had anything happened to the launch it would have been of most serious consequence to the expedition. There was nothing for it therefore but to watch the breakers and haul her up between them; but we could not avoid all of them, and two or three which broke on board nearly swamped us. At last we succeeded in weathering the point, with 6 inches water to spare.'

– *Dr Livingstone's Cambridge Lectures* (second edition), edited with a 'Life of Dr Livingstone', etc. by the Rev. William Monk, published 1860, and drawing from a manuscript provided by Captain Bedingfeld

Zambesi Delta, June 1858

It took us more than a fortnight to find a channel that would lead us into the Zambesi. The first stream we had attempted, thinking it the Luabo, turned out to be nothing but a small creek, and was revealed by a half-caste Portuguese in a canoe to be the Luawe, which, though confusingly similar in name, was disconnected from the main river. We were too far to the south.

While several of us remained aboard the *MaRobert* inside the bar, Livingstone set off on the *Pearl* to explore the other mouths. They found Parker's Luabo, the main outlet of the Zambesi, but its bar was impenetrable. Next they tried a mouth a few miles to the west, called the Kongone, which was smaller but without as great an obstruction. We found the *Pearl* lying in this mouth when we rejoined her, after being towed some distance by the *Hermes* and making the dangerous crossing over the bar. Livingstone had gone up this channel with Mr Skead aboard the *Hermes'* cutter. We set off in chase, and met them coming down. Skead was waving, Livingstone standing still, almost serene.

As we drew level with them, Livingstone raised a hand and hailed, 'I have discovered!'

'We have found a way in!' Skead explained as we drew level. 'A way in to the main river!'

As we prepared to tow the cutter back to the *Pearl*, the two men came on board.

'Now we begin,' Livingstone said, 'now we begin.'

'What happened?' asked Kirk. 'How did you find the way?'

'It is simple, Dr Kirk. The natives know the landscape around them. All one has to do is get them to tell you. Now we can find a route for the *Pearl*. Now we begin.'

'We had a tight scrape to get here,' Bedingfeld said. 'It was nearly the end of the *MaRobert*, let me tell you.'

Crossing the bar of the Luawe had been the easy part. But our vessel was not made for the swell of the open sea, so when the *Hermes* towed her, her metal had trembled with each swell. But the real difficulties came when crossing this new bar. All of a sudden we found ourselves in four feet of water, with the seas curling up and breaking against our side, swamping the after cabin and threatening to invade the engine room. If they had reached the fire our only hope would have been speedily extinguished.

‘You don’t think God would let the launch sink to the bottom, do you?’ Livingstone scoffed. ‘What use would it be to Him there?’

Now that we were all assembled again, Livingstone took the whole party – all of us crowded in the *MaRobert*’s little cabin – to explore this new channel and the streams leading from it, in search of a waterway that would take the *Pearl*.

You must understand that the delta is an impossible maze. The Zambesi breaks apart into four or five streams that wind their way to the sea, but the largest of these, like the Luabo, are blocked at the shore by large bars created by the mass of sediment that they carry with them. One needs to find a route up one of the smaller channels, although identifying the right ones is made difficult by the presence of other streams, which look pretty much the same, but lead nowhere, such as the one we’d already tried, the Luawe. Some are mere tidal creeks, taking seawater up and then down again; others are channels that form near the coast by gathering floodwater that spreads over the flats of the delta.

Even the streams that flowed out of the Zambesi proper, such as the one we were in now, would be blocked at some point by shallows or sandbars, or by large islands, or by becoming too narrow to take a ship up. What made it possible – and at the same time so difficult – were the little streams that spread out across the delta, flowing parallel to the coast, sometimes even away from it, most of which ended abruptly, but some of which linked these channels to one another. A maze.

We took one of these streams that forked from our channel, about twenty miles up. This was the channel Livingstone had used to gain access to the main river in the cutter, but would it do for the *MaRobert*? Would it do for the *Pearl*?

A number of natives had gathered on the bank, one of them, curiously, wearing a blue shirt. Livingstone called out to him in Portuguese, and the fellow cried out in response. He, and two others, in the more usual state of near-nakedness, came on board.

Who was this fellow? From where had his blue shirt come? I realized we had come to the outskirts of another world.

He seemed at ease with Livingstone, pointing in various directions in response to his questions. The Doctor seemed comfortable with him, more comfortable, it seemed, than he was with us. I wondered what we had been doing learning Sechuana on the *Pearl*, when Portuguese would have served us better. I suppose Livingstone thought then that we would move through Portuguese territory quickly. A mistake.

The channel was deep enough, but narrow, and it had some nasty turns. The native kept pointing forward, and calling out, in words that I couldn’t understand, but whose meaning was as clear as a driver’s call must be to an ox. Soon there was a crackling

sound, as the paddles began to brush against the reeds on either side. I looked at Kirk. He was thinking the same thing I was: that this was all too similar to the unfortunate termination of the Luawe. Was this really the stream by which Livingstone had entered the river?

We kept at it, chugging up the narrow stream, and I found it strange, seeing the dismal evidence before me but knowing that Livingstone had come this way. I thought that this is what faith must be, and perhaps this was the manner in which he always travelled. Seeing one thing but believing another – in his case because God told him so, while we were believing what we'd been told by Livingstone. And, after five miles, there it was: our stream took us into a much larger river, flowing perpendicular. We'd found our way into Parker's Luabo, which is really the Zambesi itself, or the main stream of it, as it spreads over the delta.

We had turned from a narrow alley into a grand highway, though it was wider by far than any road. It was two or three miles across, although it was difficult to tell if you were looking at the opposite shore or at an island in the middle of the stream. On the bank, which was low and grassy, troops of black fellows had gathered, clapping their hands in unison as we passed. Our blue-shirted guide cried out to them, some sort of greeting, and they shouted back in response.

Livingstone was in conversation with this fellow, pointing upstream and then down. The native said something and Livingstone nodded and laughed. I don't know when I had last seen him laugh. I don't know what they were talking about.

The *MaRobert* made its way slowly upstream, rumbling and spluttering and hissing as it went. Although the river was broad, it was very shallow in places, and the stream was divided by shoals and islets into numerous small channels.

We came to a village near the shore, among cocoanut and banana trees. Many of the huts stood upon poles five or six feet from the ground, presumably to protect them against flooding. A little way up, another village, and then another. We anchored a short distance above one of them, and in no time several natives came alongside in canoes, holding up little round baskets, and shouting '*Malonda! Malonda!*', which meant things for sale. There were baskets with rice, bananas, oranges, lemons, limes, cabbage, fish and wax, and some items that I did not recognise. They wanted calico in return.

We went ashore and Livingstone spoke to the villagers, using the guide as an interpreter. For a while I watched him. This was the Livingstone I had read about in *Missionary Travels*; the Livingstone that everyone knew about. He seemed far more at

home now, in the way he was interacting with them, than he had in London, or Cape Town.

The villagers were muscular, and wore only a small piece of cloth. Some of the men had their hair plaited into short tails.

‘They are busy with the rice harvest,’ Livingstone said. ‘They say they have been completely plundered by the rebel leader Mariano during his war with the Portuguese.’

The landscape was dominated by the most extraordinary trees, which dwarfed the palms around them. They rose, perfectly straight, to a height of fifty feet, and were draped with long creepers and convolvuli that hung all the way down to the ground.

‘Remarkable,’ said Livingstone, ‘what do you think those are, Dr Kirk?’

‘They look like pandanus,’ he replied, ‘as are the palms around them. Perhaps they are a new species – I’d have to look more closely to see.’

‘They look like the spires of village churches,’ I mused.

‘Or minarets,’ said Kirk. ‘They do have a heavenly aspect.’

As the sun dropped low in the evening, I looked upstream, to where the river glinted into the distance, and imagined the places to which this highway would lead us. Sena, Tete – these names that I knew so well, though at this stage they remained words, locations on maps that I had studied – and, beyond them, Kebrabasa, the Batoka Plateau, the Victoria Falls. Names that were bound up with hopes for glory. But for now we would turn back down, and go back towards the sea, to see if there was any better way to bring the *Pearl* in.

We spent several days trying various passages for the *Pearl*. She had already tried to enter the stream we were now in, but had been unable to find a way in, even though from here one could see the sea. We went into another channel entirely, the Muselo, as Parker called it, which branches off on the other side of the Luabo and reaches the sea some miles north-east.

Our blue-shirted guide gave us the native names: the Kongone he called the Maiudo, the Luabo was the Timbo, and the Muselo the Nyamacari. ‘Nya-ma-ca-ri,’ he had to say several times, exaggerating the movement of his lips and forming a grotesque grin in the process, when some of the others found it so difficult to repeat it back to him. When I attempted it after a while, I got it right immediately, and he laughed and pointed at me and said something to Livingstone that must have been approval. How happy I was of that.

‘It is not so different from the kind of word the Kafirs would use,’ I said, to explain why the word had come naturally to me.

His name was Antonio. A Portuguese name, even though he was a native, not even a half-caste.

When we saw a couple of middling-sized bamboo or reed houses and asked him what they were, he told us they were barracoons or storehouses for slaves. These rivers had been used by slavers, in secret.

‘Mr Baines,’ Livingstone said one morning, ‘These pandanus trees are a most striking view. You would be doing your duty as artist if you painted them.’

I jumped to my feet. ‘Yes, Dr Livingstone. I will indeed.’

Kirk came with me, and Antonio the guide. We had time, as the others were taking latitude and chopping wood for fuel, so we forced our way through reeds, grass, matted jungle, mud and the intertwining stems and roots of the mangrove and hibiscus to a group of the most picturesque trees we could pick out. There were ordinary pandani – screw pines – such as I had often seen in north Australia, but among them were the new kind. The stem was perfectly straight, supported by roots shooting like stays from eight or ten feet up the stem, and throwing out rather irregular branches from the ends of which grew small bunches of small but unmistakeable pandanus leaves, while convolvulus and other plants climbing to the very top showered down wreaths of dark green leaves and pink flowers to within a few feet of the ground.

As I took out my sketchbook and pencil, Kirk climbed up a tree with sprawling branches that rested against one of the common pandani, and with his axe started chopping at the pandanus’s stem.

‘Let’s see if there is any fruit at the top,’ he said.

The tall tree in front of me formed the centrepiece of the sketch. Kirk’s tree was a little to the right.

‘This bark is hard,’ he added, after a few blows, and then, after a few more, he said, ‘Aha. The wood is softer inside.’

A cracking sound filled the air, and the palm fell sideways and down with a bounce as it struck the undergrowth.

‘No fruit,’ he announced, when he inspected the leaves at the top.

In my sketch I put Kirk back on his woodcutter’s perch, with the axe in his hand and the top part of the tree lying on the ground, as it was now. I put myself, crouched down with my sketchbook, near the cone shape formed by the roots of the pandanus in the

centre. We were dwarfed by the trees that rose up and filled the picture. Antonio I placed near to me, his hand on the roots of the tree.

Kirk was now cutting through one of the creepers that hung down from one of the taller pandani.

‘Some sort of watery juice,’ he said, brandishing the cut end of the creeper, ‘quite a lot of it.’

‘And the tree,’ I said, as I drew the small branches breaking through the hanging creepers, ‘is it a new species?’

‘They look very different – thoroughly different – but I don’t believe I can pronounce them distinct species. There are particular differences I’d need to see.’

Back at the launch, I showed the sketch to Livingstone.

‘A good likeness,’ he said. ‘Have you put yourself in it to indicate the scale?’

‘Yes,’ I said, although that was not strictly true. I did, from time to time, insert myself into my pictures, usually in the corner, unobtrusive. It gave a sense of scale, yes, but it was also a record that I was there, not just observing, but there.

‘You really should colour it.’

‘Watercolour,’ I said, ‘or perhaps it warrants oil.’

‘I’d say this scene deserves oil.’

I felt a smile break out on my face. A commission from Livingstone! Now I was doing what I was meant to do. All this work on the stores would hopefully come to an end until we got to Tete, and I could concentrate on my art, and exploring.

Kirk and I had brought back specimens, which we put in my corner of the launch’s cabin. I had found some giant snails, bigger by far than any I had ever seen, and I gave these to Tom Davis. ‘Boil these for me, will you, Davis? Be careful not to break the shell.’

Davis gave me a significant wink. ‘Ah sir!’ he said. ‘You savvie this? You savvie dis good for eat?’

‘No!’ I laughed. ‘Not to eat! I want to preserve the shell!’

They had strange eating habits, the Kroomen. I’d been amazed around that time when someone had shot a monkey, and it had gone straight to their pot.

In search of fresh food for ourselves, Kirk found an unfamiliar fruit with an orange skin. He broke it up with his hands and put some in his mouth, immediately spitting it out again.

‘Strychnine,’ he said, still spitting. ‘The seeds are poisonous. But the flesh around them is edible. Quite good, actually. Try it.’

I chewed, nervously at first, but it was all right, and I savoured the refreshing coolness.

We saw lots of animals – various kinds of buck, wild pigs, badgers, otters, and of course hippopotami. What we really wanted, of course, was fresh meat, and while Bedingfeld, Livingstone and Skead set off in the launch to sound the bar, the rest of us went hunting.

For a full day we were unsuccessful, and we spent the evening – unhappily – eating salted pork again. We had seen plenty of buck, but we missed them, or merely wounded them, or they ran off while we were reloading. The closest Kirk got to anything was to a leopard, and this when he was otherwise occupied, and encumbered with all his loose clothing round his feet. He fired at it, but only wounded it, and fortunately for him it ran away rather than making an attack. Kirk did eventually manage to kill a reedbuck, but generally we only managed to wound the poor animals. I put a bullet into one and it collapsed to the ground, but when the others rushed towards it the beast leapt to its feet and ran off, only to die somewhere far away, providing a meal for distant scavengers.

The mission to the bar was even less successful. This Muselo, they found, when they sent the boats to sound the depth, also failed to offer an entrance for the *Pearl*.

‘It’s no good,’ Bedingfeld announced to all of us when we came aboard. ‘No – no good at all.’

‘Thank you, Commander,’ Livingstone muttered.

We had spent too long in this part of the delta. It was time to go back.

The best route we’d found was the first we’d gone up – a stream called the Kongone, which joined the Zambesi, or the Luabo, by another channel – cutting across – also, I think, called the Kongone, but I may be confused. We made our way back down this stream, back towards the *Pearl*. On the way we discharged our native guides when we passed the villages where we had picked them up. It was remarkable to watch them eat the food we gave them before the termination of their contract. It was the last good meal they would have for days, and they seemed to eat enough for all those days as well as this one.

For some time there have been differences and with some words with Capt. Bedingfeld, who comes out perhaps as the great man and forgets that he is but the equal of others when the Doctor is present. These differences have been with Baines and Rae chiefly but the worst disputes have been with Skead and the Capt. of the *Pearl*.

– John Kirk, journal, 10 June 1858

University of Cape Town

Zambesi Delta, 11 June 1858

Livingstone addresses Bedingfeld in the *Pearl's* cabin. 'Commander, you'll oversee the provisioning of the *MaRobert*. Captain Duncan, I must have a word with you about the way ahead.'

'Sir,' says Bedingfeld, 'I think I might have something to add about that.'

'I will manage with Captain Duncan, thank you,' Livingstone replies. 'Please, sir, get your own vessel in order.'

Bedingfeld looks as if he is about to shout, or laugh, but he says nothing in response. He turns quickly and walks off. 'Rae, Baines, Jumbo! Come with me!'

We take the whaleboat across to the *MaRobert*, and Bedingfeld sallies forth with a barrage of orders. I am to attend to the stores, and Rae to the engine. The Kroomen are to chop wood for the journey.

'And this!' Bedingfeld says, gesturing to our things in the cabin. 'What is all this?' He comes to the corner where Kirk and I have stored our collections of plants and roots and leaves. 'Rubbish!'

'Commander Bedingfeld,' I venture, 'these are—'

'Rubbish!' he bellows, picking up a box with a young pandanus shoot.

'—botanical specimens.'

'For heaven's sake,' he says, catching my gaze for a moment, and then heaving the box overboard. 'Am I supposed to command my little ship from a rubbish dump?'

Bedingfeld has spotted the snail shells on the floor. He kicks one of them towards the door. Little chips come off it as it rolls.

'Stop!' I cry, quickly moving in his way as he bears down on the other one. I crouch down and pick it up.

Bedingfeld looks at me with a wild grin.

'This is ... science, Commander,' I say softly.

'Then take it,' he snorts and turns away. '*Peter!*' he bellows. 'Jumbo, find me Tom Peter. This place needs cleaning up.'

I pick up a tray of plant specimens. 'I think it's best if I take these back to the—'

'*Peter!*'

Back on the *Pearl*, I find that the hold has been sadly disarranged by the ship's crew in my absence, so I take the spare Kroomen and start setting it in order. How wrong I was about my storeman's responsibilities becoming lighter. It is backbreaking work, but it gives me good reason to remain aboard the *Pearl* when she is taken up the river. Apart from his Kroomen, Bedingfeld navigates the *MaRobert* alone.

The launch goes ahead into the river, and the *Pearl* follows. Here we are, at last, taking a ship up the Zambesi. On deck we are elevated twelve feet or so, and everything takes on a different appearance from aloft: the muddy-coloured water, broken here and there by upwellings of sand, the grassy banks, the landscape stretching into the distance on either side, and the long, awning-covered steam launch, chugging ahead of us.

It is astonishing to think that this ship on which I am standing was the same one that transported us through the endless sweep of the Atlantic Ocean, and the rough seas around the Cape. How wondrous it must look to the natives on the shore, who have seen nothing this size in their lives. They must think that this was carved from the trunk of an unimaginably big tree.

We have gone some miles up when the deck shudders under my feet and a scraping sound wells up from below. A moment later the shouts and cries of the ship's men fill the air.

'Halt the engine!'

The *Pearl* has grounded on a sandbank. The *MaRobert*, I see, has slowed down and is preparing to turn back.

The ship's crew leap into action. The men run out a warp, Skead takes the boat and one of the men fastens the rope to a bundle of reeds. It is a frail hold, but it is enough for the purpose, and the *Pearl* comes off the sandbank.

Bedingfeld has brought the *MaRobert* alongside and is shouting words we cannot hear. He is shaking his fist, then pointing at the river. He seems to mean that Duncan should be following a route that he is pointing out.

For half an hour we proceed without incident, and then the *Pearl* runs aground again. Once more she comes off easily, and once more there are bellows from Bedingfeld down below.

Livingstone stands two paces back from the rail, looking at Bedingfeld. He is shaking his head ever so slightly.

Twenty miles up, we come to the branch into the narrow channel, and the *Pearl* follows the *MaRobert* into it. It is narrow, only thirty yards in places, and one would be able to pluck reeds from the boats alongside. It is a remarkable sight: the launch below,

threading her way through the ribband stream and turning in obedience to a sign from the captain's finger through the most intricate passages. There are some difficult turns in this channel, and I watch anxiously as the ship navigates one, and then the next.

I realize that we are all standing there and looking out in complete silence, and that no one has said anything for many minutes. I shift my position, so that I can get a view of Livingstone, who is standing somewhere behind me. The Doctor is leaning over the rail, staring at the stream ahead, and his lips are moving. He is praying, and, as I see that, I begin to pray too.

We keep at it, chugging up the narrow stream, each man praying to himself, clinging to a desperate hope, refusing to consider the possibility of being sent back again to where we started.

The *Pearl* turns into a bend in the river. There, just beyond, is the main channel. We are within sight of it. Not far to go now. The ship straightens out of the corner, but is she turning quickly enough?

'Hard a starboard!' a voice bellows.

There are urgent cries all around me, and then a deep juddering sound as the ship strikes the bank. The jolt seems more serious than the earlier groundings in the main stream. The men try to get her off, as before, but she remains stuck. On the bank, Duncan is pointing and directing. Gordon is hovering behind him. Bedingfeld, I notice, remains on board the *MaRobert*.

At this time the river is dropping with the tide. We will not be able to get her off tonight, so we make ourselves comfortable with a few hawsers made fast to the bushes.

Again, natives appear with things for sale. For the wax they want a penny's worth of calico per pound.

Before the morning tide, all hands help carry the chains, spare anchors and everything else of weight and put them into the boats, in the hope that this will lighten the ship sufficiently. But, when the waters rise, she remains unmoveable. Our next chance is the afternoon tide.

Under Duncan's direction, the spare spars are hoisted out, and at low water, when the men can stand all round the bows, these are thrust under the bottom with an empty water cask lashed to their ends, so that as the tide rises it might help to lift her, if only by the fraction of an inch.

Livingstone stands watching from the riverbank, a few yards away from me, but he does not notice my presence. Captain Gordon approaches him.

‘I am concerned about this, Dr Livingstone,’ Gordon says. ‘I am very concerned indeed. The Admiralty has charged me to help you, but also to take responsibility for Her Majesty’s ships. What if the *Pearl* is stuck here? What then?’

‘We will get her off,’ Livingstone says quietly.

‘But *will* we, Doctor? I’m not sure I share your confidence.’

‘Captain, please. She will come off. I’m sure Captain Duncan has done all that is necessary. There is nothing to do but wait for the afternoon tide.’

‘And if we do, what then? The river is falling. And what of this war?’

Livingstone shakes his head. ‘We will listen to God, Captain.’

In the afternoon, as the water rises, the *Pearl* begins to yield to the strain and at last she is torn from her bed of sand, to everyone’s cheers. Then all hands are put to work: hoisting up the spars and securing them outside the ship, and hauling in the ropes and chains. We set off again, the *Pearl* following the *MaRobert*. Both vessels enter the Luabo and steam a little way up before anchoring for the evening.

I am standing on deck when Bedingfeld comes on board and storms below into the saloon. I walk in after him and immediately wish I hadn’t. He and Captain Duncan are at each other again.

‘Yes, I do blame you,’ Bedingfeld is saying. ‘And, yes, I do believe that I would have done a better job than you.’

‘You, sir,’ says Duncan, ‘were supposed to show me the line. You took me into too sharp a turn.’

‘Rubbish!’ says Bedingfeld. ‘You could’ve had the channel marked with bright flags and you wouldn’t have been any good. If I would simply be allowed to do what I had been commissioned to do – to take charge of *navigating* this river – we wouldn’t have been in such a predicament. You, sir, seem to be unable to control your ship!’

‘Commander Bedingfeld!’ Livingstone’s voice erupts from behind me ‘You know very well that your authority does not extend to another captain’s ship.’

I take a step to the side, but now the wall is in my way.

‘Another *captain*?’ Bedingfeld spits. ‘I hardly think a mere ... merchant mariner is worthy of the title at all. I certainly will not defer to one.’

There is no way I can escape my position as a reluctant spectator to this quarrel. I wish I could be somewhere else, or turn invisible. I feel as I did as a little boy, when my parents threw harsh words at each other while I was in the room.

‘Do you refer to me, sir?’ Duncan says.

‘I certainly do – you who were still a ... steward’s boy long after I earned my first commission.’

Kirk and Rae have appeared at the door, curious, no doubt, what all the shouting is about. Now they stand there as awkwardly as I.

‘Mister Bedingfeld!’ Livingstone hisses. ‘That is *enough!* I will not allow you to disrupt the harmony of this ship for one moment longer.’

‘*Harmony?*’ I hardly think—’

‘Yes, *harmony*, though perhaps you do not know of such things. You suppose you are worthy of some special treatment, with a man to attend to your needs, when none of us has such a privilege – not even I, as the leader of this expedition.’

Bedingfeld makes to speak, but Livingstone continues.

‘And may I say, sir, that you have not proven your claim to be a great navigator. Nor have you been prepared to put yourself in any kind of danger. We crossed the bar into this river without you. The charting of the river, which is supposed to be your responsibility, has been done thanks to Mr Thornton and Mr Skead. From you, nothing.’

Bedingfeld’s eyes widen as Livingstone speaks. He remains utterly silent.

‘And I must say that Captain Duncan has followed a much straighter course in the *Pearl* than you did in the *MaRobert*. I fear that if you had been navigating the *Pearl* we would have been stuck miles back.’

Bedingfeld seems to stand taller than usual, having puffed himself up with a deep breath. And, then, he lets it all out, exhaling to a stoop. In looking away from Livingstone for a moment, he catches my eye. I try to look away, but I am too late. How I wish I wasn’t present to witness such things.

‘Sir,’ he says, his voice all aquiver, ‘I shall not respond to this here. I shall give it to you on paper.’

‘Very well,’ Livingstone replies, ‘but you must do it in a civil way, even on paper.’

Bedingfeld strides away, and I become even more aware that I am where I am not supposed to be.

‘Well,’ says Livingstone, to no one in particular, ‘I fear that the tropical climate has allied itself with the flaws in Captain Bedingfeld’s character. I pray that everyone else will act in union, if we are to realize God’s plan for this expedition.’

I have not been spoken to directly, but I need to make sure that he doesn’t think he lacks my support.

'Dr Livingstone,' I say, not knowing what I am going to say next. 'You ... you suggested I turn my sketch of the pandanus into an oil. I think I shall begin with that now. If my services are not ...'

He nods and waves me off.

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I cannot but feel deeply that, knowing as you do the opinions of men high in my service as to my professional character, you should have so soon and at a time when I supposed I should have been of the greatest service to you, have slighted me in the way you have and I trust, if your confidence in me is shaken, as it appears to be, you will allow me to return to England as soon as it can be done without inconvenience to the Public Service.

You can hardly suppose, Sir, that an officer of any standing can be spoken to Publicly in the way you thought it necessary to speak to me this evening without remonstrance. I feel that I have done my duty and exerted myself to the utmost to forward the objects of the Expedition and I intend to do so until an opportunity occurs when you can dispense with my services. In the meantime my position with the junior members of the Expedition must be considerably injured and I should feel obliged if you would, as much as possible, give me your orders in writing, that I may have it in my power to show that I have carried them out to the utmost of my power.

– Norman Bedingfeld, letter to Livingstone, 11 June 1858

University of Cape Town

Zambesi River below Nyika Island, June 1858

The *Pearl* had got off with the tide, but however much the level might fluctuate from the influence of the sea, there was a much larger shift coming from the other direction, from the waters that flowed from inland. The country was entering the dry season. The river was falling.

The next morning Bedingfeld was a sorry sight. At some stage during the night he had stormed away from the boats and had had an altercation with a plant with leaves like stinging nettles. His skin was covered with a fierce red rash. For once he wasn't full of talk, keeping silent as Kirk treated his skin. He must have come back during the night in considerable agony and said nothing until someone saw him in the morning.

Mr Skead took Bedingfeld's duty and went upriver with the launch. The party returned hours later with news of an obstruction ahead. A few miles up there was a group of islands and shoals that were difficult to pass. What did this mean? We were now in the main channel of the Zambesi. How was it possible that a ship could not go up her? This was, after all, God's highway. Did Livingstone's expression betray anxiety, embarrassment? He, after all, was the one who had painted the picture of this great waterway, and we were battling to take a vessel up it. But, no, I doubt I would have seen anything like that on his face.

The first concern at this stage was the safety of the *Pearl*. Captain Gordon remained agitated with worry that she might be stranded there until the next rains. It was decided to leave her anchored where she was, and to send a party aboard the *MaRobert* to investigate the river ahead. Their aim was to make a final assessment whether or not the river was fit for navigation by the *Pearl*, as well as to examine the progress of the rebellion, lest the hostility of the natives add to the dangers facing the ship.

The party set off, with Bedingfeld in charge of the launch. Livingstone of course was there, and with him were Rae, Thornton, Captain Gordon and other men from the *Hermes*. I remained behind with Kirk and Charles.

The natives brought fish to sell, among them a kind of barbel, which they seemed to revere in some strange way. It had been severely wounded by being stabbed, but when Kirk placed it in a tub of water, it gave off a series of electric shocks. I touched it, and had to pull my hand away after a while. Only our steward Tom Davis was able to pick it up. The natives called it '*shynyessi*'.

Kirk and I took one of the whaleboats and landed a little way up, where the reeds did not present too much of an obstacle, and walked to a nearby village, consisting of about ten huts, made of reeds. A few people were engaged making fish baskets of the reed, tied with twisted strips of Palmyra leaf. It contained two chambers made by short reeds projecting inwards.

One of the men showed us a pipe, made of a horn, with a side pipe of reed and a clay bowl. The horn was partially filled with water.

Kirk sucked the pipe and it made a gurgling sound.

'How original,' he said. 'The smoke passes through the water, which presumably will cool it down.'

On the way back, Kirk stopped and looked around to see if anyone was nearby.

'Livingstone showed me a letter last night,' he said, 'from Bedingfeld.'

'What did it say?' I asked, intrigued.

'He said that he objected to being treated the way the Doctor had treated him, and asked to be released from the expedition as soon as could be done without inconveniencing its progress.'

'Has it come to that? Already? What is Livingstone going to do?'

'I don't know. He wrote Bedingfeld a letter, accepting his resignation, but then he decided to keep by him for a little. I suppose his main concern is the state of the river and whether it will take the *Pearl*.'

'Bedingfeld *has* been impossible,' I said.

'No one will argue with you there. He's proud, too proud to be ordered around. But perhaps Livingstone could have handled him differently from the start.'

I nodded my agreement, but this kind of talk made me feel uneasy.

The launch returned after three days, having steamed as far as Mazaro. With them aboard the *MaRobert* were two natives, who appeared undaunted by what must have been their first passage aboard a steamer, or their first sight of a ship. They were singing and whooping and waving their fists in the air.

There were a couple of hundred of them, Thornton told us as soon as he had landed. Some were armed with bows and arrows, some with guns. 'They looked hostile, let me tell you.' His eyes darted between Kirk and me. 'I thought my time was up.' But Livingstone had called out to them, that they were English, not Portuguese, and pointed to the Union Jack flying above the launch. Some of the natives seemed to understand, and

gave a loud cheer, and soon they were running to the riverbank with things for sale, as always.

‘And the river?’ Kirk asked. ‘Will it take the *Pearl*?’

‘I don’t know,’ Thornton said. ‘The Doctor hasn’t said what his plan is. The river becomes very wide: in some places three miles across. But it is shallow, and it is shallowest where it is widest, with sandbanks blocking the way. I don’t know what he plans to do.’

This was something we would discuss. Livingstone announced that the entire party would meet aboard the *Pearl*, everyone, to discuss our future course. Before this he went with Captains Duncan and Gordon to have a word with them. I don’t know if Bedingfeld was included.

When Livingstone came on deck, we were all assembled, and no one had said a word for some minutes.

After consultation with Captains Duncan and Gordon, Livingstone announced, it had been agreed that the *Pearl* would make ready to depart for Ceylon, and the crew of the *Hermes* would rejoin their vessel and return to the Cape, taking Mr Skead with them. An island some fifteen miles upstream had been selected on which to house the expedition’s stores, its isolation from the land affording protection from any consequences of the war. Only when we were safely encamped would Her Majesty’s vessels leave us, and from there our ship would be the *MaRobert*, which would bear our expedition and its equipment to our destination.

I thought of all the stores in the *Pearl*’s hold. The food, the equipment, supplies, ammunition. Tons and tons of it. It would fall on me to see it offloaded and packed up. What a heavy thought. And, worse, this would slow us down considerably. But Livingstone did not show any sign of disappointment. It was as if the plan had always been to bring the *Pearl* to this point and then to assess from here the unlikely possibility that she could go any further. My understanding was that the plan had been the opposite.

Livingstone cleared his throat. ‘I must stress – and, Captain Gordon, Captain Duncan, I trust you will convey this very clearly when you are back in England – that there are particular conditions at work here. I would’ – he cleared his throat again – ‘not like it if you told stories that Dr Livingstone’s river is no good.’

There were reasons, he said, for our predicament. Clearly we had entered the river at the wrong season, when the water was falling, putting the vessels at risk. This had been

the result of various delays, no fault of our own. We had not had time to conduct a proper survey of the river, and if this were done, no doubt a better course would be found.

‘You will, I trust, tell everyone about the healthy climate,’ he said, ‘about the cotton – of excellent quality – that Mr Livingstone has found growing in one of the gardens, which the people say they would gladly cultivate for sale.’

Finally, he announced that Captain Gordon had very kindly offered the *Hermes*’ pinnace to the service of the expedition. With her sails, she would – should anything happen to the *MaRobert* – enable us to carry out the object of our enterprise without being reliant on the Portuguese. Livingstone then turned to Duncan. ‘Captain Duncan, as agreed, when it is time for the *Pearl* to go back down the river, she shall have the *MaRobert* to pilot her.’

‘Will that be necessary?’ Bedingfeld asked.

‘Commander Bedingfeld, do not press my patience.’

The island was called Nyika Island by the natives, but we renamed it Expedition Island. Kirk was to take charge of the camp there. I would stay on the *Pearl* and oversee the offloading of the stores. The framework of the iron house was put into the pinnace and other stores into the launch. The two boats set off that afternoon, leaving me to get up another cargo. It was harassing and dirty work, getting out crates and barrels and sacks and loading them onto the *MaRobert* and the pinnace, which made numerous trips there and back, ferrying everything to Expedition Island.

A short distance upstream from the ship was a small islet, which I went to explore with Captains Duncan and Gordon, when the launch was away and a load of stores was ready on the deck. We thought we might assist the transport by boating some of the heavy things up there during the *MaRobert*’s absence. In the meantime the launch returned, took the cargo I had left on deck, and was steaming up as we came down.

‘Mr Baines,’ Livingstone said, ‘I would appreciate it in future if you would be at your station when we come for the stores.’

‘I’m sorry, Dr Livingstone,’ I said, ‘I— we thought—’

‘Your thoughts need to be with the stores, Mr Baines. That is where your services are required.’

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone. I apologize.’

‘And, Mr Baines, my rifles. I don’t know where they are, but as you supervised the packing in England I assume you do.’

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone, I— I will find them.’

Where, I wondered, could they be? The ship had been loaded in such a hurry that there was no order to the cargo. I could hardly be blamed for that, but the Doctor was in no mood for misfortune. I feared that the rifles had been left in England. I prayed that it was not so.

The hold was in chaos. It had been emptied somewhat, but, once again, in such a hurry that what was left was strewn around as if this was a shipwreck. I crept around on my hands and knees, lifting boxes of medicines, looking beneath crates of glass beads, cases of scientific instruments, casks of salted pork. Where were they? What would I say to Livingstone? That it was not my fault? Until – after perhaps an hour – there they were, on the floor, beside a telescope. Thank God, I would not have bad news for the Doctor.

After days of toil, there remained only one load left to be taken up to Expedition Island. The launch arrived in the evening, bringing Kirk down to collect his things. He had been relieved on the island by Livingstone. I would go up the next day with the remaining stores. Then, as Livingstone had promised Duncan, the *MaRobert* would guide the *Pearl* back to sea. But Bedingfeld thought otherwise.

‘No,’ I heard him say to Duncan that evening, ‘I cannot allow this. You will have to make your way down without her.’ Or words to that effect.

‘Sir,’ said Duncan. ‘I have the Doctor’s word for it, and therefore the launch will come down.’

‘She shall not go down, if I can help it.’

‘Well, I was promised that, if I got the *Pearl* up as far as possible, I should have the advantage of her pilotage going back, and I think that, having fulfilled my part of it, it would be shabby if you drew back from yours.’

‘I don’t care what *you* think.’ Bedingfeld turned round to Captain Gordon and hissed something to him. I could make out the words ‘What do you expect!’ He turned back to Duncan.

‘I have to get the expedition up the river. This is not what my vessel needs.’

‘I can assure you,’ said Duncan, ‘that whether you like it or not, the launch shall come down. I have Livingstone’s promise.’

‘Livingstone?’ said Bedingfeld. ‘With all respect to the Doctor, Livingstone does not understand what is good for the launch. Has anyone looked at the rivets? They are under immense strain from the work she has been made to do. What she needs is not unnecessary wear and tear. What she needs is maintenance – if she is not to rust away before she reaches Tete.’

‘Sir, I am not going to argue with you. This is an order from Livingstone. Only he can change it.’

Bedingfeld shrieked. ‘How am I supposed to take charge of navigation when my authority is undercut again and again? The Doctor is a landsman. He does not know of such things. Oh, what is the use?’

I was happy to be outside the cabin this time, to be able to walk away from the scene of this altercation. When Livingstone came, no doubt there would be another, but I would be on Expedition Island by then. As I turned away, there, I saw, was Charles, nearby in the shadows, also listening to the argument. He looked at me, in a way that made me uncomfortable, as if I was somehow involved. I gave him a nod of acknowledgement, but the light was too murky to see if he responded.

I finished loading the stores, gave a hand to Kirk, who had to prepare the botanical samples to be sent to England, and said my farewells to Captain Duncan, Captain Gordon, Trevorrow the carpenter, and the other men who I had come to know.

The next morning we set off, Bedingfeld and Rae, Charles and I, while Kirk remained on the *Pearl* to get his things in order. There was heavy fog on the water. It was peaceful on the launch, its engine chugging, the river water broken in a large V, the shape that a flock of birds sometimes forms in flight.

‘It’s bloody ridiculous.’

I looked up. It was Bedingfeld.

‘It’s completely unnecessary, don’t you agree?’

‘You mean, the launch—’

‘They have Captain Gordon and Mr Skead – the *great navigator* – to see the *Pearl* over the bar. What do they need the *MaRobert* for? Duncan and Livingstone are just being bloody-minded. They’re just disagreeing with me because they can’t bear to agree with me. Wouldn’t you say?’

I had to admit I did think it was unnecessary, although I didn’t in fact say so out loud. I looked to see where Charles was. He was near the bow of the launch, but looking in our direction.

‘I don’t know,’ I said.

‘Mr Rae agrees with me. I thought you were enough of a nautical man to do so too.’

I looked at Charles, at Bedingfeld, and shrugged.

The commander snorted. ‘So you’ll agree with everything he says. You’re that kind of man, are you?’

‘I’m not,’ I said. ‘I just don’t think this is the place ...’

‘Well, *I* shall do what I know is right, regardless of who Dr Livingstone is.’ He returned his attention to the river.

The journey was otherwise uneventful. I saw several alligators in the water; nothing else. After a few hours we reached our destination. This Expedition Island was a low, grassy outcrop. The iron house had been erected near the shore, and three tents had been set up. I went to work immediately offloading the stores. Charles, I saw, had gone directly to his brother, and the two were in earnest conversation, no doubt about Bedingfeld.

I was relieved when the launch set off again, leaving me with only Charles and a few of the Kroomen. The house had been erected strangely: it looked as if some parts were missing. Some had been filled in with wood; others would still need to be done. I would have to look and see if there were reeds for thatching.

In the afternoon, Jumbo came running towards me from the water’s edge. He pointed at the river and cupped his hand over his ear. ‘The launch come,’ he said, still pointing.

It couldn’t be, I thought; if she was piloting the *Pearl* to the river mouth she would not arrive for another day at least. But to be sure I climbed onto the roof of the house, and there she was in the distance, chugging towards us, towing the pinnacle and whaleboats behind her. What had happened? Had Bedingfeld convinced the Doctor? I doubted it. But something was afoot. I would have to wait and see what.

Once the *Pearl* left us and made her way towards the sea, we were seven men, and twelve Kroomen with us, with our headquarters on Expedition Island. It had taken six weeks to explore the river delta and transport our stores this far. We were forty miles from the sea and more than two hundred miles from our next destination, Tete. It would take another three months to move the expedition and its equipment there.

PART III

THE RIVER

It will be gratifying for you to hear that I have been able to follow up without swerving my original plan of opening up a way to the sea on either the East or West Coast from a healthy locality in the Interior of the continent. And I can announce not only a shorter path for our use but if not egregiously mistaken a decidedly healthy locality. By this fine river flowing through a fine fertile country we have water conveyance to within 1° or 2° of the Makololo. The only impediments I know of being one or two rapids (not cataracts) and the people in some parts who are robbers.

– David Livingstone, letter written during his first journey across Africa to Arthur Tidman, president of the London Missionary Society, Tete, 2 March 1856

University of Cape Town

Cape Town, autumn 1860

'It makes no sense,' Chapman says, after I have told him my story. 'He is deceived.'

I nod, but I say nothing.

I have told the story so many times and in so many ways. Full accounts and brief summaries, depending on the response I see in the person's eyes. A story for people I know will believe me, and one for those who seem suspicious. There is always someone to whom I have to tell it for the first time, though this has become less common now. It is the nature of this place, a port city, where people are always passing through. But it will probably be like this for the rest of my life.

Chapman is returned from his expedition to South-West Africa. No doubt he has heard the essentials of the story from others, in the days since his arrival, but this is the first time he is hearing it from me.

Still he shakes his head. 'No. He has been deceived about you.' His eyes are full of sympathy. Or is it pity?

I can never tell exactly how a man is going to react. Some listen quietly, some respond with outrage. Some, I can tell, do not believe a word I am saying and think I have taken leave of my senses. Others – very few – are quick to condemn Livingstone. Most of them hold that the Doctor has been deceived, that he would not have done what he did unless someone had misled him. They utter words of support, but what are they really thinking? Are they anxious to leave the room as quickly as can be politely done, lest they be contaminated by my misfortune?

With Chapman it is different – I'm sure of it. We go back a long way. We travelled together, at Mooi River, ten years ago now. And he is now married to the daughter of Captain Roome, who gave me the passage from Lynn to here all those years ago. He will not doubt me. Surely he won't.

As I look at him, I feel my eye twitching again and I quickly turn away. This affliction: it bothers me most when I am talking to someone. I always liked to hold a man's gaze attentively, but now I find myself looking away after an instant. I fear that, in their eyes, it makes me appear shifty.

'Look,' I say, moving over to the desk in the corner of the room. I open a drawer. The letter should be in here, at the side – but where is it? Yes, over there. I open the envelope.

'Look,' I say. 'From Archdeacon Merriman – who I knew in the Eastern Cape, before he came back here. Shall I read it to you? He says he knows first hand of my ... here: he says he has ... *the most entire confidence in your uprightness of character*. And here. He says: *a desire for the acquisition of gain was most foreign to your nature*.' I strike the paper with my knuckles and read further: '*Dr. Livingstone must be under some misapprehension respecting you*. From the Archdeacon, James.'

Chapman is nodding.

'Here is another. From Syfret the lawyer.' I open the envelope.

'Thomas, it's all right.' Chapman holds up a hand. 'I believe you. I do.'

I stand there, silenced for a moment.

'I know you,' he says. 'I know you are not capable of these things.'

I take a deep breath. 'Thank you, James,' I say. 'It's just ...' I sit down on the couch.

We say nothing. I'm aware of the clock ticking. Logier's clock, which keeps me company through the dull days.

I look up at Chapman. Yes, of course he believes me. I take a deep breath. 'James, enough of my misery. Tell me about your journey.'

He describes his trek through the desert of South-West Africa, across the salt pans, but my attention has drifted for a moment: I'm not exactly sure how we got here.

'The plan now,' he says, 'is to set up a series of trading stations across the interior. And I've made a good start.'

A successful journey, then. The journey he was about to embark on when I last saw him, here in Cape Town, before the *Pearl* took me to the Zambesi Delta. A journey that seemed so much less glorious than the one I was about to begin.

The Logiers' servant comes in with a tray of coffee.

'Thank you, Lettie,' I say.

I stir in three spoons of sugar and take my cup.

'Perhaps you should join me,' Chapman says.

My cup rattles on its saucer. 'What do you mean?'

'Why don't you come with me when I return? Across South-West Africa, to the Victoria Falls, and then along the Zambesi to the coast.'

The Victoria Falls ... Along the Zambesi... The thought makes me giddy. But how?

'I have no money, James. Unless you were planning to pay me a salary.'

'Ha!' he laughs. 'If only I could afford to. But, Thomas, I could use your abilities. I'll need a boat, something that can be easily transported by ox wagon and assembled when we reach the river.'

A boat.

'I could ... I could design one for you.' Would there be money in it? Here I am, relying now on a man nearly ten years my junior.

'Build it for me,' he says. 'We'll share the costs. And in return I'll give you free passage and some necessary equipment. I can't pay you anything, but what you hunt will be for your own profit, and of course what you paint.'

For a moment I think: Yes. Say that you will. Work out the details later. But how is it possible? I am too weak. And how would I afford it?

I've done the occasional portrait, but whatever I've earned from that has gone towards doctors' bills, and to contribute to the food that Mrs Logier puts on the table.

I shake my head. 'It is an excellent idea, James, but I can't see a way.'

The problem of money. If I wanted to join Chapman, how would I pay my way? It is how it always has been, the journey with Angas, with McCabe: not enough money to support myself. This expedition with Livingstone was supposed to be my escape from all of that. It was supposed to make my name, so I could rely on employment on ventures sponsored by government, by the learned societies, by patrons interested in the exploration of the earth. And perhaps some modest profits, from my paintings, from a book, to keep Mother in some sort of comfort, and myself, when I become too old to rough it any longer.

'Think about it, Thomas,' he says. 'I won't leave for several months. Who knows? Perhaps a way will present itself.'

As the weeks pass, I look for news from the Zambesi, but there are only scraps. Some say a mission station has been set up. There are reports that a new steamer has been sent out. I hear that Rae has gone back to England, but he did not pass through the Cape. For every report there is a contradiction. Nothing is certain.

There are stories about Bedingfeld, of course. That he was full of bad reports about Livingstone and the expedition, but few would listen to him. Will they listen to me?

My walk to the post box has become a ritual, a ritual without purpose. I've stopped believing that I will get any response from the Foreign Office.

Until one afternoon, in the middle of May, it comes. An envelope with Her Majesty's seal. For some time I do not open it. I walk with it into the house, and settle on the couch. I turn it around and around, scrutinize all the marks on it, and imagine what kinds of words might be written inside.

I tear open the envelope and my eye jumps from phrase to phrase, greedy to consume the contents with a single gulp: *dismissal from the Zambesi Expedition ... Dr. Livingstone was entrusted ... Lord John Russell ... you are entitled ... reason to interfere ... twenty pounds ... Dr. Livingstone's discretion.*

What does it say? I read from the beginning:

Foreign Office, April 4th, 1860

T. Baines, Esq., Cape Town.

Sir,—in reply to your letter of the 19th of January last, complaining of your dismissal from the Zambesi Expedition by Dr. Livingstone, I am directed by Lord John Russell to remind you that Dr. Livingstone was entrusted as leader of that Expedition with full power to dismiss any member of it with whose conduct he might be dissatisfied, and I am to state that his lordship sees no reason to interfere with the exercise of Dr. Livingstone's discretion in the present instance.

The Secretary of State for the Colonial Department has, however, been requested to acquaint the authorities at the Cape that you are entitled to a passage home to this country.

If you should be indisposed to avail yourself of this offer, the Colonial Authorities will be instructed to cause the sum of twenty pounds to be paid to you in lieu of the expense of such a passage.—I am, &c.,

E. Hammond.

I read the words several times, until the hot flush of anger changes to numbness. Livingstone, it seems, could have acted as unjustly as he wished, and they – those in power in England – would simply give him their blessing. And the end of the letter – *ha!* Twenty pounds to buy a man's dignity. And his silence. I could do with twenty pounds, no doubt about that, but I will refuse it with pride. Of that much I am certain.

I rise to my feet and I am out on the street. The sun is bright in my eyes, and I have to squint. I am walking, walking, my letter in hand. People look at me strangely. I realize how cold I am. My feet – I am still wearing slippers. Did I close the door of Logier's house? But I am too far away now. Where am I going? Syfret. I must talk to Syfret the lawyer.

Green Market Square is bustling with people. I push my way through them to the other side, to the tall white building. The plaque on the door: *Syfret and Son*. Up the stairs

I climb, to Syfret's office. His secretary looks flustered as she stands aside to let me through the door.

'Mr Baines,' she announces to Syfret.

'Ah, Thomas,' he says. 'Come in.'

He is on his feet, his fingers press on my hand. He sits down again behind his large desk and straightens his tie. He beckons me to take a seat.

I show him the letter, and we talk. He asks me about the conditions under which I was appointed, about my instructions from the Foreign Office, about exactly what Livingstone did and said. He gives his advice and my head feels heavy.

As he walks me to the door, he looks at me with concern. 'Can I arrange you a cart home?'

Back at the house, I discuss the matter with Logier. I discuss it with whoever visits the house. Insist on a hearing, some say. Do nothing, say others. Don't bring further disgrace upon yourself.

Disgrace? What do you know about disgrace? You in your safe, unadventurous little world?

There is a knock on my door. 'Sir,' says Lettie, 'dinner is ready.'

Dinner? I thought it was still morning.

I sit at the table in silence. I see Mrs Logier looking at her husband with a worried look.

Back in my room, I sit at the desk and take out my writing paper. It is time.

Cape Town, 15 May, 1860

To the Right Honourable Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Sir,—I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of 4th April last.

I have rehearsed my reply over and over. I hardly need to think about what to write next.

I am perfectly aware that any member 'refusing to obey any reasonable order from the Commander,' subjected himself to forfeiture of pay. Let Dr. Livingstone prove this against me if he can. The Doctor's power of dismissal is also further limited by the following clause, in his letter of instructions to me:—

I take out my copy of my instructions and transcribe the relevant words.

'9th. You are distinctly to understand that your services are engaged for a period of two years, unless some unforeseen accident should happen to the Expedition, when you will be set free as soon as an opportunity is afforded of returning to England.'

I continue with my complaint, trying hard to remember everything that my legal friends have told me.

Even if Dr. Livingstone possessed this arbitrary power, I submit that he has no right to bring a criminal charge against any British subject, without giving himself the opportunity of defending himself in a fair trial, and still less to unite in himself the offices of accuser and irresponsible judge. Be this as it may, it will be remembered, that in my letter of January last, I asked only for an examination, as this is not granted, I do not require a passage to England.

Now, with a sigh of satisfaction, I complete my missive with words I have been burning to write.

I have already disclaimed all pecuniary motives, and therefore beg most respectfully to decline the money offered me.—I have, &c.

T. Baines

Let's see how they will respond to that. They will see now that I am not the type of man who will accept unjust treatment. I will carry on demanding a proper hearing until I am given one. I will make Livingstone see that he was wrong, that he was misled, that it all should have taken a different course.

If only I could meet him, talk to him. And then I think of Chapman's proposal, that I join him and return to the Zambesi. Imagine going back ... back there.

My sleep remains fitful, troubled by memories that are sometimes more vivid than what my senses take in when I am out of the house. The smell of oil from the *MaRobert*, the haze from the fires in the distance, the fizz of insects in the heat, the glint of the river at certain times of day.

The river. I had heard so much about this river. I had read Livingstone's account of it in *Missionary Travels*, and heard him speak of it at public meetings in London, in Cape Town, and in our company. And there I was, afloat on its waters. On the Zambesi. That

appearance that it took, in the last light before sunset, if one looked west: it was transformed in that moment, from the dull colour of mud to a glimmering silver sheen. I often looked that way, at that time of day. Because we were on the east coast of the continent, the sun set inland, not over the sea, as it does here. So, by looking this way, I was also looking up, up, up to where our destination lay.

I tried to paint this view, many times. But I never managed to capture this light. Perhaps it was not something that fell upon the eye only.

From the time we entered it, I was on or beside the river almost all the time. I was, in fact, in sight of the Zambesi for longer than any of the others. All that time I would look up, at sunset, at where we were going, or where we were supposed to have gone. At the beginning it was a promise, a promise of glories that lay ahead. But it would become different things as time went on. At what point did we realize that the Zambesi was not what Livingstone had led us to believe? The signs were there, from the start. They were there even before we got there – in the very difficulties in finding a way in.

But we had no idea what it would present us. The river got the better of us. And so we turned on each other.

[N]ow that Captain Duncan is gone I hope that you will be disposed to give that consideration to the rest of your companions which you will wish to be awarded for yourself. A pretty extensive acquaintance with African Expeditions enables me to offer a hint which, if you take it in the same frank and friendly spirit in which it is offered, you will on some future day thank me and smile at the puerilities which now afflict you. With the change of climate there is often a peculiar condition of the bowels which makes the individual imagine all manner of things in others. Now I earnestly and most respectfully recommend you to try a little aperient medicine occasionally and you will find it much more soothing than writing official letters. I shall strive to treat you with the same respect as heretofore, but at the same time other thoughts and duties are more in our line than long rigmorole letters to show our friends at home.

– David Livingstone, letter to Bedingfeld, 28 June 1858

University of Cape Town

The mood has altered with the departure of the *Pearl*. There is something about Livingstone's demeanour, when he lands early in the morning, that says very plainly that he is not to be crossed – though when was it otherwise? Captains Gordon and Duncan: I wonder where they are at this moment. Even if they met with entanglements on their way down, they must be well clear of the delta by now, somewhere in the open sea, the *Pearl* on her way to Ceylon, the *Hermes* back to the Cape. There's nothing in the Doctor's expression that says he is troubled by their departure, even though we have been left so far down the river. His manner, in the way he answers something said by his brother, though the words are lost to me, has a certain look, the look of a man in command.

He is pointing at the launch, now waving his fist, and then he walks off, towards the iron house, towards me. He hasn't seen me, because I'm standing in the shadow of the house, with the morning sun behind me.

'Good morning, Dr Livingstone,' I say, when he is a few paces away and still hasn't spotted me, so as not to startle him. (I could probably have retreated unnoticed.)

'Yes,' he squints at me, 'Baines. Good. The launch will need to be offloaded – of everything. Captain Bedingfeld believes her hull needs looking at. We'll do so tomorrow, but you'd better get started this morning. Everyone.'

'Yes, sir,' I say, glad of something clear that needs to be done, even though it is going to be unpleasant work. I wonder if Livingstone intends me to tell the others, or whether he will do so himself. I'd better mention it.

I walk in Charles's direction. He is standing looking at the *MaRobert*.

'We need to empty her of everything,' he says when he sees me. 'Bedingfeld had better hope he is right about this...'

'I hope our ship isn't rusting!' I say, with a bit of a laugh, trying to lighten the mood.

Charles looks at me for a moment. 'Good,' he says, and takes his leave.

When I arrived at the island on Friday, only Charles was here. The rest came up with the launch on its final journey up. Kirk and Thornton came ashore; the rest of them slept on board. It was the first occasion I had seen Charles on his own since the time we'd studied magnetism in Cape Town with Maclear. He is a stern fellow. So is his brother, of course, but with the Doctor it is always because something needs to be done, some

obstacle overcome. Charles seems to be stern even when there is nothing to be stern about.

The iron house was partly built when I arrived, and I set about thatching the roof with reeds to protect the contents from rain. It is full of the expedition's stores, leaving little space for living in. Three tents had been set up, two of which Kirk and Charles had already occupied. I slept in the third, but I didn't make myself at home there, because when others came we would need to share.

The island is about a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. It has a steeper bank on one side than on the other, like a flat rock that lies in the water at an angle. Our camp is at the water's edge, on the side that is raised, about fifteen feet above the level. The way up is rather steep, the bank of stratified sand and mud. It is hard work carrying the stores up the slope.

At noon we gather outside the iron house for a service.

'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding,' he recites, from the book of Proverbs. *'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.'* Now he looks up, and runs his gaze to each of us in turn, before returning to the text. *'Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil.'*

Livingstone closes the book and clears his throat.

'God shall direct thy paths,' he repeats. *'Even when we do not understand where our path lies, He will guide our feet. To our frail imaginations the way may appear to be blocked, but, if He has willed it, He will guide us around any obstacles in our way. We may, at the end of it, find that those obstacles were put there to test us, to make us stronger, to keep us humble. We must not think that we understand God's path for us: He knows what is best for us, even when we do not.'*

Livingstone, I know, was originally to go to China, when he first became a missionary, but the Opium Wars put an end to that. So he went to Africa instead. But what is one supposed to do in a case like that? Does one see the war as an obstacle that God wants one to overcome, and go to China regardless, or does one do something entirely different – as Livingstone did – and believe that this is the path of God being revealed? How does one know? How does one become so certain, as Livingstone is? I wish I could see things the way he does.

'Let us pray,' Livingstone says. I close my eyes.

'Oh Lord, teach us to have faith, to believe that You will guide us, and not to let our stubborn habits stand in your way.'

I open my eyes for a second. I am looking directly at Bedingfeld, quite accidentally, and he flashes a glance back at me. If his eyes had words they would tell me most sharply to mind my own business. I quickly close my eyes again.

‘Even when we do not understand the plans of Thee who makes our paths, help us to be not wise in our own eyes.’

For the rest of the service I avoid looking in Bedingfeld’s direction. I look at Thornton, who is paying no attention. No doubt he is in the world of his books.

‘We will do no more work today,’ Livingstone announces, nodding somewhat theatrically to Bedingfeld. ‘Tomorrow the launch shall be examined and for the remainder of today we shall observe the Sabbath. Captain Bedingfeld, I trust that you will be satisfied on both counts.’

‘I will, sir,’ says Bedingfeld. ‘It is only right.’

Everyone disperses quickly. I am glad of an opportunity to rest. I have my journal to attend to. I have fallen a few days behind: I am still on 25 June and today is the 27th. I need to write about my arrival at the island, and I do so.

... I stretched a tarpaulin over the rafters as soon as the launch was gone and next morning began thatching them with long reeds.

In the afternoon Jumbo told me that he heard the engine of the launch and, though I doubted the possibility of it as I understood she was to accompany the Pearl to the mouth of the river, I climbed the roof and saw in the distance her light and the sail of the pinnace given us by the Hermes and which deeply laden with coals she was towing up. She arrived about 7 or 8 p.m. and we heard that Capt’n Duncan, having taken his ship beyond the most difficult part of the river, had consented for the sake of forwarding the expedition to dispense with her attendance.

That is all I need to record. But I wonder how much more there is to it. Kirk tells me that Captain Duncan released Livingstone from his promise some time earlier, but that Livingstone told no one, not even Bedingfeld. Bedingfeld, he said, had carried on protesting when there was no reason to.

I must keep reminding myself that what I write in my journal is not only for my own eyes. Perhaps it helps that I’m writing it as an extended letter to Mother: it stops me from putting down thoughts that are too private. But of course they will be sent to the Royal

Geographical Society. I remember always that there may be less familiar eyes scrutinizing what I write.

Kirk also told me that before the *Pearl* left, Livingstone had presented him with pages and pages of official letters to copy. This was usually Charles's job, but of course Charles had come up to the island with me.

'I hardly had any time to write anything of my own,' Kirk told me. 'But the Doctor – he didn't stop. He must have been up all night writing.'

'What was he writing?' I said.

'The official letters were to Lord Malmesbury. Livingstone wanted to assure the Foreign Office that the *Pearl's* turning back was not reason for dismay. But I don't know what he wrote after that, or who he wrote to.'

Perhaps some of it was personal. Perhaps he was writing to his wife. A letter that would be taken by wagon from Cape Town to Kuruman, where Mrs Livingstone would be heavy with child.

I look upstream. I wonder how serious this war is, how widespread, how long it will go on. Will the Portuguese reassert control? Why does the Doctor seem so impartial, when the Portuguese have been so helpful to him in the past?

Monday morning brings hard work once again. The launch must be cleared of all remaining cargo so she can be hove down for examination, as Bedingfeld feels necessary.

'I will not be told that I cannot look after my vessel,' Bedingfeld says, 'certainly not when she is my responsibility. The rivet heads are rusting off and need painting.'

'This time I will indulge you, Captain Bedingfeld,' Livingstone says. 'This time only.'

My job is to oversee the offloading of the stores and to try to ensure that things stay in some sort of order. Unpleasant as the work is, it's better than being out there.

The launch is heeled over by a tackle from her mast-head to the pinnacle, but from the flatness of her bottom it is impossible to incline her very much and we cannot even raise the turn of her bottom above the waterline. But one can see enough to get a sense of the state of her hull. It does not appear to be in too troubling a condition.

'Now,' says Livingstone, 'the rivets. Commander Bedingfeld believes the rivets are rusting off. Dr Kirk, how do they look to you?'

Kirk clambers a little closer and shifts his position to get various views.

'I must say,' he answers after a while, 'to my eye they seem perfectly good.' He leans down a bit lower. 'No sign of rust.'

‘Thank you, Dr Kirk. Mr Baines? How do they appear to your eye?’

The moment he addresses me, I have, for a few seconds, no idea how to respond. Livingstone seems so angry. What would I say if I *did* see rust? Would I contradict him?

A shiver runs down my back: that feeling, as I hurtled down the dark stairs, and somewhere behind me, the rattle of footsteps, my name being called. *Thomas!*

I forget for a second: what is the answer Livingstone wants now? But it’s all quite simple: the rivets are clearly fine.

‘Yes,’ I say. ‘Yes, I agree. They are ... not ... I cannot see any rust.’

‘Thank you, Mr Baines. I am *very* relieved that our artist can see what is plainly before him. Now, the river is falling and we are losing precious time. But if Captain Bedingfeld has it on divine authority that rust can appear on a good ship, then we must delay so he can see for himself what common sense tells the rest of us.’

‘Am I wrong, sir,’ Bedingfeld says softly, ‘to be concerned about the state of the vessel that is now to transport us all the way to Tete? Is that so wrong?’

‘What I do see is this,’ Livingstone says, seeming not to have heard Bedingfeld’s words. ‘The deck is filthy. Commander Bedingfeld, you seem concerned with imaginary problems at the expense of real ones. I suggest you get the men to scrub the deck.’

‘Ah, so now you are happy to stay here for a while,’ Bedingfeld snaps. ‘I thought you were for leaving immediately.’

‘I am concerned, Bedingfeld, for the health of my men. I hope you will acknowledge that I must take responsibility for that, even if it offends some misguided sense of your authority over this vessel.’

Bedingfeld stays silent for a second. Then he bows deferentially. ‘As you wish.’

There is plenty of work to do on the launch, now that she is our main transport up to Tete. The deck-house needs caulking to render it watertight, and I busy myself with that.

I have an idea to make a gangboard outside so that the Kroomen might pass to and from the helm without walking over the roof. In the afternoon I begin. It is satisfying to work with wood, reading its grain and working around its blemishes, fashioning it with metal tools into something practical.

Kirk, whose work keeps him at the camp most of the time, comes near when I am hard at it. He nods appreciatively at my handiwork. ‘Quite the carpenter,’ he says. Livingstone, unfortunately, is not nearby at the time.

I see him later, when I am loading the pinnace with Rae. Livingstone comes striding towards us. His hair flops against his forehead with each step. Something has angered him.

‘Mr Rae.’ He starts speaking before he has reached us. I am glad now that he is not coming for me. ‘Mr Rae, I would like your advice on the capabilities of the *MaRobert*, if you please.’

‘Of course, Dr Livingstone, what is it?’

‘Bedingfeld’ – the name has become a curse on Livingstone’s lips – ‘believes that she can take no more cargo than she has already. I find this hard to believe. We have twenty-five tons to transport upriver; Bedingfeld would have the launch take a minuscule fraction of that.’

Rae’s lips are pressed tightly together. He shakes his head slowly. ‘I can’t say I agree. The middle section is so much heavier than the outer ones. I think two tons or so in the fore and aft sections would – if anything – *steady* the launch. It would ease the wear and tear on the bolts joining her.’

‘Thank you.’ Livingstone laughs and looks to the heavens. Rae, too, has a smile on his face. ‘Thank you, Mr Rae. Mr Baines, please make sure that the launch is loaded exactly thus. Two tons in the forward section, two tons aft.’

‘Yes, sir,’ I answer.

This will cause more unpleasantness. Bedingfeld won’t be pleased.

I learn from Kirk that Livingstone intends to set off within days for Sena, or Tete, depending on how they find the condition of the river and the state of the war. We have taken a stroll to the north of the island. Thornton is with us.

‘I am to remain here and take charge of the camp,’ Kirk says.

‘I’ll probably be required to stay too,’ I surmise, ‘since the bulk of the stores will be left here. Although they’ll need someone to look after the stores that they deposit wherever it is that they get to.’

‘I believe – Mr Thornton – that the Doctor intends you for this task,’ Kirk says, with an encouraging smile. ‘I’m not sure if he has mentioned this to you—’

‘N–no.’ Thornton shakes his head.

‘—and I can’t be sure that he has made his mind up about this. I’m sure he will communicate this to you when he does, but it might be wise to prepare for either possibility.’

‘To – to Sena? Or Tete?’ Thornton says. ‘And I’m to remain there on my own? No, he hasn’t said anything to me about this. When is he planning to leave?’

‘As soon as he can. He is very keen to get going. He seems very annoyed by these delays.’

We have come to a small creek between the island and the bank. The water looks inviting: it would be a pleasure to jump in, to cool down, and wash off the sweat and grime.

'I wonder if it's safe.' Thornton is thinking the same thing.

'I don't think it's worth risking it,' says Kirk, peering left and right to make sure.

'How far do you suppose this war goes?' I wonder out loud.

'I have no idea,' replies Kirk. 'We can only hope that Livingstone manages to keep the peace as he has so far.' He looks at Thornton, who has seen this at first hand.

'Yes,' says the boy, 'they became friendly enough, the rebels, when they discovered who we were.'

'I had a visit here,' Kirk says, 'when you were down at the *Pearl*, from a Portuguese officer and soldiers. They seemed to have some fear that we should not be able to protect ourselves among the natives, and gave me a letter for the Doctor, from the Portuguese Officer at Mazaro, offering assistance and protection to us. But the Doctor rather turns up his nose at protection from the Portuguese.'

'I suppose he doesn't want to take sides,' says Thornton.

'The Portuguese can't be very happy about seeing rebels attached to our party,' I venture.

We are startled by a loud cracking sound. There, across the bank, an alligator thrashes through the reeds and takes to the water. Nearby, another does the same, then another. They appear like logs floating in the water, though the first one has disappeared beneath the muddy surface. So much for any thoughts of a bathe in the river. How unfortunate.

'This is an unhealthy place,' says Thornton. The poor boy appears quite ill, and he looks to Kirk and me with the expression of a young man who does not know what to make of anything, or what he is supposed to do.

'Go on, Richard,' I tell him. 'Find a shaded place at the camp, and lie down and get some rest.'

'Yes,' he says nervously. 'Yes, I think I will. Thank you, Mr Baines.'

I watch as he picks his way back, carefully checking his footing.

'He is right,' says Kirk, 'about the unhealthiness of this place. We do need to get further up as quickly as possible. The Doctor has reason to be impatient.'

The air in the distance is hazy. There are fires burning somewhere beyond. What do they mean? Thornton has disappeared from view.

'Poor boy,' Kirk says again. 'I think this is all a bit much for him right now. But he'll manage. He reminds me of myself when I arrived in the Crimea, several years ago. Not a

clue what to do, but certain that there was something I was *supposed* to be doing. More taxing than the work itself, really.'

'He doesn't look well. I think the climate is getting the better of him.'

'Oh, that's clear enough. But I think what's ailing him more than anything is the bickering of his superiors, and of course the fighting that's happening around us.'

'I was also nervous when I first landed at the Cape, just a year or two older than Thornton. And again when I arrived at the frontier. Did you – when you were in the Crimea – did you ever meet Florence Nightingale?'

'No.' Kirk laughs. 'You'd think I might have. But when I arrived in Constantinople the military doctors there didn't really seem to want us young graduates at all. We were forced to be tourists for a time, as no work was given to us. I can think of worse places to be a tourist, of course. We even visited Greece – we were a group from Edinburgh – and climbed Mount Olympus, in fact. I was more a botanist than a doctor then. I found a new species of fungus there, which Mr Hooker at Kew was most excited about. *Muscari latifolium*, he named it – my muscari, fancy that!'

I give an approving nod. I often have to remind myself that Kirk is more than ten years younger than me. Only twenty-five, but his manner is so much older. He's a remarkable fellow.

'But we ended up doing medical work,' he continues, 'and lots of it. Six months at a British hospital in the Dardanelles. Men with injuries all right, but most of them down with awful diseases – cholera, mostly, and it's not pretty in those conditions. But, no, I never did meet Florence Nightingale. Pity. Imagine – having worked with her *and* Dr Livingstone.'

'It's strange, though,' I venture. 'With Livingstone, I mean. I expected ... something different. I almost imagined this expedition would be ... something else. Perhaps greatness from a distance appears more solid, more—I don't mean to say he's not a great man. It's just—'

I'm not sure I'm expressing myself properly, but Kirk is nodding.

'I know what you mean,' he says. 'But if you think of all he's done – it's what you're saying, isn't it? His journey across this continent is such a remarkable achievement in newspapers, and in people's conversations in England – in his book! But there must have been problems, setbacks – like the *Pearl* leaving us so far down. Perhaps *that's* the greatness of the man – to rise above it all, and press on, and achieve what he set out to achieve, in spite of all of it.'

‘You’re right. That’s exactly it. I expected it to be more like his book – precisely! – but the book of *this* expedition will put all these setbacks in their place, next to what we do achieve. But this disagreement with Bedingfeld...’

‘Livingstone showed me a letter that he wrote to the captain, putting him in his place. It is not going to please him, not one bit. I fear there is an evil spirit between the two of them.’

I nod. ‘I wish they wouldn’t antagonize each other so. I’d expect Livingstone—’
Someone’s behind us. I turn around.

‘Discussing our salvation, gentlemen?’ It is Rae, a short distance away. How has he come so close without our noticing? ‘What a perfect day to be stranded on an island so far from anywhere.’

‘Not at all, Rae,’ Kirk says, turning to let him into our company. ‘We’re discussing how different it is *being* on an expedition with Dr Livingstone, instead of merely reading about it.’

‘Ah yes, Livingstone.’ Rae’s accent is stronger than Kirk’s, or the Doctor’s.
Livingstone comes out *Levingstone*. ‘So you think we’re in trouble then?’

I make to speak, for the question is addressed to me, but Kirk answers more quickly. ‘Not at all. But don’t you think it’s strange – living this, day to day, unlike the folk in England a year from now, who’ll hear a much briefer story that passes so quickly over how Livingstone’s expedition came to achieve what it achieved?’

Come to think of it, Kirk also pronounces it *Levingstone* now and then.

‘Indeed,’ says Rae. ‘Indeed. So, Dr Kirk, did I hear you say you’d worked with Florence Nightingale?’

I take my leave, and make for the camp.

In the morning I am at it again with the gangboard. I have learnt that I am indeed to stay here with Kirk and Charles, and some Kroomen. We are to protect the stores and make scientific observations. Charles is to try the photographic apparatus.

Everyone else is to go upriver, to Sena or Tete, depending on the progress of the rebellion and the consequent condition of the country.

Kirk has been working at the iron house from where we will take scientific observations. We have made a start. Last night we got out the astronomical telescope, but we were unable to get a clear image of the night sky, because of the refraction from the hot air. When I looked through, the sky appeared to shimmer and the stars were blurred.

Kirk has taken out the meteorological instruments. The marine barometers are of no use now, and one of the mountain barometers is smashed. We will have to treat the remaining ones preciously.

Today some natives come from the rebels' camp. Dr Livingstone shows them his galvanic magnetic machine and gives them a shock with it. They immediately give it the name '*shynyessi*', which is the electric fish that the natives brought aboard the *Pearl*, which gives a shock when one touches it in the mud. No one thinks to give them the English name, as we usually do, perhaps because in this case our name is so much more cumbersome, and there is some poetry in the way that they describe it.

In the evening I go for a walk around the island. I have my rifle with me, but take care not to go too close to the shoreline, in case I stumble upon any alligators or hippopotamuses.

On my way back, but still some way from the camp, I hear voices in the dark. I stand still and listen.

'Well, you know what I think about that.' Livingstone's voice.

'Yes, yes, I know very well.' It is Charles. 'Always the same answer.'

I can't see them, so they won't be able to see me. There is only a sliver of moon, and there are tall reeds between us.

'And, besides, Charles, it's too late now. You're here. And this is the best place for you.'

'It's—'

'Do you really want to go back to where you were before? The way things were in America? Do you?'

There is no answer from Charles.

A dry reed crackles under my foot. I crouch down.

'Just think where you've come from, Charles. Think where both of us have come from. The workhouse. We've pulled ourselves up—'

'Well, a fat lot of good it's done me!'

'Who's there?' Livingstone's voice is directed outwards. Towards me.

I remain dead still. Surely they can't have heard me.

'It's nothing. Some creature. This island is full of them.'

I feel more terrified than I've felt at any other time on this expedition. More than when the waves were crashing onto the *MaRobert* when we attempted to cross the bar. More than when I found myself feet away from an alligator. I have let the moment pass – the moment when I could have piped up, 'What? Is someone there? Dr Livingstone. I

thought I heard voices but I couldn't be sure.' Now I can be found out, for lurking here, for eavesdropping, when in fact I stumbled here by accident. I remain crouched down and hope they won't come my way. Time seems to stop as I wait, but eventually they walk off, and I wait for another few minutes before daring to move.

In the morning I learn that Bedingfeld has written Livingstone another letter of resignation. I learn this from him directly, while I am helping to load the launch. He speaks as if he is talking to himself, but, because I am the only one in earshot, it is obviously meant for me to hear.

'I've had enough,' he mutters. 'I won't be insulted like this again.'

I say nothing in reply.

'I've told him I'll stay on until he can find a replacement,' Bedingfeld says, more directly to me now, 'but I will not stay on indefinitely. I won't tolerate this kind of treatment.'

'Do you ...' I stumble for something to say '... think that's possible? That the Doctor can find someone else, from out here?'

'Oh I'm sure there are plenty of fools in England who Livingstone can convince to come out here at a moment's notice. But they'll not fare any better than I have. He'll see then how wrong he's been. No, I don't expect it will happen in a hurry, but I can't go on as if nothing is wrong, can I? Maybe Livingstone will treat me differently now.'

Why, I wonder, is Bedingfeld confiding in me? I do think he has a point about some of this, but we're not exactly friends.

Mercifully, Kirk and Thornton appear and put an end to the conversation.

Together we remove the cabin table to make more room and stow boxes of biscuit in its place. I go back to the iron-house, and when I return with the last armful of stores, Bedingfeld is shouting orders to the Kroomen. Rae is calling from below. Livingstone is giving last-minute instructions to Charles. Thornton rushes up to me before boarding.

'Thomas,' he says, 'look after Crab, will you?'

'Yes, of course,' I reply.

And then they are gone.

I watch as the *MaRobert* steams into the distance. She disappears from view, and soon there is no sign of her smoke and the water becomes still. It is as if she has been absorbed by the jungle.

The latter part of your letter, I need scarcely remark, had been better addressed to a child. That my letter should have come to you after you had decided not to go down the river is not to be wondered at, as you seldom condescend to let me know your plans, and heard it in the usual way (after my letter was out) through Mr Rae from the Master of the Pearl. Had you sent for me and told me, you never would have had it; and most of the misunderstandings would have been avoided and the Expedition benefited, had you treated me as your second in command and allowed me to know your plans and see your wishes carried out, at *least* as far as the getting to our destination, which, I think, concerns me more than any other member of the Expedition. I do most earnestly hope that for the great cause we have both at heart, that of spreading civilization and the gospel among the heathen far in the interior, we may pull together until an opportunity offers of your getting a better man, or one that you will like better, when I will gladly return to England. In the meantime I will do my best to carry out your wishes as far as I know them, and I trust I shall go home feeling I have done my duty, however unpleasantly situated and disappointed at finding my position anything but what I expected it would have been when I volunteered...

Your Obd. Humble Servant
Norman B. Bedingfeld
Commander, R.N.

– letter to Livingstone, 30 June 1858

Expedition Island, July 1858

Our garrison now consists of Dr Kirk, Mr Livingstone and myself, with three Kroomen and Mr Thornton's little dog Crab.

The camp is tolerably comfortable. I finished thatching the roof earlier this morning. The iron house itself is uninhabitable because of the stores stacked up inside, but the overhanging eaves form a verandah, now protected above by thatch, and enclosed on the sides by sails and in front with piles of boxes. In this space stands the table from the *MaRobert*, and boxes for chairs. We even have old tins for salt cellars, sugar jars and butter dishes.

'How was the morning shift?' Kirk asks Charles.

'Uneventful, thankfully,' says Charles. 'But I'm not feeling well. I think I've caught a chill.' He turns away and coughs quite seriously a few times. 'I hope it is only that.'

'I'll give you something for a cold, and let's keep an eye on it. Thomas, you and I will both have to do a shift of guard duty the next night or two.'

'Fine,' I say. 'It's not too taxing. As long as the Kroomen take over in the middle of the night!'

Breakfast consists of biscuit and salted pork, as always. We have a good view of the river and the vegetation beyond from our table. The clouds are flat-bottomed and tower up high into the sky. It gets cold during the night, but it is beginning to warm up. The days are hot, even though it is the middle of winter.

'I'm not sure that the tents are a good idea,' Kirk says. 'When the afternoon air starts cooling, the tents remain hot from the midday sun, which is not healthy. I've rigged up a hammock here in the open; you might think about doing the same.'

'What, and be exposed to the cold air at night?' Charles scoffs.

'Well, you'd then avoid the transition between hot and cold every time you get in and out of your tent. That might be why you've got sick.'

'Well, it's too late now. I'm sure warmth is the best thing for me now.'

There is a tapping sound above us – rain – which swiftly turns into a rumbling clatter. It is a heavy shower.

'Good thing we've finished the thatching,' I say. No sooner are the words out of my mouth than water suddenly comes gushing down upon us! All three of us leap up from the table.

'Oh no,' cries Charles, 'this won't do me any good!'

'Get in the tent,' Kirk tells him. 'Baines, come – the tarpaulins! Jumbo!'

I climb up onto the roof, making sure I keep my feet to the beams. Jumbo follows me and I instruct him to do the same. Kirk and Tom Coffee pass us a tarpaulin, then a sail, and we start spreading them over the roof.

In no time I am drenched, but I can't get any wetter, and soon we have the roof covered and waterproofed.

The meridian altitude of the sun by my observation, corrected for index error, is $48^{\circ} 25' 47''$, giving when worked out latitude south $18^{\circ} 23' 56''$. Dr Kirk's latitude is $18^{\circ} 22' 57''$, differing 59 seconds or about a mile from mine. I do not think either of them perfectly agree with the position as given by Mr Skead.

According to the tide poles that we have set up, the river appears to fall about one and a half inches per diem, and Kirk by measuring levels on the beach estimates its fall since the highest flood to be about eight feet.

In the evenings we try several stars, but all the artificial horizons and mercury have been taken on board the launch. I try with ink and Kirk with a spirit-levelled plate of glass, but neither of them gives a sufficiently definite image. My artificial horizon is lent to Dr Livingstone.

Towards the end of guard duty one morning, two canoes approach the island. The smaller one, with just two people aboard, passes us and continues on its course, trailing a train of ripples in the unbroken water. The other, much larger, steers in towards the landing place. There are five men aboard, and three children. It is laden with bags of goods.

The men are muscular fellows, clad only in loincloths. One of them comes forward from the rest and cries out in Portuguese. Kirk answers back, using words that are beginning to become familiar to the ear.

'They want to trade,' Kirk tells me, and approaches them. I beckon Jumbo to join us, and half-run to catch up with Kirk.

The headman is short but broad-shouldered, as are so many of the natives here. He has something hanging over his shoulder: a battle-axe, with the shaft against his chest and the blade over the shoulder. He must be in his thirties, though it is difficult to tell exactly. He is chattering away to Kirk and pointing as he does so, up the river, and then to his canoe, where the other men are opening the bags. They have rice and millet. The children

are sitting quietly, staring at us with wide eyes and inscrutable expressions. I wonder if they are passengers or cargo.

‘His Portuguese is much better than mine,’ Kirk tells me, ‘but I can understand some of what he says. They come from Mazaro. They saw the launch there two days ago. He doesn’t seem unhappy about that, which is good news.’

The man points to himself and then at our feet. He repeats the gesture a few times, still chattering in Portuguese, then crouches down and makes a sewing motion with his hands above his own foot.

‘He is a shoe maker,’ Kirk exclaims, and, indeed, the fellow is imitating the motions of the awl and double thread in a very tradesman-like way. How strange: that this native, in the middle of nowhere, should know how to make shoes, when he goes barefooted himself. Who taught him his trade, and why did they choose him and not some other fellow? Did he show some aptitude with some other craft, weaving perhaps? I wonder how many of his shoes are being walked about in, in these strange places that await us upriver.

Charles and the other two Kroomen have made their way down. Charles is carrying two rifles, one of which he hands to Kirk. He looks at the headman while talking to us out of the side of his mouth. ‘What do they want?’

‘Aah!’ says the headman, and calls out to one of his men. The fellow fetches something from the canoe. A rifle.

‘Aha!’ the headman laughs, pointing at our firearms and then at his own.

‘Nothing to worry about,’ Kirk tells Charles. ‘They seem friendly. They saw your brother two days ago.’

‘Good.’ Charles nods. ‘I trust my brother is well?’

Kirk looks at him, uncertain if this is a question Charles expects him to translate.

The headman holds his rifle up for us to see. It is an old flint musket, not very good quality. It is of English make but has no government proof stamp on it. There is an engraving of an elephant on the lock plate. I point at this and speak the Kafir word for elephant, *Endlovu*. The word in his language might well be similar.

‘Aah!’ the man says, laughing with recognition, and sallies forth with a stream of words that I don’t understand. He points at the icon and then to us.

‘Eenglis?’ he says.

‘In English?’ I say. Good, he wants to know the word in English. ‘Elephant. *E-lephant.*’

He nods. 'Sim, sim. *Elefante*.' But from his gestures it seems he wants something more from me.

'It is the same word in Portuguese,' Kirk explains to me. '*Elefante*.'

Still the headman looks at me. Does he think I am withholding the English word? Would I be able to explain to him that the word is the same in both languages?

Charles holds up his rifle for the fellow to see and taps it on the base. 'Let's show him what a proper rifle can do,' he mutters. He pulls back the hammer, raises the weapon to his shoulder and then looks at the headman, with a smile and a little wobble of the weapon, to make sure he has the appropriate attention.

I'm not sure about the wisdom of this, but any such thoughts are thrust aside by the crack of gunshot, and all eyes dart to the other side of the river, where Charles is aiming. It is not a great distance across the water, so the ball flies over the opposite bank without a sign.

The natives start laughing and shaking their heads.

'Is this a good idea?' I say.

'I beg your pardon?' Charles replies, objecting to the question with a stare.

'I— We don't want them to become familiar with our arms, or how to handle them ... do we?'

'No,' says Kirk, 'but we don't want them to think our weapons don't work, which is what they seem to think now.' The natives are still talking among themselves. 'Perhaps we should demonstrate just once more.'

Kirk directs the headman's gaze upstream, to the long expanse of water that stretches into the distance, and then points his own rifle in that direction and fires a shot.

The noise resounds and fades and then – *plop* – there is a splash on the water the best part of a mile away, twelve hundred yards or so.

This has a very different effect on the natives' minds. 'Ohhh,' they intone, and their chatter now has a much more respectful sound.

The natives point to their rice and millet. They wish to trade. Kirk indicates that we want four bags of millet, and then the haggling begins. They want calico, of course, but as always they try their luck and demand too much.

While this is going on I fetch my sketchbook. They have agreed on one fathom of checked calico for the millet.

I ask the headman if he will stand for a sketch. It's a difficult idea to convey to someone who does not share one's language, or even the very concept of art, but it's something that I have done many, many times, in Africa and Australia, with varying

degrees of success. It requires a quick cartoon of something that the subject can see – a tree, a mountain, preferably another person. Then I gesture to the man himself. Sometimes people understand immediately. Sometimes they never do.

This headman gives me an unexpected response. He shakes his head but calls another of his men, and instructs him what to do. This fellow has a bow and arrow, and I mimic the pose I wish him to take: legs slightly bent, the bow in one hand and the arrow in the other. As I take a step back, he moves too, so, between us, the headman and I have to get him back into position.

Now I can sketch. I stand to his right, slightly behind him. The way he is standing, the muscles in his calves are prominent, as are those in his back and shoulder. The headman stands watching as I work.

In a few minutes his fellow's form begins to take shape on the page. The headman does not recognize it immediately, but quite soon he gasps and begins laughing. My subject turns to see what the fuss is about.

'Aiee!' the headman exclaims, leaping at the man and manoeuvring him back into position. He then looks at me, and at the paper, and at me again, beckoning.

I continue. I'm not enjoying being directed like this by the headman. I wouldn't mind if I were on my own, but somehow it is different with Charles and Kirk watching, especially Charles.

When I am finished, the fellow is called from his pose to come and look at his likeness.

He gasps and laughs too. But it's different from the headman's reaction. It always is among such people. The subject is not responding with the surprise of recognition. His response, his surprise, is the realization that this is what he looks like. These are not people who look at themselves in mirrors.

'What is his name?' I ask the headman, and Kirk, who must translate.

'Er ... *nome*,' Kirk says to him.

I point to the fellow and echo Kirk. '*Nome*.'

'Ah,' says the headman, and responds with a string of conversation, from which it appears, after some confusion, that the man's name is Zeno.

'Zeno,' I say, pointing at him.

'Zeno, Zeno,' they confirm.

'Thank you, Zeno,' I say to the man.

I can see that Kirk has started smiling.

I write below the sketch: *Zeno, a native of the country near Nyika or Expedition Island*. I like, wherever possible, to give the name of the people whose portraits I paint.

'Zeno,' Kirk laughs, once they have left. 'I wonder if there was a Plato among them, and a Socrates.'

'And what host of other antiquities?'

The meridian altitude today gives latitude $18^{\circ} 24' 7''$, being only seven seconds or sixtieths of a mile different from that of yesterday, which was $18^{\circ} 24' 0''$.

Kirk has discovered that the black sand which is so common on the banks of the river deflects the needle of the compass by several degrees. This must diminish the value of the magnetic observations, as it is mixed in all the sand beds of the island. It seems to be titanic sand.

To the south of our camp and by the water's edge we have a good section of the strata showing the false bedding and titanic sand. When we first came there was a sandbank about four feet above the water mark on which one could walk easily. This is now rapidly going away. As the water falls, the stream has altered its course and is now beating against this part.

Charles has decided to get out his photographic apparatus. He is feeling much better now, although he has not relieved Kirk and me from our nightly watch.

This science of photography is, of course, of great interest to me, though it is not something I wish to do myself. To create an image with machinery and chemicals, rather than with imagination and artistic skill ... it is fascinating.

But what a performance it is. A dark tent is set up in front of the iron house, with trays and chemicals. Charles must apply colloid to the glass plate, twisting and turning the plate so that the chemical spreads over it and then runs off the edges and all that is left is a thin, even film. This plate is inserted into the camera. Now it is ready to capture the image.

The camera itself is a hefty piece of equipment. It is a box a foot by six inches by six inches, made of black metal and with a glass lens at the front. Elevated on its three legs it is almost as tall as a man. Charles stands behind it, shrouded by a heavy black cloak. He is under there for quite some time, mumbling and muttering. Taking my sketchbook, I amble a few yards away and face the view to which the camera is pointing: the iron house itself. It takes a few quick strokes of the pencil to capture the shape of it, and a few

moments of shading to create something that looks very like what is before me. Charles has got no further. He clammers out from under the cloth, still muttering.

‘Let’s have a look,’ says Kirk, who is standing nearby. Kirk knows a fair amount about photography himself – more, it appears, than Charles, by the way he is pointing out something that Charles is doing wrong. ‘You’ve got the wrong flap open here,’ he explains. ‘Try it this way.’

Charles is back under the drape again, then he steps out and takes off the lens cap for a few seconds. ‘There!’ he says. ‘Let’s try a few more. Let’s get everyone in front of the house.’

Kirk explains that Charles is employing the wet collodion process, which requires a short exposure time – only a few seconds – and makes it possible to photograph people. He also has pre-prepared dry collodion plates, but these are only good for landscapes, or dead animals, where there is no movement at all.

Kirk and I move in view of the camera’s lens. I call the three Kroomen to join us.

‘Stand here,’ I tell Jumbo. ‘Mr Livingstone is going to capture our picture, under that cloak. Stand very still.’

Jumbo looks at me quizzically, and stares at the apparatus with great suspicion.

Again Charles disappears under the covering, then reappears, and off and on goes the lens cap.

‘Right,’ he says. ‘Let’s develop them.’

The fumes in the tent are dreadful. It is close and suffocating, steaming with acetic acid and colloid. It takes the eye some time to get used to the darkness.

Jumbo peers at the shapes that are forming on the surface, and shakes his head.

‘I see more strange things here,’ he says, ‘than I see my whole life. If I have these things in Sierra Leone, I no have to work for plenty days.’

When one goes from the darkness back into the bright sunshine it is a shock to the eyes. I feel quite dizzy.

Strange to think that exactly the same photograph could be taken by two different photographers, provided they knew what they were doing. Once the equipment is set up properly, the photographer becomes almost irrelevant. My art is created by my mind. The object I paint needn’t even be before me. It could be something I remember, or something I conjure up in my imagination. I suppose, though, there is something appealing about an image that is a reflection of the thing itself only.

Perhaps in a studio, in the city, the technology is sensible. But for travel, when the equipment is so bulky, and expensive, when one could simply carry a sketchbook and watercolours ... it is not practical. I can't see it ever catching on.

I continue with my oil painting of the pandanus tree, in front of the house. Charles is still trying to take some photographs, and, since I will appear in them, I remove my hat, to give a better picture.

'Perhaps this is not a good idea,' Kirk warns, 'in the midday sun.'

'I'm used to the African sun,' I say, 'and it won't be for long.'

It doesn't really feel all that hot at all. In fact I feel rather chilly. I hope I'm not getting a cold. If I am, I will not give in to it. There is work to be done, and work will be good for me. It's as Dr Livingstone says: most ailments can be fixed by physical activity.

In the afternoon I begin to feel quite weak. Perhaps I should rest for a little while. Not for long.

I go to my tent and lie down.

There is a rustling sound outside, like fire. There have been great fires in the distance; have they come closer? I open the tent flap and peer out. There is nothing.

The sound is in my mind, a droning noise, like a swarm of insects, which buzz all around, and then cluster into a shape, my mother's voice.

'Thomas. You need to decide if you want to make something of your life.'

'Mary-Ann,' Father interjects, 'for goodness' sake, he's just a boy.'

'I know you are, Thomas,' Mother carries on addressing me directly, ignoring Father, 'but if you want to improve yourself, you need to start working towards it.'

The voice changes. It is Emily's voice now.

'I can't, Thomas – I'm so sorry. But I can't see a future for us. It's not the ... picture I have. Can you understand that? You may not now, but you will at some stage. You will forgive me?'

'I've forgiven you,' I whisper. 'You didn't think I was good enough, did you?' Does she still think that now? Does she realize that she made a mistake? But the voice is no longer hers. It is Dr Kirk's.

'Here. Swallow this.'

I do as he says. The taste is horribly bitter.

'Now drink some water.'

Water, yes. I am thirsty.

Kirk is there and then he is not. When I close my eyes I am not in complete blackness; it is more of a dark red. I cover my eyelids with my arm. An image forms, like a picture emerging on glass in Mr Livingstone's dark tent.

I recognize the landscape. I know it well. A hill in the Eastern Cape, once the army has passed through. The wounded cow lies in front of me, lowing, lowing painfully. I raise my rifle to shoot it. Once the report of the shot has cleared, the lowing continues. It comes from all around. All around are cattle. They are all dead, slaughtered, as far as the eye can see. But still the lowing comes from them.

I must find Livingstone and ask him what to do.

My eyes open.

I can hear the launch outside. They are back. Livingstone is back. I must hurry. They'll be leaving again soon, for the Victoria Falls.

The Falls. Hurry, hurry.

I disentangle myself from the blanket and sit up. I begin to stand, but I feel too giddy. I crawl out of the tent on all fours.

'Baines!' calls a voice. Is it Livingstone? 'Baines!' No it is Dr Kirk, running towards me. 'For God's sake man, what on earth are you doing?'

'The launch ...' I stretch my hand towards the landing place.

'What the devil are you talking about? You're not well. You shouldn't be out of your tent.'

'They ... mustn't leave without me,' I say.

'Come,' says Kirk, 'back into your tent.'

'The Falls ... I don't want to miss the Falls ...'

Kirk crouches down next to me.

'There's nobody here,' he says. 'You've been dreaming. We're still on Expedition Island.'

Expedition Island. Yes.

The sky has become dusky. Why is that?

'Dark ...' I point up. 'Is there another eclipse?'

'It's half past five,' Kirk laughs. 'You've been asleep for a few hours.'

My throat is dry. My head aches and my skin feels prickly, but worst of all is the dry throat.

'Water,' I say.

'Yes, I know. I'll get you some more as soon as you'll get back in your tent.'

‘Thank you.’ And then I remember. ‘Guard duty. Then I must get ready for guard duty.’

Kirk laughs again. ‘You’ll do nothing of the sort. Stay in there. I’ll be back in a moment with water and medicine.’

University of Cape Town

Baines complains of having had no rest and having been troubled with fearful dreams ... At noon, Baines begins to talk to himself and soon becomes quite delirious, talking incoherently of the Kafir War ... By night ... he says that he is aware that he has been talking incoherently, and says that he could not find words, that he knew what he wished but that the wrong word always came out.

– John Kirk, journal, 11 July 1858

University of Cape Town

Expedition Island, July 1858

The launch returned after three weeks, in the middle of July. We'd had a rather sharp spell of sickness in the camp the week before. Charles Livingstone and I were stricken with fever, but, thankfully, Dr Kirk was spared, and was able to attend to us and apply his medical skills. He believed our symptoms were consistent with malaria. I have little recollection of those days, and know only what Kirk told me: that I complained of severe pain in the forehead and was wracked by fever, and could not hold down the quinine and opium that he administered. But under his medical care we soon recovered, and when Dr Livingstone returned I was on my feet again.

Thornton was still with them. The plan had been for him to remain at Sena with the stores, but Livingstone had considered the place unsuitable: too damp and too much risk from fever. There had not been water enough for them to land at Sena – they'd been obstructed by shallow swamps and sandbanks – so they'd offloaded the cargo at a place some four hours away, and it had to be carried there by the slaves of the *senhor* in charge.

They had suffered delays in their journey upriver. The channel was difficult, but they had as much to say about the inadequacies of the *MaRobert*. Rae was full of complaints about the construction of her boiler and furnace, which made it near impossible to get up steam, even using the hardest wood, and even this would be consumed quickly.

Things had not gone smoothly between Bedingfeld and the Doctor. And that did not change now that they were back on the island. At dinner, when the rest of us lined up for our dose of quinine, Bedingfeld stood to one side.

'I've decided not to,' he said, his hand held up in refusal.

'What did you say?' Livingstone whispered.

'I've decided to stop taking it.'

Livingstone laughed and shook his head.

Bedingfeld took a step forward. He stood upright and looked just past Livingstone, his eyes fixed somewhere in the distance. 'I don't think this is the right way of taking it.'

'I beg your pardon, Commander, what on earth do you mean?'

'This is the wrong way of taking it – little doses, every day. If I become sick, I'll take it then, and that way I will receive the full benefit of the remedy when I need it.'

Livingstone's eyes widened. 'So! Commander Bedingfeld is not only a great navigator, but now a medical expert as well! Dr Kirk, come and listen to this.'

'You can laugh all you want. But wait and see.' Bedingfeld thrust his chin out.

'Wait and see? My dear Bedingfeld, I have seen enough to know that your health has already been affected by the climate. I am responsible for the health of the members of my expedition: you will take your medication as instructed.'

'I won't, sir.'

Livingstone drew in breath, about to say something, but stopped himself. I wasn't sure if I was seeing things clearly, but his hands appeared to be shaking. When he spoke he spoke quietly.

'I am not going to fight you on this, Bedingfeld, but if anything happens to you – and I won't be surprised if it does – these men are my witnesses that you disobeyed medical instructions.'

'Go on,' Bedingfeld sneered, prodding the air with his finger, 'write it down.'

Where did Bedingfeld get the courage to cross Livingstone the way he did? None of the rest of us would have dreamt of doing so. At that stage we were convinced that the Doctor knew best – I certainly was, and especially on matters to do with medicine. Bedingfeld seemed to disagree with Livingstone on everything. But why would he risk his health? He must have been certain he was right about this.

Livingstone wanted to see what we had done while he was away. 'I trust you have used the time constructively,' he said to Kirk and me.

We were sitting around the table in the camp. Bedingfeld had not rejoined us.

'We have indeed,' Kirk replied. 'We have taken copious measurements. Mr Livingstone and I have tried our hand at photography. The technology is ... new to us. But we are making progress. And Mr Baines has been painting and sketching, as always.'

'I have been working on the pandanus,' I said. 'It's still not finished. But I have done some sketches – look.'

I showed him the pictures of the natives who came to visit. Livingstone peered at one of them. He was looking at the caption I'd written, with the native's name.

'Zeno?' he exclaimed. 'You've written that as his name?'

'It is funny, isn't it,' I said. 'That was the name he gave us. Zeno.'

Livingstone shook his head. '*Zina*,' he said, 'is their word for *name*.'

Oh dear. I'd heard that wrong. We all had. The conversation had been confusing, but we'd all been certain we'd interpreted it correctly. I'd been certain enough to write it on my sketch.

'You thought he was giving you his name' – Livingstone was laughing now – 'but he was just telling you the word for name. It's a good thing, Mr Baines, that you don't have the task of recording their language.'

I laughed a little too. A few chuckles. But Livingstone was not laughing in a manner that invited one to join in. It was not mocking, exactly, but it made me feel as if it was.

That evening I drew a line through the word. Now the caption simply read '*a native of the country near Nyika or Expedition Island*', and of the man's proper cognomen we remained in ignorance.

The launch was due to leave the following day on its next ferrying trip, and this time I was to come and Thornton was to stay behind.

The Doctor, Thornton told me, had met some of the Portuguese authorities, and he was now even more impatient to move upriver. It seemed the war was becoming more serious, or perhaps Livingstone was realizing how serious it already was.

The Portuguese were fortifying themselves against the rebels. Troops were gathering at Mazaro, just thirty miles upriver, and people were sheltering in the stockade at Sena, another sixty or seventy miles further up.

I was, for the first time, going to enter the field of this war.

I still could not make out exactly what it was about, but I had picked up scraps of information from the others. It seemed that the main instigator had been a half-caste called Mariano, a slaver who had started a war with the Portuguese. He had gone to Quilimane to negotiate with the governor, and had been arrested there, but his brother Bonga was carrying on the war.

What exactly were they fighting about? I wasn't sure. And why was Livingstone neutral towards them if they were slavers? I suppose the Portuguese had been involved in slavery too. Many of the rebels, I believe, were former slaves of the Portuguese.

In the morning I was busy loading the *MaRobert* and the pinnace. I recorded as much as I could in the store book. Things were getting complicated now. There was a load of stores at Sena, and now we would take another one, also, I understood, to Sena, but that had not been confirmed by the Doctor. So much was loaded onto the boats that it was impossible to make a note of absolutely everything – it would have taken hours, and was surely a

waste of my time, which could be more profitably spent painting. And what would it pay to be so meticulous, when I would have no idea, while away, of what was being consumed and traded by the others who remained here? Once it was all landed at Tete, and I could see it all, then I would try to make sense of it.

As I was hauling a case of ammunition onto the pinnacle, I heard Bedingfeld's voice. He and Livingstone were on the shore nearby.

'I must tell you, sir,' Bedingfeld said, 'the Kroomen are not happy about always having to work on Sundays.'

'What?' Livingstone exclaimed.

I remained crouched down among the boxes. I was in the shade, so I would probably not be seen. Bedingfeld's arms were outstretched.

'It is their right, sir, as Christians, to be allowed to respect the Sabbath. I must ask you to reconsider your position...'

'Reconsider what? What nonsense is this...?' Livingstone's voice was a hiss. 'What are you suggesting? You make it sound as if I've refused some sort of request...'

Bedingfeld took a step forward, and Livingstone a step back. They were coming closer to me. 'A request, yes, not unreasonable, for a Christian such as yourself...'

'What the devil? What are you talking about?'

'You don't, sir, doubt the truthfulness of what I'm saying?'

'I believe I do, sir.' Livingstone stood his ground now.

'Then you are no gentleman.' Bedingfeld waved his arms in the air. 'If I were to write home to my friends – godfearing men, men who respect God's commandments, including the fourth...'

'Enough, Bedingfeld,' Livingstone said quietly, and then he bellowed, '*Enough!*'

I pressed myself deeper into the shadow.

Bedingfeld, too, had taken a step back. Livingstone's face was red as hellfire. Could I see that, or am I imagining it now?

'Just you come with me.' He moved closer to the launch, and Bedingfeld followed.

'Jumbo!' Livingstone called. 'Assemble your men. Now ... Dr Kirk!'

Kirk, who was in the cabin, came out and stood at the gunwale.

'Doctor?' he said.

'Dr Kirk, I would like you, if you will, to be witness please, as I ask Jumbo if he has complained about working on Sundays.'

'He has spoken to *me*,' Bedingfeld said quickly. 'He has asked me to speak to you, to give his men Sunday free of work.'

The Kroomen were shuffling as they arranged themselves in a line on the deck of the launch.

‘Jumbo?’ Livingstone said. ‘Is this true?’

‘Yes,’ Jumbo said, with a grin, ‘I did want ... to have it, but I know... master he work ...’

‘You do understand, Jumbo, *why* I make you work on Sundays.’ There was a gentleness in Livingstone’s voice now.

Jumbo nodded in reply.

‘You do know’ – Livingstone was looking at Bedingfeld now – ‘that I need to get us out of this unhealthy place as quickly as possible, to get the party upriver. You don’t think’ – looking at Jumbo again – ‘that is unreasonable, do you?’

‘Yes, I know. Whatever master say we do.’

‘Thank you, Jumbo. Thank you. If only everyone else shared your understanding of what is necessary for the welfare of this expedition. We are hampered enough by this blasted vessel, with its faulty engine, foisted on us by dishonest men.’

‘It is,’ Bedingfeld agreed, ‘a shabby vessel.’

‘I blame you, Commander, as much as those sham boatbuilders.’

‘Me?’

‘Yes, you. *You* saw the trials on the Mersey, and *you* said she got up enough steam under wood. You’ve seen how she runs on wood here: no bloody good at all! So how, I ask you, did she perform to your satisfaction under wood on the Mersey?’

‘Doctor, I—’

‘I’ll tell you how: she *didn’t*! It’s impossible. You saw her running on coal, and you didn’t bother to check.’

‘Dr Livingstone.’ Bedingfeld drew himself up. ‘This is outrageous. I was there and you were not. I saw the wood put in, and Mr Laird told me that the steam had been got up with wood.’

‘So you saw a smiling Mr Laird waving a piece of wood in front of you. But did you go to the engine yourself, did you look in the furnace to see if there was any coal there?’

‘I hardly think that would have been necessary. He gave me his word. If you were so suspicious, why did you not go there *yourself*?’

‘I sent you, Bedingfeld, because that was your job, and because I trusted you. Clearly I was mistaken. You were deceived, and you have deceived me!’

‘Sir, you go too far. I will not stand around while you insult me. I am even sorrier now that you did not accept my resignation while the *Hermes* was still here.’

With that he turned and thundered off.

Livingstone turned around, seeming now to take in who was watching. I didn't want to look like I was hiding, or as if I wasn't working, so I stood up clutching a box, a box that I had carried there some time earlier.

'I fear,' Livingstone said, holding up his hands for a moment, 'that Commander Bedingfeld is deceiving himself as well as the rest of us. He seems to have forgotten that he withdrew his resignation. I don't know how he expects us to believe him about what he saw at the *MaRobert*'s trials.'

Rae was shaking his head. 'Impossible that she was fed only with wood there. Why would she be performing so differently now? There must have been coal in the furnace.'

The launch was soon due to leave, and I still had some of my own things to collect from the iron house. On my way back I met Kirk, who was coming towards me.

'Good luck,' he said. 'I am glad that I'm remaining on land service.'

The launch set off at noon, heavily laden and with the pinnacle in tow. Aboard were Livingstone, Bedingfeld, Rae and me: it was not the most genial company.

The Kroomen having requested me through their Head Man to ask the Dr that they might have their proper times to meals & also rest on the Sabbath, I did so in respectful terms, when I was most grossly insulted by Dr Livingstone before the men, accused of falsehoods & having deceived them all by making a false report about the Launch's trial at Liverpool. Dr Kirk was called upon to witness all this. He also told me that I had been [illegible] to the 2nd Hd Krooman on an occasion when I had to speak to him for neglect of duty & he behaved in a most insolent & mutinous manner to me – the same system was adopted with stowing the Launch. I was allowed nothing to do with it & not allowed time to repair the sails or repair the [illegible]. I also wished to have one of the wheels straightened that had been bent against a bank but was not allowed to do so.

– Norman Bedingfeld, log, 19 July 1858

University of Cape Town

Mazaro, Thursday 22 July 1858

The fog is impossibly thick this morning, too thick to risk setting off in the launch. We have to wait until after seven o'clock before we can weigh anchor.

I spend much of the time at the bows, in silence, watching the water ahead. It is the third day of our journey. My first sight of the river beyond Expedition Island. It seems a long time since I have been moving into new territory. I spent nearly a month on Expedition Island, and before that there was the fortnight on the *Pearl*, after she ran aground. A long time to be standing still, when we're supposed to be breaking into new territory. A long time getting no closer to the Falls. But we are moving now.

The scenery has been, for the first stretch, the same as before: grassy plains on both sides, with a palm tree here and there. But now the landscape begins to undulate ever so slightly. On our left is a ridge covered with trees. Ahead of us, in the background, a series of hills has risen to break the flatness of the horizon.

'The Shupanga ridge,' says Livingstone, pointing to the closer feature. 'We are getting close.'

At about nine o'clock we reach Maruru, the home of Don Azevado, an influential Portuguese gentleman who aided Livingstone on his previous expedition. The house is pleasantly situated on a point of the north side of the river and surrounded by trees, among which are a cocoanut and some palmyras.

I land with Livingstone and the Kroomen to fetch wood for fuel. I see now that the house has been recently plundered, and the buildings around have been burnt down by the rebels.

Don Azevado is not there, but we do find a familiar face: Antonio, our native guide from before. He is wearing the same blue shirt. I wonder how he keeps it from getting filthy if he wears it all the time. Perhaps he has two, so that one may be cleaned while he wears the other. Unlikely.

While the Kroomen carry on board a quantity of hardboard beams for fuel, Dr Livingstone and I observe sights for the longitude.

Antonio cries out and points to the river. A canoe is drifting down the stream. He is asking Livingstone something.

‘Very well,’ Livingstone says. ‘Jumbo, take the whaleboat and fetch that canoe for Antonio.’

I wonder where the fellow is who it belonged to. Probably some fugitive who has perhaps been killed or drowned.

Antonio boards the launch with us.

I nod at him. ‘Hello,’ I say, and smile.

He smiles back. He is sitting cross-legged on the deck, very much at home.

The *MaRobert* chugs along for another mile. Livingstone stands peering at the north bank.

‘Here we are,’ he says, pointing. ‘Look over there. That’s where the Mutu joins the Zambesi, and flows all the way to Quilimane, when it has any water in it.’

There is, I can see through the last remnants of mist, no river at all. Just a little gully scarcely ten feet wide and four deep, and now that the river has fallen it is not only perfectly dry but actually eight or nine feet above the level of the Zambesi water. An old canoe lies capsized in the mouth; it will have to wait till the next floods before a drop of water can rise to her.

How strange that this channel is marked on maps as the main route from the Zambesi to the sea. And yet the streams do not even connect. The way we have travelled is not credited as a route at all. Well, it has been rather difficult. But it is not completely dry like this, disconnected.

Just beyond, to the north-west, I can make out a few huts. This is the village of Mazaro, where the others landed when they were looking for a route for the *Pearl*, and where Livingstone came on his previous journey, before proceeding on to Quilimane. The banks appear to be lined with hundreds of poles, but as we come closer they turn into people. They stand unmoving as the ripples from the passing *MaRobert* begin to slosh against the shore. Some appear to be Portuguese, but most are natives. With some it is difficult to tell.

‘Soldiers for the Portuguese,’ says Livingstone. ‘They must be preparing for some sort of action.’

‘We cannot land here,’ says Bedingfeld. ‘Perhaps further up.’

‘No, Commander, I do not believe we are called to flee. Bring her in over there.’

The launch drifts closer to the shore.

‘Baines,’ Livingstone says, ‘come with me. Let us see what is happening here.’

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone.’ I am quickly on my feet.

I disembark and follow the Doctor, watching the heels of his boots and placing my feet in his footsteps. I see it only when I am almost on top of it, when the Doctor cries out in surprise. A dead body, naked – black-skinned and caked in dark blood – lying before us. And next to it, another. Both have been decapitated. The one closest to me, a footfall away, has been unspeakably mutilated, its genitals cut off, by some fellow who wished to retain a proof of his having killed a man. The smell is horrific, striking me in the belly like a solid projectile and knocking the wind out of me. As I bend over, coughing, I spy a head, a severed head, lying in the bush a few feet away.

‘Good ... God!’ I cry, staggering away.

Livingstone, too, has backed away, and has his hand over his mouth.

‘What—’ I splutter. ‘*Are we in danger?*’

The Doctor holds out a hand to becalm me, and then waves it under his nose. ‘These men were not killed today. The danger has passed. Come!’

I follow him up the bank. Now elevated, I can see there are more corpses lying on the ground, more than a dozen of them. What on God’s earth has gone on here?

Livingstone calls out to the soldiers who are standing nearby. ‘Major Sicard! Onde está o Major Sicard?’

A Portuguese officer comes up to us. ‘Major Sicard,’ he says, pointing at the huts nearby. ‘Sim.’

We follow him and on the way are intercepted by a man whom Livingstone recognizes with a cry. ‘Don Azevado!’

‘Dr Livingstone!’ By his attire and demeanour he is clearly a man of authority and means. ‘You come at a critical time, my friend. We came back here only yesterday, to take the village back from the rebels. You must be careful.’ His English is fluent but hurried. ‘We lost thirty men, two of them Portuguese. The village has been plundered.’

‘Senhor Tito, is he here?’ Livingstone asks.

‘Sicard is here, yes,’ says Azevado, waving his arms, ‘he is somewhere here, with his men. But the governor – he is here too, in that house, and he is not well. This is good, that you are here; this is fortunate. You must take him, to safety. Take him up to Shupanga. You must leave here. It is not safe.’

Azevado now looks at me and offers his hand, glancing back at the Doctor for an introduction.

‘Thomas Baines,’ Livingstone says. ‘Our artist.’

‘Welcome to Mazaro Mutu,’ says Azevado, shaking my hand rapidly, and then turning around and setting off with the Doctor.

What good manners in such circumstances. I must remember to mention this to Mother. And how fine it sounds to be described as 'our artist'.

'Thank you,' I reply, although the two men are some distance away from me now. I follow them, breaking into a run, towards one of the mud huts in the village. They enter the narrow doorway and I walk in after them, my eyes taking a few moments to get used to the gloom. There, lying on the floor, is another Portuguese gentleman, with a blanket twisted around him. On the one shoulder that I can see are insignia that are not familiar to me but clearly indicate high rank. He must be in his fifties or sixties.

He is rocking himself, like a child, and moaning.

'Your Excellency,' Livingstone says.

The governor looks up and stares first at Livingstone, then at me, with a look of deep suspicion. And then ... he starts laughing, laughing uncontrollably, and slapping the mud floor of the hut with his hand.

'As I say,' Azevado mutters, 'he is not well at all. Senhor Tito has taken command of the operation here.'

Livingstone is crouched next to the governor, placing his hand on the older man's forehead, feeling his pulse, looking into his eyes.

'He is burning with fever. We will take him to safety when we leave. I'll need men to carry him to the steamer.'

The governor starts mumbling, words that are gibberish to me, and I suspect they would be so even if I understood Portuguese. Was I like this in the worst of my fever? Kirk said I was muttering about all sorts of things, and I remember nothing of it.

'Dr Livingstone,' a voice booms outside.

The Doctor turns to the speaker. He is a large man, his hair a mixture of black and white. A thin moustache adorns his top lip.

'Senhor Tito. How good to see you again. I'm going to take Governor da Silva on the steamer. But I'll need some men to carry him there.'

I have read about this man in *Missionary Travels*. Major Tito Sicard, the commandant of Tete. Livingstone stayed with him for some time before progressing to the coast.

'Thomas Baines,' I say, holding out my hand. 'Artist.'

As soon as the words are out of my mouth, the crack of gunshots pierces the air.

'The rebels,' Sicard says softly. 'They are coming back.' He turns away and bellows orders in Portuguese.

I startle again at the loud boom of a drum somewhere close by, each deep, slow beat momentarily deadening the sounds of whooping voices and gunfire. All of a sudden there

is a whorl of people around us, Portuguese soldiers and their native followers, some with old muskets, some with bows and arrows, with assegais. The attack is coming from the land, but people are running in all directions, some of them, no doubt, trying to escape the rebels' fire rather than confront it.

A number of Portuguese have gathered in a line, and are firing into the jungle from where shots are coming. One is standing crouched on a giant anthill, giving him protection and elevation.

Good God, I'm back in the middle of a war.

'Come,' the Doctor says to me, 'we must get help for the governor.'

We scamper back towards the launch, keeping in the shelter of huts or trees. We cross paths with a black fellow carrying a young man, a boy, who appears to be wounded. Livingstone pauses to take a look. The boy has a deep gash exposing the joint of his left elbow, and another wound in the side. Livingstone says something to the man. I cannot hear what.

I turn away from the boy; I cannot bear to look too closely at his wounds. Thankfully, he is now being carried away by his father, brother, whoever the other man is.

'Is there any time,' I ask, 'to sketch the scene? Perhaps from over there.' I point to the junction with the Mutu. 'It is far enough from the fighting to be safe.'

Livingstone smiles – it is a startling reaction. Even his eyes smile at me for that instant. 'Yes. Good. This is worth ... representing. Yes, do that. Can you do it quickly? If I need help I will get it from one of the others.'

'Twenty minutes?' I hold up my sketchbook to show him I am prepared.

'Yes.' He touches me on the shoulder. 'Go. Quickly. Twenty minutes. We must go then.'

I make my way along the bank, stepping quickly past bodies on the ground and looking out for alligators that will surely come to feed on them. The individual sounds of gunshots and shouts blend into a more general noise of battle.

The sound takes me back, to war in the Amatola, six, seven years ago. The whizz of bullets past my ears – it's a sound that stays with one. I'd found it difficult to raise my rifle against a man. In that moment I seemed to lose the power of sight; all was hazy before me. When I first killed a man it came as a surprise. He was standing on a ridge, deriding our Fingoes who were firing at him. I dismounted, took aim, and pulled the trigger. The first shot was short. The second came closer. It startled him so much that he fell to the ground. That's what I went to bed thinking. The next day they told me my shot had killed him. Several men confirmed that the killing shot had been mine.

I was surprised that I had hit my mark, but also at my reaction. The men slapped me on the back and congratulated me, and I laughed with them, but it was an empty celebration. I felt strange about taking the man's life, in an instant. The next time I had a clear shot – at a retreating native – I hesitated long enough for him to escape. I could not bring myself to shoot him in the back. That time there was no back-slapping; only sarcasm from the man beside me. I was more comfortable with a sketchbook than with a rifle. And so I find myself here. I realize I'm unarmed.

At the Mutu I find shelter behind a clutch of reeds. The capsized canoe is lying before me. It will form the foreground, on the right side of the picture. There is a body lying at the bottom of the bank, ten yards away, in two or three inches of water. Its head is closest to me; one arm is draped over the chest, the other lies in the water; the legs are slightly bent, knees together. It will soon be taken. I place it at the bottom edge of the picture. Somehow, now that I am sketching it as part of a battle scene, it becomes a less repulsive thing.

Beyond the canoe and the reeds, the shoreline stretches away at a slight diagonal, from right to left. The *MaRobert* is close to the water's edge, more or less in the middle of the picture, with the pinnacle beside it. There are a few trees in the distance.

As I work with my pencil, the sound is increased by cannon fire. Some of the warriors have formed a line at the front, but others are swarming down to the river and launching canoes into the water. On the paper they are simple strokes, with no features beyond arms and legs. A crowd of them has gathered on the shore near to the launch, a few yards of water separating them.

A small group of about six men are running in my direction along the beach. I don't know if they've spotted me, but I keep still in my shelter behind the reeds. As they come closer I can hear their voices, chattering and yelping. As they run past I wonder if the sound is panic or relief – strangely, I can't tell.

My position might not be entirely secure. There's a chance that the rebels might sneak past the Portuguese right, and find me here, unarmed and helpless. I must also get back to Livingstone. I quickly draw a few men in the foreground, three of them, holding their bows and arrows. Now, my sketch is sufficient; I will turn it into a watercolour this afternoon. I must remember the colour of the grass and reeds over here, and the red ensign of the *MaRobert* there.

I pack up my traps and make my way back. To my right, with their backs to the river, is a line of men firing into the jungle. Their fire is not being returned with any spirit, as

far as I can tell. I would be able to hear the sound of bullets whistling past them towards the river.

I can see, coming down the bank, Dr Livingstone, carrying what must be the governor, although it looks less like a man that he is carrying, and more like a tall, limp scarecrow. I did not notice how tall the governor was when he was on the ground in the hut. Rae is on the shore, waving his arms wildly towards the *MaRobert*. There are natives all around, and in the water, trying to clamber aboard the vessel. I can make out the Kroomen, armed with cutlasses, keeping them at bay. Bedingfeld must be there too, though I can't see him. I must hurry: the situation is becoming desperate.

I am almost there, moments away, as the governor is pulled aboard, followed by Livingstone. The shore is dense with people, throwing in their property and swarming after them. I have to push my way through them. As I pull one of them by the shoulder, to make a way for myself, the fellow turns round and we are looking each other in the eye. He protests incomprehensibly, and then, as he falls silent, I can read something of his meaning in his expression. He sees in the colour of my skin that I have a place aboard this vessel, and there is a hateful envy in the way he looks at me, and yet he seems to be appealing to me to take him with me.

'Baines!' Livingstone is holding out his hand. 'Come on!' Beside him, Rae is pushing a clambering native down. 'Quickly! Come on!'

Heaving myself aboard, I find the deck of the launch crowded with natives. Rae and the Kroomen are shoving off the ones who have climbed aboard. Bedingfeld is screaming orders; the engine of the steamer is rumbling. I join the melee and push against the throng of stowaways. The launch will be far too heavy with all these people aboard.

When we push off from the landing place, we still have a dozen or so of them aboard, beside the personal attendants of His Excellency, and as the weight of these supernumeraries depresses our little vessel too much they are ordered into the pinnace that is towing astern.

Back on the shore, a Portuguese officer stands discharging his rifle towards the river. Is it possible that the rebels have come round so quickly? Following the direction of his fire I see ... no rebels, just the men thrashing in the water, swimming towards the islands in the middle. And, over there, one floating motionless on the surface, face down, arms outstretched. I turn back to the Portuguese officer. He is shooting at his own men, deserters. Firing again and again. More and more of them stop moving in the water, though even more continue on their course.

Bedingfeld is busy ordering the Kroomen around. Livingstone must be attending to the governor somewhere. I take out my sketchbook; it is undamaged from the struggle to get onboard. The sound of the battle has faded, drowned out by distance and the engines of the *MaRobert*. Occasionally I can hear what I think is cannon fire, although it might be a noise from deep within the bowels of the launch.

We have been silent for some time, and then, as if responding to a prompt, all of us are talking at the same time.

‘Did you see that?’ I say, pointing in the direction where the Portuguese marksman was firing at his men.

‘They got into the cabin!’ Rae is telling me. ‘Knocked Tom Davis right over. They were about to take our arms and ammunition from the racks!’

‘That was a lucky escape,’ Bedingfeld whispers.

Rae is mimicking the motion of pushing a man off the deck.

The Kroomen, too, are talking excitedly, rehearsing the unbelievable events that we have escaped.

Where is the Doctor?

I find him in the launch’s cabin, kneeling beside the governor. Some of the governor’s attendants are nearby.

The image is vivid in my head, Livingstone walking through danger with the governor slung over his shoulder. Now I have seen Livingstone the hero. Perhaps it takes this kind of adversity for this to be manifested. Today’s events will be written about, talked about, and I was there to see it.

Livingstone looks up at me.

‘Did you get your picture?’ he says.

‘I did,’ I reply. ‘I did. Today I will turn it into a watercolour.’

Livingstone nods. He approves. And, it is true, I have been a little heroic myself.

‘We must get the governor to Shupanga,’ Livingstone says. ‘We must make good speed. Tell Rae, and that ... Bedingfeld.’

I make to leave, but I sense that Livingstone is not finished.

‘That Bedingfeld ... a disgrace. Where was he?’

He seems to be talking to himself as much as to me. I say nothing, but stand there, until he looks up at me.

‘Go.’ He waves his arm. ‘Tell them to make speed.’

When Bedingfeld got back to the boat, he said to Mr Rae, 'Let us get out of this. Get up steam as fast as ever you can, and let us go away'. Rae replied, 'But where is the Doctor?' Bedingfeld replied, 'I don't know', was very pale and, when Rae went first ashore, ordered him back. B. said, 'I don't care who is ashore. I shall never come in here again.' Rae then took his gun, determined to see what had become of me and, on coming up the bank, saw me coming with the Governor. On going down again, he found that Bedingfeld had put Davis, a Krooman, outside the cabin door with a gun in his hand and all the rest had guns and bayonets fixed. He said to Rae, 'Catch me again going into the bank! Those who like may go ashore in the boat'. He seems to have been too much frightened to think of my order and would have run away and left me, had Rae not refused to set the engine a-going.

I note this down now because Rae was narrating the story a day or two ago. To such our defence is to be committed in the event of a war. The words in Rae's pocket book are: B. '*Let's get out of this as soon as possible*'. Rae replied, 'Some time is necessary to get up steam'. '*Well, get it up immediately*'. R: 'But the Dr is ashore'. '*I don't care who is ashore. Let's [get] out of this: he can get to the boat. I will never anchor at this shore again*'. He was very pale and agitated and, when R. went ashore, stamped his foot and ordered him aboard.

– David Livingstone, journal, February 1860

I was, I felt, seeing a different Livingstone. It had been a day of horrors, but Livingstone seemed kinder, more attentive, than ever before. For a moment I was strangely grateful for this war. In the face of dangers, Livingstone had become the great man whom I had read about, and I felt more his equal than I had before. It gave me an opportunity to show him qualities, abilities of my own, which he had perhaps not been able to see until now.

One thing remained as before. Bedingfeld. There was a poison between them. On the journey away from Mazaro they managed to avoid speaking to one another; they managed, on that little vessel, to avoid each other's company completely; apart from one incident.

I was sitting quietly on the deck when Livingstone emerged from the cabin, where he had been looking after the governor. His eyes squinted slightly, as they became used to the direct sunlight, and fell upon Bedingfeld, who was standing nearby.

'Mister Bedingfeld!' Livingstone's voice drowned out all sound. 'Where the devil were you?'

'Doctor?' Bedingfeld seemed to shrink slightly.

'Where were you? I ordered you to bring the Kroomen, and where were you?'

Bedingfeld looked at the Doctor with a frown. I waited for his reply, expecting an outburst of indignation. But he said nothing.

Livingstone jabbed his finger towards the captain. 'Here. Cowering, cowering like a ... coward!'

As I would learn later, after I had gone to paint the scene, and once the cannon fire started, Livingstone had found Bedingfeld on the shore and told him to bring two Kroomen to the house. Livingstone went back there, but Bedingfeld never came, and nor did any Kroomen. Rae would tell me that Bedingfeld wanted us to weigh anchor then and there and flee the battle, leaving Livingstone – and me – behind.

Bedingfeld had never struck me as a coward, not with the way he had stood up to Livingstone. This was the first time he had not answered back. Usually he would protest, or at least announce that he was going to write a letter. He just stood there, the fight gone from him. I felt almost sorry for him.

In the afternoon we reached Shupanga, on the south bank. There is a native village there, but also a large stone Portuguese house, and it was to this that the governor was carried by his attendants. Livingstone went with them, to see to his patient. They were met by a brown-skinned Portuguese man who emerged from the house and ran back inside ahead of them.

The house was situated on a grassy slope, about a hundred and fifty yards from the water's edge. It was built of stone and brick with mortar, and the roof was covered with tiles. In front was a verandah, which afforded one a splendid view of the river, with islands in the middle of it, and beyond a sweep of green, forests of palms and tropical trees, with Mount Morambala rising above them in the distance.

Near the house was an orchard of mango trees, an enormous fig tree, and several giant baobabs. I measured the diameter of the fig tree by walking the area that it shaded: thirty-nine paces. (One more, I recall, than my age at the time.) On the grass beneath it were a number of canoes in various states of metamorphosis from the logs out of which they were being created.

There were people milling about. Parties of armed natives were coming and going, perhaps to join the battle from which we had come. Without Livingstone, there was no way of telling.

I approached the house and placed my hand on the whitewashed wall. It was strange: a feature of civilization, out here. To get here, we had struggled through undeveloped river and swamp; and the main route to the sea – via the Mutu – was, as I'd seen earlier that day, all dried up. This wall was a piece of Europe that was far more disconnected from it than was, say, the Cape. And of course beyond this there were others – Sena, Tete – and beyond that ... well, the only civilization would be that which we brought with us. That was the exciting part. But this – the whitewash, the flat walls of brick and mortar – was interesting.

It was old – more than a century, perhaps older – and there was something of a tranquillity about it, in spite of the activity nearby, in spite of what I myself had seen earlier in the day. It was, I thought, already standing here, on this same spot, with the same view, when my grandfather had not yet been born, or perhaps even his father, whom I had never known. The Portuguese were here even then.

I walked to one of the baobabs, the nearest one, about a hundred yards from the house. It made a particularly fine scene: its leafless branches showed white against the deep-blue sky, and were overhung with light grey creepers coiling and winding about

them. Bushes and parasitical plants partly screened it with their dark foliage. It would make a good picture.

This looked bigger even than the giant baobabs I'd seen in Australia. I walked to the trunk to measure its circumference. First I made a little notch in the bank with my knife, and then I reached across from there, a full span of my arms. Then another, and another. Twelve times around. Estimating my fathom at only five feet (and I think it is a little more than that), that would make the circumference sixty feet.

I sensed movement behind me and turned around. It was Livingstone, standing there quite still, watching.

'Quite a specimen,' I said, walking towards him. 'The biggest I've seen.'

He nodded. 'How wide is it?'

'Sixty feet in circumference,' I replied. 'In Australia, Dr Mueller – the botanist – measured one at fifty-eight feet, so if my reckoning is accurate, we have a larger one here.'

He nodded again. I could see he approved; this was, after all, one of the reasons we were here: to measure, to record. He had caught me at it of my own initiative.

'I'd like to see how they compare to the Australian,' I added, 'but it's impossible to tell when they're leafless.'

'You will see plenty more in the summer months; you'll be able to tell us then.'

A party of armed natives was passing the house.

'How is the governor?' I asked.

'He is a fool and lucky to be alive. They told me – at Mazaro – that all he was prepared to take for his fever was a little camphor. He *insisted* on nothing else.'

Livingstone snorted. 'Raspail still has his disciples, it seems.'

I nodded my agreement, even though I was unsure exactly what he meant. Livingstone knew best when it came to medical matters.

'Now that he is insensible, the proper remedies can be administered without any protest.'

Quinine was the thing for fever. I did understand that.

'Now,' Livingstone's voice marked a subject that concerned me more directly. 'This place will not do. We will need to take the stores to Sena. The rest of the Portuguese will come here – so they said – but perhaps not immediately. It will be more secure then, but Colonel Nunes tells me the man here is not to be trusted.'

'Not to be trusted?' I said. This was the man who had met Livingstone and the governor's entourage. Francisco was his name, if I remember correctly.

‘They say that if the Portuguese are not here, he will connive with the Landeens and they will take whatever they please.’

There were tribes of Landeens, I understood, living on the south bank.

‘When will we leave?’ I asked him.

‘The governor should have improved sufficiently by tomorrow. We will leave then. We will need to take on wood for the journey. As much as we can carry.’

‘I will see to it,’ I said with a nod.

We returned to the launch after dark. I had spent the rest of the day, once I had arranged the wood, sketching the surrounds. Livingstone and I had waited for the stars to come out, so we could measure the latitude of the place. We rowed back and found everyone waiting quietly. Bedingfeld remained sullen.

We left the next afternoon, after Livingstone had attended to his patient and made sure that he would recover.

Antonio remained with us, and in addition we took on another native who knew the river and who would guide us upstream. He seemed awed at first, at the size of the launch and the sound of her engines, but he was quickly at home at the bows, pointing and shouting directions.

The river beyond Shupanga was intricate at first, with winding channels much like we’d experienced lower down. The guide pointed out the best route, but it was slow going. But there were stretches, for the first time, where the river deepened into a reliable channel, with two fathoms and without obstruction. Mr Rae got up as much steam as the engine would manage, with Tom Coffee feeding in logs as quickly as the rest of the men could chop them.

There were periods, when a favourable wind rose, and we raised the sails of the *MaRobert* and the pinnace, and progressed at a fine rate. I imagined how the country would look as a map, with a large scale – one mile to the inch perhaps. If the launch’s position could be marked, and if one stared at it closely, one might just be able to see us moving, infinitesimally penetrating the interior.

But these passages were always short-lived. Invariably, after half an hour, or an hour, a sandbank would rise up from below, or we’d find ourselves in a dead end, and would have to send the whaleboat to find a way out.

It was a grinding disappointment each time it happened. I was hoping, all the time, that we had at last found the great waterway that Livingstone had described. Perhaps it

was still further up. Perhaps it was the wrong time of year; the water needed to rise just a little to cover these obstacles.

The incessant cutting of wood slowed us down further. We had to stop repeatedly as the *MaRobert* gobbled piles and piles of fuel. She had been named originally after Mrs Livingstone, the mother of Robert. But we gave her another name, the *Asthmatic*, for the wheezy, coughing breath made in her pipes by the most copious amounts of the hardest timber. I don't know who came up with the name – someone on an earlier trip – but it had stuck. Livingstone used it most often, and it seemed more fitting than bringing disrepute to the name of his good lady.

Would my own boat have done better? It would have been much smaller, and could not have carried as much. If only the river had been deeper and the *Pearl* had managed to ascend further. Without the misfortunes, the groundings, the slow progress, would the mood have been happier, would I have appeared differently in Livingstone's eyes? Would the future – my future – have taken a different shape?

At some point on the journey up, the pilot pointed out a bamboo house ahead of us on the north bank.

I made out the name *Bonga* in his explanation. Bonga, the rebel chief who was leading this war.

'Is he saying that place is Bonga's?' I asked Livingstone.

'Yes.' He nodded. 'That is one of his stockades.'

Bonga. The man responsible for so much upheaval, and he had a fearsome reputation among the Portuguese. Who was this fellow?

Our progress continued to alternate between good stretches and frustrating obstructions. Bedingfeld's mood seemed to darken with every grounding, and it was fed by Livingstone's silent – but very obvious – criticism. On one occasion Livingstone spoke. 'For goodness' sake, Bedingfeld, was that not avoidable.'

'The problem, Dr Livingstone, is *your river!* It is simply not suitable.'

Livingstone held out a finger, and spoke very quietly. 'Perhaps it is you, captain, who are not suitable.'

I looked for a refuge of calm elsewhere on the boat, but it was difficult to find. The Kroomen were unfriendly towards Antonio and the pilot, acting in a bullying manner. I looked out at the water ahead of us, and let my imagination travel, all the way to the Falls that I hoped to paint one day.

Three or four days after leaving Shupanga, the double hill of Sena came into view. It rose up from the surrounding landscape, its top indented like a saddle.

We would not be able to land near the town; the main channel had shifted away and the way to Sena was now blocked by sandbanks. We'd have to land some distance away, and by late afternoon we had still not got there, when it was quickly becoming too dark to take the launch up. Dr Livingstone directed me to accompany him in the whaler, along with Antonio and the pilot. The pilot almost managed to run us aground a number of times, but in the end he brought us to a narrow opening in the bank and showed us the path leading to Sena.

We walked for some distance, passing a village and some cultivated land, until we came to a creek that obstructed our way. On the other side a canoe was moored, and beyond it we could hear voices from the next village.

Livingstone shouted out into the darkness, trying to summon someone to ferry us across. After a few moments, without response, Antonio tried calling out. 'Tell them,' Livingstone said, 'to come and meet the white people of the cloth.'

I wondered what he meant: that there was a Christian minister present, or that we had calico to trade with them. But it was no matter; no one came in response to Antonio's cry.

After waiting a little longer, I took my pistol and fired a shot into the bank, which roused them all right. There was a babble of voices and a patter of footsteps, and gradually, as their curiosity began to outweigh their fear, people appeared from the villages on either side, to find out the meaning of it, and they seemed greatly relieved when they found that our intentions were peaceable.

Livingstone addressed them, speaking a few words in their language and using Antonio as a translator for the rest. The effect was that two of the villagers picked him up and started carrying him across the stream, and the next thing two others were lifting me up and performing the same duty for me. They were by no means a pair: one was a foot taller than the other, which made for an awkward crossing. It was strange to feel their muscular shoulders under my thighs.

One of them accompanied us as a guide, and we began walking. The way was mainly uphill, and after some miles we reached the high line of palisades forming the stockade of Sena.

I could see, in the dimming light, something strange about the wall. Some of the stakes that formed it seemed to be growing, sending out green shoots. Had they been recently cut down and placed there, I wondered. Had they taken root? It looked as if the branches in some places had become intertwined.

We walked along the wall for about half a mile, until a man appeared out of the dark, a sentry.

He spoke quietly but firmly in Portuguese, and Livingstone responded. There were more questions and more replies, which must have satisfied him, because he took a step back and removed two or three poles to let us in.

We were in a settlement, with stone structures and houses. It was too dark to see anything precisely, but I could sense people moving in the shadows, just beyond our sight. We were brought to a large house with a long verandah in front. The man in charge, Senhor Ferrão, had to be awoken to welcome us. He appeared in his dressing gown, a pipe in his mouth.

‘Ah, Dr Livingstone,’ he said, and there followed a brief conversation in Portuguese, after which Ferrão addressed the men around him, and they scurried off on some errand.

He had the air of a man to be taken seriously, a man who was used to giving commands and having them obeyed. He had been the governor some years before, governor of the whole Rivers. But he was not in any way unfriendly, and did not seem troubled by the inconvenience of having been roused after retiring for the night.

We were shown to a room in a house nearby, where two beds were being set up for us on boxes. I was exhausted; it had been an extraordinary day. We climbed into our beds, and there we slept, Livingstone and I, while the others remained aboard the launch, and everybody else all the way back down the river at Expedition Island. We were now as far as any of us had come on this expedition, Livingstone and I.

I was woken by a strange sound, a whimper. Was someone in distress? It came, I realized, from inside the room, from the bed next to mine. Livingstone. I sat up, quickly but quietly. It was not completely dark – it must have been close to dawn – but it was difficult to see at first. The sound was clear enough, though. He was asleep, dreaming, and making soft noises as he did so. Then he formed something that sounded like a fragment of a word. ‘Ba—’ He repeated it. ‘Ba— Ba— Ba—’

As my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and as the light slowly grew, I could see his nostrils quivering slightly as he breathed, his hand, the hand he used to signal directions, lying palm up on the pillow, the fingers curling.

‘Ba—’ he said again, and there followed some words that I did not understand. They were not English. Was he sleep-talking in Sechuana?

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I whispered, crouching at his bedside. ‘Dr Livingstone.’

The rhythm of the breathing stopped. I wondered if in time I would call him David.

‘Mmm.’ He stirred a little. ‘What? Baines!’ He sat up quickly. ‘What time is it?’

‘Not long before sunrise,’ I replied.

He cleared his throat, the sound almost like the growl of a wild animal.

‘We must get to it,’ he said, quickly blinking the sleep from his eyes.

We made our way to Senhor Ferrão’s house, past a few smaller dwellings, some of stone and lime, others of reeds and mud. Between the houses were deep pits dug into the ground. Ferrão’s was the grandest building in sight, a fine old building. I could make out figures on the steps of the porch, and, as we came closer, I could see they were natives, who saluted us by bowing and clapping their hands.

The sun had broken over the horizon, and from the porch there was a good view of part of the village, dominated by an old fort and church, with the river and the hills beyond it to the eastward. Above them loomed Mount Morambala, now silhouetted by the light, in the direction from which we had come. While Livingstone went inside to speak to Ferrão, I sketched the scene.

When Livingstone came out again, we made our way to the fort. ‘The commandant should be able to give us assistance bringing up the cargo,’ he said.

The fort was an oblong-shaped structure, with mud-covered walls that were being repaired. They looked brittle with age. We found the man in question at the main gate. He was shouting orders to a group of soldiers, who quickly set off to obey his command.

Livingstone approached and addressed him in Portuguese. The commandant replied (I learnt afterwards) that he would help in any way he could, but that most of the people in his command were about to join the Portuguese at Mazaro, and that Livingstone would be obliged to use the villagers to bring up our cargo.

The fort at Sena dates from the sixteenth century. It’s astonishing to think: the Portuguese built it – and another further up at the Tete – three hundred years ago, before Raleigh, before Drake, before English ships had gone very far. But it seemed that only now, after all this time, was anything being done with any sort of urgency.

The wooden stockade was recent. Some of the poles were still growing, as I had seen the night before. My eyes had not deceived me. Many of them, having taken root, were sending out branches, which of course was the idea, because it would be considerably stronger once they became interlaced. The stockade was about a mile long and a quarter of a mile broad, enclosing a substantial area. People had flocked there ever since the rumours of war had begun to spread, increasing the population of Sena tenfold – there were now many hundreds of people living there. All around was activity to do with the war – men building, carrying, moving around with purpose.

Back at Ferrão's, a large party of Africans was gathering. They were Landeens, allies of the Portuguese. They marched up to the house and performed a war dance. Quite a frightful sight. While the rest stood in a semicircle, one by one they took turns to rush into the middle and give a most energetic representation of a deadly combat with some invisible foe, leaping high into the air, crouching, advancing and retreating, brandishing a spear or axe most fiercely. The others, who surrounded the fellow in the middle, applauded enthusiastically at this macabre pantomime – and it was macabre, because something about the manner of the performance, and the way it was received, made one certain that this was a rehearsal of an actual feat of arms of which the warrior felt most proud.

They were dressed like Zoolus – and that's of course what they were, Zoolus who had come north, and are just called by a different name, as the Matabeles are, Moselekatze's men. The chief was highly ornamented with feathers waving above his head, a dozen brass rings on each arm, a tiger skin, and rolled strips of hide attached to his waist, resembling the tail of an animal. He carried a spear that ended in a deadly metal blade, and a battle axe, its handle inlaid with tin. A fine sight, when he stood to dismiss his men, with a commanding attitude. Many artists much better than I would be glad to be offered such a study.

I spent some time examining the village and sketching. Most of the stone structures were in some stage of ruin, which was strange to see out here. One would expect European buildings in the tropics to be much newer than this.

I walked some way towards the hill, Kevramisa, and passed what looked like graves. Drawn on the stones were six-pointed stars ... the Jewish star. Could it be possible, I wondered. Were Bedingfeld's strange ideas true after all? I peered at the shape. The lines were quite rough, but it looked very like the Star of David. No, surely not. My imagination must be getting ahead of itself. Surely.

Livingstone arranged a house to keep our stores, and some villagers to carry them there. He had found a chap to take care of it all, a half-caste, named Louis. A framework three or four feet high had been built, and they were raised upon this to preserve them from the depredations of the ants.

We took our half-caste Louis with us back to the launch, which we found a couple of miles away. She had steamed up in the meantime and was lying a short distance from the shore. The Kroomen were cutting wood on the deck.

Bedingfeld and Rae emerged from the cabin. They had a listless look about them. It was strange to see them – I had almost forgotten them. I had to admit that I preferred travelling with Livingstone on his own.

We walked to the nearby village of Nyaruka, where we found three of the heaviest pieces of our machinery lying near the landing place. A crowd of natives were collected, but they seemed to have little idea of uniting their strength so as to use it to advantage, though after they had found the difficulty of carrying up one of the lighter pieces, they readily entered into our plan of lashing two long poles to the heavier so that a dozen or eighteen men could take it on their shoulders.

‘In all this time,’ Livingstone said, ‘the Portuguese haven’t taught them a thing.’

I made a note in the store book as the goods were carried off. Our four cases of beads were next to be taken up.

In the evening we took our half-caste friend Louis on board to dine. The tenant of the house had kindly sent us a leg of mutton, which Tom Davis prepared. When he saw Louis at the table and realized that he was joining us for dinner, his face betrayed a look of shock, and his manner become surly. His pride was greatly hurt, and it took some time before he recovered his good temper after suffering the indignity of being compelled to wait upon a black fellow.

The journey downriver was easier, now that we were going with the current, but still we ran aground and found ourselves in channels that led nowhere. Livingstone and Bedingfeld were snapping at each other all the way down.

We anchored off Latitude Island, a mile upstream from Shupanga, and went ashore in search of more wood, as our supply had all but been consumed. There was no *lignum vitae*, apart from a small specimen burned through and partially imbedded in the ground. Nearby was a taller tree with some dead limbs high up.

‘Why don’t you jump up and cut them down?’ said Livingstone.

Had he spoken in jest or earnest? I couldn’t tell, and, as he walked off, I was left wondering. He had said it with a bit of a laugh, but I did not yet know him well enough to understand if this meant he expected me to try or not.

Better to attempt it if he hadn’t meant me to than neglect my duty if he had, and it was a chance to impress him. There was a bush vine hanging from one of the branches, which might take my weight. But, as I gave it a gentle tug, it came down with a leafy rustle.

I hadn't heard Livingstone joke very often. He always had a stern air about him. Sometimes he was highly energetic, other times quietly sombre – but always the sternness. Perhaps, as he became more comfortable with me, I would see that he had a humorous side.

The trunk of the tree had no branches, and it was too large to span with the arms. I tried cutting steps in with a tomahawk, but the wood was too hard, and I could make no indentation.

The next morning I returned with the Kroomen, and once they were at work, cutting the burnt lignum vitae, I returned to my tree. I'd brought a handsaw with me, and a rope, which I managed to throw over a branch. I climbed up and, with the saw, cut through the largest dead limb. It was fully a foot in diameter near the tree and more than thirty feet long. The wood was hard; it seemed of excellent quality. Livingstone would be pleased. I called to the Kroomen and instructed them to cut it into smaller pieces, and then started sawing at a smaller limb.

I could not tell whether Livingstone was surprised or not when the Kroomen carried the first armfuls of wood to the *MaRobert*.

'That tree you suggested,' I said, 'it has provided fine fuel.'

'Good,' he said, with a nod, and turned towards the cabin. 'Come with me.'

He led me to the galley, and pointed out items for me to take, as a small present for the Portuguese: sugar, chocolate and milk in tins, preserved bacon, and a few other items. But the invitation was to more than just collecting stores. We set off together in the whaleboat, towards Shupanga.

'Colonel Nunes is there now,' Livingstone said, 'and the governor is out of danger.'

We approached the island opposite Shupanga, where the Portuguese were now encamped. Livingstone told me that in the morning of the attack on Mazaro the rebels had at first succeeded in getting so far into the Portuguese camp as to make prize of a quantity of sugar and provisions, as well as the sword of the commandant of Tete. The first man who seized it was shot, a second took it up and was also killed, but a third succeeded in getting it away. Imagine what a picture that would have made: a rebel standing tall, brandishing the sword, one leg slightly bent, his foot resting on one of his poor dead comrades. The other slain man I would place in the foreground, his arm outstretched to the corner of the canvas.

A number of canoes and a launch were lying on the lower side of the island and the soldiers had huddled themselves in small buildings of reeds.

We were greeted by Major Sicard himself, who seemed no less jovial for having been driven out of Mazaro or having his sword stolen.

‘Look,’ I said, ‘I have something to show you.’

I unfurled my sketch of Mazaro. Sicard’s eyes widened, and he looked up at me with a nod of approval. I glanced at Livingstone; his expression remained stern.

‘Ha!’ Sicard said. ‘This is very good. You are ... very good artist.’ He nodded to Livingstone, as if to approve his choice of personnel. Livingstone nodded back.

Sicard gave an order in Portuguese to one of his aides. He wanted, from his gestures, somebody summoned here. ‘Ha,’ he said again, and pointed to the corpse lying at the entrance of the Mutu.

In a few moments, one of the native warriors appeared, accompanied by the aide.

The commandant pointed again to the corpse. He was, I realized, showing this native the portrait of the man he had slain. The fellow stared at it for a long time, and spoke some words that I didn’t understand, but his meaning was clear enough that he was pleased – with me as well as with himself.

There were more orders from Sicard, and one of his officers placed his hand on my shoulder and beckoned me to follow him. I looked at Livingstone; he gave me a slight nod, so I went with the officer.

He took me round the island and pointed to the opposite bank. There, not a hundred yards away, sat a party of rebels, about twenty of them, with others scattered nearby. A couple of six-pounder field pieces were pointed at them, but there seemed no determination to open fire. There the rebels sat, and there the guns stood, and it seemed that so it would be for eternity. A very strange sight. It was not considered worthwhile, I learnt, to waste ammunition till some more formidable demonstration was made.

I had just commenced a sketch when the launch appeared, steaming past Shupanga. It was time to continue the journey, so I hastened back and boarded. Bedingfeld and Livingstone were glaring at each other again. There had been another quarrel.

Expedition Island
Zambesi, 31st July, 1858

Commander Bedingfeld, R.N.

Sir, As you have tendered your resignation and also expressed regret that it was not accepted, I have felt it to be my duty to make arrangements for your safe conveyance to Quilimane in a few weeks hence, and there you will be provided with comfortable lodgings until the arrival of one of H.M. cruisers will allow of your departure for the Cape, where the Admiral will provide you a passage to England in one of the Government vessels. You are not to incur any expense whatever on account of Her Majesty's Government on this Expedition.

Your resignation is this day accepted and you are from this date no longer a member of the Zambesi Expedition. You are required to deliver into the care of Dr Kirk all public property, including the chart of the river for further use and all the scientific observations you may have made. And, as a few weeks may elapse before Colonel Nunes can convey you to Quilimane, your comfort will be best provided for by your remaining on this island till I find you may remove.

A supply of Quinine is at your service, should you think it proper to adopt the sanitary precautions followed by the rest of the Expedition.

I am your obedient servant
David Livingstone
H.B.M's Consul commanding Zambesi Expedition.

Expedition Island, 31 July – 1 August 1858

We arrive at Expedition Island on the last day of July. Kirk, Thornton and Charles are standing on the shore as the launch drifts in to the landing place. Crab is running in circles and barking.

Livingstone is first off the launch and strides past them and towards the iron house. 'Charles,' I hear him call, 'come with me.'

Bedingfeld disembarks a moment later, and sets off in the other direction. As he passes the others, Crab growls and barks at him. Bedingfeld shouts some curse in return, but I can't hear what.

Thornton is quickly on board, his eyes full of questions.

'What's going on?' he asks, looking back at Bedingfeld.

'He's going to get it now,' Rae says, shaking his head, as Kirk joins us. 'He's been ... Bedingfeld, I mean' – making sure Kirk knows who we were talking about – 'if anything he's behaved worse than before.'

'He doesn't look happy,' Kirk says. 'Neither does Livingstone. What has he done?'

'Shied away from helping the Doctor in the middle of a battle. That's the worst of it, but there's plenty more.'

'A *battle*?' Thornton looks at me now. 'What on earth?'

'Let me show you,' I say. 'I have a sketch of it.'

'Dr Kirk!' Charles calls out from the house. 'My brother would like to see you.'

Kirk shrugs. 'I suppose I'll hear all about it from the Doctor now. Will you show me later?'

'Of course.'

Thornton's expression says very clearly that he is eager to hear the story here and now, and we are keen to tell it. His eyes grow wider and wider as we tell about the trip to Mazaro, the headless bodies there, the outbreak of fighting. I show him my sketch at the Mutu, and point out what was going on. Rae tells him about Livingstone's rescue of the governor and the difficulties in getting onto the launch.

'If Bedingfeld had his way,' Rae grimaces, 'Livingstone would have had to swim halfway across the river to get to the launch. Baines too.'

'Really?' Thornton looks at me.

‘What do you think is going on in there?’ Rae points at the house. ‘Do you think Livingstone is going to dismiss him?’

I shake my head. ‘I don’t know. Perhaps he will. Perhaps they both just need some time apart.’

‘Time apart?’ Rae scoffs. ‘I hardly think that’s going to mend Livingstone’s temper.’

Desiring a few moments away from the others, I take Crab on a walk, setting off in a different direction from the one Bedingfeld took.

Here we are, still on this blasted island. Each rock and plant is too familiar. Only the shoreline offers any interest, as it alters with the changing course of the river.

I sit on the bank for a while. The sandmartins are flying about, looping through the air and then returning to their nests in the bank. This fighting fills me with unease. Was it like this ... among the Apostles, or King David’s men, or Moses’ followers, on their way to the Promised Land? The men of God were often hard men, and there must have been those who did not get on with them. But then Bedingfeld considers himself a man of God as much as Livingstone. What is it between the two of them?

And is it just Bedingfeld who feels Livingstone’s wrath? I must say, I feel uncomfortable around him. Not all the time, but it always comes at some point. Perhaps he sees some fault in me, some shortcoming.

I must have been away for half an hour: I’d better not be away too long, in case I am needed for something.

‘Come, Crab,’ I call, and begin the walk back. I follow the shoreline, and, as I approach the house, I see Thornton. He comes running towards me, glancing over his shoulder once or twice.

‘You won’t believe it,’ he says in a loud whisper. ‘The Doctor just showed me a letter. He’s written a letter now accepting Bedingfeld’s resignation. He’s separated him from the expedition!’

At that moment I see Bedingfeld, striding in our direction, with a piece of paper in his hand. The letter – he must have received it right now. He comes quite close, but doesn’t seem to notice us. He is muttering to himself: ‘...that’s very fine, oh yes.’ Then he laughs. ‘Ha! Let’s see how well you do ... let’s see how well you do ... then you’ll realize what a bloody mistake you’ve made. And the Kroomen?’ He laughs again. ‘Ha! Oh yes, you’ll see ...’

As he moves some way beyond us, his words become indistinct, but I can still make out the occasional ‘ha!’ all the way on his route to the launch.

I look at Thornton. 'What did it say, this letter?'

'He said – Livingstone said – that he accepted Bedingfeld's resignation, and Bedingfeld is to be sent to Quilimane, where he will await the next steamer home. Livingstone has made arrangements with Colonel Nunes. He said he'd already shown it to Mr Livingstone and Kirk, and they thought it fair.'

Charles, Kirk and Thornton. I find it slightly surprising that the Doctor showed this letter to Thornton. I suppose if I hadn't been off walking he would have shown it to me too.

I will stay close now. I walk towards the house, hoping to find Kirk. He is there, in the main room, but talking to Livingstone. I'd better not interrupt. I go to the stores in the front, to see if anything needs doing. But I don't know what Livingstone wants to do next, so I have no idea what needs packing up and what should be left there. And there are no Kroomen around to help me. Perhaps I should use the time to work on a picture, but most of my current materials are on the launch.

There is movement from the house: Livingstone, Kirk and Charles emerge. Livingstone's gaze lands upon me for a second; there is an angry glow in his eyes. Kirk gives me a faint but reassuring smile as they walk past. I fall in behind them. Halfway down to the launch, Livingstone halts.

'Jumbo!' he bellows. 'Tom Jumbo!'

The Kroomen are all on the deck, and all stand still and straight at the sound of the Doctor's command. Jumbo is quickly at the gunwale. Rae appears from behind the engine.

'Jumbo,' Livingstone orders, 'assemble your men at the house, please – in five minutes! Mr Rae, you too.'

With that he turns, and Charles and Kirk follow him back to the house. I follow them a moment later, but not before I see Bedingfeld's head peep out from the cabin.

'Jumbo,' Livingstone says, once all the Kroomen are lined up and standing to attention. 'Commander Bedingfeld is no longer in command. Is that clear? From now on, you are to take no orders from him. Do you understand?'

Jumbo nods, his eyes looking straight ahead like a soldier's. 'Boss no boss any more,' he says.

'Make sure all your men understand. Stand at ease.'

I am standing on the verandah, with Kirk, Thornton and Rae. Charles is outside, a few paces from his brother. I am glad of the shadow here.

Jumbo is addressing his men, and they talk among themselves in their own language. There is much murmuring and nodding and shaking of the head.

‘You should have seen him.’ Rae walks out towards Livingstone. ‘You should have seen him, when he came onto the launch after he’d received the letter. He was singing and dancing in front of the Kroomen. He sang: *I’m going to Quilimane! I’m going to Quilimane!* and he danced about like a madman. And then all of a sudden he became very serious, and went into the cabin and started writing something.’

I look around. Is Bedingfeld in earshot? Where is he now?

‘He’s trying to turn them against us,’ Livingstone says.

‘Oh, he told them that he would soon be back in Sierra Leone, in command of a man-of-war again, and if he found them there he would know who to give jobs.’

‘Ha!’ Livingstone snorts. ‘Bedingfeld, once again, seems to have an inflated sense of his importance.’

With that, he goes among the Kroomen and talks to Jumbo, placing a hand on his shoulder. After a while he turns to us all and raises his voice.

‘Jumbo, I believe you have something to say to everyone here.’

Jumbo stands before us with a frown on his brow. He clears his throat. ‘Governor Hill ask us work two year for Dr Livingstone.’ He nods his head to emphasize the fact. ‘We work for Dr Livingstone.’ He nods again. ‘Two year.’

‘Very good,’ says Livingstone. ‘Thank you, Jumbo. Your loyalty is appreciated.’

The head Krooman gives a little bow and returns to his men.

‘Dr Kirk.’ Livingstone looks in our direction. ‘You are now second-in-command. I trust you will exercise your position more nobly than your predecessor.’

‘I hope, sir, I will do so to your satisfaction.’ Kirk shows no sign of self-consciousness, no sign of revelling in another man’s misfortune. His expression is calm. It’s hard to believe that he’s ten years younger than me – more.

Livingstone approaches the verandah. ‘Now, Dr Kirk, Mr Baines. We have work to do for the next trip. Jumbo, your men too. Mr Thornton, you will work on your sketch of the river. We will need it in addition to Bedingfeld’s.’

‘Yes, Doctor,’ says Thornton.

I wish I was the one being asked to do this. I’d be good at it – better than Thornton – and it would be a way to use my skills to please the Doctor. Instead I must struggle with the chaos of the stores.

‘This machinery,’ Livingstone says. ‘It will do for the pinnacle. And those boxes of biscuit.’

There is such a great deal still to be packed. It will take this trip and at least another two to remove everything from this place. The stores are proving a substantial encumbrance. This must be causing Livingstone frustration. And it is a devil of a job for me to keep note of them in the store book.

‘Those bales of felt,’ he says, ‘they can go in the launch.’

In the afternoon, we are all assembled at dinner, except Bedingfeld, when Tom Peter comes quietly to the table, takes a plate and makes his way to Davis’s pot.

‘What are you doing, Tom Peter?’ Livingstone asks.

Peter looks at him, an awkward expression on his face.

‘Peter? I asked you a question.’

‘Me take food for cap’n,’ the Krooman says.

‘Wait a minute.’ Livingstone stands up and gently takes the plate from Peter’s hand. He holds up a finger, which the Krooman eyes with unease. ‘Captain Bedingfeld is no longer to tell you what to do. You go back to him and tell him he must fetch his own dinner.’

Peter nods, but his face is a picture of displeasure. He looks as if he is about to burst into tears. Poor chap, he now has to go back and tell this to Bedingfeld. I am feeling uncomfortable enough myself, and everyone else appears unhappy about the awkwardness of it. I hurry through my dinner. Perhaps I will finish before Bedingfeld comes. Perhaps he will not come at all. Someone should surely take some food to him.

Fifteen minutes later Bedingfeld appears. He stands stiffly, his chin jutting out more noticeably than usual.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ he says, holding out an envelope. ‘If you please.’

Livingstone very slowly reaches out and takes the letter. ‘Thank you, Commander,’ he says, in a civil tone.

Bedingfeld turns and takes a plate to the pot. Apart from the clinking of the ladle, the room is completely silent. No sound whatsoever. I am, I realize, holding my breath. No one else is moving a muscle, apart from Livingstone, who is settling back onto his seat.

Bedingfeld turns to us all, the plate in his hand. ‘Good afternoon,’ he says.

I nod and give a little grunt, as do the others. Only Livingstone replies with a clear ‘Good afternoon.’

I look down at my feet. Livingstone is being harsh with Bedingfeld. Too harsh? The name of St Paul wells up in my mind; a name I heard so often in church as a boy. My picture of him is a stern man, without much humour. He had a job to do: a church to build

in a hostile environment. There was no time for pleasantries. Probably there were men who were cast aside. But I wish it was not like this.

Livingstone opens the letter and reads it to himself. Charles sits next to him, looking at his brother for permission, I think, to read over his shoulder, but the Doctor is completely absorbed. Still no one says anything. I glance at Kirk. His eyes are calm. Thornton looks anxious. Rae looks at me with almost a smirk.

‘Well,’ Livingstone says, after a while. ‘Here we have the good Commander’s reply. I shall read it to you.’ He holds up the paper. ‘*MaRobert, Expedition Island, July 31st, 1858.*’ He clears his throat.

‘Sir, I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of to-day’s date by which you suspend me from duty, directing me to wait some weeks on the Island until an opportunity offers for my being sent to Quilimane, a notoriously unhealthy place, to wait there until another opportunity offers a man-of-war calling: a very unlikely occurrence, the country between this and Quilimane being in a state of war and unsafe to travel, as you are perfectly aware. Your offer of Quinine I can fully appreciate. I beg to call your attention to the fact that I have not refused to do my duty and have never disobeyed any of your lawful commands and I shall call upon others to witness it. I shall consider myself a member of the Expedition until properly provided with a passage to England and I object to go to Quilimane under the present circumstances.

‘I have the honour to be ... Sir,’ he mumbles the salutation, *‘Your obedient humble servant, Norman B. Bedingfeld.’*

Livingstone folds up the letter and puts it back in the envelope.

I cannot believe this is real. Bedingfeld, who was so proud, who seemed so strong, writing this pitiful letter. Yet there is dignity about it. And he’s right, isn’t he, about the dangers between here and Quilimane. What if another battle were to break out, like the one at Mazaró? His life could be at risk.

‘Well,’ Livingstone says. ‘How curious that Commander Bedingfeld should now consider himself a member of the expedition when he has asked, twice, to be separated from it, and now that I have finally accepted his request. Has it sunk in, now, that the stoppage of his duties also means the stoppage of his pay?’ He looks up and juts out his chin a little. ‘I think you’ll all agree, gentlemen, that this does not require any answer.’

And what, I think, about mercy? What about forgiveness? I asked that in class one day, when I was very young. Father Harding had been speaking about God’s retribution upon sinners.

‘You are called to forgive others,’ he answered me, ‘but don’t go and sin expecting God to forgive you. That’s what the Papists do, and God will condemn them too.’

Rae is pointing at the letter in Livingstone’s hand. ‘That’s what he went off to do, once he had finished going on in front of the men the way he did.’

‘Jumbo told me a most interesting thing after our meeting this afternoon,’ Livingstone says. ‘He tells me that once he had assembled the men to work on this expedition, and they discovered it was Captain Bedingfeld who would command them, all but three of them refused to serve, and he had to enlist more men to replace them. Such is the reputation of our great naval officer.’

My toes curl tightly with discomfort. I wish to stand up, but I don’t want to be the first to leave.

In the morning, Bedingfeld is moving his things up from the *MaRobert* into one of the tents beside the iron house. It will be the first time that he is not quartered in the launch’s cabin.

Kirk has been ordered to join the launch on its next trip up, tomorrow, so he is packing his things to take on board. This time I will be staying behind on the island. My instructions are to assist Livingstone’s brother with magnetic observations and to take down the iron house.

I have some things of my own in the launch’s cabin, which I must collect. I watch from a distance, as Bedingfeld comes off with a box and trudges up the hill. But while I am gathering my possessions he returns, and continues packing, doing the same thing as me. He, of course, will never bring his things back here. He will never again travel on the *MaRobert*.

I work quietly and do not catch his eye. A man must be left to reflect on these matters in peace, without someone gawking at him. But Bedingfeld breaks the silence.

‘This is the most disgraceful treatment I have ever experienced.’ He speaks softly. ‘Never, even in my first days in the navy, have I been treated as badly as this.’

There is something pitiful about him now. Livingstone has humiliated him. ‘I’m sorry,’ I say, ‘that it has come to this.’

Kirk appears at the door with a suitcase. ‘Excuse me,’ he says, laying it down just inside the cabin, and backs away.

‘So,’ Bedingfeld says, ‘Dr Kirk is now Livingstone’s second-in-command. Well, perhaps that will suit the Doctor better. Another Scotsman. But he won’t know a thing about boats, or about how to handle the Kroomen. You and Rae: you’re the only ones

who know anything about sailing. But I don't know how much good it will do you. This river ...' He shakes his head. 'They would have been better off choosing the Congo.'

'Not that the Congo would have brought us to the Doctor's Makololo.' I regret the words as soon as I have said them.

'The Doctor does not care about his Makololo,' Bedingfeld hisses. 'He pretends to, but he cares only for himself. He wants to be the first, to see, to discover something, and we are just getting in the way. Do you think he wants to share the glory with the rest of us? I'd watch myself if I were you, Mr Baines.'

He looks at me, but he does not demand a response. Such statements are, of course, understandable from a man who is upset. But his words fall heavily upon me. I find myself wondering if there is some truth in them.

It is Sunday, and we have a service at eleven. It is the largest gathering in a while: all the Kroomen, as well as Antonio and the pilot. I think back to the first Sunday when the whole party had assembled. So much has gone wrong since then. And now we have lost one of our number.

'I am the way, the truth and the light,' Livingstone reads. *'No one cometh to the Father but through me.'* He speaks about truth, about God's truth, which is revealed to us if we are faithful, about simple truth, being honest and not telling lies, for how could we then expect God be true to us?

He gives us our orders for the next day, to prepare for the launch's departure, but for the remainder of Sunday we are to do only light work, and only if we wish; and the Kroomen are to rest. Jumbo and Tom Peter are to go with the launch this time, and Wilson and Black Will to remain on the island. Thornton will be staying behind as well.

Kirk has taken two young hawks out of a nest, and in the afternoon gives them a snake I killed yesterday and injured rather too much for a specimen. I find my alligator's head has been wetted so much that the skin has peeled off it and I think it best to lay it in the water so as to clean it for a skeleton.

In the afternoon, when I pass the house, I see Livingstone sitting at the table writing. He doesn't notice me, so I stand there for a while. He is utterly absorbed, writing furiously, without looking up for a moment.

My Lord,

It is with considerable regret that I have to inform your Lordship that I have this day accepted the resignation of Commander Bedingfeld, a naval officer on half pay who was recommended by myself in reliance on the testimony of his friends as a suitable person for assisting this Expedition in the navigation of the Zambesi, for, if there was one thing that engaged my attention more than another in the selection of my companions, it was to secure those only whose previous experience of the discomforts of travel and whose good temper promised fair to [*illegible*] from the beginning to the end of our enterprise. It is therefore very mortifying to have to report at this early stage the defection of one whose claims to the consideration of Her Majesty's Government for the appointment which he has repeatedly resigned consisted chiefly in my having been led to form a too favourable estimate of his zeal and self-command.

– David Livingstone, dispatch to Lord Malmesbury,
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated 31 July 1858

University of Cape Town

Expedition Island, August 1858

Why was it that I signed the statement for Bedingfeld? That wretched statement that would cause so much trouble? Was it the cause of everything that was to follow?

It happened on the day the *MaRobert* left for her next trip upriver. Livingstone asked Thornton after breakfast if his chart was ready.

‘Almost ready, Dr Livingstone. I have completed it as far as Mazaro. I’ll have it finished in a couple of hours.’

‘Good. Dr Kirk. Charles. Please go to Bedingfeld and ask him for his map and his remarks on the river.’

The two men set off towards Bedingfeld’s tent. I had been back on my feet for only a minute or two when they returned.

‘He refuses to give them up,’ said Charles, out of breath.

‘He says,’ Kirk added, ‘He says they are no use to anyone but himself and he has had no time to do anything with them.’

Livingstone closed his eyes and gave a long sigh. ‘Must everything to do with Bedingfeld be an ordeal? Do I have to put every little request in writing?’ He took out pen and paper and started writing a note. ‘Charles,’ he said, once he had signed his name at the bottom, ‘make a copy in the journal. Dr Kirk, will you deliver this note to Bedingfeld when Mr Livingstone is finished?’

I went back to my work on the stores. There were piles to one side, to be carried to the launch and the pinnace. Jumbo had gathered his men to begin the work.

Some time later, when Kirk had returned, he joined me as I walked down towards the launch, where the Doctor was waiting. As we passed the row of tents, Bedingfeld opened the flap of his and put his head out.

‘Dr Kirk,’ he called, and beckoned.

‘What is it?’ Kirk muttered. ‘I hope this is news that will please the Doctor.’

As Kirk approached the tent, Bedingfeld called out again. ‘Mr Baines?’

What now? I made my way there.

Bedingfeld had made the tent quite comfortable, with a bed and boxes for his things.

‘Here,’ he said, ‘here is the chart. I don’t think this is going to make a blind bit of difference one way or the other. But give it to Livingstone. If he doesn’t get it from me, he’s going to blame me of trying to sabotage your journey.’

‘Thank you,’ said Kirk. He glanced at me for a moment. I could see he wasn’t enjoying playing courier in this conflict.

Bedingfeld cleared his throat. ‘I ...’ he began, but fell silent.

Kirk raised his eyebrows. What was coming?

Bedingfeld looked down at the ground. ‘I ... worry that people in England are going to get the wrong idea, about why I am returning.’ Now he looked up, first at Kirk, then at me. ‘It is ... unfortunate ... that there have been these ... disagreements ... between myself and the Doctor. I apologize, if it has been uncomfortable for you, being caught in the middle. And, no matter. I will be gone soon. But, as I say, I am worried what people will think. Back home. Perhaps they will not trust my word, and assume worse of me than they should.’

‘You will, I’m sure, be all right,’ Kirk said. ‘If people know the truth, that there were, as you say, disagreements – that is not so unforgivable.’

Bedingfeld had a point, though. Thrown off Livingstone’s expedition: that would be a hard thing to recover from. Even then I appreciated that.

‘Ah, but what will people’s grubby imaginations conjure up?’ Bedingfeld said. ‘*Mutiny! Desertion!* Hm? These are the stories that would excite people, and I will have only my word to protect myself.’

‘And you wish us ...’ Kirk began.

‘Just the simple truth. That’s all I ask.’

‘I must get this back to Livingstone,’ Kirk said, holding up Bedingfeld’s chart.

‘Proof,’ Bedingfeld raised a finger, ‘that I am not uncooperative, that I did not wish to undermine the expedition.’

‘And you wish us to sign ...’

‘A statement.’

‘Saying what?’

Bedingfeld reached behind him and held up a piece of paper. ‘Saying that you did not hear me disobey any lawful commands.’

I quickly looked down. Bedingfeld had indeed disobeyed Livingstone’s instructions.

Kirk drew air through his teeth. ‘That is open to interpretation. If it is the simple truth that you want – as you say ...’

‘Then will you sign this instead? That I was willing to stay on, to navigate the launch until a suitable successor was found.’

‘That’s true,’ I said quietly.

‘I did hear you say that,’ Kirk agreed.

‘Then sign, will you?’

‘I must take this to the Doctor,’ Kirk said, raising the chart again.

‘Yes. But later. We will talk again later.’

‘I must go too,’ I said, ‘to the boats. The Doctor will be wondering where I am.’

‘Well,’ Livingstone scoffed. ‘Is this what our great navigator considers a chart? Perhaps he had reason to withhold it.’

I glanced at Kirk. It was true that Bedingfeld had never paid much attention to the methods of surveying.

‘It is,’ Kirk agreed, ‘little more than an eye-sketch.’

‘Thank goodness we will have Mr Thornton’s chart. I suspect we will find that far more useful.’

Thornton must have smiled at that.

The next few hours were filled with hard work, loading the launch and the pinnacle. I was not feeling my best, a little tired and dizzy, but hard work was the best thing for it.

My mind was filled with thoughts about this statement that Bedingfeld wanted us to sign. It was true what he had said. The Press in England might well try to make even more of his return than was the case. Yes, he had not been a constructive presence on the expedition, but the Press might want to find something more sinister in it. Even the Doctor should not mind if I signed a statement telling the simple truth: that I’d heard Bedingfeld say he was prepared to stay on until Livingstone found someone to replace him. Livingstone seemed quite happy to navigate himself, and of course I would be too, so it wasn’t as if Bedingfeld had left us in the lurch. No one could argue with the truth. Certainly not Livingstone.

I hoped to discuss the matter with Kirk, but there was never an opportunity. So much had to be done before they left. I helped stack boxes in the launch’s cabin, leaving little space for them to live in. Kirk was at the pinnacle talking to Livingstone, then I couldn’t see him any more.

I find it difficult to recall the order in which events occurred. There was an increase in activity before the launch left. Livingstone was shouting orders from the pinnacle, and Charles was trying to direct the Kroomen from the shore. Thornton came aboard with a

pair of shoes. 'Here,' he said to Rae, 'you can use these.' The pinnacle lay deep in the water; the launch, too, was heavily laden. They cast off in the middle of the day, drifted some distance down the shore, and then steamed off across the river.

I remember going out to take observations with the magnetic dip instrument, as I'd been ordered by Livingstone, but I found the mechanism difficult to use. It is, of course, no easy matter to come in at once from hard work and remember instructions received six months before.

I must have made some groan of exasperation.

'Having some trouble?' It was Bedingfeld, who had appeared nearby.

'I'm ... it's all right. I'm trying to remember how to use this.'

'Let me help you.' He came closer and looked at the instrument. He pointed out some mechanism or other that I'd forgotten about.

'Thank you,' I said. I looked again at the instrument. But still it was confusing.

'You're not looking well,' he said. 'You should get some rest.'

'Perhaps,' I said. 'If I can just remember how to work this. There's a right way, and I just need to remember what it is.'

'I'd like to speak to you again,' he said, 'about the statement.' I turned to face him. There was a softness in his eyes, as I would never have believed possible before.

'Will you sign?' he said. We were in his tent now. He held out a sheet of paper, which I read carefully to make sense of the words. *At the request of Captain Bedingfeld, R.N., we hereby certify his perfect willingness to continue his duties until a proper successor can be found to take his place.* Kirk had already signed – or did he sign later?

'I will take this... I must think. I will bring it back to you.'

'Very well,' he said.

The statement was the truth. Kirk and I had refused to attest that Bedingfeld had never disobeyed orders, but this we'd agreed was true. There should be nothing to worry about. But it did worry me ... as if I was doing something in secret.

Then I did a stupid thing: I decided to show the document to Charles. He was in charge of the camp now, after all, and this way I would be doing nothing in the dark.

I found Charles in the iron house, lying down on his bed.

'Mr Livingstone,' I said. 'I want to show you ...' I held out the document '...something that Captain Bedingfeld has asked me to sign.'

'What is it?'

'I don't want anyone to think that I am ... it's simply something that I heard Bedingfeld say ...'

Charles took the paper and read it.

‘Prepared to stay on,’ he read. ‘I’m sure that Commander Bedingfeld says he was prepared to stay on.’

‘Yes, I heard ... some time ago. He asked Dr Kirk too.’

‘Indeed? But he didn’t sign?’

‘He didn’t sign a statement that he had never heard Bedingfeld disobey an order, but ...’

‘Good. I’m sure he didn’t. I can think of plenty of instances when Bedingfeld disobeyed orders.’

‘We would, of course, only sign something if we knew it to be true.’

‘That’s right. Why would you sign if you knew it to be false? Thank you for showing that to me. Now go.’

Wait. If this happened after the launch left, then Kirk’s signature would already have been on the affidavit. But it wasn’t. Not yet. This must have happened before the launch left.

I *do* recall sitting in Bedingfeld’s tent again. Was *this* now after the launch left? Was Kirk’s signature there now? Does it matter?

I took my pen and signed, ‘*T. Baines*’, as it appeared at the bottom right of my pictures. I hoped that this would be the end of it.

‘You’re not looking well, Mr Baines. Can I offer you’ – Bedingfeld presented me with a glass – ‘a little brandy? It will do you the world of good.’

‘Thank you,’ I said, keeping the glass still while he poured a liberal measure into it.

It burned as it flowed slowly down my throat. It felt like it was doing me good. I always remember, whenever I have a drink, the articles of indenture I signed to become an apprentice to William Carr, ornamental painter, in King’s Lynn. I would not enter taverns, inns or alehouses and I would abstain from alcohol. I was only sixteen. Oh yes, and I would not contract matrimony. That vow has stood to this day.

‘You might as well stay here,’ Bedingfeld said. ‘If you’re taking down the iron house you’ll need somewhere to stay. Charles and Thornton will take the next one. You might need some looking after.’

‘Thank you, Commander Bedingfeld,’ I said.

Perhaps it was only then that I signed the statement.

On the way to the house to collect my things, or perhaps I was going to check on the hawks, I encountered Thornton.

‘Did Bedingfeld ask you to sign something,’ he asked me, ‘a statement?’

Charles must have told him about it. Unless Bedingfeld asked him to sign too.

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘he did.’

‘And did you?’

‘Sign it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Yes, I did.’

‘You’re mad. The Doctor won’t like that. He asked *me* to write a statement *about* Bedingfeld.’

‘Saying what?’

‘Saying ... something I heard Bedingfeld say some time ago: that it was not his business to look after the Kroomen’s provisions, and that Livingstone should have got a lighter man to do his work, not an officer of his standing. Livingstone wants me to write that down. He wants a record of Bedingfeld’s ... wrongdoings. He won’t be happy about you writing statements on *Bedingfeld’s* behalf.’

‘It’s the *truth*.’

‘So’s what I said.’

‘I’m sure it is. Look, I’m not taking sides. Bedingfeld asked me if something was true and I said yes it was. Simple as that.’

Of course I had made a mistake. I had signed my name on behalf of Livingstone’s enemy, and that would make me his enemy too. But so had Kirk. How did Kirk square it up with the Doctor? And I wasn’t taking sides – apart from the side of truth, which the Doctor had preached about in his sermon. Was I expected to lie? No, I wasn’t going to spread falsehoods about Bedingfeld just because he’d been dismissed. If I were asked to certify that he’d been argumentative, and pompous, I would do so. But I did hear him say he was prepared to stay on, and so I had to certify that too.

The launch was away for three days. It was not a happy time. Charles was in an unpleasant mood. The Kroomen, now that Bedingfeld wasn’t giving them orders, did whatever they wanted. Charles tried to take charge of them, but they didn’t listen to him. He was huffy with Bedingfeld, refusing to speak to him at all.

I preferred to avoid the unpleasantness, so, whenever I felt well enough to do so, I busied myself with doing what the Doctor had ordered me to do. The days were windy, so I had little success with magnetism. When I could find the Kroomen, I worked at taking down the iron house, pulling down sheets of metal. There was simplicity in that: sticking to a task and getting it done.

‘Mr Livingstone is a useless fellow,’ Bedingfeld said to me later in the tent, while I was writing up my journal.

I did not have as much admiration for him as I had for his brother, that was true, but I wasn’t going to agree openly with Bedingfeld. It would not do to conspire in any way.

‘Mr Thornton is not exactly a picture of industry himself,’ Bedingfeld continued. ‘You seem to be the one doing most of the work around here.’

That was true too. Thornton was little help in taking down the iron house, and Charles none at all.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘it helps to work to ward off fever.’

‘As does this,’ he said, holding up the brandy bottle. ‘May I pour you a glass?’

I thanked him, and took a sip. Again the fiery feeling down my throat. I drank the glass as I continued with the journal.

‘You’re very diligent about that,’ Bedingfeld said, pointing to the notebook on my lap. ‘Always writing.’

I smiled and held out the glass for him to refill it. ‘Well, I think it’s important to record what we see here. Few people get to experience places like these ... Hopefully it will be of interest to the public one day, but it’s certainly important for me, as a way of remembering.’

‘Would you let me read what you’ve written?’

The request felt strange. But why? If I did intend to publish my journal, why not let someone else read it now? Were there private thoughts in it, things that I didn’t want him to read? What had I said about him? No, I’d been careful in what I’d written. The journal would be submitted to the Society; I was always aware of that.

I looked at what I’d written about that day: ‘*Tuesday morning proved windy and after a persevering effort I was obliged to give up magnetism, and when the Kroomen returned from hunting I commenced taking down the house. In the afternoon Messrs Thornton and Livingstone, being attacked by a mild form of industry, gave me some assistance.*’ No, that would not do. I drew a line through the words ‘*being attacked by a mild form of industry*’.

‘Why ever do you want to read it?’ I asked.

‘Well ... I agree with you. It’s important to have a record. Truth be told, I’ve been ... well, not as conscientious as you. There are some ... gaps ... in my journal. One or two things. A name here and there. A date. Yours I’m sure would clear matters up.’

‘I suppose it would be all right,’ I said.

I started feeling much sicker, but Bedingfeld doctored me with brandy. I drifted in and out of consciousness. Whenever I awoke, there he was, writing. There must have been a great deal of missing details in his journal.

When I felt better I went back to the iron house, and pulled at a sheet of metal.

‘Wait,’ said Thornton, who appeared at my back, ‘what are you doing?’

‘I’m ...’ – wasn’t it obvious? – ‘I’m pulling down the house.’ As I was told to do.

‘Yes, but this part must wait. This is where we work, where we eat. This must surely wait until the launch comes, until we are ready to leave.’

Where we work ... I wasn’t seeing much work going on from Thornton, or Charles.

But no, the boy was on his feet, and away, leaving me to do what I was supposed to do. I pulled down another sheet. Dr Livingstone would be angry if he returned and the house was still standing.

‘Mr Baines!’ The voice was Charles’s. Thornton had brought him. ‘Mr Baines, stop at once!’

‘Mr Livingstone, I’m only doing what I was ordered to do.’

‘Yes, well.’ Charles frowned for a moment. ‘I’m in charge of the camp now, and I’m ordering you to stop. Do you want us to have our dinner in the rain? This must stand until the launch returns.’

‘Mr Baines,’ said Thornton. ‘I think you should get some rest. You’re not looking very well. You really should be wearing your hat in the sun.’

I spent the afternoon in the tent, alone. Bedingfeld had gone off somewhere in the boat. I helped myself to some of the brandy, in case it would help.

It was sunset, that day, when the launch returned. I had been sleeping, my head filled with the crashing of sheets of metal, pulling them down, pulling them down.

Everyone was gathered at the landing place, except Bedingfeld, who was standing on the path near the house. I passed him on the way down.

‘Not one grounding,’ Livingstone was saying. ‘Do you hear that? Not one grounding. By myself or by Dr Kirk. This piloting is not so difficult after all.’

Tied to the launch was an enormous canoe, no doubt meant for more cargo for the next trip.

‘Mr Thornton, we found your charts very useful. Didn’t need Bedingfeld’s at all.’

I glanced back where he’d been standing, but Bedingfeld was gone.

‘Major Sicard has lent us this canoe,’ Livingstone said. ‘With it, I believe we can get everything up from here in one trip.’

I went back to the tent before tea. Bedingfeld was there, lying in the bed with his arm over his eyes.

‘Coming to tea?’ I asked.

‘No. Tell them I’m not feeling well.’

‘Not feeling well?’ Livingstone scoffed. ‘Well, no doubt his pride is injured, seeing that we did so much better at navigating than he, our great naval navigator!’

This talk of Livingstone’s made me feel uncomfortable, as if I was the one being laughed at.

‘He was well enough this afternoon,’ said Thornton between mouthfuls, ‘to take the boat to the opposite sandbank.’

Rae had a grin on his face. Kirk, I could see, shared my unease about talking about a chap like this when he wasn’t present. He blinked more quickly than usual.

‘Indeed?’ Livingstone raised his eyebrows. ‘What do you say, Dr Kirk? This piloting isn’t so difficult, is it? *Not one grounding.*’

‘Well,’ Kirk said, ‘I did graze the bottom once, but nothing serious.’

‘No indeed. If it was Bedingfeld, we’d have spent hours laying out anchors, uncoiling manilla ropes, as if we were a frigate, not a seventy-foot steamer.’

‘Speaking of which,’ Kirk said, meeting my eyes for a moment, ‘we’re told that a Portuguese brig has landed at Quilimane.’

‘A brig,’ I repeated. This was exciting. I wondered how old she was. The Portuguese still used ships that were older than anyone else’s. They’d been built to last.

‘The *Villa da Flor*,’ said Rae. ‘Ninety-five feet, twelve guns.’

‘Yes,’ said Livingstone. ‘The governor wants her to come up the Kongone and make available her artillery and men for the war.’

Up the Kongone, I thought, when we had struggled so?

‘There are reinforcements arriving from Sena,’ said Kirk. ‘I believe the Portuguese mean some serious action.’

‘By which time we will be well on our way,’ Livingstone declared, ‘and need no longer concern ourselves with this war. The Portuguese cannot be said to be entirely without fault in this conflict, and we will soon be out of the colony. I believe we can take everything from here in one trip. And then we will finally be gone from this island.’

But then what, I wondered. We would still have stores just a little way up at Shupanga, and more still at Sena. To get them up to Tete, we would have to continue

making ferrying trips. Not this far, certainly, but it would take a long time before we got everything to Tete, and even then we would still be in Portuguese territory.

Now I had permission to take down the rest of the iron house. I was resting on my haunches for a moment when Livingstone strode up to me.

‘Mr Baines.’ He held out a book. ‘Can you tell me anything about this?’

It was a notebook of some sort.

‘What is it, Doctor?’

‘That’s what I’m asking you, Mr Baines. Do you recognize it?’

Was I supposed to?

‘Do you recognize it, Mr Baines. A simple question.’

‘N-no, Dr Livingstone,’ I stammered. ‘I don’t.’

‘Would you be so good, Mr Baines, as to look inside.’

He held the book out. I looked at it, then at his face. There was anger in it. What was wrong?

I took the book from him, and looked up at him again. He thrust his chin out a little, a gesture that told me to hurry up. I opened the book. My hand, I noticed, was shaking slightly.

There were dated entries. It was a journal. The handwriting was untidy, difficult to read. Whose was it?

Livingstone snatched the book out of my hand. I felt giddy, as if I might fall.

‘It’s Bedingfeld’s. But you know all about it, don’t you?’

Was this what Bedingfeld had written when he borrowed my journal?

‘It was handed to me by Dr Kirk. He received it from Bedingfeld. It is supposed to be a “Log” of events aboard the *MaRobert*.’

He took a step closer.

‘What interests me is that Bedingfeld said he never had time to write anything in the public journal, and now’ – he held up the book – ‘he presents us with this.’

The Doctor took a deep breath.

‘Bedingfeld has *falsified* events in here.’ He shook the book. ‘Be careful, Mr Baines. Whatever the two of you are up to, I’m not fooled by this. And the Foreign Office won’t be fooled either. I’ll make sure of that.’

‘But Doctor Livingstone,’ I cried. ‘I don’t—I know nothing of this. Captain Bedingfeld borrowed my journal, yes, but I don’t know anything about *falsifying* ...’

He stared at me, his eyes fiery.

‘And you will also deny, I suppose, that you a signed a statement supporting Bedingfeld?’

Here the trouble had begun, as Thornton had said.

‘I did, Doctor Livingstone. I will not deny that. I told Mr Livingstone. I showed it to him.’

The surroundings were starting to swirl. I staggered to the side and grabbed hold of a crate to keep on my feet.

I looked up at Livingstone, in search of some concern.

‘I’m not ...’

‘Think carefully, Mr Baines, about what you have said. I want the truth from you.’

With that he turned and strode off.

The truth. Had I ever wanted anything different myself? But what did he want? The truth about what?

‘Yes ... truth ... of course.’

University of Cape Town

Cr B. ... failed to write anything for the Public Journal and, when requested to do so, declared before witnesses that he never had any time to write, yet, after the acceptance of his resignation on 31st July, he borrowed the private journal of Mr Baines and wrote a document purporting to be a Log kept on board the Launch. It contains internal evidence of having been written not on the dates assigned but long afterwards. He refers, for instance, on the 11th June, to what was said on 24 July, quite unnecessarily adding, 'He afterwards (24th July) informed me that he had kept a copy of it.'

This so-called Log, as might have been expected, is written, if I may use the expression, *at me*, and I submit it to your Lordship's judgment as containing the worst that could be said against my conduct and as containing his own statement that he had again resigned an appointment for the salary of which he seems now determined to make a strenuous effort.

– David Livingstone, dispatch to Lord Malmesbury, 6 August 1858

University of Cape Town

Father Harding seems not to have aged at all. He looks exactly the same as he did when I was at school: thick white hair combed back over his skull, long sideburns down to his jawbone. He speaks in his usual theatrical manner, his reproofing voice accentuated by an accusing finger.

‘Now Thomas, we know that boys will be boys, but we become angry when they tell lies. This is the time of your life when you’re becoming a man, Thomas, and good men do not tell fibs. I know you’re lying, Thomas, now tell me the truth.’

‘I’m not lying, sir, I *am* telling the truth!’

‘John Thomas Baines! I’m disappointed in you! Why are you lying to me?’

‘But *sir*—’

‘*Baines!*’ It is Dr Livingstone. ‘*Baines!*’ He is shaking me gently by the shoulders.

Dr Livingstone— I try to say his name but my throat is burning up the saliva I’d need to speak, and my words become a painful crackle. My thoughts are deafened by the terrible beating of a drum in my head, each beat bringing unbearable pain. I can see him talking but the sound of his voice comes through in intermittent pulses, silenced by the beating drum, the waves of a terrible sea crashing on the shore with demonic speed, again and again and again.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

‘Baines! —still! You need to conserve —do you hear me?’

Then his voice becomes clearer, and I can hear it over the drum. ‘We will make a man of you, Thomas, if you will only tell the truth!’ I must be getting better. And Dr Livingstone has never called me Thomas before.

I gather a hot ball of saliva in the back of my mouth.

‘I’m sorry, Dr Livingstone, I didn’t mean to lie!’

‘Baines, you fool!’ *Boom!* ‘—quiet!’ *Boom!* ‘Kirk!’ *Boom!* ‘—needs water!’ *Boom!* ‘Rest yourself, Baines!’ *Boom!*

There’s a glass of water at my mouth. I sip it, and water gushes down my neck. It is painful to swallow at first, but then it feels cool, putting out the fire in my throat. I gulp and gulp and then the glass is dry.

‘More water, Kirk, hurry!’

Another glass, and again I gulp and gulp. For a moment the fire is out. I must explain everything to Dr Livingstone; I must tell him before it is too late.

But the words combust in my mouth, burning up before I can get them out. There's another glass at my mouth. I drink and drink.

Livingstone is there, and Kirk behind him, and other people I do not know. They're all speaking, all at once, but their words are also crackles. And above it all, the beating of the drum. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

Livingstone and Kirk have gone away. The strangers have pushed their way in front of them, black strangers, warriors, summoned by the drum. They are dancing a savage dance, their feathers and animal skins swaying to the drum, like wheat to the punching gusts of a terrifying wind.

My friends return and lift me to my feet. I am too weak to support myself. They carry me to the tent, where Bedingfeld holds open the flap. I am lowered onto his bed, Bedingfeld's bed. Kirk brings another blanket.

'You have a bad case of sunstroke,' Livingstone says. 'You shouldn't be exposing yourself to the sun. I will take you up to Shupanga on Monday.'

His words are very kindly meant, but this, of course, is an impossibility while I have to do work that obliges me to be in the open air.

I lie shivering under the blankets.

'Here,' Kirk says, holding out a glass of something, 'take this. It will help.'

The taste is horrible, bitter. My stomach revolts against it, twisting. Kirk holds out a bucket just in time, and I vomit into it. Very clever, Dr Kirk. Bedingfeld wouldn't like his bed fouled.

The headless bodies lie before me. They don't smell as bad as they did the first time. But it is still best to move away from them as quickly as possible, before the fighting starts.

Beyond them, littering the landscape, are the corpses of cattle, stretching as far as the eye can see. There must be hundreds of them, perhaps thousands, though who could count that many?

I wake up often during the night, each time covered in sweat and troubled by whispers and shadows that retreat into the darkness. I am burning with heat, and throw off the blankets.

Mother comes into the tent, and dabs my forehead with a wet cloth.

'My poor Thomas,' she says, 'look at you.'

'Thank you, Mother,' I whisper. 'How did you know I was here?'

'Captain Bedingfeld told me. He said you were not feeling well.'

'No. Dr Livingstone says I have a touch of sunstroke. But I'll be all right.'

‘That’s my boy.’

Outside it is light again. I still have a severe pain in my head, and my body feels weak, but I am able to get to my feet. Charles is standing some distance away with the magnetic instruments; Thornton is busy with something – I can’t see what. I make my way down to the launch. Livingstone is at work at the pinnacle. Rae is on the *MaRobert*, fitting blocks for the swivel guns. In the cabin Kirk is fitting shelves.

‘Whatever are you doing?’ he says. ‘You should be resting.’

‘I’m terribly sorry,’ I say, and sit down.

I try to eat something, and manage to hold it down. The sickness must have passed.

Three canoes arrive with fugitives from the seat of war, some of them, from the marks on their breast, most likely runaway slaves who of course do not relish the idea of being recaptured.

While they are here, a heavy squall comes on from the south-east. The air has become rain, lashed about by the wind.

‘The stores! The stores!’ cries Livingstone, and everyone is running up to where the iron house used to be. I don’t have the strength to move as quickly as them. When I get there they are covering our goods with tarpaulins. I grab hold of a corner.

‘Baines, for God’s sake, man,’ Kirk shouts, ‘get to your tent.’

‘But what about—?’

‘To your tent!’ His outstretched arm is not to be disputed.

The storm is so severe that water comes into the tent on the windward side. I move some things to the middle to protect them. Kirk appears a little later.

‘On Monday you’re going up with the launch to Shupanga,’ he says. ‘When you’re feeling up to it, pack your things. You don’t know when you’ll feel knocked up again.’

‘Thank you, my friend, I’ll do that.’

‘But don’t try to carry it down: the Kroomen will do that for you.’

I smile and nod.

Most of my things are here with me. Five boxes of personal effects, plus artist’s materials, my books, my rifle and ammunition. In an hour I have everything packed.

The shivering has started again, so I climb back under the blankets. Kirk is beside me again, with Livingstone. Kirk touches my forehead and looks into my eyes, as if he is looking right through them to the interior of my head. What is he looking at?

‘Hot skin, contracted pupils,’ he says.

‘What are you giving him for it?’ asks Livingstone.

‘Calomel and jalap with quinine. And a little opium. He should sleep.’

Livingstone nods, as Mother comes in from outside.

'You remember my mother, Dr Livingstone,' I say. 'Your wife sat with her at the festival at the Freemasons' Tavern. Mother, have you met Dr Kirk?'

Kirk puts his hand on my cheek and makes a 'shhhh' sound.

'Don't talk, dear,' Mother says. 'Be quiet. Listen to the doctors.'

'Kirk is a top-notch doctor, Mother.' I whisper very quietly now, so only she will hear. (Kirk would be embarrassed in any case.) 'He looked after me the last time.'

Livingstone is looking around the tent. 'So Bedingfeld has applied for a sextant and various other instruments,' he tells Kirk. 'Says he wants to use the time before a ship arrives to take observations.'

'A fine time to start,' Kirk replies.

'Yes, why should I let him have expedition property when he's shown no inclination before now to take any measurements at all? I'll tell you what he's trying to do: he wants to make some show of still doing expedition work so he can complain about not being paid. I'll not let him.'

Mother touches my cheek, and looks into my eyes. I'll be all right, with her near.

I lie awake in the darkness. Bedingfeld is snoring in the other bed. Then who is—? A shadow. A shadow is moving towards me. A man. I try to cry out, but I have no voice any more. He comes closer. Is it—? It is Livingstone, surely. Even in the darkness I can make out the lines of his sideburns, his moustache. Then what is wrong? Is he—? I can see the hair on his chest. He comes closer. He is at the edge of my bed now. Is he ... naked? As he climbs onto the bed, I leap up, up to the top of the tent. Not my body – my body remains there – but my mind. I can see from up here. Livingstone is now crouching over me; my body lies there, dead still, now that I am no longer in it. Though is it me there? I can see – is it? – Mrs Livingstone, lying in the bed. What am I doing here? Mrs Livingstone, I'm so sorry, I seem to have stumbled into your cabin. Can I fetch you a glass of water? I can see the white of Livingstone's buttocks, moving, rhythmically, up, down. No. Please no. It is too late to look away. Perhaps they will not see me, if I quietly— Mrs Livingstone opens her eyes and meets mine. Too late. But her eyes are ... my eyes. I am looking up at Livingstone, looming above me. The look of shock in his eyes, the look of rage. I tumble down, down the stairs, running, running. The footsteps behind me. The voice, bellowing into the darkness. '*Thomas!*'

I am called awake by the beating drum. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* Each beat brings searing pain inside my head. I'm burning, the red of a fire; quickly I open my eyes. It is light again. What day is it? Is it Monday? Have I been left behind? Oh no, have they left without me? I try to stand up, but my body will not reply. Am I alive?

People come and go. There is food before me. I try to swallow, but it makes me sick. I am desperately thirsty, and manage a few sips of water, to stop the burning. That is all I can stomach.

Come, they say, come, and I am carried down the hill. All aboard. What ship is this? There have been so many. Henry and I would spend hours looking at them in the harbour. I drew them all, almost all the ones I saw, and some I'd only heard about.

I try eating again – thank you, Dr Kirk, my friend – but again I vomit everything up. It must be the seasickness. The trade winds are rough this year, and the *Pearl's* flat bottom doesn't make things comfortable.

When I open my eyes again my father is there. I must be dreaming. Father is dead. I haven't asked him yet what he thinks of the Zambesi. He's more used to the open sea than to rivers.

But he's the best navigator I know. Livingstone has done well to find him. He will see us up to the rapids, oh yes, and past them. All the way to the Falls. How fitting, that Father will see them with me.

'Are you getting on well, boy?'

'I am, Father, I am. Apart from this ... sickness.'

He dismisses it with a wave. 'And this Dr Livingstone, is he a good man?'

'Goodness, Father,' I laugh, 'you've been away for a long time.'

'I've read the papers,' he says, 'but you know, Thomas, you only know a man when you look into his eyes. What do you see when you look into his eyes?'

'I – I don't really remember.' What *colour* are Livingstone's eyes?

'Not the colour,' Father says – I must be thinking aloud. 'What do you *see*?'

I remember now, that look. Fierce and determined, but sad at the same time.

Father looks to the side. 'I must go now. I must leave you to your friends.'

Dr Kirk is at my side. He is smiling at me. I can hear the chugging of the engine. By the light in the cabin it must be early morning or late afternoon. Kirk touches my forehead, and takes my wrist to feel my pulse.

'Are you feeling all right?' he says. 'You've been very sick, but I think you're on the mend. You've had a good sleep, the best you've had in days.'

It is afternoon. How long have I been here?

Dr Livingstone is here now. I have not been left behind.

'How long has he been awake?' the Doctor asks.

'No time,' Kirk answers. 'I was watching him when he woke up, not five minutes ago.'

My arms and legs are heavy; I don't think I can move them. It feels strangely as if they are not part of me, and have not been so for a long time. My fingers move as if from a long sleep, but they feel as though they have been engaged in strenuous labour. This was worse than the first time.

'You'll need a few days to get your strength,' Livingstone speaks to me. 'What you need now is rest. We are on the way to Shupanga. You'll get good rest there.'

Kirk calls for water and Jumbo brings it. He is grinning broadly and shaking his head. He clucks sympathetically, and beams again.

The water fills my mouth with cool, cleansing freshness. It washes down a taste that is dirty and bitter.

It feels strange to gather the words and speak. 'How long have I been ill?'

'A few days,' Livingstone says gently, 'on and off. You've had a bad touch of sunstroke; there's been hardly any sense in you at all.'

His eyes are brown. The brown of dry earth.

'You've had a high temperature almost all the time,' Kirk says, 'and you've been sleeping in between, but I could see you've had no rest there. We were worried about you.'

I sleep some more and awake. My limbs have some life in them, although much heavier than usual. My body once again belongs to me. I'm hungry.

For an instant I can taste roast beef. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. My mouth fills with saliva. Imagine. Roast potatoes with crispy golden skins. My stomach yawns with emptiness. It feels like it will collapse on itself. And pudding. Yes, that's what I'd like. Rhubarb and custard, a big bowl of it. And chocolate. Chocolate cake with lots of icing.

Kirk helps me up, and takes my weight as he guides me to cabin door. The deck of the launch has become as familiar as a home. Beyond it, the brown expanse of the Zambesi. We are moving up again. From the beginning, or close to it, but we are moving up.

'Kirk,' I say, 'is there any sugar?'

Baines is worse again, similar to his first attack. He has slight shivering, severe and continued vomiting with prostration of strength, hot skin, contracted pupils, and tendency to delirium. Give him Calomel and Jalap with quinine etc. When he goes to bed he sleeps well.

– John Kirk, journal, 8 August 1858

University of Cape Town

Shupanga, August 1858

When we landed at Shupanga, Colonel Nunes was waiting for us on the jetty, with a group of blacks around him.

The earth was hard and comforting to my feet, but I still didn't feel strong enough to carry my weight, so, however enlivening the promise of a cool house with stone walls, Kirk had to help me there.

Standing at the house were Don Azevado, Governor da Silva, and Francisco, the keeper of the house. The governor was looking quite well now. He stood straight and tall – he who had looked like a scarecrow when Livingstone had carried him from the battlefield at Mazaro.

'I have a patient for you, Governor,' Livingstone cried out, when we were still some distance away. 'The expedition would owe you a great debt if you would extend your hospitality to Mr Baines and Dr Kirk.'

Don Azevado said some words to the governor, who called out to Livingstone in Portuguese.

'He says you repay us immediately,' Azevado translated. 'It would be an honour to be given the company of your friends. And,' he added, conspiratorially now, 'of course the governor owes *you* a great debt.'

Kirk's instructions were to look after me, while the others went back down to fetch the stores. 'It'll be for a few days,' Livingstone explained to Nunes. 'We'll be back to collect them by Monday before we head upriver.'

Francisco showed us to a room at the back of the house where we would take up quarters with Colonel Nunes. It was about fifteen feet square, with two doors leading into it, and a window looking into a yard at the side of the house. Nunes's bed stood against a wall, and on the other side of the room, natives were moving boxes, on which our beds would be placed. A group of blacks were milling around in the courtyard outside.

'This will be my first room of brick and mortar since leaving Cape Town,' Kirk said.

When I went out again, I found that our personal luggage had been brought up to the house. Between the Kroomen and Colonel Nunes's people, the rest of the cargo was being landed and carried up.

'I should really make a note of where all this is being stored,' I said.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ Kirk said. ‘You’ll do nothing of the sort. Rest is what you want.’

By dinnertime everything had been safely landed, and a meal was brought up to the house. We were quite a group in the mess room: Livingstone, Rae, Kirk and me, and the governor, Azevado and Nunes, as well as one or two other Portuguese officers.

‘Major Sicard would have liked to see you,’ Azevado said to Livingstone. ‘But he is with his men on the island.’

‘You will,’ Livingstone said, ‘convey him my greetings.’

I retired early and lay in my bed. The walls were covered in cobwebs, and on the wooden ceiling, in the beams, were ants’ and bees’ nests, and a couple of swallows’ nests. It was dirty but there was something comforting about a built structure that was old.

When Kirk arrived some time later, I had been dozing off. The men outside were singing war songs. I’d not been sure if the sound came from my dreams or the courtyard outside, but now that my friend was here, it was clear that they belonged to the real world outside the window.

‘Will this continue all night?’ Kirk said.

It was late when Colonel Nunes came to the room. I had already been asleep for some time.

‘Desculpe,’ he whispered.

‘Not at all,’ I replied, as Kirk said something similar.

He had a slave with him, a young man who, once the Colonel was in bed, presented him with a pipe. As Nunes took it and put it to his mouth, the slave lit a match. It was clearly something of a ritual.

I heard a sucking sound, as Nunes drew air through the pipe, and then a satisfied ‘Aaaaah.’

He lay his head down on the pillow, and the slave held the head of the pipe, and so they proceeded, the slave providing the hand for the prostrate Colonel, until the pipe was finished. I had never seen anything like it. I wanted to say something to Kirk, but of course I couldn’t. The slave put out the light and lay down on the floor, near his master.

It was strange to us that the Portuguese still had slaves. But the more time I spent in their colony, the more I became used to it. Were they really slaves at all, or were they merely servants, as you’d find among any civilized people?

During the night – that night, and other nights – Nunes would wake up occasionally. Sometimes a rat would awaken him, or sometimes the mosquitoes. But each time he

would wake his slave, and then it was another pipe. I would wake up in the pitch dark, and smell tobacco, and then I would see the red glow, as Nunes inhaled, and in that gloomy light I'd be able to make out the arm of the slave, holding the pipe to his master's mouth.

As my strength returned, I was able to walk about a bit. Kirk and I visited Azevado's temporary encampment, where he and about a hundred of his people were comfortably huddled in small thatched buildings.

Senhor Tito was there, and men were walking around carrying arms and equipment. Preparations, we discovered, were under way for sending away a small force under Sicard's command. Numerous slaves were tying up mat bags of meal and other food, taking them up on their heads and falling into Indian file, with a Portuguese soldier here and there among them.

I had my sketchbook out to capture some of this activity. A few of the soldiers stood for a while to watch while I worked.

'It is very good,' Azevado said. He was, I saw when I turned around, nodding.

'It's a quick sketch,' I said. 'I have much better at the house.'

'You must show them to me. I would like to see them.'

Sicard told him that he must see my picture of Mazaró.

The activity among the soldiers was increasing. Portuguese officers were marshalling the men. As the armed party mustered, four men brought a kind of cot swinging from a bamboo pole covered with a quagga skin. Sicard seated himself in this, bade us farewell, and the bearers set off at a half trot, each man leaning inward against the opposite one so that, though they carried by one pole only and their four heads were in a line, their feet were fully a yard asunder.

This was a machela, Azevado explained. It was a common form of transport for the Portuguese.

Back at the house I showed Azevado and Nunes my pictures.

'Excellent, excellent,' said Azevado, as he peered at the lines of a landscape. Then he looked up at me and smiled. 'It is unfortunate that you have been sick, but we are pleased to have your company. You are very welcome here. I – all of us, the Portuguese – like you very well.'

'Well,' I said. 'That is very kind of you. You are all ... exceedingly kind to us.'

Colonel Nunes brought a woman from Tete to stand for her portrait, which she did unwillingly, I thought. I told her it was no harm and when finished gave her a piece of

cloth, but I heard a loud clamour of female voices long after. A man consented willingly to sit for another piece of the same type.

I did several portraits while I was there. One of the household slaves agreed for a piece of cloth to dress himself in his war costume and stand for his likeness. He was a fine well-made man about five feet eight inches in height, very muscular, and with breasts projecting almost as much as those of a young girl.

All the important Portuguese were gathered here. The governor, usually based at Quilimane, was now temporarily stationed at Shupanga, as were Colonel Nunes, who was the military commandant at Quilimane, and Major Sicard, the commandant at Tete. They had all been brought here by this war.

I asked Azevado about this rebel, Bonga.

‘He is a monster. Like his brother.’

‘His brother?’

‘Mariano. But they call him Matakenya, which means trembling. Such is the fear that he inspires in men. He makes them shake with fear. Many of his enemies have ended up with their heads on sticks.’

I glanced across at Kirk. Livingstone, I know, thought that the Portuguese exaggerated the evils of these rebels.

I learnt that this chief Mariano had been charged with a crime, which from negligence or venality had been overlooked by former governors. But on a recent visit to Quilimane he had been arrested and sent to Mozambique. His people were now fighting to get him back, but whether his return would, as some said, put an end to the war or whether it would only serve to encourage his tribe to more energetic measures no one could say.

The governor said something in Portuguese and spat on the ground.

I looked at Azevado quizzically.

‘The Vas dos Anjos,’ he repeated. ‘It is their name, the name of this family.’

‘A Portuguese name?’ I said. ‘They are not African?’

Azevado shook his head. ‘There is some African blood, yes. But more Portuguese.’

Were these rebels something like the Boers – people whose ancestors were from Europe but who now fought European authority?

‘But mainly,’ Azevado added, ‘their blood is from Goa.’

He said this as if it were quite normal. I nodded.

‘I believe,’ Kirk said, ‘that Dr Livingstone has offered to mediate in this matter.’

Azevado translated to the governor, who said firmly, 'No,' followed by a string of Portuguese.

'He says it is not necessary,' Azevado explained. 'We will solve this problem.'

While I was at Shupanga a party of Landeens arrived. These were in fact proper Zoolus, from the vicinity of Inhambane or Delagoa Bay, to which they had fled in former times from the tyranny of Dingaana.

They stood under the fig tree, covering themselves with their shields. I noticed that beside the oval shield of bullock's hide they possessed several characteristics of the Zoolu not observable among the Landeens at Sena. The hair of many of them was gathered up and neatly fastened to a black ring, perhaps a buffalo horn, on top of the head, so as to give them the appearance of wearing a Scotch bonnet open on the top, all the hair on the crown of the head within the circle being shaved off.

Their chief was a young man of mild appearance with an oval face and a countenance that reminded Kirk and me of the published likeness of Sandilla at the time of the Kafir War. He wore a fringe of beads around the back of his head three inches deep and hanging down so as to put one in mind of the Assyrian or Egyptian monuments.

Other divisions of his force were now arriving, and they began to perform a fearsome war dance. They lifted their feet up high and thumped them down again. They made aggressive stabbing movements with their spears. It was an impressive show of force. Later I saw the chief in consultation with the governor. He did not seem at all subservient. He was, I imagined, attempting to drive as good a bargain with the Portuguese as possible in return for their services against the rebels. But, as I learnt later, this was a regular occurrence, even in times of peace. These Zoolus claimed to control the land at Shupanga where the Portuguese had settled, and they were collecting a tribute for it.

We had been at Shupanga for nearly a week when the launch returned. She was deeply laden with the remainder of our stores. Bedingfeld was with them, but this was as far as he would go. He would have to wait here until Colonel Nunes could arrange him a passage to Quilimane.

I'd been working on a number of pictures at Shupanga, and I had some of them out in the dining room. I was finishing a watercolour of a hawk. One of the soldiers had shot it in the wing, and it was still alive when it fell on the ground. We had to kill it, of course, but it was not badly damaged, and gave me a good idea of how it would have looked alive. In my picture I put it on a high crag, about to leap into flight.

Thornton and Charles were watching as I put last sweeps of colour in place.

‘It doesn’t look right,’ Charles said, his words like a bucket of water thrown at one, or a slap with an open palm.

‘What do you mean?’ I demanded.

‘It just ... looks wrong. As if it’s ... stuck together. Like a fossil in a museum.’

‘Like a fossil?’ I snapped. ‘And perhaps you could do better? With that camera of yours?’

At this point I noticed Livingstone, who had heard us and moved a little closer. I certainly didn’t want him to witness this.

Charles shook his head. ‘No, a camera would never be able to capture an animal like that. That’s your job, as painter. It just looks wrong to me.’

Livingstone had heard every word Charles had said. He came closer and peered at the picture, then at the two of us.

‘It is not right,’ he said to me. ‘You have painted it from a dead animal, have you not?’

‘I have, Dr Livingstone, but how else is it possible...?’

‘There’s something ... lacking,’ he said. ‘You must try harder. If we’re to have a record of the birds and beasts of this region, the pictures must be believable.’ He raised his eyebrows.

Charles had taken a step back now, but he remained close enough to witness my discomfort. Damn him!

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone,’ I murmured.

Livingstone starting looking at some pictures I had done of the natives.

‘You do not have their colour right,’ he declared.

‘I beg your pardon, Dr Livingstone?’

He tapped his forearm with palm of his hand. ‘Their skin. It’s a difficult thing to get it right. Many good artists battle with the skin of Africans.’ He looked at the picture and shook his head. ‘You do not have it.’

I was dumbfounded. I looked at the picture. The colour was right. It was accurate. Livingstone hadn’t even seen the native who I’d painted. How could he talk about how he was supposed to look?

‘It depends,’ I said, ‘on the light, the time of day. And on this particular fellow. I can assure you, this is how—’

He held up a hand. ‘This man is a Landeen, is he not? I know the colour of their skin, and this is not the colour.’

I probably stood there looking like a fool, my mouth half open to utter some defence, but I could muster no words in response to this ridiculous criticism. And all because Charles had had things to say about my hawk. Charles who was utterly unable to capture an image with that heavy and expensive machinery of his. How dare he?

Livingstone was in a hurry to leave again, and I was directed to join the *MaRobert* on her voyage to Tete. Thornton would remain at Shupanga with Kirk – and Bedingfeld. It was the last I would see of our naval commander. He kept to himself most of the time, but our paths crossed once or twice.

I found him sitting at the water's edge, some distance from the house. This was the evening before I left to go upriver. Bedingfeld looked up at me and then down at the ground again. I think I understood him a little better than I had at the beginning.

I remember his final words to me. 'Watch yourself, Mr Baines. The Doctor will not share the glory with any man.'

University of Cape Town

He protests against my using his first resignation. This after he had told me he was sorry it had been withdrawn, and telling both Dr Kirk and myself that he had given in a second resignation and also written in his 'Log' that he had resigned twice. I never met an individual who seemed to trust more in the power of lying than Commander Bedingfeld.

– David Livingstone, journal, 16 August 1858

University of Cape Town

Zambesi River above Shupanga, August 1858

We have run aground again. Livingstone stands at the bows, looking at the expanse of water around us. The river is miles wide here. How is it that we cannot find a channel?

He turns and his eyes meet mine, just for a moment. They appear dull, as if the light that fires them has retreated into his skull. He quickly looks away.

We have been travelling for eight days now, but we haven't got very far. Seventy miles, by my reckoning, and we have more than a hundred to go. Much of the time is spent hauling the launch over shoals, winding our way back down the channels we have tried and attempting new ones.

The *MaRobert* is towing the pinnace, laden with stores, and the two whaleboats. It is too much for her to bear. We are not going to get anywhere like this.

The men are in the water; it barely comes up to their knees.

'Heave!' Livingstone cries.

The men groan and pull with all their might.

'More steam, Mr Rae!' Livingstone calls.

Slowly, with a grinding sound, the *MaRobert* inches over the bank. Now the pinnace will have to be hauled the same way.

A thought has begun to develop in my mind. The *MaRobert's* inadequacies as a craft are compounded by the burden put upon it – the weight of equipment, and of the pinnace and whaleboats in tow. And why? Livingstone would be able to advance to Tete much more easily if the pinnace could be set off on her own, perhaps with one of the whaleboats. She just needs someone to captain her.

Livingstone takes the responsibility of leading the *MaRobert* upriver, and even in the times when I relieve him, it is not work he'd be unable to do himself, if necessity presented itself plainly. Why have two men doing one man's job, especially when that job is made much harder by the pinnace in tow? I should take the pinnace myself, and so free the *MaRobert* to make its way more quickly to Tete, so that Livingstone can set about preparing for the task that lies ahead.

Our original intention was to reach Tete aboard the *Pearl*, and from there we would cease to be passengers and get on with the real work, which is going to the cataract and seeing it for ourselves. Our whole journey so far, at least since the *Pearl* turned back, has

been the result of an unfortunate setback; we have, in a sense, not even reached the beginning, as it was planned from the start.

At breakfast, Livingstone is in a mood. 'I curse myself for listening to Bedingfeld,' he mutters after a while. He looks at Charles, who returns his brother's gaze most earnestly, but says nothing. The older Livingstone continues. 'There was a vessel that was recommended to us, the *Bann*.'

'I know her,' says Rae. 'She was used in the Crimean War to clear out enemy harbours.'

Livingstone nods. 'She would have been able to transport all of us to Tete in one trip. Instead we are stuck with this sham vessel with her sham engine. But Bedingfeld advised against the *Bann*.'

'Why, brother?' asks Charles.

'Oh, he found some problem with her. Said she wasn't suitable.' He clears his throat. 'But the real reason was that Bedingfeld would have had to sail her all the way from England himself, while the rest of us came aboard some other vessel. And Bedingfeld knew he didn't have the stomach for that – you saw how seasick he got on the *Pearl* – so he lied about her capabilities.'

Charles and Rae are both shaking their heads in disgust.

'Dr Livingstone,' I say.

He looks up at me.

'I have been thinking. Would it not make more sense for me to take the pinnace and for you to proceed to Tete unencumbered?'

He gives a snort and says nothing.

What does this mean? Does he not take me seriously? Does he not think I am being serious?

Charles is peering at me, a frown on his forehead.

'It would,' I venture, 'allow you to reach Tete much more quickly, and you could then go downriver again to collect the others, while I'm still making my way up.'

He looks at me for a while with a slight frown. 'It would be too dangerous,' he says. 'What if some mishap were to befall you?'

Charles makes a little grunt of agreement.

'I am quite capable' – I make sure my tone is not confrontational – 'of managing a boat. Remember I sailed a longboat all the way around Australia. If you could spare two of the Kroomen I could manage.'

He shakes his head. 'We will find a channel here. It will not be necessary.'

In the afternoon we are in difficulty again. Only in one place have I found an inch or two more than the draught of the launch. But she will not pass.

'What about over there?' Livingstone says. He points to a dead tree in the water, near the bank.

The men are sent to wade there, to determine the depth. Near the tree they sink more deeply than anywhere else.

'That is water enough,' Livingstone says.

I fear it may be only the scouring away of the sand around the stump, but I say nothing. What other possibilities are there?

Livingstone steers the launch and passes close by the tree. Slowly we inch past and there is no grounding. I watch as the pinnacle approaches the tree. She draws level and – oh no – she is stuck.

We are in danger now. The launch is beginning to lose her headway, and the current will pull her round.

'Jumbo! Toby!' I cry. 'Take a line to that tree!'

Livingstone calls from the tiller. 'Let go the anchor!'

The men are rushing around the deck, trying to get the anchor ready.

'Quickly! Quickly!' I cry.

But it is too late. The *MaRobert* is beginning to swing round.

The current takes her on the broadside, causing such a strain upon the chain as nearly to tear out the winch to which it is made fast. She settles broadside down upon a sandbank, and reaching nearly across the narrow channel is soon resting upon her central compartment with the sand scoured away from both ends of her by the stream.

'In the water! In the water!' Livingstone cries to the Kroomen.

If we don't get the launch off quickly, her compartments might separate and she will become a wreck.

Some natives have approached in their canoes. They are looking on in wonder. Livingstone calls out to them and waves his arms about.

Our Kroomen carry the anchor upstream, with the help of some of these natives. A manilla line is taken in aft and led forward to the winch. With all the spare hands hauling on the line and the natives pushing at her side, her stern is at length hauled up to anchor. The line is then taken forward, she is swung and dropped down and, the natives lifting off the pinnacle, she is caught as she drifts down and made fast astern.

We all sit in silence. Livingstone has a calm expression on his face, but there is movement at the edges of his mouth and his eyes do not remain on anything for more than a second. He appears to be having an intense debate within himself.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I say.

‘What—?’ his eyes flick towards me, seemingly startled, as if he had forgotten I was here at all. ‘Yes, what is it?’

‘My idea: to remain with the pinnacle. Would it not make sense now?’

It seems that his eyes are looking through me, but now they find focus.

‘Yes,’ he says quietly. ‘It would make sense.’

In the morning I take my last things aboard the pinnacle. My crew consists of two Kroomen, Tom Toby and Black Will. I have one of the whaleboats to tow.

‘Farewell, Doctor!’ I cry.

He waves back.

‘Godspeed to you!’ I add.

I let go my anchor and cast off the painter, and my vessel drifts away from the *MaRobert*.

‘Steam, Mr Rae!’ Livingstone cries.

The launch’s paddles turn and she moves away from me.

She grounds before passing the point of the island, but having now only one whaleboat to tow she is easily got off.

I watch as she now goes gallantly with sails and paddles against the tide.

I look about. It is now only me, and my two Kroomen. A long voyage awaits me, and the prospect fills me with satisfaction. I can now make a meaningful contribution.

The *MaRobert* has disappeared from view.

Island of Pita
25 August 1858

My Dear Mr Thornton

We have found the Pinnacle too heavy for the engine in low water where we are obliged to do slowly and cautiously and I have it at Pita to make the first trip in the launch alone. Mr. Baines volunteered to remain or go down to Shupanga with the pinnacle but I would not hear of it at first. He was however improved so much & we are beyond the war country that I consented to his remaining in charge close to a village belonging to the Portuguese of Senna...

I hope you are enjoying yourselves in botany & geology. In making your copies of the chart put in native names or those of your own invention rather than Bedingfeld's. To you belongs the honour of first laying down these portions of the river & your names ought to stand. Thus what he would call Arab Point from seeing an *East Indian* there call Nyaruka Point. Sunday Island & River Island call by something in their geological formation to mark your own stamp on them. I missed your chart badly.

As I am requested by the Government to furnish to H.M. Secretary of State for foreign affairs with a full statement of the case of Bedingfeld I shall require from you for the use of that Minister your evidence as to what you heard when I requested Bd. to adopt some system in the expenditure of the Kroomen's provisions, that 'he would have nothing to do with it,' 'that I ought to have got a lighter man instead of a man of his standing' & etc. or words to that effect and as it is on such evidence as yours that the Foreign Secretary places great reliance you might state any opinion you may have formed as whether this expenditure could have gone on effectually, in the state of [in]subordination into which Bedingfeld was drawing it. This however, is optional. The evidence is to be written on foolscap paper & the original alone sent. It is not to be made public but for the use of the Foreign Office alone.

If you can remember that B. told me he had written nothing up to that time for the public journal please do so.

– David Livingstone, letter to Richard Thornton, 25 August 1858

Zambesi River below Tete, August–September 1858

With my two Kroomen on board, I began my journey up. It was more difficult than I'd thought it would be. I had hoped that I would have been able to make my way to Tete, however slowly, and arrive there gloriously. But it quickly became apparent that I would never do so. Even in the pinnace there was little way of progressing up that broad labyrinth of shoals called by courtesy a river. There was simply not enough water in it.

But it was not an unhappy time. It was the first occasion during the expedition that I'd been alone. Not properly alone, of course, but without the company of other Englishmen. I felt a little like Livingstone must have felt on his journey across Africa. I noticed the benefits: while I had hardly been able to speak a word of Portuguese before, when there was always someone more proficient than I, I now found myself quickly acquiring the basic words, out of necessity, and even the odd word of the natives' language.

They would come in their canoes, or I would meet them at the bank, and I could ask for *galenas*, or *coocooricoos* – a word, I imagined, that they must have coined the day before when they wished to speak to us about fowls. At night, of course, I made sure I was anchored safely away from the shore.

I also learnt to take accurate observations, though this too came slowly. I don't know how many times a cloud appeared from nowhere to block the sun just minutes it reached its zenith, resulting in a degree of guesswork. My latitudes would often disagree, so I'd be thirty minutes – or half a mile – west of the previous day's position, even though I'd progressed only a hundred yards. But I stuck to it, and became better at it, and soon I was able to determine with reasonable certainty the location of various places and put them on my map.

I took care over the chart. This was my stretch of the river. Mr Skead had charted the river mouth, up to Expedition Island. Thornton had mapped it from Expedition Island to Sena. The next segment was mine to put on paper, and, when I was not knocked down with fever, I did so with care and pride.

Three weeks after I'd waved goodbye to him, Livingstone met me again, on his way down from Tete. Tom Toby heard the engine first. He stood up, a frown on his brow.

When I asked him what it was, he replied that the launch was coming. For a few moments I thought he must be mistaken, but then the sound reached me. The low voice of machinery.

It took a quarter of an hour, the sound growing louder all the time, before she came into view. Livingstone stood at the bows, and Rae near the engine. I stood up and waved.

Livingstone had two of his Makololo onboard with him, tall fellows with ebony skin, their hair tied in circles above their heads. They had been waiting at Tete for him for two years, and when they saw him, Livingstone told me, they were overcome with joy. They had run into the water, and some of them had wept. Many had died of smallpox, and some had been murdered when they had visited a nearby chief, but the rest had waited patiently for the Doctor to return and bring them back to their homeland, where he would settle among them.

Livingstone told me that all was well at Tete, where he had left Charles, and that he was now on his way to the sea, where a man-of-war would be waiting for him.

‘If you have any letters for England,’ he said, ‘I can take them. And your journal – will you give it to me?’

The journal – the copy, not the original – would be sent to the Royal Geographical Society, and they would decide what use to make of it. I remember the date. It was the 17th of September. I wrote the final entry, telling of the day’s meeting, and I signed off, to Mother, before handing it to him, along with a letter to Dr Shaw at the Society, asking him to let my mother know whether she could show it to any friends or consider it strictly private. I was handing over a record of my achievements and observations, which would make its way back to England, to Whitehall Place, to Union Street in Lynn.

Livingstone left one of the Makololo with me, a fellow called Macomocomo, who I’d have a lot to do with later, and set off on his journey down, and once again I watched as the *MaRobert* vanished into the distance.

It must have been a week later that I saw a small armada appear to the south-east. I’d been suffering from fever, and my mind must have conjured up strange explanations for this vision. It was Major Sicard, with a flotilla of canoes, making their way upriver. Livingstone had asked him to help me.

There was cheering and shouting from the Portuguese and their native allies. The war was over; the rebels had been defeated, their stockades destroyed.

Tito had a letter for me, from Livingstone. I have it with me still, although I could probably recite it from memory, so many times did I read it.

Senna, 19th Sept 1858

My Dear Baines

The Lynx entered the Kongone with some provisions and lots of correspondence – sent up two officers who accompanied Dr Kirk to the Shire stockade to beg four canoes to bring up what the Lynx had brought. The Portuguese took the stockade empty and the war being finished Major Secard takes up our little engine and sugar mill and will on coming to you take a canoe load out of you and then assist you with men up to Tete. He will lighten the pinnace sufficiently to enable you to go up with ease. You will make a chart if you can, and a drawing from Bardari or a little in front of a remarkable group of conical hills on your left. Kasisi is one also opposite the island of Mozambique at a spot the Major will point out Bonga's stockade and the Luonya with the rocks opposite may be interesting. Bedingfeld is gone to Quilimane with Colonel Nunes. Thornton's foot has prevented him working much, but all is well otherwise. The Governor is here and there was a grand to do on Saturday. We came a fine large channel more towards the middle of the stream than where we went up and escaped all the bother we had in going up and which induced us to leave the Pinnace.

Give my love to my brother and shew him this note if you like. I take the Governor on board in ten minutes for Shupanga.

By the way Bedingfeld referred in an official letter to a certificate signed by you. I think it advisable to give Her Majesty's secretary of state the exact words to which you signed your name and will thank you for them for his use when you write down to Senna.

I am &c.

David Livingstone.

From the time Tito met me until I arrived at Tete the fever didn't let me go. Sometimes it was at the edges, an unnatural shadow just beyond my vision; other times it came onto the boat and strangled me, leaving me insensible. But I had my charge: to continue with my chart of the river, and even though there were places that I could not put down with confidence because my mind was wandering, I did a good job.

With the help of Tito's men, I was now able to progress upriver. I was on my way to Tete, where Livingstone's brother was waiting, and Kebrabasa lay ahead. Both were to have powerful influence on my destiny.

PART IV

THE CATARACT

Our curiosity had been so much excited by the reports we had heard of the Kebrabasa rapids, that we resolved to make a short examination of them, and seized the opportunity of the Zambesi being unusually low, to endeavour to ascertain their character while uncovered by the water.

– David and Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*, 1865

University of Cape Town

Cape Town, spring 1860

I am going back into the interior. There are still plans to make, details to work out, but I am going back.

Since Chapman presented me with his proposal, the idea has obsessed me. The prospect of going to the Victoria Falls, of journeying down the Zambesi to Tete, and finding the Doctor again... It is impossible to shake such a thought. But how could I afford to pay my way, to contribute – the boat, equipment? Where would I get the money?

There have been other possibilities. I learnt, a few months ago, about an imminent expedition led by none other than John Hanning Speke, to explore the great lakes in the middle of the continent and to solve the mystery of the source of the Nile. This was to be a government-sponsored expedition, one that might set me right with the scientific establishment again. Yes, I thought, there are explorers other than Livingstone. If he does not appreciate my talents, I shall offer them to others who might.

This news filled my mind. Imagine. To join Speke's expedition as artist. I imagined Livingstone opening a letter and reading. How his brow would crinkle with displeasure when he learnt that Thomas Baines has travelled to Lake Victoria and is painting scenes that illustrate the greatest discoveries of the age, work that will be celebrated in London and throughout the world.

The timing of this news seemed propitious. I had decided, after receiving no satisfaction from the Foreign Office in response to my letters, that it was time to appeal to the Cape government. Sir George Grey, after all, knows me. When the expedition stopped at the Cape on the way to the Zambesi, Sir George embraced me most heartily and spoke generously of my abilities. He would know that Livingstone was mistaken. Sir George would host Speke's expedition in Cape Town, and he would have certain influence.

I wrote to him and offered my services for the expedition. I said I would be prepared to work for no salary, and asked only that the governor would cause an investigation into the charges against me.

I must confess, the idea gave me pleasure, that I would join the party of one whom Livingstone considers a rival. Livingstone considers everyone a rival. Bedingfeld was right. He does not want to share the glory with any man. That is all.

The reply was a blow. It came from the governor's private secretary, and said that Captain Speke thanked me for my offer but was compelled to decline it. '*Having completed his party,*' the letter said, '*he has no place for any one else, however desirable.*'

A polite response, but infuriating. It is the politeness that is the most infuriating thing. Those words: '*however desirable*'. They mean, of course, quite the opposite: that I am undesirable, that a man rejected by Dr Livingstone can be no good for anyone else.

I had to find a way of clearing my name. Chapman's proposal was the only way. Find the money somehow to build his boat, and go with him.

I must go back to the Zambesi. My first thought was the right one. I must return to Tete, and obtain evidence from the people there, before too much time has passed. And I must meet the Doctor himself. Confront him. That is what I must do.

It seems that fortune has not abandoned me entirely. During the winter, news reached Cape Town that Prince Alfred was to visit South Africa. Everyone was filled with anticipation and spoke of nothing else. When the time came, we all followed the news as he travelled to Natal, and the Eastern Province, and visited Moshesh of the Basuto.

When he finally came to Cape Town, there were moments when I managed to forget, for a time, the Livingstone affair. With the whole town caught up in the excitement of the Royal Visit there were plenty of commissions. People wanted pictures of the young prince on his journeys around the country, and I was called upon, with all the artists of Cape Town, to work on the official decorations for the city's festivities.

He is a young boy, only sixteen: would he know that I was the artist who had been dismissed from Livingstone's expedition, Livingstone who had an audience with his mother? Would members of his entourage know this, someone seeing the paintings beforehand, and saying: 'No, we can't have this. The pictures by Bowler can remain, but not this Baines fellow.'

The main event, of course, was the ceremony at the harbour, where the prince laid the first stones for the new breakwater. Positioned on the keel of an upturned boat, I furiously sketched the scene. The prince and his party were surrounded by crowds of people and a flotilla of boats, large and small, as far as the eye could see.

I have made dozens of reproductions, details, variations, many of them to order, some in the hope that a buyer will appear. Saul Solomon has paid me for pictures that he plans to publish in a book about the Royal Visit. And so, at last, some money has come in. It was fortuitous, but not quite to the extent that I'd hoped. The largest of the pictures,

twelve by sixteen feet, in oil, I had expected the city would buy, but there seems to be some delay. It had better not be some objection to my standing with the Doctor.

‘So then,’ Chapman says. ‘We will be ready to leave in a matter of months.’

We are out for an evening stroll, on the Green Point road, with a few other friends. Williams is there, and Logier, and Henry Hall. The wind has dropped, and the sea is gentle, but on the horizon is a thick bank of grey cloud, an approaching storm.

‘How are you getting on with the boat?’ Williams asks.

Chapman and I glance at each other at the same time. There has been some disagreement about the boat. He proposed using iron for the frames. But that will not work. It will rust in no time at all. Copper is the thing, if we are to do this properly – though of course this is more expensive. I told him I might need some money up front for the materials, which I could pay him later from whatever profits I make from the trip. But he refused.

‘Very well, John,’ I reply. ‘The frames will be ready ... well, I could finish them in a month if I didn’t have to work to make money.’

I see my friends nodding.

‘But I mustn’t complain. The commissions from the Royal Visit have made it possible at all. As has’ – I look at Logier – ‘the generosity of friends.’

‘I’ll tell you what you should do for money,’ says Henry Hall. ‘If you’ve been wrongly dismissed from the expedition, then in fact you’re still a member of it. Demand a formal discharge, and for your salary to be paid until that moment.’

‘And medical expenses,’ adds Williams.

‘Quite right. Until they’ve discharged you properly, you’re still their responsibility.’

We all laugh. It would be futile, of course. But it would, in fact, be right. Wouldn’t it?

‘And, Thomas,’ Logier asks, ‘you are sure about this? This trip to South-West Africa?’ He glances at Chapman. ‘Are you strong enough yet for such a venture?’

‘I am greatly improved,’ I say. ‘Much of the time I feel my old self again.’

‘Much of the time ...’ He frowns sympathetically. ‘Listen to you, Thomas. You wish to return to the part of the world that did this to you in the first place?’

We have come to the end of the path. Waves are swishing against the jagged black rocks.

‘I must return there before too long,’ I say. ‘I need evidence, evidence from people who had anything to do with me there. But if I leave it too long ... People’s memories will become uncertain. It has already been over a year.’

The sun is sinking into the bank of clouds. It's time to head back. We will not see a proper sunset.

Back at the house I sit at the desk and look out the window. Lion's Rump looms in front of me. The clouds are starting to pour over it, like waves.

The plan with Chapman might work, but it might not bring me any money at all. It feels so similar to my previous journeys, the ones I made years ago, which amounted to little in the end. That was all right, when I was a younger man, starting to make my way. The prospect of journeying with Livingstone seemed so different. Will I ever be accepted onto a government-sponsored expedition again? Is there any chance of being sent out by one of the learned societies? Livingstone's expedition was supposed to open the door to that. But it has done the opposite. I have lost everything. Who will employ me now, now that I am Dr Livingstone's thief?

Next month I turn forty, and I have nothing to show for it. Nothing, other than disgrace.

Blast them! I am the one who has been robbed. Robbed of my reputation, robbed of my livelihood. Robbed of my dreams.

I'm clutching, I see, a pen my hand. I pull the writing paper towards me and write at the top of the page. '*On Her Majesty's Service,*' and below that the address, and the date. '*19, Dixon Street, Cape Town. 15 October 1860.*'

And what of my things at Tete? I was sent away without an opportunity to fetch anything. My clothes, my equipment, my artist's materials. Have I not been robbed of that too? Who knows what is still there, what Livingstone has taken with him, what has been stolen.

I feel my eye flickering. When will it stop? When will I be healthy again?

'To the Right Hon'ble Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.'

The pen marks the paper with a scratching sound, and it seems entirely appropriate that there is nothing gentle about it.

I repeat my demand for an investigation. I state again that I was dismissed without proof, and in my absence. The words take form before me: '*slanderous and malicious charges*' ... '*without the slightest proof*' ... '*calumnious attack upon my character*'.

I am writing quickly, angrily, but my politeness has done me no good, so let them know that I will not be bullied. Henry's comment is in my head: I should demand my salary until I am properly discharged. We laughed about that, but now I am serious. Let

them know I will not be timid. The demands flow with each sentence, but nothing seems unreasonable. Oh no.

I have the honour to request that I may receive my discharge from the Zambesi Expedition with full pay at the rate of £300 per annum, up to the day on which it is granted, £5 0 0, mess expenses on board H. M. S. Lynx, on my passage from the Zambesi. One guinea per diem (according to the scale allowed me on the Australian Expedition), for my expenses in Cape Town from the 7th of January up to the date of my discharge. Repayment of all medical expenses I have incurred or may incur during the same period, and compensation for the loss of my private equipment which I certainly could not replace for less than £200 and which if I ever recover it will be so long kept from me that I shall be obliged to purchase a new outfit for my next journey to the Zambesi.

Yes. There, I've said it. My next journey to the Zambesi. Let them know that this is what I plan.

It is now my intention to return to the interior for the purpose of continuing the exploration of the Zambesi. I shall assuredly seek a meeting with Dr. Livingstone, and challenge him to a proof of the slanders to which he has lent the sanction of his name, before any number of independent men, British or Portuguese in Tete.

I look at the page, inked on both sides with an angry scrawl, an honest scrawl. I am, I realize now, going to send this. It expresses exactly what I wish it to, what I wish them to hear. How to conclude? *Fair play*. Yes. I raise the pen.

If he refuses this, I shall consider that he is afraid to give fair play to the man he has calumated, and shall hold myself at liberty to pursue whatever course I deem most proper.

At the bottom I sign my name, 'Thomas Baines,' and add: 'Artist Zambesi Expedition.'

I fold the letter and sit back in the chair. For the first time I feel satisfied. I can feel my heart beating, but it provides a certain calmness. I close my eyes. My ears are filled with the sound of the wind battering the windows, the rain upon the glass.

Back to Tete, I think. Imagine going back. It was this time of year when I first arrived there. The baobabs were beginning to blossom. It was midday when the town came in view from the pinnacle. The low stone structures of the Portuguese. Charles was there; the others were somewhere lower down the river.

As I landed, with my crew – two Kroomen and one Makololo, as well as Tito's men – as I landed there, I had no way of knowing, that this would be my home for the next year. A long time, a time in which everything happened.

I was at the true beginning of our expedition, the reason why we were there. Upriver were the Kebrabasa rapids, the cataract, the object of our exploration. Everything was still to happen.

University of Cape Town

The Lynx lost a boat's crew, all but four, on the bar of the Luabo, six men having been drowned by the cutter being upset... It is unfortunate that this serious accident happened, as people are prejudiced against the river by such things.

– David Livingstone, journal, 7 October 1858

University of Cape Town

Tete, November 1858

Tom Toby appears at the door. 'The boat,' he says, pointing towards the river.

I swing my feet down from the bed and stand up.

They're here.

I've stood up too quickly. Darkness closes in at the edge of my vision, but it begins to recede as I stand there quietly for a moment.

I'm on the mend. A week ago I would have been unable to get up at all. Now I can move about, as long as I don't exert myself too much.

They're here. Finally. Every day there's been some moment when I've thought: The launch *must* be coming soon. But I've also had a sense that she would never come, that I'd be stranded here with Charles.

'Have you told Mr Livingstone?' I ask Toby.

He nods.

I put on my shoes and tie the laces. My fingers fumble a few times. Slowly does it.

I step out onto the verandah and take in the river beyond. There she is, in the distance. I cannot make out very much, other than her paddle wheels and masts and funnel, and the plume of grey smoke that rises from her as she chugs towards the settlement. It will be fifteen minutes before she gets here.

I walk down the staircase of the residencia, which fans out dramatically as it reaches the ground, and I take a few paces towards the bank. A sound makes me turn and I see Charles on the verandah, brushing the lapels of his jacket before he opens his parasol. He is not looking directly at me, and for a few moments he does not notice me down here. I do nothing to attract his attention.

'Ah, Baines,' he says after a while.

'Mr Livingstone,' I reply with a nod.

I wonder what the Portuguese make of him. He has always seemed slightly repulsed by them, and now that he is living among them, he is taking more care than ever with his appearance, as if he can prove his superiority by making sure he is better dressed. I fear it makes him seem ridiculous in their eyes, as I must confess it does in mine.

'So,' he says. 'Here they are at last.'

'At last.'

Charles was already here when I first arrived at Tete. Livingstone brought him here directly after leaving me with the pinnacle, before himself going back down again for the next load of stores, and for some time Charles was the expedition's only officer here. Senhor Tito provided one half of the rooms in the governor's residencia for us, and there I joined Charles when I arrived. It is a grand old house, with walls of brick and a tiled roof, with its wide verandah and long stairway. It has large shuttered windows, with cotton cloth for glass, and the floors are covered with a red plaster. Our rooms are generously sized, with more than enough space for each of us and our luggage and stores.

Tito has been extremely hospitable. I was weak with fever when I finally arrived here, and he had men carry me to my room. I was sick for a week, but I have been recovering slowly since then. The Portuguese, generally, have welcomed me. We sit on the verandahs and drink tea and smoke our pipes, and in the evening we enjoy a glass or two of wine and brandy.

I've been working at my chart of the river, and at my pictures – which as always generates interest among the locals. Charles has been trying photography, but it has not been a great success. Few of his pictures amount to anything, and – oh, yes – he had an accident in the dark tent, knocking over the table with the bath of chemicals, and spilling nitrate of silver all over his clothes. The Makololo, thinking it water, wiped it off him with their hands, and were most distressed when they went out in the sun and saw the shining stains on their hands. Charles asked if they wanted to be washed all over and become white men, which seemed to amuse them as much as it did him.

The launch is heavy in the water. I can begin to make out figures on the deck, though I can't see how many or even who is who. They must have a good view of the town now. I wonder what they are thinking, those who have not come here before: Kirk and Thornton. Tete is much larger than Sena, with more stone structures: the fort, in its large walled enclosure, the church, the school and the houses, the grandest of which is our residencia.

Charles descends the stairs, gives me a parting nod, and turns towards the harbour. He is going to meet the launch there. I decide not to join him, but wait until he is out of sight, and then take a different route, further from the shore, between the native huts. I walk at a good pace, not too quickly, but I reach the harbour at the same time that he does.

The *MaRobert* is quite close now. I can see the paddles turning, and men crowded on the near side of the deck. Thornton is the first one I can make out, standing near the bows, watching. My other friends come into vision: Kirk, nearby; Rae at the engine; Tom Jumbo and some of the Kroomen. I look for Livingstone but I can't find him.

There appear to be some Portuguese on board too. There are two men with white skins. I wonder who they are.

Livingstone, I see now, has been standing on the other side of the launch. While the others have been looking towards the settlement, he has been looking at the undeveloped side of the river, or at the water itself. I am struck with the quick realization that our mission is beyond Tete, that this is merely the stopping point.

I wonder if he recognizes me yet. I am eager to show him what I have done, my chart of the river.

A small crowd has gathered at the landing place, most of them the Doctor's Makololo. They are waving and cheering. Charles looks decidedly uncomfortable. The men on the launch are waving back.

The two white men don't look Portuguese at all. They are dressed in naval garb. English navy. Livingstone mentioned, in a letter, that they'd received help from the men of the *Lynx*, which they'd met at the bar. But what are they doing all the way up here? They can't be joining the expedition, can they? Who are these fellows?

The launch is close enough for the line to be tossed, and I put myself into position to catch it when it is.

The Makololo are on the shore, singing and chanting. I keep my eye on one of them, a tall one, whose name is Mbea, or some such. He has closed his eyes and his face is full of joy. This cannot be anything like their meeting of a few weeks ago, since that was a reunion after many years apart, but they are still welcoming Livingstone with celebrations. Perhaps they know: now is the time when we start the journey back to their home.

This is, indeed, the real beginning of our journey. The hope was that the *Pearl* would bring us all the way here, a few weeks after arriving at the delta. Imagine. Imagine all we could have avoided: the war, the sickness, the unending ferrying of equipment and stores, for months and months. Perhaps the fight with Bedingfeld would not have happened.

There is now a great din around me: the Makololo singing, Portuguese and natives shouting to be heard, the engine of the *MaRobert*.

Livingstone is acknowledging the welcome from the Makololo with a gesture that indicates thanks and humility.

Kirk catches my eye and smiles. Thornton sees me too and waves. I wave back at both of them. My friends. How long it has been since I last saw them: two and a half months now.

When the launch is still being tied, Livingstone leaps across and is surrounded by his Makololo. He seems not to have noticed me, or, for that matter, his brother.

There is an arm on my shoulder: it is Kirk.

'Baines,' he says. 'Are you all right?'

'Getting better.' I nod. 'Getting better.'

He looks at me. No doubt his doctor's eye sees that I am still weak.

'Baines!' Thornton is beside Kirk, smiling at me.

'She needs some repairs,' Livingstone calls out to Sicard, his arm stretched out towards *MaRobert*. 'Mr Rae will take charge.'

Rae stands on the deck and nods. Then he looks at me. 'Mr Baines,' he says.

'Mr Rae.'

He turns his attention back to Livingstone and Sicard.

'Who are these other men?' I ask Kirk and Thornton.

'Mr Walker, Mr Rowe,' Kirk explains. 'Quartermaster and leading stoker. They come from the *Lynx*.'

'The *Lynx* is still at the bar?' I ask.

'No, she left nearly a month ago, when we were still there. These two men volunteered to join the expedition.'

'Good fellows,' Thornton adds. 'Rowe the stoker will be helpful with the engine if Rae falls sick again.'

'The first mate was most anxious to take Bedingfeld's place,' Kirk says. 'As was another officer. Even the *captain* wished to join. But the Doctor would not have it. After his experience with Bedingfeld, he's finished with naval men of any authority.'

I look at Livingstone. He is talking to his brother now. I wonder if I should go over and greet him. But no, he's addressing the Makololo again, pointing towards the launch.

'So we've been everywhere,' Thornton says, flinging his arm downriver. 'Back to the bar, then up to Sena.'

'Expedition Island is quite quickly shedding the signs of our settlement,' Kirk adds.

'Up the Shiré – a little way,' Thornton continues. 'We climbed halfway up Morambala.'

'Livingstone made enquiries about going to Gorongoza too, but there wasn't enough time. He is eager to explore Kebrabasa while the river is still shallow.' Kirk lowers his voice. 'He speaks of blasting the rocks if necessary.'

‘And we met the rebel chief!’ Thornton exclaims. ‘The notorious Bonga! He had lunch aboard the launch! Can you believe it? He’s quite unwarlike now. You should have seen his stockade. The Portuguese have destroyed it entirely.’

I’m struck that I have missed seeing fascinating things. I thought I’d be going closer to the heart of our mission by coming nearer to Kebrabasa, but it seems everything of interest has been happening in the opposite direction. Still, I’ve charted my section of the river. Skead, Thornton and I: each of us has laid down a portion of its course. My contribution is important. I look at Livingstone, but he is still engaged with his men and his brother.

‘And what about you?’ Kirk asks. ‘You must have had quite an adventure on your way up.’

‘Quite an adventure, yes. I’ll show you my paintings. Come, I’ll show you the residencia where you’ll be staying.’

‘There was a mail bag,’ Kirk says, having to speak loudly now. ‘There are letters for you. I’ll see if I can find them.’

As I look at Livingstone, he glances back at me. I nod – I think he sees it before he looks away. Our real task starts now, and I am ready.

There are five letters for me. Two from Mother, one from Emma, from John Arrowsmith at the Royal Geographical Society and from Chapman at the Cape. Our first mail bag. My first contact from the outside world.

The envelopes from Mother and Emma simply say *Thomas Baines, Dr Livingstone’s Zambesi Expedition*. That is enough to get them to me. And what a journey they have travelled. The same journey, in fact, as I: probably via London, to the Cape, to the Zambesi Delta, to here, at Tete.

Mother’s letter is full of news from the town. Mrs Cunningham has died; she would have turned seventy-five the following month. The Jennings family have left for Norwich. There’s no work in Lynn, they say. ‘*How clever you were to leave when you did, and look where it’s got you, dear boy.*’ Mr Wallace tells her that the Museum has become busier since I joined the expedition, and that people are forever asking her if there is any news, but she hasn’t heard anything since the letter from Cape Town. Ah, good, she got that. She has received the pictures and specimens that I sent. She’s been hard at work writing to people who might be interested in buying my paintings, but nothing firm has been settled yet. Ah, Mother, soon that will no longer be necessary. Soon they will come to us.

Emma's letter is shorter. She wishes me well, and says how excited she is about the expedition. *'Oh, Tom, it's so wonderful to imagine you tramping about there with Dr Livingstone! You must be best of friends by now.'*

Best of friends. No, I would hardly say that. Livingstone remains remote. I feel like a child around him, as if I were Thornton's age. But I'm not. I'm thirty-eight later this month. Why do I feel so ... uncomfortable? That's it, isn't it? I never feel comfortable around Livingstone.

Chapman wishes me well. *'I hope that when you come back you will not be so famous that you forget your old friends!'*

What would I say if I was completely honest? *Look, chaps, the truth is, things haven't gone as well as expected.* I'd feel a little ashamed, if the expedition were suddenly over, and we'd achieved only what we've achieved so far. I suppose that is how Bedingfeld must feel. Presumably he has stopped in the Cape by now. Once we've ascended Kebrabasa, everything will be all right. Then these uncertainties and difficulties will be washed away.

There's a knock on the door. It's Rae. 'Dinner time,' he says.

We gather in the dining room, where Tito has arranged a meal for all of us. Usually it has been just Charles and me, often with Tito and his young aide-de-camp, Senhor Pratt, sometimes one or two visitors from the Portuguese, and too many servants hovering around. Now the room is filled with people, all of us seated around the heavy wooden table.

Tito stands up and says something to Livingstone in Portuguese. Then he gestures all of us and says in English, 'Very pleased to have you.'

'Thank you, Major, thank you,' Livingstone responds. 'Her Majesty's Government will be very grateful for your hospitality.' He switches to Portuguese. I've learnt enough to understand that he's saying we mean to stay here until Monday, and will then set off for Kebrabasa. I assume Livingstone will address us properly as an expedition, to tell us what the plans are – though perhaps he will not.

The servants enter with plates of food, and lay them down carefully before each of us. Beef steaks in a garlic sauce. It is exceedingly good. The others are tucking in most heartily: no doubt their diet has consisted of more salted pork than fresh meat. Thornton, I see, is discreetly scraping the garlic off his meat before he puts it in his mouth. I am used to the food of the Portuguese now. It is greasier than English food, and spicier, and uses garlic more liberally. We eat fowl often. Charles commented once that it is a wonder we

are not clucking by now. The bread is good, though somewhat gritty, because they use a soft sandstone to mill the grain.

‘Where’s Davis?’ I think out loud, because I can’t remember seeing him with the other Kroomen.

‘Sent away,’ Livingstone says, still finishing a mouthful of food. He wipes his mouth with a cloth. ‘He was caught stealing the mess wine. I sent him off on the *Lynx*, along with Tom Will, for his bad foot, and for not understanding English.’

‘Ah,’ I say.

Davis gone. That saddens me more than a little. I liked the fellow, though I won’t mention that here. His food was not bad. And Tom Will too? He was our steward on the island.

‘Who is the cook now?’ I ask.

‘One of the Makololo has taken over those duties,’ Livingstone says.

The others are silent.

‘It’s taking time,’ Livingstone adds. ‘The first day he made us coffee with cold water!’ He laughs at this – unusually – and there are smiles around the table now. ‘But he’s learning quickly enough.’

‘I had to be ship’s cook on the pinnacle,’ I say. ‘I set up an oven on the deck, in a metal tin.’

‘As long as you didn’t burn a hole in the hull,’ Thornton laughs.

I laugh too, but I notice that I’ve lost Livingstone’s attention.

I wish to talk to him about my journey, and to show him my chart. But after dinner he is off, as always.

Thornton has moved into my room, and Kirk, who is sharing a room with Charles, appears at the doorway, with an armful of newspapers.

‘Thought you might want to have a look at these,’ he says. ‘They came in the mail bag.’

‘Thank you, yes.’

Cherbourg, and Its Meaning, says the headline of the *Illustrated London News*. At the bottom of the page is a picture of a ship, with the caption beneath it: *Departure from Gravesend of Troops for India*.

‘There are *Punches* too,’ Kirk says. ‘I have some in my room. You’re welcome to help yourself.’

'*Punch!*' I laugh. 'I'm sure this is the furthest any copy of *Punch* has been, in this part of the world.'

'I'm sure,' Kirk agrees.

'While you're here,' I say, 'both of you, let me show you my chart.'

I am proud of it. This is not an ordinary chart, like the ones done by Thornton or even Skead. I have coloured it, given it an artist's touch, making it pleasing to the eye as well as practical for the navigator. I've left the river clear and marked sandbanks in yellow. The banks and islands are coloured with green watercolour, which fades an inch or so from the bank. The course of the pinnace I have marked with a red line.

The chart is on five large sheets, each two by three feet. The scale is roughly two and a half miles to the inch. From Sena to Tete, the journey on the map is about seven feet.

On the sides I have sketched various features: the *MaRobert* passing the Manganja range, the cliffs of the Lupata Gorge (drawn from memory, as I was sick then), Bonga's stockade.

Thornton points to the reaches below Lupata. 'This is where we saw the elephants. And this is where we kept running aground.' He looks up. 'It's remarkable. But I wouldn't expect anything less.'

'A good map of the river,' Kirk says. But he seems to have reservations about something.

'But something is wrong...?' I ask.

'No...' he shakes his head. 'It's an excellent representation of the river as it flowed at that moment. But we've seen how it changes. That sandbank' – he points to a yellow half-moon – 'will have moved by next month, and the best channel will be on the other side of the river. I fear the Portuguese are right about this. But' – he strikes the air – 'it is impressive, Baines.'

'I hope the Doctor will be pleased with it.'

'I'm sure he will.' Kirk stands up. 'A walk? Show me this town of Tete.'

'Of course.'

Thornton says he will stay in the room and unpack, and Kirk and I set off.

I point out the landmarks as we walk past the houses of the Portuguese. We pass the hospital and the church, and come to the school, a beautiful old building, which was built by the Jesuits, hundreds of years ago, before they were thrown out of the country for a while. Much has been explained to me by Senhor Generoso the trader, whose English is quite close to fluent. Others have been friendly, but communication is more difficult. I have come to know Senhor Pratt, the young officer who takes charge of the house when

Tito is away, Senhor Pascoal, a wealthy merchant, and Senhor Raposo, a man of importance in the government of Tete.

We approach the harbour, where we can see the *MaRobert*. Livingstone is on the shore, shouting something to the men on deck.

'He's in a hurry,' Kirk says. 'But he's in a better mood than he has been. It was a difficult passage until we got into Lupata. Hours of every day spent hauling the launch over sandbanks, sometimes over sixty yards. And he's been anxious about the stores.'

'The stores?' I ask. Is this something that I have done, or not done?

'There's a great deal left at Shupanga still, and at Sena. He had hoped to employ natives to bring it up in the larger canoes, but the costs of transport are exorbitant.'

Livingstone has his Makololo around him and is talking to them. His hands are animated. I wonder what he is saying.

'He's troubled, too, by rumours of an explorer reaching a great lake to the north. An Englishman with a party of Arabs.'

'Burton.'

'It would be, if the rumours are true. The Doctor has been in more of a hurry since hearing that.'

We walk on in silence for a while. Ahead of us is the fort, with the thick wall enclosing a square in front of it. There are men on the bastions, some in dark blue uniform, others in pale-coloured flowing garments. They are talking loudly and laughing. They wave as we pass.

'Boa-tarde!' one of them cries.

'Boa-tarde,' I reply.

Kirk waves back too.

'And these new men?' I ask. I can't tell if Kirk has become friendly with them. 'Are they here for long?'

'As long as any of us, I suppose. They seem first-rate fellows. They'll be useful to the expedition.'

'Ah,' I say. I feel uncomfortable about them, newcomers who have come to share the glory. They have had a fast journey up here, while we have done all the work. But I don't say anything to Kirk.

Over the next days, Livingstone is hard at work and impossible to get hold of. He seems everywhere, and nowhere. He sets up a tide pole near the residencia, to mark the rise of the river, and he supervises the planting of a garden, to measure the yield of cotton seeds.

He investigates a quantity of coal which Senhor Tito has had brought from the nearby beds, and which Rae and Thornton pronounce to be good in quality. He is, Kirk tells me, trying to inoculate a cow with smallpox in order to create a vaccine, as there is some of the disease about. He is eager to leave as soon as Rae has finished making repairs to the *MaRobert*. I can see it will not do to go and interrupt him.

It is as if a storm has struck this small settlement. I realize now how slow the pace of life has been here, now that there is so much activity. Some of the Portuguese appear quite flustered.

I take the store book to the room where the stores are kept, and try to make sense of it. There are boxes piled on top of one another. This will be impossible. I think of all the goods still lying at Shupanga, at Sena. How am I supposed to know what is where?

I'm feeling tired and weak. I could do with a little sugar, but finding some will be a treasure hunt. I look from box to box, until – there – I see it. I open the cask and dip a spoon into the soft white grains. As the first spoonful reaches my mouth, the wonderful sweetness on my tongue and down my throat, I feel a little more awake, alert.

I've come to recognize the fever long before it strikes. There are signs that herald it: a feeling of weakness from within, a hollowness, and the world I experience becomes, in a strange way, discoloured, like a picture that has been left out in the sun. All that remains are the browns and dirty yellows, much like the landscape in drought. The blue of the sky has no effect on me; it might as well be the colour of bare canvas.

This time I fight it. Rae, I hear, has finished the repairs to the *MaRobert's* engine. We are due to leave for Kebrabasa in two days. I cannot be left behind.

But by afternoon I find myself shivering uncontrollably, in spite of the hot weather.

Kirk is shaking his head. 'To bed,' he orders.

'I'll be all right,' I say. 'A little rest should do it.'

'Walker is down with fever too.'

'Ah, yes, well. Welcome to the Zambesi, chaps.'

'What's that?' Kirk asks.

I feel the sickness welling up. I vomit up my dinner on the ground.

I am lying on my bed when Livingstone comes. I jump up, too quickly, and I feel faint.

'Lie down, Baines, lie down,' he says.

I sit on the side of the bed.

'You've come,' I say, 'to look at my chart.'

He answers with a half-smile. Of course he has. I get to my feet again and walk unsteadily to the table.

‘Here. This is the first sheet. There are five of them. I drew it in some detail, and I filled in the features that you asked me to.’

He looks at the sheet, and then flips quickly to the last, which shows the Lupata Gorge and Tete, before returning to the first.

‘It’s very good,’ he says. ‘But we found a better channel on our latest journey up. Had we found it on the first trip, it wouldn’t have been strictly necessary for you to take the pinnacle.’

Not strictly necessary? All those weeks in an open boat, often suffering fever. Can he mean that my efforts were not needed? But Kirk and Thornton said there were frequent groundings. The launch could not have managed with the pinnacle in tow, or with the load that I took. Why doesn’t he simply thank me for it?

‘I must ask you again,’ Livingstone says, ‘about the statement that you signed for Bedingfeld.’

Bedingfeld? What has he to do with anything now?

He clears his throat. ‘I took the opportunity, of the *Lynx* being in the bar, to send despatches home concerning the Bedingfeld affair, as well as more positive matters. Dr Kirk and Mr Thornton being with me, they were able to write statements ... clarifying matters. But of course I have nothing from you.’

I feel stung, that my achievement is not being appreciated. He has not come to see my charts at all. All Livingstone can think about is Bedingfeld again!

‘Dr Livingstone, I have already told you, but it is such a long time ago now.’

‘It’s not long, Baines. Don’t you realize? It’s not long at all. Bedingfeld will have stopped at the Cape already, and is probably close to England by now. Who knows what lies he is spreading, and how they will injure the work of Christ!’

‘Lies...?’ I slump back on the bed. I don’t understand. ‘What does this have to do...?’

‘Think carefully, Baines, what your exact words were. I must have it on paper.’ He is holding out a pen. ‘You must write it for me.’

I try to sit up but slip backwards again with a groan. I feel faint. I look at the pen held above me, then at Livingstone. ‘I said ...’ My voice croaks.

Livingstone stares at the pen for a moment, and then draws it to himself, and takes out a pocket book.

‘Yes,’ he says. ‘You said...?’

What were the exact words? Does it matter?

‘That ... Captain Bedingfeld said ... he was willing to retain the command of the *MaRobert* until someone else was found. A successor. Suitable. Until a suitable successor was appointed.’

Livingstone is scratching the words on the paper.

‘Those were the exact words?’

I remember, now, the words ‘perfectly willing’: that he was *perfectly* willing to stay on. But it makes no difference.

‘Those were the words. As well as I can remember them.’

Livingstone glares at me. ‘You would do well not to sign your name to things ... if you do not keep a copy.’

With that, he turns and walks out of the room.

On Sunday, Thornton is also down with fever. He is in bed, covered with blankets. I feel a little better. I must be strong enough for Monday’s expedition to Kebrabasa.

Livingstone is displeased; I must show him that I am a good explorer.

The sound of a crowd fills the house. Everyone has gathered for the service. The Makololo are there, as are the Kroomen.

‘Thomas, you should not be up,’ says Kirk when he spots me.

‘I’m all right. I think a little exercise before Monday...’

Kirk shakes his head. ‘You are not strong enough to come this time. I’m telling you to get some rest.’

I see Walker standing beside Rae.

Kirk notices. ‘He’s better. You’re not, Thomas. You and Thornton are staying here. Go and get some rest.’

I return to my room. The sound of Livingstone’s voice, reading prayers in Sechuana, is in my ears as I drift to sleep.

Charles, too, will be staying behind. He is going to practise his photography. I will be left under his command again while the others are out adventuring.

It is mid-morning when I hear the faint sound of the *MaRobert*’s engine. I walk out onto the verandah and watch as she floats out of the harbour and slowly steams into the distance. Curse this fever that keeps me away.

Baines ... had an attack of intermittent [fever] which, as usual, went to his head. He thinks his certificate was, 'We certify our belief that Captain Bedingfeld is willing to retain the command of the Ma Robert until a suitable successor be appointed'. He is to be watched, as it is known he formerly had brain fever.

– David Livingstone, journal, 6 November 1858

University of Cape Town

Tete, November 1858

Kebrabasa had become for me something like the summit on the ascent of a mountain, or the North Pole on an expedition to the Arctic. I was desperate to be part of the party that finally reached them. When the account was finally written, I wanted my name to be among those who were there to see what was to be seen. Livingstone and Baines. I wanted people to utter those names together, as they spoke of Burton and Speke.

So it was with feelings of discomfort that I watched Livingstone set off for Kebrabasa without me. Livingstone and Kirk. And Rae, and these new men Walker and Rowe. And it was with feelings of relief when they returned, after five days, with findings that were inconclusive.

The days spent waiting for them at Tete were difficult. I had been sick again, and Thornton too was unwell. He had no appetite and was becoming weak. Charles was in charge of us, and now that his realm had grown to include Thornton and the Kroomen who were left behind, he seemed to feel it necessary to tell us what to do and what not to do, in a way that was unnecessary and unpleasant.

For me, the disappointment of being left at Tete was very slightly allayed by the comforts that I could find there, from being in a settlement rather than in a camp in the wild. I would sit with the Portuguese on their verandahs drinking tea, and we would talk, as my grasp of their language grew beyond the rudiments, about the weather, about the river, about the war that had just ended. In the evenings we would share the odd glass of wine or brandy, which did nothing to hinder my recovery.

They were impressed by my art, and a group of them would always gather when I drew something new or worked up an earlier sketch into an oil.

I'd notice Charles walking past and looking displeased. Once or twice he called me. 'Mr Baines, I need you to help me with something, please.'

He'd ask me to assist him with his photography, which involved standing around doing nothing while he fumbled about, trying to work out what to do. If he'd got to a point where he needed me, and called for me then, it might have been all right. Once or twice he asked me to help him mix chemicals, which involved exposing myself to noxious fumes in a stuffy tent, which I'm sure did my health no good. The work was futile, because the outcome was always a failure. It felt to me that he was simply finding an excuse to pull me away from the Portuguese, who were not as friendly with him as

they were with me, and to prise me away from my own art, which I was getting on with far more successfully than he.

Charles was sharp with the Kroomen. He ordered Tom Toby to carry all his equipment some distance out of the town, where he planned to get some views of the fort. Toby was still sick from his exertions on the way up, and hardly in a state to play the role of porter. He stood there and looked unhappy. Charles screamed at him. 'Pick it up!'

'I don't...' I found myself saying, and began again. 'Are you sure it's a good idea for him to carry that? He's still sick.'

'Sick?' said Charles. 'I hardly think he's sick. He was well enough last night to stay up carousing until an ungodly hour. He and that other Krooman.'

'What about this Makololo over here?' I said, summoning the fellow with a wave. 'He's in perfectly good health, and I think he's proven his worth as a porter rather well on his journey with your brother.'

Charles glared at me, but now that the Makololo man was upon us, he couldn't send him away. 'Come,' he said, and pointed to the photographic equipment to be carried.

In the afternoon, Charles addressed the Kroomen at the bottom of the stairs. He called them to attention; I noticed that they did not snap to it as they had when Bedingfeld had commanded them.

'There will be no more loud behaviour after eight o'clock at night, do you hear? You will be on the pinnacle by then, and you will stay there. Is that understood?'

The men murmured and nodded.

I was, I have to say, quite fond of the Kroomen by now. Perhaps it was the fact that they were boat people, as were my own folk, though Freetown and Lynn were worlds apart. It had to do with the companionship of Tom Toby and Black Will on the pinnacle. I liked them far more than the Makololo, whose worth I wasn't yet able to perceive, apart from their loyalty to the Doctor. The Kroomen had spirit, sometimes barbarous in nature, but not so different from the rough men I'd hear bellowing crude seaman's songs from the pub at the harbour when I was a boy.

They were, it is true, becoming restive. For all his faults, Bedingfeld had kept them in check, and now he was gone. They did not respect Charles, not one bit, and he was making them dislike him even more now.

They didn't heed his command, and I could hear them making merry in the middle of the night. Charles heard them too, and the next morning he called two of them, whom he had spotted away from the pinnacle.

Tom Toby and Jack Sabe stood before us with their heads bowed.

‘Mr Baines, you will stop the grog of these men, for disobeying orders. I shall report them to my brother when he returns.’

‘Mr Livingstone, I hardly think ...’ I lowered my voice as much as I could. ‘Is it right to stop one of the few pleasures ...?’

‘Mr Baines,’ he hissed, ‘I would appreciate it if you would not question me before the men. Unless you want me to report to my brother about you as well!’

I shook my head. ‘As you say.’

When the party returned from Kebrabasa, they were exhausted. They had steamed up the gorge until the *MaRobert* could go no further, and then they had proceeded on foot for two days.

I was desperate for information, but Livingstone said nothing, except that we would need to return. I was pleased about that.

Kirk was unusually quiet at first, but when he had recovered he told me what he’d seen. I listened attentively and imagined the scene when he told us about the journey into the gorge, where mountains towered above them, and the river wound precipitously. They had steamed up as far as it was safe to go, but the *MaRobert* had struck a rock when they were landing, punching a hole in the hull. Fortunately it was above the water line. They set off on foot, and came to several rapids, which would have made navigation impossible now that the water was at its lowest. At higher water, Kirk said, they should become easier, although there was one that might become more difficult – it was hard to tell.

At one rapid, Kirk had climbed down for a better view, and the black rocks were so hot, he was forced to let go occasionally, though in danger of falling to the bottom. The feet of the Makololo had been blistered on the scalding surface. It sounded like a daring adventure.

If the river were to rise six feet, Livingstone believed, it would flatten the rapids sufficiently. We would need to go again as soon as we could.

We were not in a good way. I was getting better, but was still shaky; Thornton was still not eating anything; one or two of the Kroomen were suffering from fever. Even Livingstone was unwell. He had developed an affliction of the skin – herpes, Kirk explained to me – which knocked him down for a few days. It was unusual to see him inactive for a change, and Kirk told me he was in a foul mood.

I was up early one morning to sketch the river from the harbour. All of a sudden the sound of screaming came from the water – a woman’s voice. I jumped to my feet and saw that a woman had fallen in the river from the pinnace, where the Kroomen slept. A moment later, someone leapt from the deck of the *MaRobert* into the water. I moved closer to the shore. Coming from the pinnace to where I stood was a skiff with three women and one of the Kroomen. It was Tom Wilson, who, when he saw me, looked at me with a sheepish expression, and I thought I perceived relief on his face, that it was me and not one of my fellows – Livingstone perhaps, or Charles. The women appeared panicked, and were looking back at the water, where their companion had fallen. Once the skiff had reached the shore, Wilson hurried them off.

In the water the man – I could see now that it was Mr Rowe – was swimming to shore with the woman.

I looked at the women who had just landed before me. Two of them had run off, but the third paused a while, watching the rescue of her friend. She turned and looked at me, with an expression that I recognized from the women who frequented harbours and sailors’ taverns. I felt strangely unsure of myself, as if I were the one out of place, and found myself – foolishly – returning her look with a smile. I decided it would be better if I hadn’t been here, and I quickly withdrew into the shadows.

I noticed another figure making his way to shore. It was Rae. As soon as he landed, he ran off, in the direction of the town, no doubt to the residencia to make known what had happened. Once he was out of sight I scuttled away.

Rae had gone to inform Kirk, who in turn let Livingstone know. Livingstone went immediately to reprimand the Kroomen. There would be no grog for any of them now.

Livingstone announced at breakfast that the Kroomen had been guilty of misconduct with women and that one of the women would have drowned had it not been for the exertions of Mr Rowe. Charles shot me a glance that seemed to throw some blame in my direction, as if I were complicit with the Kroomen because I had been more lenient with them than he had.

I looked at the Kroomen differently after that. To think that they had taken women on board. I had been embarrassed when my eyes had met the woman’s. I found my mind wandering to her shoulders, her neck, and had to stop myself. I noticed, now, when I looked at the Kroomen, how muscular they were, how powerful their bodies. I’d already known it, of course, but it was as if I was seeing it, properly, for the first time.

We were soon busy with preparations for the next trip.

Livingstone commanded me to get up stores for an expedition of three weeks. It was an almost impossible task. There were large quantities of stores still at Shupanga, and at Sena. I had not been present to see exactly what had been left there. My natural inclination was not towards bookkeeping but towards art. But to keep track of everything in the store book was as much an act of imagination as of record-keeping. And to locate the stores, in amongst the loads that had been brought by the *MaRobert* on her two trips up, involved a great deal of luck, and of course plenty of hard work.

The plan now was to explore the whole length of the rapids, and to sketch and photograph them before the water rose too much. I was weak, but I was ready to embrace what lay ahead.

University of Cape Town

Things look dark for our enterprise. This Kebrabasa is what I never expected. No hint of its nature ever reached my ears. The only person who ever saw the river was José St. Anna, and he describes it as fearful when it is in flood. This I can very well believe from what I saw.... What we shall do if this is to be the end of the navigation I cannot now divine, but here I am, and I am trusting Him who never made ashamed those who did so....

I look back at what has happened to me. The honours heaped on me were not of my seeking. They came unbidden. I could not even answer the letters I got from the great and noble, and I never expected the fame which followed me....

It was thy hand that gave it all, O thou blessed and Holy One, and it was given for thy dear Son's sake. It will promote thy glory if Africa is made a land producing the articles now raised only or chiefly by slave labour.

– David Livingstone, journal, 20 November 1858

University of Cape Town

Zambesi above Tete, 22–24 November 1858

Today is the day that we leave for Kebrabasa. I am up before dawn to finish packing my things and to oversee the loading of the last stores.

‘We must hasten,’ Livingstone says. ‘The rains are taking effect.’

The water has risen abruptly during the night. According to the tide pole it is a foot higher than it was yesterday morning.

Livingstone gives me a quantity of sugar for the crew. It is locally made sugar, which the Portuguese call molasses, but Walker and Rowe declare it as good as the sugar they are given on naval ships. I try some. It is sweet, but it has a rough taste. I prefer the proper manufactured stuff. But I take a few spoonfuls.

After breakfast, I go on board with Kirk and Thornton. Rae is tending the engine, with Tom Coffee. The Kroomen are milling about.

This is the first time I have boarded the *MaRobert* for a journey since I took the pinnace at Pita. Three months ago, but how much longer it seems. My old spot in the corner is vacant, so I place my bag there.

Even the interior of the cabin shows signs of wear. There are water stains on the wood, even patches of mould, and fine cracks in the metal. Outside, the hull is drawn with the marks of fatigue.

I stroke my hand along her railing. I almost expect to hear Bedingfeld’s gruff voice calling out some naval command. I wonder what he is doing now.

Livingstone and his brother come aboard, with a number of Makololo. Livingstone is holding his consul’s cap, and places it carefully on his head.

‘Mr Rae,’ he says, ‘do we have steam?’

‘Aye, sir,’ Rae replies.

In the cabin, Thornton has his geological tools unpacked, and points to them one by one to make sure he has everything. ‘Light hammer, heavy hammer, light pick, heavy pick, wedges, chisel, dip and prismatic compass, aneroid barometer, thermometer, tin box for specimens. I think that’s all.’

Have I remembered everything? Blankets, ammunition, food, cutlery. Oh, goodness: there’s nothing to eat off? I’ve forgotten the crockery!

I jump up and approach the Doctor, who is still standing on deck. ‘Dr Livingstone,’ I speak quietly. ‘I ... I need to go back, there’s something I need to bring.’

‘It must wait,’ he says, looking away. ‘It is too late.’

‘Sir, it is the crockery.’

I fear he will raise his voice now, before all the others, but he says nothing. He closes his eyes tightly and takes a deep breath. When he opens them he waves me off.

Taking Wilson with me on the whaleboat I hurry back to shore, fetch the crockery, taking meticulous care not to break anything, and return to the launch. We’ve taken ten or fifteen minutes, but it feels like an hour.

It is ten in the morning when we start for Kebrabasa.

The water is flowing swiftly, the current much stronger now than it has been before. As we pass the walls of the fort, the current catches the bow, and the launch veers towards the rocky bank.

‘Turn her! Turn her!’ Livingstone cries, but there’s little the helmsman can do. The hull scrapes against the rocks.

It could have been much worse. It was just a light touch, and no damage has been done.

We stay close to the shore whenever we can, where the current is weakest. Even so, at times the paddles manage to do little more than stem the current. The whaleboat in tow swings from side to side.

Looking behind us, I watch the ripples in the turbid water. I notice something following us, just breaking the surface. An alligator. Now and then its whole head shows above the water, and the ridge of scales on its back.

‘The rise has disturbed them,’ Livingstone says. ‘They think we are some large animal swimming.’

I shiver. Prey for the alligators. I stand watching this beast for a long time. It keeps up with us easily, and after a while another one joins it. Then I can see only one. Where is the other? Has it drawn level, waiting for us to strike a rock and capsize?

Around midday we stop at the house of a Portuguese half-caste, whom Major Sicard has enlisted for us as a guide. José Anselmo St Anna is his name. Apparently he hunted elephants around Kebrabasa when he was younger, and knows the area well – as well as anyone can know it, since no one ventures there very often. It is remarkable that a place so near to Tete should be so unexplored, that it is almost impossible to find someone who had ventured there.

José must be in his forties, and from his house and his appearance I can see immediately that he is a man of great wealth and high status. He is well dressed and

sturdily built, and in the sound of his voice is authority and confidence, even when he greets Livingstone with a deferential bow.

José brings four men with him, so now our launch is packed with people: the Doctor and his brother, Rae, Kirk, Thornton and me, Joe Scissors the pilot, eight Kroomen, ten Makololo, the new men Walker and Rowe, and now Senhor José and his entourage. More than thirty bodies in all, aboard our little launch.

I find a spot in the shade, near the bows, and watch the river and the scenery.

There are rocks on the banks, and Joe the pilot takes care to avoid them. Soon our path is blocked by a sandbank, so we have to cross to the other side, the engine rumbling and spluttering as it struggles against the stronger current in the middle of the stream. The sandbanks alternate from one side to the other, so we have to keep crossing, which slows our progress tremendously.

On the left bank of the river we pass two large ruins. These, José tells us, are the handiwork of a chief, recently dead, named Chisaka. He desolated the east side, because, he claimed, he had been bewitched by the Portuguese.

Or, Kirk suggests in faltering Portuguese, he simply desired to plunder them, and this story offered him an excuse.

José laughs and agrees that it is possible.

The country is becoming more hilly. Now and then we pass a lone palm tree, but mainly there are baobabs. The area is populated, and people come down to the banks to watch the steamer pass. Still the alligators pursue us.

In the afternoon I wash my rifle, and take care to dry it properly. With a needle and thread I repair a leather flap on my left boot which has started coming loose.

It is a hot afternoon, and everyone has become quiet, apart from the pilot and the helmsman, with their call and acknowledgement of the river's twists and turns. I look at the horizon ahead. In the distance, beyond where my eye can see, lies the pathway to our future. Dear God, let it be a success. Take us to the Promised Land.

When we stop for the night we have to allow enough time before sunset for the Makololo to build huts for sleeping. They refuse to spend the night on the water – some sort of superstition – so they go ashore and gather strong reeds which they bend over to form something like the frame of a tent, and this they cover with grass.

On the deck I play a tune on my accordion. I start with a jolly tune, but I follow it with something more plaintive. The sound of it takes me back to previous camps at night: during the Kafir War, during the expedition to Australia. It takes me back to the fields outside King's Lynn, to Father.

All of a sudden there is a heavy shower. Large raindrops roar on the shade cloth above me, on the metal of the engine and on the water below. I gather my waterproof sheet, in case it seeps through, and light my pipe.

It is a two days' journey to the Kebrabasa gorge. It is not far – not even thirty miles – but the current slows us down immensely. Each day the water is noticeably higher and flows more powerfully. We have to keep crossing to avoid the sandbanks and rocks in our path, and, once our initial supply is exhausted, we have to stop often to cut wood. There are signs and sometimes glimpses of koodoos, gazelles, zebras, but we are unable to get a proper shot at any of them.

There are rain showers during the day, and the weather is cooler than it has been. We pass several dry river beds, which are waiting to fill and bring more water into the Zambesi.

José is full of information about the country. He is forever pointing to a hill or a village. I can understand some of what he says, though not a great deal. I hear the word *Monomotapa*, which is a name I've always known. *Monomotapa. Prester John. El Dorado. Jerusalem.*

When Thornton replies to José it takes me a moment to realize who is talking. He is speaking Portuguese! When we were at Expedition Island he knew as little as I did. I am slowing picking up what I need to get by, but he sounds much more fluent. How did he learn so much so quickly? This must be what happens when you sit around reading books.

I take out my sketchbook and watch as the scenery changes. In the distance are steep mountains that mark the beginning of the Kebrabasa gorge. The country around us is rocky now, with steep hills that rise up from the banks.

Thornton is discussing the geology with Kirk and Livingstone. They are talking of schist and gneiss, feldspar and hornblend, metalliferous and metamorphic rock. With my pencil I sketch the jagged lines of the rocks, quickly capturing their shape on the paper. There they are: perfectly described.

José points to the mountains ahead and speaks to Thornton.

'He says there is copper in that mountain,' Thornton explains. 'The one on the left bank.'

'The right bank,' I correct him. 'The river is flowing towards us.'

'Well, yes. The right bank. But to *our* left.'

José says something more.

'He says there were copper mines, in the days of the ... Maravi?'

José is nodding. 'Sim ... sim. Maravi.'

On the second morning, the water has risen further. It is rougher than before, with foam on the surface.

After progressing for an hour or two, we see a woody area ahead of us, and there we spot a herd of koodoos grazing on the river bank. We anchor and I join Kirk, Thornton and the Livingstone brothers to get a shot at them. We pass through the wood parallel to the river for about three-quarters of a mile when we come upon about four fine fellows in a small steep ravine. They run up and stand on the opposite bank, where they are partly hidden by the trees. Kirk and Livingstone fire. Thornton gets a running shot at them and I give one of them two barrels, but none of them are badly hit. Kirk runs in their direction. I follow him but lose him after a while, so I head back to the boat.

When Livingstone comes on board a moment later, he is all for leaving immediately.

'But wait,' I say, 'Dr Kirk is not yet on board.'

'He will catch up with us. Mr Rae, the engines, please.'

Rae laughs heartily and says, 'Aye, sir.'

I find it hard to believe that Livingstone will simply set off and leave Kirk behind, but he does exactly that. I look back to see if I can spot Kirk, but there is no sign of him. Thankfully, the progress of the launch is so slow that he will easily be able to keep up, but imagine his dismay at finding us gone when he comes to the landing place.

The Makololo steward has breakfast ready, and, as we sit on the deck eating, I peer out at the bank for my friend. Livingstone sees him first. 'There he is,' he says very casually. Kirk appears from the rocks ahead of us and stands waiting on the bank.

Livingstone sends the boat for him, and Kirk is soon among us. I hope he realizes that not all of us abandoned him, but I can't really say anything now.

'What happened to you, Dr Kirk?' Livingstone says lightly.

'Chasing fresh meat,' he replies. 'Obviously I was too slow.' He seems to be in good humour about it. His tone is not challenging.

'Have some breakfast,' I say. 'I'm pleased I haven't finished all of mine yet. It would seem discourteous.'

'Thank you. And then, if you don't mind, you can drop me on the bank and I'll carry on walking,' Kirk laughs. 'I'm sure to get to Kebrabasa sooner that way!'

There is laughter all round, even a smile from Livingstone, though only for a fleeting moment.

We steam through Kebrabassa and up to near the narrows beyond the village. There we go along the shore to allow the Makololo crew to sleep out of the boat. The Doctor changes his appearance completely from the first time he saw the rocks beyond this and in the shaking of his beard, we could see that things were not working well. It came out at tea over Baines, about the Makololo not getting regular rations on board. Now I do not know of any orders having been given to Baines to have them rationed and if they are to have their cocoa, biscuit and salt pork and grog, there won't be much soon for the men. However that is as the Doctor may think, only he might explain a little more as well as think. Baines is scarcely off the sick list and has been, I should say, the hardest worked member of the expedition.

We are to start tomorrow overland. How our party may stand it, I have doubts. Thornton is well but not long off the list. Baines certainly is still weak and the Doctor's brother never does very much. I really don't know what is in him when put to it.

– John Kirk, journal, 24 November 1858

University of Cape Town

Kebrabasa, 24–27 November 1858

It was my worst moment on the expedition so far. There had been unpleasant encounters with Livingstone before, plenty of them. But this was worse, far worse.

Livingstone, I remember – I can picture it as clearly as if it was this morning – was in a temper. He had the manner of a man possessed, though of course the metaphor would appal him, and he'd probably curse me for it, once more. He was ... how can I describe it? We'd all come to know Livingstone by now. Not the familiarity of friendship. Oh no. But we'd been with him long enough to recognize his moods, to know when to stay out of his way and keep one's thoughts to oneself. It was always like this after things had gone wrong, when he was brooding upon it, and thinking what to do next – or *seemed* to be doing so, for in such times he'd hide his thoughts from the rest of us even more than he usually did, which, you'll have to take my word for it, is a grand achievement in itself. It was different when some danger was present before him. I was with him on the battlefield at Mazaró, with all the fighting going on around us, and, strangely, he was at his most genial then. It was then that he seemed most ready to speak his mind to me, and when I felt most able to speak mine. It was the time I felt closest to him.

Livingstone showed his best side when a situation demanded him to act in a certain way, when he was required to show his mettle, when there were tangible challenges ahead. That's when the picture I'd had of him before I'd met him, the Livingstone of *Missionary Travels*, sprang to my mind and seemed again to correspond to this man dressed in dark blue who gave us instructions that we'd carry out without hesitation because there was no reason to question.

That's why it surprised me, when he turned on me. We'd reached the mouth of the gorge that day, flanked by two mountains, a thousand feet high. The channel narrowed to sixty feet, and there was no bottom at ten fathoms. It was imposing scenery, but there was nothing here to cause dismay. Livingstone had come this far before, with Kirk and Rae. He'd been impatient, yes; that morning – the same day – he'd left Kirk behind, after we'd landed to chase a herd of koodoo. He said Kirk could catch up over land, which he did – but he must have been taken aback when he got to the landing point and found he'd been deserted, especially Kirk.

It came as a shock nonetheless. Once we had anchored for the night, and were at tea, Livingstone began shouting at me. Something to do with the Makololo not getting their

regular rations. He appeared before me, his voice loud and his expression furious, with accusations that I had disobeyed his orders regarding the men's rations.

'Mr Baines! Do you expect my men to carry on starving? Is that what you think English protection should mean?'

I stammered and spluttered. I had no idea that I had been supposed to give them anything. The men must have gone to him and said they were hungry. But was this my fault?

'You will take heed of your responsibilities,' he said, jabbing the air between us with his finger. 'Do you understand?'

'Yes, Dr Livingstone,' I murmured.

Everyone else was looking away, much as I had done when Livingstone had been shouting at Bedingfeld. In this respect it felt that I had taken on our naval commander's role.

Yes, we'd come to expect trouble when things went wrong, when Livingstone was lost in his private thoughts instead of heading towards some clear goal. But here we were, at the beginning of something, something great. Kebrabasa lay before us; we were in the mouth of the gorge. Perhaps Livingstone doubted it; he certainly wouldn't show it. Perhaps he *was* showing it, in his manner towards me. But there's no way he could have known, and he wouldn't have pressed on with such energy, such vigour, if he had.

I stood on the deck, dismayed. My hands were on the railing, and I looked out at the churning water, the jagged rocks. No one came to talk to me. Of course not. I would not have gone up to one of my fellows if they had been treated like that. Let a man lick his wounds, gather himself.

This, Thomas Baines (I can tell you now), is what will define your relationship with David Livingstone. This is the proper beginning of it. But I didn't think that then. I thought perhaps there had been some miscommunication. Perhaps his instruction had been vague, indistinct, and I hadn't heard it properly. Perhaps he *thought* he had given me the order, but had neglected to in the midst of the day's turmoil. I was angry, yes. I knew he was wrong to have shouted at me like that. But I still looked for some reason.

It wounded me that he had shouted at me in front of everyone, especially those new men, Walker and Rowe. What would they think of me now? And was that a smirk on Charles's face?

When I regained my courage and turned to face my fellows, I met Kirk's gaze first. His eyes were calmly encouraging.

Kirk remained a reasonable fellow. Until the end. Of all of us, he was probably the least affected. A good man, Kirk, and somehow he stayed on the right side of the Doctor. I, clearly, was unable to.

We had gone as far as the *MaRobert* would take us. On the previous journey they had proceeded a little higher, but now she would be left in this rivulet where we had anchored, for fear of a rise in the river when we were absent.

On the passage through the gorge the launch had seemed vulnerable. For the most part she had found a gentle current, on the south-west side of the channel, and the rocks in the stream were clearly visible above the water, so they were not difficult to avoid. But the river followed a winding path, and in some of the narrows the current ran strong, and we came close to the sharp rocks on the banks.

From here we would have to proceed on foot. Walker and Rowe would remain aboard, with a few of the Kroomen.

We started overland early the next morning. We had gathered our things and were ready to leave, when Livingstone said, 'And what about you, Mr Rae? Are you not bringing anything with you?'

'I ... I ...' Rae stammered, his red skin going even redder than usual. 'I thought I was to remain with the boat.'

'This is an exploratory mission, Mr Rae, and the boat will not be going anywhere for a while. Be ready in five minutes.'

'Aye aye.' Rae was not used to being told off by the Doctor. He always managed to stay out of trouble, never said the wrong thing. Now he was frantically getting his things ready for an overland trip he had not even planned to be on. I felt some relief that it was someone else being reprimanded.

'I'll wait for him,' Kirk said to me. 'Go up with the others.'

We had to carry some of our personal effects, while the Makololo carried the rest, as well as the expedition's equipment.

Kirk and Rae caught up with us after a while, poor Rae lumbering under the burden of all of his luggage, since the porters had all gone ahead.

I was still feeling the effects of my sickness, and soon began battling to carry my load. Kirk was concerned about me, and Thornton, and took some of my things. The Doctor, after some time, ordered one of the men to carry them.

Charles Livingstone, I noticed, was carrying nothing at all, apart from a green parasol, which he held open above him. His rifle was carried by one of the porters, his luggage by another, and it took another two of them to carry his photographic equipment.

Yet he began to fall behind, and was breathing deeply, exhausted by the walk that Thornton and I, still recovering from our sickness, were managing better than he.

We were walking through a landscape that belonged to another world, a world of demigods, perhaps, or some such mythic creatures. But as humans we were out of place.

The river flowed through a deep and narrow chasm, forty or fifty yards wide, with steep walls rising eighty feet from the present water level. The chasm cut through a rocky plain, upon which we were walking. This plain was much wider, and there was evidence that the water flowed here when the river was higher. On both sides, steep hills rose up, forming a broad valley. The chasm wound from side to side within this area, so the plain was wider sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other.

These words – valley, plain, even rocks – do not begin to describe what we saw. The area was filled with huge mineral masses, some round, some angular, and all were covered in a strange black glaze, as if some devilish blacksmith had coated them in molten lead. They showed the signs of unimaginable force thrust upon them: they had been heaved up, contorted, bent, jammed and fissured in every direction. Great potholes plunged deep into the rock, so a man might fall in and never come out. The granite in places was fluted perpendicularly, reminding Kirk of old wells in the East, whose sides were grooved over centuries by the action of ropes. Pieces of rock, from pebbles to large boulders, had been driven into chinks by the force of the rushing waters so firmly that they broke rather than move; and generally all were worn so smooth as to be slippery.

The heat of the sun was captured in the valley and magnified by the bright black rocks, which were too hot to touch for any time, as well as too smooth to gain a decent footing. It was terrible work on the bare feet of the Makololo. When we came to a pool, we found the water near the surface too hot to drink, though deeper down it was cooler.

After a while we heard a great roaring sound, which heralded the first cataract, which Livingstone and Kirk had seen previously, though from the other bank. This, José told us, was called Shibadda.

A large rock split the river into two channels, where it fell, frothing, at an incline. The fall was five feet in twenty yards. On our side the channel was fifteen yards wide.

‘Could a boat get through here?’ Kirk asked.

'I believe so,' said Rae, loudly enough for Livingstone to hear. 'A boat the size of a pinnace ought to be taken safely through.'

'Do you think so, Mr Rae?' Livingstone said.

'Oh yes. If she had a powerful enough engine. Unlike ...' He didn't need to finish his sentence.

'When the river is higher, of course, the incline will be flatter. It may even smooth over completely.'

I couldn't imagine it. But of course I hoped it along with the rest of them.

Livingstone wanted a photograph, so Charles began the process of assembling his photographic apparatus. Its three-legged stand was put up and the camera box placed on top of it. There was some commotion until the black cloak was located.

I found a comfortable spot with a good view and commenced a sketch. The dark rocks of our bank formed a diagonal from top left to bottom right, filling not quite half the picture. Beyond this flowed the white froth of the water, towards the left, with the jagged black rock that split the channel situated in the middle. On the far side was the opposite bank, sheer and black, and beyond it the landscape stretched into the distance, the colour changing from black to brown to yellow, with a line of green trees below the horizon. The black rock against the white water would make a striking contrast when I did it up as an oil later.

On the near bank I placed Kirk, where he was sitting, with his back to me, and some way further back, Livingstone and José, quite small.

Then I noticed Charles near the water's edge. He was looking for a place to set up his camera. Livingstone went down to help him. I had already filled in the colour with watercolours by the time the apparatus was set up and Charles was under the cloak, Livingstone at his side.

I quickly sketched on a new page: Charles and David Livingstone, tiny figures at the extreme bottom right corner. That is where I would put them when I painted the oil. I'd keep José where he was, and place myself close to Kirk, with my sketchbook in one hand and a mug of tea in the other, while Charles still struggled under his cape.

Next, the dark tent was set up, to develop the picture. 'I'd better see how he gets along,' Kirk said, and made his way down. How many men were required to work this contraption? By the time he got there, Charles had thrown his arms in the air and was walking away from the tent. The three men stood in conference, and then all came back in my direction, while the porters carried the equipment.

‘One photograph,’ Kirk said. ‘That’s all he took down there, and now he’s managed to make a mess of it.’

University of Cape Town

The word as pronounced by the natives is Kaora-basa, 'finish or break the service'. The Portuguese word Kebra (quebra) means the same thing, and refers to the break which occurs in the labour of toiling up thus far in canoes and then carrying the luggage hence overland to Chicova.

– David and Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries* (1865), p. 63

University of Cape Town

Kebrabasa, 27 November – 1 December 1858

I woke up this morning with a glimpse of a fleeing dream. We had come to the last stretch of Kebrabasa. The steep sides of the gorge formed a doorway, and I had difficulty seeing beyond it. All was white, the white of blank parchment. Why could I not see what was there?

It dawned on me, as I rubbed my eyes: it is my birthday. I am thirty-eight years old today. And I am on the brink of something great.

We haven't progressed very far today. After a few miles of walking we came to this river, a stream that flows into the Zambesi and which blocks our path, and much of the day has involved attempting to cross it. The natives who appeared responded with empty stares when we called for a canoe. One man shook his head and said they had none. Can they be believed?

Left to our own resources, we first tried to push a log so it would form a bridge, but it fell in the water at the wrong angle and was washed away. We built a crude raft, lashing three logs together, but it began sinking almost immediately. So we realized that the only thing to do was to ford it.

The river comes up to my waist, when I am halfway across. It is flowing swiftly, but the bed is rocky at this point, so my footing is secure. So much time we have spent upon these silty waters, in all variety of vessels, but now I find myself in it. Imagine: these drops of water surrounding me – now, and then gone in an instant – I imagine their journey, swiftly, into the main channel, downstream, now touching a bank, now the bottom of a canoe, past Tete, Sena, Shupanga, Mazaro, Expedition Island, into some channel in the delta, and out to sea. Each moment there is a new cluster of water particles around me, each one taking its place in the river's flow, rippling the surface, skimming the bed. It is alive, this river, and for this moment I am a part of it.

Thornton is behind me. He seems to be struggling a little. He looks uneasily upstream and says something which I can't hear, except the words, 'avoid any alligators'. The thought brings a shiver. Alligators. If an alligator came down now, it would find a line of tasty meals to choose from. I wade a little faster, and feel relief as I reach the far bank.

Beside the river is a large baobab. The ground there is suitable for a camp, and the day's work is, mercifully, declared to be over.

The baobab is a most extraordinary specimen. Its trunk appears to be made up of the stems of three original trees, which have joined together as they have grown up. Its stems rise up, entwined in a frozen dance, before sending out stubby, root-like branches. Upside-down, like us in this southern hemisphere.

The Makololo are gathering wood for a fire and grass for us to sleep on. The grass is spread beneath the tree, and our blankets are laid on top of it. Soon a fire is burning, a kettle is upon it, and food is being prepared. We have, thank goodness, a large quantity of small fish, procured from a native along the way. We finished the last of the goat yesterday, and it was beginning to stink terribly.

‘When we tried to form the bridge,’ Kirk is laughing, ‘it was like the Tower of Babel, with all those different languages insisting on being heard.’ He counts them on his fingers. ‘English, Portuguese, Tete, Makololo, Batoka – all shouting above the sound of the river.’

I laugh. ‘I wonder what the natives thought, about our attempts. We must have provided wonderful entertainment.’

He smiles and nods. ‘At least we crossed safely.’

Tall clouds are gathering in the sky. It looks like rain.

‘It’s my birthday,’ I say. I had not meant to mention it, but the words are out. I say it quietly. I don’t wish to make a fuss, or to make the others think I want a fuss made.

‘Your birthday,’ Kirk exclaims, loudly enough for everyone to hear. ‘Happy birthday to you!’

‘Happy birthday,’ Thornton croaks, holding up a congratulatory hand. He’s not looking well. He has caught a cold, and getting into the water can’t have helped it any.

Livingstone looks up but returns to his conversation with José. He may not have heard.

I go to sketch the baobab, and when I rejoin the party, José is holding forth about the country and the people, although, he says, he is not completely up to date about the conflicts between the petty chiefs.

Livingstone is asking for the names of things and writing them down. The river we’ve crossed is the Lue, or Lui, or Luia. A rivulet higher up is the Kaposhe; the hill on the south bank is called Nyaotetezi.

Most of us are writing before it becomes too dark – scratching the day’s events in our journals. I wonder sometimes what the others are writing. Do we see things the same way?

I look at my sketches of the rapids we have passed: the two-channel rapid called Shibadda, the three-channel rapid further along. What more are we going to see that will fill these pages?

There is some commotion among the men. The Makololo are laughing, and José's men are protesting. It seems good-natured, although one of José's men appears to be insisting something rather indignantly.

Livingstone is among them, and then he explains it to us.

'José's man says he went to Sekelutu's town and saw strange beings there: men who were three feet tall with horns on the backs of their heads. The Makololo laugh at this.'

Charles chuckles. 'And he expects *Africans* to believe this!'

We turn in for the night, while the Makololo attend to the fire. Occasionally sparks rise up above us and float for a while before they are extinguished.

My mind is filled with the sound of Dr Livingstone's voice. At first it is friendly, but then he chastises me. '*You fool, Baines!*' I clench my eyes and push the memory from me, forcing my thoughts forwards, to the future. I will show him. I will show him what I am really made of. I imagine his hand on my shoulder, a gentle touch, acknowledging my achievement.

As I'm beginning to drift off, I am jolted back by the cries of men, starting at the far end of the camp and rapidly coming closer. As Kirk, next to me, joins in the chorus, I see it in the firelight: a big spider with long, feathery legs, scuttling over our beds, one after the other.

'Kill it!' someone shouts, and there is a whump as Rae, further down the line, lands a blow with his boot.

'I hit it a bit hard,' he says, holding up the boot. The spider is now a sticky mess embedded in the sole, but one can still see the extent of the legs. They must be four inches across.

As we are settling in once more, there are cries again. I sit up quickly and – am I seeing correctly? – a miniature little creature, a monkey, is running about us.

'Catch it! Catch it!' come the cries.

The little fellow – so beautiful – darts about quite close to me now. I might just be able to grab hold of it, but I'm immobilized by its delicate perfection, as if I'd be sullyng a fairytale.

One of the men has raised a stone. I make as if to grab at the monkey, but only to shoo it off, and it works. The monkey scampers off into the dark.

'Damn,' says Kirk. 'Missed it.'

I'm aware now of the world beyond, teeming with creatures moving about in the night, surrounding our little camp with its red glow at the centre. What will it send into our midst next?

I wake up with the dawn. *Saturday, 28 November*. I managed to sleep without further incident. The rain did not come.

We march for a while through a wood. Kirk is crouched down at a bush, picking something from it. 'Loganberry,' he says, holding out a round fruit. 'Try it.'

The fruit is a cluster of bright red spheres: a little like a raspberry, but smoother, less dusty.

I trust Kirk enough to try it – his ability as a botanist and his kind character. There must be a lot around here that is poisonous.

I chew and let the juices fill my mouth. The flavour is both sweet and sour. Not unlike strawberry.

'Delicious,' I say.

'One of the best wild fruits I've tasted,' he agrees.

We walk a little further and reach the river again. On both sides, the mountains rise up, steep and sheer, a little distance from the rocky banks. In some places they seem to rise directly from the water. The river itself is calmer than we have seen it elsewhere.

The water is a pure blue colour here. It makes a clacking sound as it flows over the rocks.

José is addressing Livingstone and pointing to the banks and the stream. Livingstone has his Makololo around him, and José his own people. Rae is standing nearby, and Charles and Thornton are sitting on the ground. We join the party.

'José says he cannot account for the lack of broken water,' Livingstone says. 'He has seen this from the hill top when it was in flood and then he describes it as rushing with great force.'

The Doctor points upriver as he asks José something. José points and shakes his head.

'He knows of no place where there is a waterfall,' Livingstone announces. 'He says that now we have seen the worst. Beyond, there are rapids, but nothing so bad as we have passed.'

I look at the scene before me. This is far less formidable than some of the rapids we have seen already. If the worst is behind us, then perhaps, with a better steamer, at higher water ... The Falls seem closer than they have before.

Some distance away, to the west, a mountain peak rises above the surrounding landscape, with steep sides that come to a point, a Matterhorn without snow.

While we are all looking at it, Livingstone talks to the Makololo. Then he says to us, 'It is called Tshiperiziwa. We will go there, and climb it, if it can be climbed. It will give us a view in all directions.'

Thornton is sitting on the ground, resting his head on his knees. Kirk is attending to him.

'Thornton must stay here,' he says to Livingstone. 'He is too sick to go on.'

'If he must,' Livingstone says, and addresses his Makololo once again. A few of them will remain here with Thornton.

I am feeling tired, but I have it in me to continue. How disappointing it would be to stay behind and miss the last stretch, if that indeed is what this is.

I glance at Charles, sitting on a rock. No doubt he'll ask to remain behind too. But he does not. His face is expressionless, his eyes unfocused, as if he's looking somewhere inside his head. When we start to move, he rises and trudges on, with his green parasol to shade him.

Our route is over level ground, a little higher than the river. I don't find it too demanding, and for a while we make good progress.

Then, after half an hour, there is a call from behind us. Charles is down on his haunches. 'Rest,' he pants. 'A quick rest.'

I glance at Kirk; I can see in his eyes that he shares my view of Charles.

'Very well,' Livingstone says, 'we will stop here for a moment.'

I walk to the edge with Kirk and look down at the water below.

'I don't know why he didn't stay behind with Thornton,' I say. 'He's going to slow us down.'

Charles is lying on his back.

'And he's not much use at photography either,' Kirk says. 'If it's left to him, I doubt we'll get anything useful in return for lugging all this equipment.'

There are some hippopotami in the water below; we have our rifles with us. Kirk and I have the idea at the same time and take aim.

He fires, and a splash rises from the water, a few yards short of his target. I fire; my splash is slightly to the left.

'First-rate rifle practice,' he says. 'You can see precisely how much you are out.'

Charles is on his feet and we set off again.

Occasionally we glimpse people in the brush above us. At one point Livingstone calls to them, in a deep and sonorous voice, his arm outstretched; but they do not come.

José says that they are Badema, and that they were formerly cannibals, but gave up the habit after hoes were given to them by one of the neighbouring chiefs. Chisaka's people have lately raided them and carried off most of their children; hence their fear of us. What a brutal part of the world this is.

I glance back. Charles has fallen behind again, and is dragging himself along under cover of his parasol. Predictably, after a while, he complains again and demands a rest. I wonder how Livingstone would respond if anyone else among us slowed our progress like this.

At the resting place, Kirk and I practise shooting at the hippopotami again. They are further away this time, and we don't get very close.

We march and rest, march and rest, each time shooting at the potami. In the afternoon we stop and set up camp. There are hippopotami in the water below. The prospect of fresh meat is irresistible.

José's slave fires at one and hits him in the brain. He sinks at once. Kirk fires at another, giving him a good hard blow and making him short of wind. The creature swims away.

'Come!' Kirk beckons me, and we set off in pursuit.

When we have sight of him again we give him our barrels. Again and again we shoot, striking the armoured skin, wounding him enough that he thrashes through the water to get away. He leaps over a few stones into the rapids, where he floats down, getting hard blows as he strikes the rocks. He is quite unable to stem this current. We move closer.

The water is red with blood now. Kirk fires again and strikes him in the head. The beast convulses and gapes his mouth. He appears to be done for. I fire a final shot, just to make sure. There is an explosion of blood from its neck, and suddenly, surprisingly, the creature is alive again.

It makes for the rocks and clambers up, pulling half its great mass out of the water, thrashing and bellowing. Blood spews from its mouth and up from its nostrils, and then it falls back again and begins to float down with the current.

Two alligators appear, scaly ghosts under the water, heading in precise lines for the slaughtered beast, which is drifting away from us and sinking below the surface.

'No potamus, again,' Kirk says, shaking his head. 'Your shot must have bled him so freely that his brain recovered for a moment.'

My arms are shaking from the action of my rifle. I'm wet with sweat. I can hear my heart throbbing. I take deep breaths to become sensible again.

What a waste.

We return to the others. They are standing at a large, smooth rock which, as we come closer, turns out to be the potamus shot by José's man.

'Look,' Livingstone says to Kirk, 'it is a female with milk.'

Kirk crouches down to inspect it. 'The perineum was ruptured during the birth,' he says. 'It has started healing.'

Livingstone measures the dimensions of the animal and records the results in his notebook. Height at withers, 45 inches. Entire length from tip of nose to end of tail, 11 feet, 3½ inches. Eyelid to eyelid 13½ inches. Nose to tip of shoulder, 51 inches. Girth of waist, 102 inches. Centre of cornea to centre of ear, 8 inches. Centre of cornea to lower edge of jaw, 17½ inches.

Charles takes a photograph, this time assisted by Kirk. While they are at it, I make a quick sketch.

Now the men can start cutting up the animal. It is a laborious process: the skin is of enormous thickness, three inches at some points. The outer surface is of a slate colour. The intestines are twenty-four fathoms in length, the stomach full of grass.

'The meat is lean,' Livingstone says. 'It must have been ill with the wound for a long time.'

Some goes on the fire, and when it is cooked we relish a hearty meal. It tastes very much like fine beef. It is the best meat I have tasted in a long while.

My sleep is interrupted by unpleasant dreams, of our wounded potamus bursting into the camp, the blood still spewing from its nostrils, trampling everything in its path as it seeks me out. I awake each time and force it out of my mind.

In the morning, we prepare to set off again. Some of the men will stay here to look after the meat, and some are sent back to Thornton. Only two will come with us.

We start beside the river, but after a while it makes a great bend. We decide to head in a straight line, over the low hills, to avoid a great deal of rough climbing.

This is, I remember as I march, what Livingstone did, on a much grander scale, when he went straight overland rather than following a bend in the river, and missed seeing Kebrabasa. We are now seeing parts of the river that he did not (and we are missing a little piece of it).

Today's walk is more tiring than yesterday; my body is weaker. Charles still brings up the rear, but he is not as noticeable now; the stops are welcomed by everyone.

As we come closer to it, the mountain towers above us. It must be about three thousand feet high. On its flanks is dense vegetation, out of which rise steep, sheer cliffs, meeting high above in a single peak. The rock is yellow in colour.

We reach the river again near the base. At one point it is only twenty yards wide, but the water is calm. Rising gently from the bank is a smooth curve of white sand, a little like a beach. The party stops here. Livingstone is deep in conversation with José, who is pointing in this direction and that. I go on a little further, where the view is better, and take out my sketchbook.

Once I have a few lines down, Livingstone and Kirk appear. Livingstone looks at the shape on the page and then at the mountain. I wish he had come a few minutes later, when I'd have filled in more detail. It is at a stage now that a child would be able to do.

'This is a feature that deserves a name,' Livingstone says. 'We shall call her Mount Stephanie, in honour of the young Queen of Portugal.'

'Mount Stephanie,' Kirk repeats, and nods, as Livingstone straightens his consul's cap.

As soon as they are off, I feel regret. I should be going with them. This may well be the point at which we can be said to have done our work, as regards Kebrabasa. If there is nothing to see, then this is where we will see it, or not see it.

They are still in sight, and I get to my feet and begin to trot after them. But it is no good. My legs are too weak to take me very far. Within a minute the two men recede even further. I have to sit down.

When the history of this expedition is written, how will this day be phrased? *We went to see if Kebrabasa presented any obstacles to navigation, and, by climbing Mount Stephanie, we saw that there were none.* Will it be Livingstone and Kirk, only, who are said to have done so, or all of us who have come this far? What about Thornton, back at his station? No, probably not he.

I rise to my feet again, but they are out of sight now. I should go back, but I stay for a little while longer. The mountain rises steeply before me. They must be somewhere in the jungle on its flanks by now.

Stephanie. How unexpected that Livingstone should name it after the Portuguese queen. I write the name in the corner of my sketch; it is the first time that it is being inscribed anywhere.

When Livingstone and Kirk return, I seem to have dozed off. The sound of their voices, over the clattering of the river, pulls me back. I look at the angle of the sun. They must have been gone for two hours.

Their faces are red, their clothes wet with sweat. Their skin is scratched all over, with red cuts here and there.

‘We couldn’t get very far,’ Kirk tells me, wiping his brow. ‘The face of the mountain goes straight up.’ He demonstrates with a vertical movement of his hand. ‘There is no way up.’

‘But we could see enough,’ Livingstone adds. ‘There is nothing ahead to impede navigation.’

‘One rapid,’ Kirk says, ‘but not of particularly great magnitude.’

I return with them to the camp. The men have begun to cook the potamus meat. Charles and Rae are lying on their backs.

‘It is clear,’ Livingstone calls out, and then says something in Portuguese as he approaches José.

‘Such climbing I have never had,’ Kirk tells me. ‘Passing from stone to stone and climbing over heaps composed of enormous blocks of rock. Beautiful, though. The colours – of the rocks – extraordinary. And the jungle on the hillside is almost as bad as the rocks. It is fearful work on the clothes and shoes.’

‘And this rapid?’ I ask.

He narrows his eyes, crinkling the skin around them. ‘It is no great obstacle, but there have been so many now. It would take a ship far more powerful than the *MaRobert* to come this far. And even then...’

I look at Livingstone. He has his journal out and is writing.

‘José tells me,’ Livingstone announces in the morning, ‘that there is nothing worse upstream than we have seen already. Não é verdade, José?’

José nods and says that there are only a few small rapids, as far as he remembers.

‘Good,’ says Livingstone. ‘Her Majesty’s Government will be pleased with what I have to report. When the river is high, all impediments should vanish.’

We pack up the camp and start the journey back.

This, then, the end of our journey. It seems strange, not having found *something*, a lake that was rumoured, a stream that proves to be the long-sought source of a river.

It’s strange too because what we’ve seen seems inconclusive. Is it certain that these rapids are suitable for navigation? Not for the *MaRobert*, that much is clear. It would be

so much more of an achievement if we could steam up in our vessel and prove that way that the rapids could be navigated – by having done so.

But, with all his experience, the Doctor must know what is possible. Though his account is far more optimistic than Kirk's.

On the way back, while José passes by the back of the hills, we keep along the river side, following the bend that we missed yesterday. It is rough scrambling. The hill slope comes down to the river and our course is from one stone to another the whole way. When the river is in flood and the water up to the bush wood, it would be quite impossible. We find several rather nasty rapids, but no doubt at high flood all these too will be covered.

We reach the place where the men were left to cut up the hippopotamus. They are busy drying the meat. Only a bony carcass is left on the ground. Livingstone gives orders to the men, and they begin gathering everything to carry it to Thornton's station. Within a minute or two, a party of natives appears. They have come to beg flesh. Livingstone and José are in discussion with them, José pointing towards the river and then back in the direction we have come from. There is much nodding and shaking of heads, even from some of the Makololo. They must understand the language that these fellows speak.

'They agree that there is no other rapid or waterfall than what we have seen,' Livingstone says, mainly to Kirk.

When the men have been given their meat, we start the journey back to Thornton's station.

It is an easy walk now, by the foot of the hills and through the forest, where we startle a fine herd of koodoo and try the motandi fruit, which grows on a large forest tree and looks like a yellow plum. In the afternoon the party breaks up into smaller groups. I remain with Kirk.

'This would be a paradise if it were not so hard to reach,' I say.

'Perhaps that is why it remains a paradise,' Kirk replies.

A heavy rain shower comes on suddenly in the evening and we take refuge under a rock. While we are there, we spot a native on the other side, climbing down the side of the ravine towards the river. He casts a circular net into the water but we don't see him take anything.

The storm over, we set off again, and reach Thornton's station in the evening. He seems quite well now, and is eager to hear where we have been and what we have seen.

Livingstone is already there, with some of his men. The others return in groups.

Charles is the last to arrive. 'All I can say is thank goodness it's over,' he says as he slumps to the ground.

As I settle in for the night, his words resound in my head. *It's over*. Of course we must return when the water is higher. But we have explored Kebrabasa. We have seen what the Doctor missed on his great journey. And it is hopeful. I hope. Faith: the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Faith the size of a mustard seed, and the mountain moves to yonder place, and nothing is impossible to us.

Livingstone is still up. As I begin to doze, I can hear his voice, rising above the chatter of many others, ever pronouncing, demanding, beckoning.

There's a queerness about something. From under my blanket I can hear the sound of the Kroomen at work, Jumbo's voice, the clink of metal, a cough, and the noise of water, but something is amiss.

My eyes open, it appears all right. The Makololo are there, some of them not far away at all. Kirk has the kettle on the fire. I've caught his attention.

'Morning,' he says. 'Time for chocolate,' and 'like clockwork' – I can't make it all out: his voice is too low. Everything seems quieter than usual.

'What time is it?' I ask.

'Nearing five o'clock,' Kirk says, more clearly.

'Five o'clock and all's well,' I say, with a bit of theatre.

'And all the better for a cup of hot chocolate,' he laughs, prodding the fire with a stick. 'Wake the others, won't you? I'll have it ready in a moment.'

Charles and Rae lie sleeping. I rouse Rae first, and Charles stirs from the sound.

Why, I wonder, is Kirk making the chocolate, not the Makololo steward?

'What,' Charles murmurs, 'is it morning already – again? Oh, my.'

'Where is the Doctor?' I ask Kirk.

'He was up before me. José too. They've been in some sort of conference, with the Makololo as well. Walked off somewhere an hour ago – Livingstone and José, and Masakasa. They were going with some purpose, but I don't know what it's about. We'll find out soon enough, I imagine, and I'm tired of guessing.'

The Makololo are standing nearby. Some are in a huddle, talking in low voices – unnecessarily, for if they spoke more openly we'd not understand them in any case. Others are still, mute.

'Is that chocolate you're making, Kirk?' Charles says. 'Excellent. Small mercies, small mercies.'

Livingstone appears as our mugs are being filled. He's preoccupied, even more than usual. His pleasantries seem forced, his mind elsewhere. Masakasa has joined the other Makololo, and their silence is broken as they talk amongst themselves. Before the chocolate has cooled for drinking, Livingstone is making an announcement.

'... some new information which has come to me, concerning the river above, beyond the point we got to previously. Whether it is a matter of concern or no, whether there's truth behind what was hidden, at the bottom of it, it is my duty to ascertain at least the extent of the difficulty before making any report home.'

What on earth is he talking about?

'And it was never my custom, when travelling alone, to leave a matter unfinished, and it will be no different now.'

He speaks to us but does not look us in the eye.

'Masakasa and three of his men will accompany me. The rest of you will return to the ship.'

What information? And from whom, when? What sort of difficulty?

Charles has the same thoughts and voices them. 'Difficulty? Haven't we seen it all?'

Livingstone looks down at his brother. 'A waterfall. Some of yesterday's natives spoke of it, but one to another. They meant to keep it from us, but Masakasa heard it, and reported it to me last night. They may prove as untrustworthy in the fact as in their concealing it, but it's my duty to see if there is any truth at the bottom of it. The men agree with me on this point. *Masakasa!* Have your men ready in a quarter of an hour.' There follow some spirited words in their language.

Kirk stands up and approaches Livingstone. He appears somewhat uneasy, and he speaks gently, deferentially. 'Dr Livingstone. If I may ...'

At 5 a.m. when at chocolate, Dr. L. says he will go back again and explore the river himself. Some one has told the men of a waterfall in front of where we have been. He says that all members shall return to the ship.

On this, I suggested that it was an insult given to the members, that there were some who had not been sick nor been behind hand with any work and had kept up with anyone there, as far as we had gone. I made no application to go but simply thought better to shew Dr. L. the light in which I looked on any such thing as the Leader of an Expedition going off alone on difficult service and sending the others to smoke their pipes and wait his return. Certainly the sick should never be expected to go on and the sooner back the better.

Dr. L. on reflecting a little, said that if I chose to volunteer, I might go, so of course, I was only too glad of the chance, not only of seeing new country but also of avoiding the slur offered to us by the Doctor. In fact, too, one felt their honour rather touched by the insult which after all, I believe, was not meant for anything more than that he would do it himself and was doubtful that any other could. However as turned out, I stood the work which he said was the hardest he ever had in his whole life time, quite as well as he.

– John Kirk, journal, 1 December 1858

Kebrabasa, December 1858

We all stood there and watched, in silence, as Livingstone and Kirk, and four Makololo, headed back in the direction from which we had come, and gradually shrank into the distance. Once we had lost sight of them, like the last glimmering stripe of a setting sun, the spell was broken, and we packed up the camp and began the journey back towards the *MaRobert*. Through the wood we went, across the Luia, and along the rocky route.

We reached the launch the following day. I had no desire to remain there, waiting, while Livingstone and Kirk were exploring the end of Kebrabasa. They would want provisions when they returned. If a boat could be brought closer to them, it would be a help. I ordered Walker and a couple of the men to come with me in the whaleboat, and took provisions for a few days.

Our progress was slow. Here and there we found eddies where the current was gentle, but in most places we had to haul the boat with lines from the bank. Soon the steep sides barred even that form of conveyance, and I left the others with the boat and set off on foot, following the stream, and set up camp in the afternoon. The solitude was pleasing.

On the third morning after Livingstone and Kirk had left, I set out early in the direction from which they would return. I made my way some distance up, but there was no sign of them. I took some sketches of the landscape, and, in the afternoon I started back, to return to my camp before nightfall.

The next morning I set off again, and this time, quite early in the day, I saw them in the distance, slowly making their way in my direction.

They were fatigued and their skin was burnt and scratched. Their clothes were ragged. They were grateful for the provisions, as theirs had just run out.

The Makololo were in a bad way. They walked slowly, and at a stopping point one of them showed me his feet. They were a mess of broken blisters. He looked in Livingstone's direction, sternly and sorrowfully.

For once, Kirk was even less talkative than Livingstone. He was silent, all the way back. I was desperate to know what they had seen, but I could see that this was not the time.

After a while we came to Shibadda, the two-channel rapid where we had stopped on the way up. With the rise of the water, the rock where Charles had set up his camera was

now completely submerged. Because of the higher level, what had been a steep rapid before was now much gentler.

‘Look at that,’ Livingstone said. ‘How high was this fall before?’

He looked at me. Did he expect me to get out my sketch to show him?

‘Five feet,’ he said. ‘It was a fall of five feet, was it not? Look at it now. It is nearly level. The rise in the river is much less than that, but the effect is greater here, and it is almost level. A powerful steamer could ascend this now.’

Kirk, usually quick to engage with the Doctor, sat on the rocks in silence.

Livingstone walked towards me. ‘Mr Baines, if you please, I would like you to sketch this rapid now.’

He looked over my shoulder while I worked, his gaze flicking between the rushing water and the lines that took form on the page. He seemed anxious, as if he was about to say something, perhaps to direct me if I put down some detail with which he disagreed.

But he did not. He just nodded as I worked, and when I was finished he said ‘Thank you.’

Further down, Livingstone measured the rise of the water as three feet.

‘Three feet,’ he said, ‘but in the narrows of Shibadda it has risen five.’

We camped for the night a little further, at the place called Shimadsi.

When Livingstone was out of sight, I turned to Kirk. At first he said nothing. Then he gestured to where Livingstone had been standing.

‘He loses all reason,’ he cried softly. ‘The villagers at the first place we came to said, “Yes, yes, we will guide you, and the cataracts are of no consequence.” But when we came to another village, much closer, where they would be more intimately acquainted with it, they had a different account of the river: that there was a waterfall ahead, but we had no chance of getting near it, because of the precipitous banks. They said that one might die of thirst before they could reach the water to drink it.’

Kirk shook his head. ‘The Doctor wouldn’t listen to them. He presumed they were lying to us, that they had some interest in preventing us from establishing commerce, that – he said – they would be blamed by the Banyai, who must be their overlords, for disrupting *their* trading routes.’

Kirk was looking in the direction of the river, but his eyes were blurry.

‘But those natives were correct about what awaited us.’

At that point Livingstone appeared and Kirk would say no more. It was only later that he would continue the story.

The next morning we were met by Walker in the whaleboat. We climbed in and made our way down to the launch.

Livingstone and Kirk were exhausted. Both of them lay down in the whaleboat and slept for a time. It was strange to see Livingstone like this, inactive.

When we were back on the launch, Kirk told me what had happened.

They had walked, they had climbed, they had cut their way through thickets of vegetation. They had clambered over enormous rocks, as if, Kirk said, all the sphinxes and statues of Egypt had been thrown down before them, and all the monuments of Thebes. They had crossed fissures that, if a man fell into them, he would have trouble climbing out, even if he managed not to break all the bones in his body. The heat of the rocks made it impossible to hold on to them, and blistered the feet of the Makololo.

‘The heat,’ Kirk said, ‘was like Hell, if that place be what I imagine it.’

When they came round a bend, they saw it, some way in the distance. A cataract, falling thirty feet, at an angle of thirty degrees. On either side were steep inaccessible rocks. This was the cataract called Morumba.

Livingstone must have looked at this vision for a long time. Did Kirk tell me this, or have I imagined it? Looking out, he stood there, saying nothing, for minutes, until Kirk roused him from a strange reverie. What was going through his mind then?

‘It is over,’ Kirk said to me. ‘We are beaten. There is no way further up this river. We may as well be at the end of the Luawe.’

No wonder Livingstone sat silently in the launch, brooding, all the way from Kebrabasa to Tete. This Morumba Cataract had surely scuppered his plans for developing the region beyond.

The Doctor’s plans, however, were to prove more resilient than that.

We are all of the opinion that a steamer of light draught of water, capable of going twelve or fourteen knots an hour, would pass up the rapids without difficulty when the river is in full flood, in January or February. In my last despatch I ventured to apply to your Lordship for the Ban, a vessel belonging to H.M. Government, which was rejected by Capt. Bedingfeld. My acquiescence therein I have never ceased to regret but, having been furnished with a naval officer, I yielded to his judgment. The Ban would have taken all our luggage and all the Makololo up at one trip and saved me six months of hard labour in conveying our stores from one point to another piecemeal.

– David Livingstone, despatch to the Foreign Secretary,
17 December 1858

University of Cape Town

Tete, December 1858

‘The rains,’ Livingstone says, standing a distance from the table where the rest of us are sitting. ‘Our salvation may lie in the rains.’ He does not meet our gazes, his eyes fixed – it seems – on someone behind us, standing eight feet tall.

‘Charles.’ He lowers his eyes. ‘You and Mr Baines will remain here at Tete and wait until the river rises with the January rains.’

I am startled at the sound of my name.

‘When it has risen sufficiently, you will take the pinnacle and go back to Kebrabasa and investigate the rapids at high water.’

Have I heard correctly? Charles and I are to investigate the rapids again? Only us? But what of the others?

‘Mr Thornton, it is time for you to make a start with your geologizing. If we are to make any progress with a steamer, we will need coal. You will go to the coal seams near here and make a proper investigation.’

Thornton nods. ‘Yes, Dr Livingstone.’

‘We have coal, we have iron. We have cotton, we have sugar. It is clear to see that Africa is not destined by the Great Architect to be always a poor trodden-down slave market.’

‘Doctor,’ I say. ‘Will you not ...?’ I mean to ask why he has not said that he’ll be returning to Kebrabasa himself. He has mentioned Charles and me only, which is clearly a mistake.

‘The rest of us will take the launch downriver.’ He gives a quick nod of the head. ‘I wish to examine the River Shiré, and see how far we can go up it, where it leads, what there is to see there. We will not be idle while we wait for the rains to come. We will leave as soon as we are ready. A week, two at the most.’

I glance at Kirk. His expression is blank. I know he believes Morumba is inaccessible, and would be at any time of the year. But perhaps he saw incorrectly. He does not have as much experience of travelling as Livingstone has, or I. Perhaps Livingstone saw some possibility that Kirk was unable to, but which I will see. Perhaps that is why he has chosen me.

He has not been friendly towards me, and at times he has been short with me, unreasonable even. But these may have been mere superficialities. He does see that I am capable of this kind of travel, and that is what is important. But why Charles?

I go to my room. Things are still in a mess. When we arrived at Tete we found that part of the residencia had fallen down. A heavy rainstorm had weakened one of the columns – which are made of stone and mud – and it collapsed, bringing down part of the roof with it. Tito's servants moved our things from one side of the house to the other. Everything seems to be all right, apart from a spirit level, which was broken by having things piled on it. Livingstone is unhappy about that. It was the only one we had, so now we have no way of measuring a level plane.

After that downpour there has been no proper rain. Clouds form, a few big drops fall, and then nothing. Water steams off the ground before it can sink in. The season, they say, is unusually late this year. The people have been praying to St Antonio: the storm that brought our house down, they believe, was in response to that. But now there is drought again, and the seeds that began to sprout are shrivelled and lifeless.

Some of the people are blaming us for the drought, as if we have some power over the weather. Others, noting that the river is muddier than it usually is, blame us too. They say the English must have done something when they were upstream to make it like this.

Once again, the people are making prayers to St Antonio. Our whole party is present in the church. Now that I have been ordered to wait for the rain, the proceedings take on especial significance for me. The rains will swell the river, and when the water reaches twelve feet it will be time, time to start for Kebrabasa, for Morumba. I feel that I am more closely connected to the rain than are my fellows (apart, I suppose, from Charles, but I cannot believe that he thinks this).

The church at Tete is a grand building, towering above the structures around it. The proceedings are strange to me. The service is Catholic, with plenty of Latin thrown in, but it seems somehow pagan too. The padre is Goan, his robes a bit frayed, and the congregation is a colourful mix of Portuguese, half-castes and natives. There is none of the formality that one finds in an English church. People are talking, shuffling in their seats, looking around. They behave in the house of God much as they behave outside it. I suppose it is good that there is no pretence.

Even Thornton looks less bored than he usually does in church: I can see he is amused by some of this. Livingstone and his brother wear stern expressions.

I pray: Please, Heavenly Father, lead us to the Promised Land.

I look at Livingstone. Why on earth is he sending Charles to the rapids? I suppose he wants them photographed as well as sketched. But surely Kirk would be better. Kirk can stand this kind of travel much better than Charles, and his photography has been more successful. Livingstone must not feel he can send Kirk again. Perhaps he feels Kirk does not believe in the possibility of passing them. But wouldn't it be sensible to have the same person see the cataract at different stages?

I wonder, too, why the main party is going to the Shiré. No doubt Livingstone does not want everyone to remain unproductive while we wait for the rain. And there are other places to explore. But it does surprise me that Livingstone himself is not coming on the final assault on Kebrabasa. This is the heart of our mission, and he will not be there to see what we find.

The Promised Land, oh Lord. Lead us there. I do not seek it for my own glory. Let it rain, oh Lord. Let the rain fall.

The padre raises an image of St Antonio and, surrounded by men wearing white robes, walks out of the church, followed by the congregation. They form a great procession, snaking through the town, praying, chanting, cajoling.

As we walk back towards the residencia, I overhear Livingstone and his brother talking about the service.

'Well,' says Charles, 'I hope St Antonio wasn't paying too much attention. I've never seen such irreverence manifested in a church service. Never in my life.'

'It appears,' Livingstone says, 'that if they have faith in rain-making, they have faith in nothing else.'

Livingstone is full of criticism for the Portuguese, although he speaks highly of certain individuals, such as Major Tito, and Senhor José – at least to their faces, or to mine.

I've heard him say that the Portuguese do not possess the curiosity that characterizes the English, hence their ignorance of Kebrabasa, which some of them had described to him merely as rocks in the river.

If it is necessary to blast some of the obstacles to make the river navigable, he believes, there will be fortune in that too. If a powerful government is required, then the Portuguese will never be able to lay any claim to the route, as they otherwise might.

Near the house we pass a man whose face I recognize, though I have never spoken to him. He stands on the other side of the street – expectantly, it seems to me, as if he wants

something. He seems to be looking at Livingstone, though Livingstone does not notice. Once Livingstone has ascended the stairs he turns away and disappears.

Generoso is nearby; I beckon him. 'Who was that?' I point where the man was standing.

'Senhor Candido Cardoso,' he replies. 'He is *Juiz Privato dos Milandos Cafriaes*. A judge. He listens to the cases of the local people, the African people.'

Generoso must realize that he has not properly answered my question, because after a few moments he speaks again, softly now.

'He knew Livingstone from before. But now it seems Livingstone does not want to know him.'

That night there is an almighty storm. I am awoken by thunder and desperate shouting outside. I quickly dress and run out to see what is going on. From some distance I see the red glow. A house has been struck by lightning; its grass roof is on fire. By the time the rain comes, the structure has burnt to the ground. No one has been killed, but the occupants stand bewildered as steam rises from the black mound that was their dwelling. First fire, now water, has overwhelmed their world.

Let it rain, oh Lord. Let the rain fall.

Livingstone is among the people. But there is nothing to be done. He comes back to the residencia, sodden.

The prayers to St Antonio, he explains the next day, are done at the new and full moon, when it is most likely to rain. It is the same with rain-makers the world over.

Each day I go to the tide pole. Each day the water is a few inches higher. It rises from eight to nine feet during the week. We will go when it reaches twelve.

Kirk drew a sketch of Morumba when he and Livingstone were there. It is a simple drawing, an outline-sketch. But he is not bad, Kirk, as an artist. He manages to capture the basic shape of a thing. And the shape of this cataract does indeed appear to be formidable.

I wish that I had been there, with them. Perhaps I would have been able to see something that Kirk hadn't been able to. Some possibility.

Kirk is behaving strangely with me. 'I'm sure you will find it different at high water,' he says. 'I'm sure Livingstone has a better sense of it than I have.'

But I don't believe he means this. I believe he is just saying it. He is being polite, politic, but my real suspicion is that Kirk is jealous that I have been chosen for this mission.

Livingstone is spending most of his time writing. He asks me for a tracing of my map of the river and sketches of Kebrabasa. He asks Kirk for his chart above Tete, and Charles for his photographs.

These will accompany his despatches to the government. They will be sent downriver and to Quilimane, where the *Lynx* will be calling soon. I take the opportunity to write letters myself, to Mother, to Emma, to a few friends – Logier, Williams, Chapman, Arrowsmith. I have something constructive to tell them now, something tangible, about my mission to Kebrabasa.

Twice I have heard Livingstone tell a story about his assault on Morumba – once to Charles and then again to Major Tito, the same story. The Makololo were all worn out, their feet blistered and bleeding. They told Livingstone – this is what he said – that they thought he had a heart until then, but now they knew that he was mad.

They were sorry, they told him, that Kirk could not understand their language, because if he did they would be able to convince him to return with them and let Livingstone throw himself to his doom. They tried by signs to persuade Kirk to turn back with them, but to no avail.

The men refused to go on, but eventually they relented. The native guides, too. They said they could go no further, but in the end one of them carried water for the two explorers all the way up the mountain.

The way Livingstone tells the story, about the men no longer believing he had a heart, he seems almost proud of it. I wonder why he would want to tell that story.

I dream about Kebrabasa. I dream about Morumba. The fact that it is so difficult, so demanding ... in a sense it pleases me. As long as my health doesn't take a turn again, I'll prove to Livingstone what kind of traveller I am, what kind of explorer. What kind of man.

Writing dispatches for home, to be sent tomorrow morning to Quilimane. The Doctor writes for a new boat and gives a very favourable account of the rapids, much more than I could do.

– John Kirk, journal, 26 December 1858

University of Cape Town

Tete to Kebrabasa, December 1858 – January 1859

The *MaRobert* steamed out of the harbour a few days before Christmas. Aboard with Livingstone were Kirk and Rae, Walker and Rowe, a number of Makololo, and all the Kroomen. I stood on the bank until I could no longer see her, and then a little longer, until I could no longer imagine that I could. I was now alone at Tete again with Charles.

Thornton had, in the meantime, been sent to investigate the coal fields some distance away. He left a few days before Livingstone and returned on Christmas Eve. The boy was not well. He had a bad cold with a retching hiccup, and complained of a prickly hot feeling.

I remember my first Christmas away from England, away from the frosty air and dark skies and fires. It was in Cape Town, sixteen years before this. I was young and recently arrived from Lynn, and the sunshine was glorious but incongruous, concrete proof that I really was on the other side of the globe. Since then I had spent hot Decembers in the Eastern Cape, in Australia. This was possibly the strangest yet. I was in a Portuguese settlement where they had their own version of Christmas. There were more ceremonies in the church, and more colourful parades through the town, with the burnished effigy of the Madonna held up high. Thornton was still weak and Charles kept to himself, so it was left to me to show my face at the celebrations.

I was warmly accepted by the residents of Tete. I had become acquainted with everyone of importance – Generoso the trader, Pascoal the merchant, Candido the magistrate, Albino the officer – and they would always acknowledge me with a smile, a bow, a salute. I was the artist who had painted the battle of Mazaro, who had taken Senhor Manuel Gomes's portrait, who had returned with sketches of Kebrabasa. Charles was not embraced in the same way. It was as if they were aware of the way he criticized them in private, as if they could read it on his face.

New Year's Eve came. It was the end of another year, but not just another year. At the beginning of 1858 I had not yet been appointed to the expedition. Between then and now there had been such triumph, such frustration and hardship. My relationship with Livingstone had suffered some strain. But now I was on the eve of a trip to Kebrabasa. This was the test; or so I thought.

Thornton's health went up and down. He suffered from shivering, headaches, profuse perspiration and prickly heat. A week into January he started reading his books again, a sign that he was on the mend.

'Charles Darwin,' he explained, when he saw me looking. 'Fascinating observations from his voyage across the Pacific. Animals, fossils. I've read all the books I've brought; this is the one I'm most interested to read again.'

In another week he was back on his feet, and said he supposed he'd need to get back to his coal fields.

Charles told him to wait a few days, until he was stronger. And Thornton would, he stressed, have to return with the whaleboat as soon as the river started to rise, because we would need it for our trip to Kebrabasa.

Then, more suddenly than we expected, the waters rose.

This was a Sunday. I remember it well. The river had risen a foot during the night, and throughout the day it continued to swell. Before dinner I checked the level on the tide pole: it was up to thirteen feet six inches.

'We must go then,' Charles said when I reported this to him at the house. His eyes darted around the room, as if seeking some object that would aid him in some way. 'Yes, we must go at once.'

I spent the next day getting up provisions for twenty days and preparing the boat, and early the following morning, the 18th of January, we set off for Kebrabasa: Charles, me and eight Makololo in the whaleboat.

The current was stronger than ever against us, but close to the bank the water formed an eddy running upstream at about a mile per hour. With the Makololo paddling, singing a rhythmic chant, we made fair progress.

As we came to a curve in the river course, forcing the current closer to our shore, the men had to work harder and harder, and our progress slowed. There was only one thing for it.

'We have to cross,' I said.

Charles looked at me in disbelief.

'The flow that goes up,' I explained; 'it will be on the other side now.'

He did not look convinced, but there was no alternative. We were now making no headway at all.

As we pulled into the middle of the river, the current took us, and down we swept.

‘Harder!’ I called out to the men. But their instinct had already told them this, and they paddled with all their might.

‘You had better be right about this, Baines,’ Charles cried out. ‘We’re going backwards!’

I didn’t answer him, the fool, but kept my hand on the tiller, pointing us to the opposite shore.

It took long minutes of hard toil or so to reach it, but there, as I’d suggested, we found the same gentle eddy, taking us upstream.

‘There,’ I said.

Charles nodded, but said nothing.

We had to cross from time to time, to make use of the current, and this was the most exhausting part of it. For the rest our progress was smooth.

The scenery on the banks had changed dramatically from the rain. The vegetation was green and lush, and the fields were covered with native crops. At night we camped on the bank.

On the fourth afternoon we passed the Copper Mountain and entered the narrows of Kebrabasa, through which the water gushed ferociously. The current was forced, by a bend further upstream, to the north-eastern side, where the water overflowed the edge of the deep ravine that had contained the channel before, at low water. Between this and the outer bank of hills was a low plain, and here the water could spread, forming all kinds of bays and eddies, and these eddies, once again, aided us in travelling upstream. The opposite bank of the river – the south-west – was formed by a steep mountain rising directly up from the water.

We proceeded up the eddies for half a mile or so, until we came to a rock that jutted out into the main stream, forming a rapid, with white water frothing at its base. The noise was terrific.

‘Over the rock!’ I screamed at the Makololo, even though they were a foot away. ‘With the line!’

Three men clambered over the rock, and when they reached the other side they passed the line over and hauled the boat round the obstacle.

So we progressed, around several such obstructions, and stopped at night on a sandbank, under the lee of some rocks, past which the current was running violently.

For two more days we travelled, paddling up in the eddies and hauling through the rapids.

The rise in the water had changed the river utterly. Rocks that had towered above our steamer on her last trip were now submerged, perhaps three or four feet below the surface, causing breakers of equal height to surge into the hollow formed by the water rushing over them.

One morning we reached a rapid that was worse than we had yet encountered, with a fall of about three feet, which was higher than the boat's bow. The men could not haul her up, nor at one time keep her from going on the rocks over which the stream was pouring. Cavare stood in the bows, straining himself to pole her off, and Mantanyana did the same in the stern, but it was not till the third attempt that I could succeed in entering the boat fairly into the rapid.

We came to the bend, where the river, flowing from the west, overflowed its barriers, and forced a considerable water to the foot of the eastern hills. I recognized the rocks to which Walker had brought the whaleboat on the previous trip, where I had brought Livingstone and Kirk, when they returned from Morumba. These rocks – the eastern shore before – now formed the western face of a large island. We secured the boat and walked round the island to investigate our prospects. The water forced against its western side was turned abruptly to the south, and rushed downward in a line of dancing sharp-edged waves, upheavings of the water, four feet or more in height, rising and falling in most indescribable confusion. Round the edges of these were large whirls, and in one of these whirls a tree seemed to be carried backwards about fifteen yards. Between it and the tail of the island was a return eddy that would most probably have carried the boat into the whirls, where no one could have retained command of her. There was no hope here.

To the other side, the channel ran over a flat of large stones, the points of which would very likely have stove the boat. There was no way up.

'What do we do?' shouted Charles.

'We must cross!' I bellowed.

Charles gazed at the water rushing over the stones. He turned to me with a look of despair.

'The other way!' I cried. 'It will be easier!'

We needed to head for the western shore, where the water would be quieter, in the lee of the current caused by the bend in the river. But we would need first to drop down below the island, beyond the whirls and waves that it spawned by obstructing the flow of the Zambesi.

While the Makololo paddled with their full power, the water appeared sometimes to be calm, and at others to rush up from the bottom. We had to pass below one large rock,

and above a ripple caused by a submerged one; towards this the current drifted us rapidly, and, knowing the uselessness of fighting such a force, I did not waste time by trying to keep the boat's head up the stream, but put her straight across. The men, seeing the need for exertion, paddled as hard as is it possible for men to do.

'Pull!' I cried. 'Pull!' Of course I needn't have bothered: the men knew instinctively what to do, and the roaring of the river would drown out any sound that a man would be able to make. Charles, too, was screaming inaudibly and gripping the side of the boat with white knuckles.

I kept my hand firmly on the tiller, wrestling with the force of the water, steering us to a suitable place on the bank. We landed on an island of rock and sand, and the men leapt out to haul the boat up to safety. We sat for a while, saying nothing, the men rasping for air.

From now we would prosecute the journey on land, and we hauled the boat into a creek.

We were now on the opposite side of the gorge than we had travelled on previously. Here, as there, were black rocks covered in a smooth glaze, but the water was covering much that had been above it before, rushing around boulders, into potholes and through fissures with booming, clattering, hissing sounds.

We could not walk beside the river all the time, because the creeks that branched off from the main stream, which were dry beds before, were now filled with water. We were forced to travel inland.

When we reached Shibadda, I went to the bank and found that the rise of the water had smoothed over every obstacle. The top of the island that broke the stream before looked now like a small rock not more than eight feet high. Everything appeared so different now that it was difficult to recognize the place, so I called Mantanyana, the Makololo man who was with me, to verify our position, by making him point out every spot he remembered in connection with our camping near it.

There was, it was true, now no impediment to a steamer of sufficient power. Was there hope?

The same was true of the next rapid, the three-channel rapid. It was difficult to identify the original island, because the rocks on each side now formed so many new ones. Again I called on Mantanyana, and satisfied myself as to the locality. And, again, the water was now smooth enough for a steamer to pass. I sketched the scene, taking

special care to render the landmarks accurately. I imagined reporting favourably to Livingstone, how it would feel to see the joy and relief in his eyes.

We walked on, and came opposite the mouth of the Luia, which was proportionately swelled. It was good that we had chosen the right bank: the tributary would now have been impossible to cross.

Every day it rained at least once, sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes at night, drenching showers that soaked everything. Charles had given his waterproof to his brother. I was better equipped, with a tarpaulin jacket, but nothing would have kept one dry in those conditions. We had to make our way through tall, wet grass and under dripping boughs, so the damp always found a way in. At other times the heat was intense, exhausting, but on we pressed.

As we proceeded, it became clear that there had been some kind of turmoil among the people. We passed several native huts, but found no people in them. They appeared to have been driven away.

We followed the path, and found ourselves in a valley, where at last there were people, and fields of corn. A young lad came running to us and started speaking. Charles and I of course could not understand, but between the boy and the Makololo there was some mutual language. He offered to show us the path to the cataract for a fathom of cloth. We accepted.

The boy led us along the valley, crying out to his friends as he passed, and up a steep hill, a thousand feet high. At the top were more huts and more people, some of whom came closer to see the strange white people, others who held back and stared at us suspiciously, as the boy called out again. I felt as if I were some exotic creature, being paraded and marvelled at, just as – I suppose – one of these people would be in a provincial English village.

Before I had a chance to catch my breath, big drops of rain began to fall. One of the men who had approached us – a headman of sorts – ushered us into his hut, made of the usual wattle and daub. I was grateful for a place to rest and escape the rain.

All of a sudden the small hut was filled with sound, as the older man began addressing our young guide. It sounded like a strange sort of chant, and after a few phrases the boy responded with a loud grunt. This grunt seemed to be an affirmation of whatever the older man was saying, because the boy stood there looking contrite and chastened. So they continued for some time: a string of words from the man, a grunt from the boy; a strange singsong call and response.

Charles appeared highly amused by the proceedings, and so did the Makololo, one of whom in fact burst out laughing at one point. But on went the oration, and on went the grunting.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had started, and so too by then had the strange dialogue. I thanked our host and turned to the boy, but he backed away, out of the door. I followed him, and asked the Makololo to tell him that we were ready to proceed.

The boy shook his head. He refused to take us any further. That must have been the purpose of the older man's lecture.

'Tell him we will pay double,' I instructed the men.

The boy shook his head again, and ran away.

Other villagers pointed to a path and urged us in that direction, so we proceeded, a little less certain than before. Some children ran ahead of us, and others followed at a distance. Occasionally I caught sight of someone to the side, off the path. After a mile or so we came to more dwellings, and there we met the chief of these people, a tall man dressed in skins, who offered us one of his huts for the night, and there we slept, happy, once again, to avoid the rain that fell in the early hours.

In the morning we were given another guide, who led us about two miles, and then left us, pointing to a path. The Makololo jeered as he turned back the way we had come.

The path led towards the river, but we would reach the water much lower down than Morumba, which was our destination.

'This is not the right path,' I said to Charles.

'No?' He squinted ahead. 'Whatever do you mean?'

I explained that, by my reckoning, the path would bring us to the river opposite Mount Stephanie. We would be several miles downstream from Morumba, and it would make sense to travel directly from here, rather than taking a detour to the river.

'But there's no path,' Charles said.

'There is a path,' I retorted. 'That boy was going to show it to us. But he was dissuaded from doing so.'

'Well, what do you suggest? Hacking our way through there?' He gestured the scrubby brush that stretched towards the cataract.

I had no answer to that, so on we marched. After a while we came to a rise that afforded a splendid view of the landscape, with Mount Stephanie in the distance. We rested for a while and I took out my sketchbook. While I was still busy, Charles stood up and walked ahead. How unusual, I thought: that Charles should cut short a rest.

When we set off again – the Makololo and I – Charles was out of sight. The path became indistinct, and the ground being nearly all rock and bush, it was next to impossible to track footsteps. Had I missed him? Perhaps he had gone into the bushes to attend to his ablutions.

I waited for a while, but with no sign of him. I continued, and came to a hill, with some native huts perched on top. Up we climbed, but there was no sign of Charles here either. Where the devil was he? I sent two of the men, Mantanyana and Mbea, in various directions, and they returned without success. From the hill I could see something that looked like a way towards Morumba. If Charles was sensible, he might have started there. But why had he not waited for me?

I sent Mantanyana and Mbea to look on the lower road, in case Charles had gone there, and started with the rest of the men on the more direct route. The lower road, of course, would be folly: not only would going there take us out of our way, but we would then have to travel along the river bank, which as we'd seen from the previous journey was always the most gruelling of routes. But who knew what Charles was thinking?

A short while after setting out, I was called back. Charles, it appeared, was now at the village we had just left. I sent two of the men to fetch him, and another after Mantanyana and Mbea, who were searching the lower road.

I found him in a hut, lying on the ground, a blanket wrapped around him. His face was pale.

'Where were you, Mr Baines?' he croaked angrily.

'Where were you?' I returned.

'At the river bank. I went straight to the river bank. The path ...'

'I sent the men in all directions to find you,' I said, 'and you weren't there.'

'Nonsense. I was there.' He coughed a few times. 'I waited for you, and there was no sign of you. I climbed the rocks, to see if you had reached the river further upstream. Still no sign. Now look what it's done for me.'

He wiped his brow, which was drenched with sweat.

There was no chance of travelling any further that day. The man returned without finding the two missing Makololo. I fired guns, but there was no response. The other men constructed a crude hut from branches, which I covered with a tarpaulin, to keep out the rain.

Early the next morning I sent another Makololo out, and at about ten he returned with the missing men.

Charles was now too sick to travel, so we stayed put for the day, setting off again the following morning. Despite my protestations, he insisted that we take the low road, which was, of course, a stupid way to go, and one of the reasons why things went wrong.

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The following day we went forward about 2 miles over the rocks. The river had fallen greatly, so that the appearance of Morumbua could not differ much from what it was when you first saw it. Mr. Baines, with one Makololo, proceeded on and obtained a sketch. While waiting his return, three fishermen, whose friendship was secured by a present of a little food, informed us that the rapid opposite disappeared and all was smooth when the river was full. This was evidently the truth, as we had seen it two days before when the river was 2 or 3 feet higher, and it was then comparatively nothing. They likewise informed us that there was no cataract at Morumbua when the river was full, and the current was not strong. Mr. Baines saw about 2 miles of the river beyond Morumbua, and the channel was much wider. Returning we reached the boat in safety, and arrived at Tetté in the afternoon of the following day, after an absence of sixteen days.

– Charles Livingstone, report to David Livingstone, written 16 February 1859

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Kebrabasa to Tete, 29 January – 3 February 1859

We have barely made two miles today, but it has been hard going, climbing up and down rocks in this scalding heat. Curse Charles for leading us this way. I am now level with the north-west end of Mount Stephanie. Looking back, I see him some distance behind, under his parasol, with the Makololo between us.

If he was anyone other than Livingstone's brother I would never have listened to him. But I know what would happen: he'd run to his brother and report how troublesome I was.

I know I would have taken us along an easier route, if only I had been allowed to, if only he had listened. This path is terrible on the body. How much longer will my strength hold?

I press on a little further. Before me is a rapid, a gushing torrent with a drop of three feet. I stand and look at it, breathing deeply. No steamer could pass here. There is no way around this, and we have not even reached Morumba. Is this the end?

But the river has fallen now. From the marks in the sand I can see it has dropped by ten feet, perhaps fifteen. It changes so quickly; it is not the same from one day to the next.

Charles arrives, panting. He looks at the rapid, then at me.

'The level has fallen,' I say, and point to the high-water mark.

'We are too late,' Charles mutters. 'We are too late. High water, that's when we were supposed to look at it. Too late.' He kicks the ground.

'It's a shame,' I say – I cannot resist it – 'that we wasted the whole of yesterday resting.'

'You blame me for that?' he snaps.

'It may have looked very different, even yesterday.'

'Don't you blame me, Mr Baines.' His finger is outstretched. 'You are the reason why I became sick.'

'I am the reason? You're the one who went off on his own.'

'Yes, because you had to stop to sketch, didn't you. And now you talk of *my* delays!'

'*This* is what is slowing us down,' I cry, gesturing the rocky landscape over which we've been clambering. 'Had you *forgotten* what it was like along the river? *That's* where we needed to go' – I point upstream, towards Morumba – 'and I found a way there, overland, where it is flatter. But, no, you insisted we come this way.'

'You would have got us lost,' he yells. 'That way would have led ... who knows where! You want me to risk our mission on ... guesswork?'

'I'm the one who's travelled in Africa before!' I shout, tapping my finger against my breast. 'I know how to read the landscape, even if it looks to you like guesswork!'

'I'm the one who's been put in charge of this expedition!' he shrieks. '*You* will listen to *me*!'

I will take no more of this. I pick up my rifle and walk away from him.

'And where do you think you're going?' Charles says.

'To Morumba,' I declare. 'If we wait any longer, we won't get there until dark.'

Charles frowns. 'Morumba.' He points at the rapid before us. 'What exactly do you hope to achieve at Morumba now?'

'To see it,' I say. 'To sketch it.' Surely he cannot want to end the exploration now – this close to Livingstone's cataract.

He shakes his head. 'No. It is no use, no use now. No, we shall go back.'

'Your brother would want us to press on,' I say.

He blinks. '*Don't* presume to speak for my brother.'

'Do you honestly think he would come this far and stop? He asked us to explore Kebrabasa, and that is the part of Kebrabasa that—'

'We have explored enough, Baines,' Charles hisses. 'We have seen that when the river is high the rapids become flattened, and now that it is falling they rise up again. I can't see—'

'You want to stop me from going to the cataract? The cataract we were charged to examine?'

'We were *charged*, Mr Baines, with examining the cataract at high water, and thanks to you we missed it. We needed to see it at high water!'

'I request permission, sir' – my tone is official now – 'to go on to Morumba. If you refuse, I shall have to record the fact in my report to Dr Livingstone.'

He peers at me for a few moments. What will he do now? He takes a few breaths. 'Very well, then. Go. But you'll need to be back at the camping place by tomorrow evening. I shan't wait any longer than that.'

'Good. And the contingency plan?'

'Contingency plan?'

'There must always be contingency plan. In case something goes wrong. Then we will meet back at the boat. You will wait for me there.'

'Make sure nothing goes wrong, Baines. I'm not going to come looking for you.'

‘Six days,’ I say. ‘If I cannot make it back here by tomorrow evening I shall be at the boat within six days.’

He nods, and waves his hand, as if shooing an insect.

I take Macomocomo with me, to carry my bedding. We start across the rocky surface. What a relief to be free of Charles. Now I can concentrate on what lies ahead.

The way is over rough ground, up and down boulders. Sometimes they move under my weight, and I struggle to keep my balance. With each step I feel my body straining. The sun beats down on me; in my ears there is a ringing sound that seems to come from the heat itself. To my right the river gushes and clatters in its stony channel. Parts of the surface are smooth, others are ribboned with white froth.

My porter has fallen behind. I stop at a large rock that gives some shade and wait for him to catch up. He is exhausted. I should be too, but I am driven on, driven towards the cataract.

‘Wait here,’ I say, using the palm of my hand to make my meaning clear. I leave him rations and a blanket. ‘Do not move from here,’ I say, gesturing again, ‘until I return.’

He nods, satisfying me that he has understood.

I heave the bundle over my shoulder and set off. Again the way is over loose boulders, which is exhausting terrain to walk over, because each footfall could be perilous.

After three miles or so, even this difficult route is demolished by the landscape. Before me are black cliffs sloping at forty-five degrees, which reach all the way down to the water. The incline is too great to cross; there is no ledge or anything to grip. I will need to climb up to find where it flattens out.

‘Well, Thomas,’ I hear myself say. ‘Up we go.’

Some distance behind me I see a figure, making its way towards me, but it’s too far to see who or what it is. Could it be the Doctor? But there is no time to wait.

I scramble my way up the slope. It is a long way up, but eventually I am able to move forward again. The river is far below me now. I peer down to see if there is a path down again, but I can see nothing. Best that I remain at this level.

I clamber on for some distance. In places my view of the river is obscured by rocks jutting out below me; then, as I go a little further, it comes in sight again, twisting and turning in the ravine. From this height the sound of it is soft, a gentle hiss, which I can hear above the rasping of my breathing and the ringing of the heat.

A little way further, after another bend in the river's course, I see it. I recognize it immediately, from Kirk's sketch. The waterfall itself is obscured by a boulder, but it's clear from the shape of the surrounds that this is the place. There are sheer walls of rock on both sides of it, five hundred feet high. Beyond this, a beautiful reach of quiet river stretches a couple of miles further to the westward, threading its course through a landscape of lofty hills, with rocks coloured like Mount Stephanie.

This is the beginning of the Batoka Plateau. 'The Promised Land,' I whisper.

I clamber down a little, taking care with my grip, until my view of the cataract is unbroken. The water rushes over a steep incline, thirty degrees, with a drop of twenty or thirty feet.

Perhaps if I get closer, although the way down is perilous.

'You'll do nothing of the sort,' a voice says, my voice again. 'Look at the sun in the sky. The day is wearing on. You'll need to start back soon.'

Yes, you're right. This is the best vision I will get.

I take out my sketchbook and start scratching its shape on the page.

It does not look so formidable as in Kirk's sketch. It may be because of the greater height from which I am viewing it. Or it may be that the higher level of the water has flattened it somewhat.

But there is no way that a steamer could pass it. Perhaps when the river was higher, a few days earlier? If only I could have seen it then.

'And what good would that have done?'

It is not my voice this time. It is Father. He is clambering down the slope towards me.

'I would have seen ... if it was navigable,' I say. 'As Dr Livingstone wanted. Be careful; it's slippery. Have you followed me all the way up here?'

'And what if you had seen that?' He sits down beside me. 'If you'd seen it flattened out, what good would that have done?'

I am surprised how little he knows. 'It was our mission, Father. To prove that the Zambesi was navigable. To provide a route to these highlands before us.'

'Look at it,' he says. 'Do you really think a steamer could ever go up there?' Water rushes over the fall, every moment an entirely new mass of it, a deluge, to be replaced in an instant with another. 'But suppose for a second that you had seen that. What use would it be if the river is navigable for a day, or two, a week even. Your Doctor is looking for a highway. What kind of highway is that, if it is closed for all but a few days of the year?'

I stare at the waterfall and say nothing. What indeed? What would Livingstone say to that question? Has there ever been any hope at all? Is that why he is on the Shiré, with Kirk and the others, and not here with me?

Words from somewhere echo in my head. *Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.* Is this what I am meant to do? I close my eyes and concentrate, until I have a clear picture of the cataract in my mind. Then I will it to move. The lip of the waterfall starts receding, eroded swiftly backwards. A powerful steamer would still be needed to ascend the slope, but it is no longer impossible. I open my eyes. No. It is the same as before. The rock has not moved.

Doubting Thomas.

The valley is in shadow now, and the dark falls quickly. I pick my way back in the gloom, but soon it is too dark to go on. I will have to sleep somewhere here.

I find a fairly flat spot and lay down my blanket.

Father stands beside me.

'Are you not going to lie down?' I ask.

'I'll be all right,' he says. 'I'll keep watch tonight.'

'Thank you,' I whisper. My voice is faint. I am already falling asleep.

I wake up, sodden and shivering. Father has set off already; he is a little distance ahead, and beckons me to follow him. I rise to my feet slowly, and wait for the dizzy feeling to pass. The drum is beating in my head.

It is a hard climb over the side of the hill and down to the river. Father moves further and further ahead, until I can no longer see him. I make my way over the stones towards the place where I left Macomocomo. I can see, some distance away, footsteps in the sand. He must have come looking for me.

When I reach the rock he is there.

He makes a clucking sound and touches my shoulder. Do I look so bad? I sink to the ground. My legs are aching, my whole body. I could do with a rest, but we must set off again for the rendezvous with Charles this evening. We eat some cakes, and I get to my feet.

Macomocomo and I divide the luggage between us. He is as weak as I am; I can't expect him to carry everything. I put one foot in front of the other, concentrating all my strength, trudging over the rocks, trudging, trudging. We are little figures in a giant landscape. I watch us from above, as if from the eye of a large bird, circling in the sky.

We are mice, ants, mites. The bird swirls and loops, circling, circling, with blurring speed, until the ground shifts unsteadily around me and I find myself falling, grabbing onto a large rock to stop myself.

I do not know how long we have been walking. The sun is low in the sky, but is it morning or afternoon? Which way is east, and which west? Are we going the right way? I stop and look around, for landmarks that I recognize. Macomocomo beckons me forward. He knows the way. Yes. On I go. One foot in front of the other.

When the sun sets we are close to the meeting point. Not far to go. It's a fine prospect: a good night's sleep and porters to carry my things tomorrow.

As I get closer, something is wrong. Where ...? No one is there. Have they gone off somewhere? Surely not all of them. And the fire – there should be a fire.

There is no sign of them. They have left. But they were supposed to wait for us until tonight.

There is a note from Charles. I unfold it with shaking fingers. It says that the party left after seven this morning and were to be guided along the river by a native.

I sink to the ground. They have deserted us.

We have very little food left: three cakes each. We will have to ration ourselves to one each tonight. Why did they not leave us any food?

Sleep teases and torments me. The night seems never to end. My body aches and my head throbs. The sun rises with a cold glare and jumps in jerky movements higher in the sky. Macomocomo takes my hand and lifts me to my feet.

We are walking, walking, along the path by the riverside. I have been walking all my life; this is my eternity. There are figures all around us, mostly keeping to the edge of my vision. When I turn to face them they hide behind rocks, vanish into the shimmering air. Spirits. One of them has come closer and Macomocomo is talking to him. I wonder if they are making some bargain over my soul. I keep my distance. The figure is nodding his head and making clicking sounds with his tongue. He hands some object to Macomocomo, something dark and indistinct, and then he is gone.

Macomocomo rips something from the object and puts it in his mouth. He brings it to me. Oh God, it is food. Elephant hide. I pull off a strip of meat and chew. Tears run down my cheeks.

We are walking again, always walking. My friend brings me water from the river, and I gulp it down.

We come to our hut by the rivulet. There is a note left for me. It says that the party slept there last night. I look around for food; surely they must have left us some. They would have hidden it from animals. I look up: it would be sensible to tie it to the poles near the top. But there is nothing.

We eat our last cake and the meat from the elephant's hide. Now there is no more food. Perhaps they buried it somewhere. I go out and look about for disturbed ground. No, that would be too vulnerable to predators. They would have put a rock on top. Over there: that's the kind of rock. I call Macomocomo to help me shift it. He places his hands on it but looks confused. 'Just move it,' I say, and start pushing. He combines his strength with mine, and over rolls the rock. I fall to my knees and start digging. I dig and dig, but there is nothing. Something wells up from deep inside me and comes up through my throat as a scream: '*Chaaarles!*' My ears are filled with my heart's beating. 'Damn you,' I whisper. I look around for other rocks, suitable rocks, and see Macomocomo looking at me with an expression that calms me down. There is no food here.

The moon sinks to the horizon, red, bloody. The sun rises and we must walk again. The landscape is littered with corpses, slaughtered cattle, fallen soldiers, headless bodies, always in the distance – Macomocomo manages to find a path away from them.

There is more meat on the elephant hide, if we rip at it with our teeth. I gulp down the water that appears before me.

The sky is filled with dancing flecks of black, birds circling, vultures, come for the dead bodies. Soon we might be lying among them. Are the birds waiting for us?

Day becomes night, night becomes day, and again I am on my feet. But I can barely hold my weight now. I stumble often; now and then I fall to the ground and my Makololo friend must pull me up.

Sometimes we are beside the river, sometimes inland. There are strange beings about us: headless men with eyes set in their chests, pygmies with horns on their heads. The high-pitched voices of children swirl around me. A cob of cooked corn is pressed into my hand and I eat.

I stumble onward. We are coming to the river again. There is the boat. Macomocomo must take some of my weight for the last stretch.

'Ah, Mr Baines.' It is Charles's voice. 'There you are. We were worried about you.'

'Where ...' I try to whisper, but I have no strength to challenge him now.

Food is brought to me, but the thought of eating is strange to me. I take a little bite of cake and chew and chew, swallowing tiny amounts. I cannot stomach any more.

Big drops of rain start to fall, and quickly the air becomes a deluge. Someone places my jacket over me. My head throbs and my body convulses with shivering.

The world around me is teeming with creatures: lions and tigers on the prowl, alligators hungry for human flesh, hippopotamuses swollen with rotting gunshot wounds, coming up for revenge. The night roars and growls. I can only hope that they will not see me, that the rain will disguise my scent.

The rain does not stop. It is still pouring the next morning. Charles is with one of the Makololo, crouched beside a pile of wood. They are trying to light a fire, but it will not take.

‘Blast,’ Charles says. ‘We will have to leave without breakfast!’

I am carried to the boat, and I lie there, shivering. The men are at the sides, paddling; Charles is at the tiller. Sound rises up around me: the roar of the water, shouts from Charles, the chanting of the men as they row. The boat lurches to one side, then the other. I am surely done for.

When I open my eyes again, all is still. I lift my head and look over the bow. We are drifting downstream. Charles says something to me but it is a language I do not understand. I sink down again and sleep.

Tette
19th February 1859

My Dear Captain Denman

We examined the rapid above this at low water and found it a great curiosity for instead of a rapid it was a deep groove in a rocky bottom.... In this groove there were some cataracts but when the river is in flood all disappear. I sent Mr C Livingstone up to examine it when the river had risen 12 ft. He found all smooth except one cataract though the river had fallen several feet by the time he reached it. But we need a strong steamer to go up.... If you could say a word for us anywhere I know you will do it....

Ever yours
David Livingstone

University of Cape Town

Tete, 3 February – 14 March 1859

The *MaRobert* was anchored at Tete when we returned. They had arrived the day before we did.

I was sick with fever and had to be carried off the boat and up to the house. I must have been delirious, because I remember Kirk saying to me, 'Good God, man, you're ranting!' What I was saying I do not recall.

For a few days I did not know what was happening around me. Kirk attended to me, and Thornton was often at my bedside; Rae too, now and then. Livingstone came at least once. It would be two weeks until I was properly on my feet again, such were the rigours I had endured.

I was bitterly angry with Charles for leaving me behind. Thornton was outraged when I told him the story. I told Kirk too, and asked his advice. What should I do? Should I confront him? Should I tell Livingstone?

'I would do neither,' Kirk said.

'And let him get away with it?' I asked.

'Think about what you're going to achieve. We all know Charles is a ... Well. We know what kind of man he is. He probably knows it himself. But the Doctor seems unable to see any wrong in him, or at least to acknowledge it. God knows he's been confronted with enough evidence. If you tell him, he won't want to believe you, and then you will be the trouble-maker in his eyes.'

It was true. Charles would certainly have twisted the story and made the fault mine.

'My advice: ignore him, stay out of his way, try as much as possible to avoid situations where you need to rely on him.'

Livingstone came to my bedside again, now that my mind was no longer wandering. He did not pull up a chair, or sit on the edge of the bed, as the others did. He stood, nearer the head of the bed than the foot, a position that required me to bend my neck awkwardly.

'Mr Baines,' he said. 'It is good to see you on the mend. Charles has told me about your journey. He says that all of the obstacles were smoothed over when the water was high.'

'They were ...' I was stumbling over my words. 'The ones lower down ...' I wanted to tell him about Morumba, about what I alone had seen. But it was difficult to get the thoughts out and he did not seem to be listening.

'We will talk about this in more detail later.' He took a step back. 'But now I must make plans for dealing with Bedingfeld's sham vessel. If she weren't so thin and worn out I'd think of hauling her up. Not to mention that blasted engine.' His words were more muttered than spoken, and with the last of them he was already out of the room. He was not really talking to me at all.

Thornton was soon packing for his next trip to the coal fields. The Doctor, he said, had spoken sternly to him, and he was to get going at once. How were they to get anywhere, Livingstone had said, if they had to spend all their time cutting wood? Coal was what they needed, and Thornton was to get to it.

Soon he was away, and I was left on my own in the room. I began to venture as far as the verandah, where the Portuguese would come and visit me, bringing me fruit and meat.

Livingstone was preoccupied, as he always was. His energies were directed towards the Shiré, and the next trip that awaited them.

They had gone some distance up the tributary, a hundred miles, and had learnt from the natives of a lake a few days to the north, and an even greater lake, an inland sea, ten days further still. Now they were preparing to go again, to explore these lakes, put them on the map, great expanses of blue.

But what about the Batoka Plateau, I thought. What about those lofty hills I had seen beyond Morumba, the healthy highlands, the Promised Land? What of the promise, for that matter, to take the Makololo back to their home and settle among them?

What of the Falls, the smoke that thunders and plays tricks with the light that await my artist's brush?

Apart from our brief conversation, if it can be called that, Livingstone did not ask me about Kebrabasa for some time. When I was on my feet again, I looked for him, but he was, as usual, hard to find, impossible to follow. I felt it strange that he had not immediately asked for a detailed report. He had spoken to Charles, of course, but Charles had not been all the way to Morumba.

It must have been almost three weeks after our return that Livingstone asked for a written account. The request was casual, as if it was something he had thought of in passing. But I knew that every movement on this expedition, every discovery, however

small, required setting down in writing, and that Livingstone would use it to report back to London, to posterity.

Using my journal as a reference, I wrote carefully, meticulously, about what we had seen, where we had gone, day by day. I described the obstacles in the way of our whaleboat, but I advised also where conditions would have allowed a steamer to go, and where it would find itself in difficulty. I described the speed of the water that I had calculated by taking the time that a log took to travel a certain distance.

It was a useful report. I did not say that the cataract was navigable, or that it was not. I did not surmise about what Morumba would have looked like, had we got there a day or two earlier. I described only what I saw. Livingstone would be able to draw his own conclusions, as if he had been seeing with his own eyes.

I did not hide the fact that Charles had left me, but I wrote it without emotion.

Monday January 31st. We found the path by the riverside, and reached the hut we had built by the rivulet where the rain caught us. We ate our last cake and a piece of elephant's hide a native had given us, and found by a note that the party had slept there the night before.

If Livingstone had a heart, he would see that I had been wronged.

After I delivered the report to him, he thanked me for it and withdrew to his room.

Rae was at work repairing the *MaRobert*. She had struck a rock on the way down the Shiré, damaging one of the paddle wheels.

Kirk told me more about the expedition. The people they'd found there had been suspicious. The men were armed with poisoned arrows and the women wore a ring in their upper lips, a feature that they believed conferred beauty, but which Kirk said made them horrifically ugly.

'Like an earring,' I asked, 'in their lip?'

'No!' he exclaimed. 'A thick circle of ivory, an inch and a half across, maybe two, forced into a hole of equal size that is made in the lip. It is exactly like a ring for a table napkin. They start with them as young girls, with a small pin, and gradually stretch the skin over the years, with larger and larger rings. I have a sketch of it – I'll show you. The lip reaches two inches in front of their face. If they were to lift it their nose would poke through.'

The repulsiveness of the description gave me a certain thrill. These were the truly exotic people. But why was I not seeing them myself? Why were the sketches of them not mine?

They had never seen Europeans before, these people. The Manganja, they were called. They had encountered Arabs, from the north, but Livingstone, Kirk and Rae were the first white men they had ever clapped eyes on. Hence their suspiciousness, but Livingstone believed that on their second visit they would begin to see the fruits of their first, as the people became used to them. So it had been wherever he had travelled.

Kirk told me about the elephants they had seen. Vast herds, hundreds of them, stretching as far as the eye could see. They had wounded plenty, but had been unable to kill any, not there and then. At one point they had run out of wood when pursuing one, and would have been stranded, until Livingstone had the idea to burn the bones of an elephant carcass that they had found a little earlier. Imagine: giving chase to one poor beast using the bones of another.

The collision with the rock had happened soon after they began their descent of the Shiré. The Doctor had been navigating and had forgotten it from the way up. He'd seen it too late, and, when he did, the men had misinterpreted his cry.

'The port wheel was right over the top,' Kirk told me, 'giving the whole thing a cast to starboard, which sent things flying. Had the rock struck the body of the boat, it would have been a case of sinking, so I suppose we were lucky to escape. But the paddle was knocked in like a cracked nut.'

Livingstone and I would speak once more about Kebrabasa. It was not a discussion – no, nothing like that.

It was on a Sunday, after service, which was held outside the house while the Portuguese were in their church. The Makololo were learning the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and recited both with the rest of us.

Afterwards, Livingstone said something about the new steamer that the government would send.

'And will we,' someone asked – it must have been Rae – 'attempt Kebrabasa again?'

Livingstone opened his mouth but for a moment no sound came out of it. 'Well,' he said, 'Charles and Baines have reported very favourably on the possibility of passing. The problem, of course, has been our vessel ...'

'I didn't—' The words were already out of my mouth, before I could stop them. I did not mean to interrupt. But now all eyes were on me, Livingstone's with his eyebrows raised. I had to continue.

'I didn't say ... I wouldn't call it favourable.' All I could see were the Doctor's eyes, fierce. 'I wouldn't say I called it favourable, exactly.'

Livingstone cocked his head to one side. 'Really? I have your report, which says quite clearly ...' He frowned, as if in sympathy. 'Perhaps things are not quite as clear in your mind as they were when you wrote them down; perhaps it is the fever, mild as it is, that has confused you.'

His stared at me, as if inviting a response. But I had nothing to say.

'Well, no matter,' he said, to everyone now, though he had never really been talking only to me. 'In the meantime we shall do what we can do, which is to explore the route that is open to us. I hope no one disagrees with that – I hope no one thinks we should wallow here in this settlement until the government sends us our new vessel!' He said this with a laugh, and those around me laughed with him, but I felt that I had done some wrong, that I had insulted him by hinting at the limitations of his river.

The Portuguese continued to visit, and brought me tobacco and the occasional bottle of wine. I was, I daresay, their favourite among the members of the expedition. I daresay, too, that I enjoyed their company more than that of some of my fellows.

It was around this time that Senhor Pascoal asked me to paint his portrait. This may seem trivial; you might wonder why I even mention it; why it is part of my story. Well, yes, it should have been trivial, but it led to all sorts of trouble. And I did not do it behind Livingstone's back. No. I went to speak to him about it.

Pascoal told me that he would like his likeness in oil, as I had done for Senhor Manoel Gomes. Senhor Manoel's portrait I had done near the beginning of my time at Tete, before my first visit to Kebrabasa. Livingstone had requested it. Senhor Manoel, he said, had greatly aided him on his previous journey and this is how he wished to repay him. I told Pascoal that I had done it on Livingstone's instruction, and that he should check with the Doctor. Perhaps he should write a note.

Part of me hoped it would come to nothing. Portraits are not my forte. I am a landscape painter, first and foremost, a painter of the natural world. Plants, of course, and animals, and birds, though it is easier when they are dead. I can render the human face quite competently, most of the time, though not always. But it is not the kind of art that I think of as mine.

That said, painting a man's portrait is the easiest way to win him over, and to impress those who watch it being done.

Kirk brought me a note a day or two later. 'From the Doctor,' he said, but when I looked at it I saw it was simply Pascoal's note to Livingstone. I thought the Doctor might

have written a comment on it, but there was nothing, so I went to his room to discuss the matter with him.

The door was open and he was talking to someone.

‘... they’re taking up the trade again with enthusiasm. This French scheme allows them to do it, but why “free immigrants” would need to be transported in chains – I ask you.’

Someone murmured assent. It was Charles.

‘An English colony,’ Livingstone declared. ‘An English colony is what is required here. That’s what will solve the problems – here and in England. I can’t see why a few dozen Portuguese scattered in this vast area should stand in the way ...’

‘No,’ agreed Charles.

I backed away from the door – this was not the time to interrupt – and retreated outside. When I tried later, Livingstone was on his own, writing a letter, pages spread out before him covered with his swirly handwriting.

‘Yes, what is it?’ he said.

‘I’m sorry to interrupt, Doctor,’ I said, ‘but this note from Pascoal ... It was meant for you.’

‘And what’ – he waved his hand in impatience – ‘does it say?’

‘He asks, sir, for a picture, a—’

‘A picture?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And what has this to do with me?’

‘Well, I thought it best if he ...’

‘I’d prefer not to be bothered with such trivialities,’ Livingstone said, his pen raised. ‘Now, if you please.’

‘Yes, Dr Livingstone. My apologies.’

I think that’s the word he used. *Trivialities*. As it should have been.

Perhaps I shouldn’t have assumed that I had his permission. He was in a mood then, Livingstone. Thornton had come back again, some weeks after leaving, and, after a while, Livingstone had blown up at him. I didn’t witness the scene, but Thornton was upset afterwards, because, he said, Livingstone had used strong language to rebuke him. He wanted to throw his appointment in, but Kirk managed to talk him out of it.

I saw Livingstone, once, talking to Senhor Candido, the judge whom Generoso had once told me about. It was not exactly a conversation: it looked like Candido was trying

to talk to Livingstone, but the Doctor was having none of it. He waved his arms angrily and shouted something in Portuguese before walking away.

When I asked Generoso about it later, he told me that Candido had visited the lake in the north many years before, and when Livingstone had first passed through Tete, on his first journey, Candido had drawn a map for him. Now that Livingstone was on his way there, Candido wanted to talk to him about it. But Livingstone refused to have any sort of conversation.

Candido simply wanted to give Livingstone advice, Generoso told me. He knew this territory better than the English, after all. Generoso shook his head and shrugged.

The *MaRobert* was soon to depart again. I hoped that this time, now that there was no other mission for me, that I would join them, but it was not to be.

My health was still faltering, and there was the responsibility of the stores at Tete, but I wished to be travelling again. Kirk told me that Livingstone intended some of us – those who were left at Tete – to explore the region of Manica, where gold was rumoured, but it seemed vague, and of course nothing would come of it.

I went to the *MaRobert* one day. I wanted to stand on her deck and imagine myself setting off again, on the way to these great lakes that were reported upriver.

The Kroomen weren't aboard: I had chosen a time when they were away, so I could look around in peace. Near the base of the funnel I saw movement. A rat? No, but a small creature of some sort, standing on its hind legs.

'It's our mongoose.' The words made me jump. It was Rowe the stoker, peering from the deckhouse. He and Walker of course lived aboard the launch now.

I looked at the creature. Its front paws were drawn against its chest, and it turned its head swiftly from side to side.

'She's good at catching cockroaches,' he said.

'Cockroaches?' I asked.

He nodded. 'It's becoming a problem on board.'

The mongoose darted into a space under the engine, as if to demonstrate its prowess.

'Can I ...' Rowe's tone changed '... help you with something?'

'No no, I ...' I felt like an intruder. This was not my vessel any longer. My corner of the deckhouse, where I had stored my specimens and personal effects, was someone else's corner now. 'I was looking to see if there was any ... artist's materials on board. I'm running low of certain things.'

He looked at me quizzically. 'No, sir. None of that here.'

‘Ah,’ I said. ‘No. I was mistaken.’

‘Is there ... anything else?’

I shook my head and turned to leave.

The seaman spoke to me as his senior, but I felt unwelcome, a landsman aboard a ship. He would be travelling with Livingstone and I would be staying behind, with little to do other than paint the portraits of the prominent Portuguese.

Rae had been suffering from a bad bout of fever, and showed no signs of recovery. Livingstone was impatient to set off again and decided to leave him behind, with Charles, Thornton and me, much to everyone’s surprise. Livingstone and Kirk would travel with Walker and Rowe, who would have to attempt the engineering duties, as well as the Kroomen and some of the Makololo.

In his wisdom, Livingstone was taking the *MaRobert* for a four-month trip without an engineer, and leaving us at Tete during the unhealthy season without a doctor.

University of Cape Town

PART V

THE OUTPOST

The Chief of an exploring expedition in Central Africa must have full authority vested in him or how is he to maintain control over his party. It would be subversive of all discipline and lead to most disastrous results not only in the present but in all future expeditions to permit the Chief's authority to be questioned by every discontented or troublesome man who may fancy himself aggrieved.

But when the leader of the expedition is a well tried man such as Dr Livingstone whose character for simplicity and probity is so fully established I think it would be most unwise, if not unjust, to permit any further enquiry into the case especially as neither Dr Livingstone nor any of his witnesses could be present, and the result could only be (as it is now) the denial of Dr Livingstone's charges by the person implicated.

I recommend that the only notice to be taken of Baines's letter should be to own receipt; if anything further were added it might be that Lord John Russell saw no reason to change the opinion he had already expressed.

– John Washington, Memo on the Letter of Thomas Baines,
dated 9 Jany 1861 (19 March 1861)

Cape Town, 6 February 1861

The newspaper arrives early in the morning. A messenger has brought it directly from the printers in Castle Street, as arranged with the editors. I am at the door before he can knock: I've been up since before dawn, unable to sleep, waiting. Here at last is my answer to all the official silence, my response to their refusal to give me a proper hearing.

I walk into the dining room and clear a space on the table. The Logiers are still asleep. Only Lettie is up. She has been in the kitchen, cleaning quietly, but the sound of the door has summoned her, and she comes to see who is up.

'I am in the newspaper today, Lettie,' I say.

'That is good, sir,' she says. 'Would sir like a cup of tea, or coffee?'

'Coffee, please,' I say.

There has been a rising interest in my case. A year has passed since I returned, and yet no great triumphs have been reported from the Zambesi, nothing like Livingstone's completion of his journey from Loanda to Quilimane. To many I am an inconvenience: someone who might speak critically about their hero. But I am also living proof, evidence by my presence here, that all is not well with the expedition. I am one of three people who have been thrown off. Is it possible that the fault lies entirely with me?

More and more people are of the view that my story might be worth listening to. Among them is the Archdeacon of Grahamstown, who said he would talk to Mr Porter the Attorney-General and raise the matter with him.

'You must write him a letter,' the Archdeacon said after their meeting. 'Put your complaint in writing, and ask him what can be done.'

And so I wrote to Mr Porter – this was in November – to ask his views on my case. In his professional opinion, had Livingstone not exceeded his authority in the way he had handled my case? Had he brought forward any evidence against me? Since the charges against me were most distinctly expressed in his letter to Kirk, was I entitled to ask Kirk for that letter? Could I not rightfully consider my dismissal unlawful? Was I not entitled to a proper atonement? When I returned to Tete, did I have the right to demand an investigation from the authorities there? And, if all else failed, would I be in any way wrong in publishing the whole correspondence on the subject?

The tone was formal, professional, but I kept remembering the warm handshake Porter had given me on the evening of the banquet a year earlier, his friendliness to a fellow Cape Town man. Would any of that good feeling have survived?

The response, as usual, gave little satisfaction. Because some of my points concerned my position in relation to the Admiralty, and because he held office under Her Majesty, Mr Porter did not think it right to give an opinion on the case, and he saw no good that such an opinion could do.

He had, he wrote, no reason to doubt my character, et cetera, et cetera, and believed that Livingstone acted in a manner that was, he said, '*neither well-considered nor well-conducted*'. But his ultimate counsel was this: '*Mr Baines having done all that a man could do to obtain a full investigation into his conduct, and having failed, is only wasting time, and wearing himself out, by pursuing what seems to recede farther and farther, the notion of a trial at last.*'

Lie low, Mr Baines. Let the storm pass. Nobody wants to hear ill spoken of the Great Philanthropist. Hopefully in time people will forget all about the matter. They might think: Wasn't there some disagreement between him and Dr Livingstone? But the specifics will be lost over the years.

Theft, was it?

Yes, I think so. He was a thief.

No. I would not let the matter rest.

I lay the newspaper flat on the table. The *South African Advertiser and Mail*. On the front page are the usual advertisements – 'Valuable Landed Property', 'Household Furniture', 'Fine, Fancy and Staple Goods' – but they hold even less interest than usual. I turn the page, quickly but carefully, and my eye dances from heading to heading. 'China News', 'Episcopal Authority at the Cape', 'The Frauds on the Equitable Marine' – ah, there it is, halfway down the middle column: 'The Commander and the Artist of the Livingstone Expedition'.

A nervous thrill runs through me.

This, the editorial, I have not read before, though I've known the editors would be sympathetic. I look quickly at the beginning: '*It seems to be fated that most great expeditions of discovery should break up into violent quarrels and wretched strife.*' It runs over to the next column, ending as far down as it begins. I read its final words: '*Of Dr Livingstone himself we desire to speak with the respect which his name will always merit and command. But in this case he undoubtedly has been grossly deceived and his*

official conduct has not been marked with that justice and consideration which we should have expected at his hand.'

My eye scans the rest of the editorial: *'This charge appears to have been originally urged against him by the Revd. Charles Livingstone, while the Commander Dr. Livingstone himself was away on an expedition up the Shire.'* Further down *'The charge urged against Mr. Baines is in itself preposterous. Of all men living he is the very last who could be guilty of it.'*

I take a deep breath and a smile breaks across my face. I am presented as a man beyond reproach. With Livingstone the editors are taking a clever line. It allows one to sympathize with me without condemning him. It is, perhaps, the only way that certain people will even attempt to palate what follows.

There, on pages 3 and 4, one half of each page, is the correspondence, all of it laid bare, for the public to read, and make their own minds up. Livingstone's first letter, and his second, the one that sealed my fate but reached me six weeks after it was written. Letters to Major Sicard, and Rae, and their responses. Letters of support from prominent people, in South Africa and England. All the correspondence with the Foreign Office, the letter from the governor's office, the correspondence with Porter, and my letters to the Doctor himself.

All this paperwork, generated by my case, and now all of it being printed hundreds, even thousands of times, and delivered this very morning to houses and shops around the Peninsula.

It begins with my letter to the newspaper's editors, which fills the entire middle column, top to bottom. In it I've told of my frustrations in my appeals to the Foreign Office and Colonial Government, and said how – regardless of their outcome – I will inevitably be the loser, either because I'll be branded as a thief or because I'll never be forgiven for being the man who cast doubts on the great Dr Livingstone.

I glance down to my closing words.

My only hope therefore of obtaining anything like a fair hearing, lies in the 'Fourth Estate,' and I ask you, as one of its representatives, to do me the favour of laying down before the public the correspondence that has passed between Dr. Livingstone and the home and colonial authorities, and myself, leaving the world to judge whether the treatment I and my fellow-officers have received, is such as Englishmen ought to submit to in silence.

All I ask of you is, open the lists, give my enemy and me a fair field and no favour, and then—God defend the right.

I am, &c.

T. Baines.

‘My enemy.’ What would I have thought, if someone a few years ago had told me I’d use this term in relation to the Doctor? It still fills me with dread and regret, whenever the thought takes shape after a few moments of absent-mindedness: that between Livingstone and me there is antagonism, animosity. Even now I can barely believe it. The words on the newspaper begin to blur, ink and paper forming a dirty grey.

Lettie appears with the coffee.

‘Thank you,’ I say, taking the cup and setting it down carefully, so as not to spill on the paper.

One letter that remained to be written, once I’d decided on this plan, was to Livingstone himself, and I did so shortly before Christmas. Chapman had already departed for Walvisch Bay by then. I would follow once I had completed the boats and finished my work to get everything in the newspaper. I wrote to Thornton too, but the main letter was to Livingstone. I scratched angrily with my pen on the page, but I felt also a sense of satisfaction as the words took form:

You sent to the Colonial and the Home Government the malicious slanders invented against me by your brother, and as far as possible cut me off from all opportunity of defending myself against them.

I paused for a moment to consider how to close, and then the ink flowed from my pen. I had imagined saying words like this to him hundreds of times.

My present intention is to ask whether you intend to support the slanderous charges to which you have lent the sanction of your name or to offer reparation for the injury you have done me, – and to challenge you if you dare trust the justice of your cause to meet me in Tete before any number of independent men and produce any evidence, you may be able to collect against me.

The letter was meant for his eyes, of course, but not only his. Who knew when it would reach him, this very sheet of paper, after travelling the same journey I had travelled: around the coast, over the bar, through the delta, up the river, to wherever they would be, in a native village, out in the open somewhere, with baobabs all around. That it would reach him at all seemed a marvel now. I would certainly not get a response from him. But this was now a public challenge.

'I have had a hard fight since I arrived here,' I wrote to Thornton. *'I stick like a limpet to my claim for a fair and open trial.'* I'd often wondered how he was. Of all my fellow officers, he was the one I missed the most.

Logier appears at the doorway, in his dressing gown. For a few moments he glances down at the papers spread before me.

'So,' he says, 'it is out.'

'It is out,' I reply. 'I have my public hearing.'

'Well, my friend. You must be very pleased.'

I turn back the page to show him the beginning of the article, and my eye falls on my earlier letter to the Doctor, written on the Zambesi shortly before I was sent off. It is strange to think, as I look at this precise type, that this letter was written in furious heat, with a pen that was difficult to hold with feverish fingers.

It is the same with all the letters, originally written by different hands, on various sorts of paper, with their watermarks, their smudges and stains, the ink blue or black, some on official letterhead, some in a hurried scrawl, others in a clerk's ordered script. They are now all marshalled into neat columns, confined in their ranks, giving a sense of calmness and order, of finality.

All my letters to the Foreign Office are here, all four of them, the first written soon after I returned, the last only last month, setting out my defence, showing my refusal to be silenced, and making them look unjust and mean-spirited by their lack of response.

I had intended the letter to Livingstone to be the last, but after I'd written it I received a note from Mother, from which I learnt disturbing things about the authorities in London.

She had met Captain Washington, she said, in order to draw the last of the money owed to me. I was nervous about this: I feared they would try to force some additional but inadequate payment upon her, in an attempt to absolve themselves of their responsibility in some underhanded manner. I would have to write to warn her against this.

What disturbed me most of all, however, was a note of Washington's that Mother had copied, claiming that I was aware of the Foreign Office's decision and had acquiesced in it, and – most curiously – that I had been dismissed '*for disobedience of orders*'.

I could see what they were doing. They were trying to alter the story, confuse it. Perhaps now they felt the original charge to be a little preposterous, and they had to come up with a new one.

So I had to write to them again and set the record straight. I had not been dismissed for disobedience of orders, but for theft – and let them prove that. I repeated my demand for a lawful dismissal, and for my rightful pay until that came about. '*I protest in the strongest manner,*' I wrote, '*against any attempt to force upon my mother in my absence any amount of money short of that to which I am justly entitled.*'

I was, of course, once again writing for the public eye. I would receive no satisfaction from them. That I would have to achieve by my own means.

'Now I can be on my way,' I say to Logier, 'as soon as I've finished the boats.'

For a few moments he says nothing, a slight smile on his face. Then he nods. 'How much longer will they take?'

'A month, I hope, if I can give them most of my attention.'

The boats are made of copper and there are two of them. They will be joined by a raft-deck, on which we will travel. I often recall, with an ache, my days in Lynn, working on the boat for Livingstone, the boat that was never required. My life then was all innocence and hope. Mother's eyes were so full of pride. Within me there was a joy that seemed to erupt at every moment. Was this another man's life? I take a deep breath. No, it will not pay to think this way.

The plan is this. I will sail to Walvisch Bay, where Chapman and his brother will be waiting for me. From there we will travel overland by oxwagon, with a party of natives, through the interior of South-West Africa. We will reach the Zambesi above the Victoria Falls and will assemble the boats. We will make for the Falls – at last! – and from there we will journey – by boat where possible, overland where necessary – to Tete.

The main challenge, as always, has been money. If I could have devoted all my attention to the boats, I would be there by now, but I have had to find ways of making an income – to build them, to pay my way to South-West Africa, and for all the equipment I will need to take with me.

Chapman hopes that the expedition will be profitable, through a series of trading stations across the continent. I hope so. But I must say that my main goals are the Falls and Livingstone.

‘And your health, Thomas,’ Logier says. ‘Are you sure you are strong enough?’

‘It’s too late now,’ I say. ‘They are waiting for me: I must go. But, yes, I am ready. I look forward to it, Frederick. To be on the water again, and on a boat made by my own hand ...’

Looking at the newspaper before me, the words look hard and cold. If he had just acknowledged he had made a mistake, if he had taken me back ... I would have forgotten about this all.

But it is done now. It is out in the world.

I make a point of walking about in the afternoon, to see what kind of reaction there is to the paper. People on the streets turn and whisper and stare, some of them nodding their heads in support, others eyeing me suspiciously. Perhaps I am imagining it – in some cases, at least. I cannot be sure.

In the days that follow, my friends call upon me. Everyone, they say, is talking about it, my case against Doctor Livingstone.

On Sunday morning I go to church at St George’s. I make sure I arrive just as the service is about to begin, and I sit near the back. Throughout the service heads turn towards me as word filters through the cathedral that Livingstone’s enemy is here.

Afterwards, people throng outside, as they always do, but today the din of voices seems louder than ever.

‘Well done,’ says a man I do not know. ‘Why should you take it lying down?’

‘You’d best be sure you know what you’re doing,’ another says, a young man with a smooth face. ‘Pulling down Dr Livingstone’s reputation to save your own ...’ He shakes his head.

‘Does it matter whether I am right or wrong?’ I ask him.

He snorts and walks off.

So it will be. There has been plenty of that and now there will be plenty more.

‘It’s about time someone pushed Livingstone off his pedestal.’ The voice comes from behind me and I turn. It’s an older man: I know him by sight, though we have never spoken before. ‘He’s too bloody sympathetic to the blacks of this country. He and his missionary types.’

I look around to see if anyone has heard this. Though his accent is English, the man speaks just like the Boers, and I don't wish people to think that this is the reason for my difference with the Doctor.

In no time the reactions all start to sound the same. It is as if I am hearing them across a long corridor, or in a dream. There is a hollowness to the sound.

Not a week after the publication of the letters, another missive arrives, the envelope bearing the Foreign Office stamp. What is going on, I wonder. It is impossible ... that something could have got here so quickly.

It is, of course, a response to the letter I posted in October. It is dated 12 December, the very week that I wrote to Livingstone and Thornton, and before I'd even written my last to the Foreign Secretary. The seas had borne letters between us, travelling in different directions, with no knowledge of one another's contents.

What would I do if the letter revealed a change of approach, a softening? Would I then regret throwing all open in the newspapers?

But there is no need to worry. It is a curt reply:

I am directed by Lord John Russell to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 15th of October last, and in reply I am to refer you to Mr Hammond's letter of the 4th of April last informing you of the view taken by his Lordship of your case.

Once more, they wish to silence me, unaware of the newspapers and letters already on the seas, spreading my story around the world.

Once more, I shall write in reply. It will do not good, of course, but it is something I have to do. I want it on record. If someone looks in the archives one day, he will see my refusal to be silenced.

But that is the last thing I shall do. Now I must concentrate on what lies ahead, the journey back to the Zambesi, to the Falls, and to Tete, where my things are, where I will find out where the Doctor is. And from there ... well. Imagine, if one day I arrive in his camp, having come all the way across the continent from Walvisch Bay. How surprised he will be! Will he recognize me at last? Will he look into my eyes and see ... a sort of kinship?

We will sit down and talk, facing each other as men, putting everything aside. What words will we use when we greet each other? But wait. I must not get carried away.

I would be pleased to find that his brother is no longer there. Livingstone has wronged me, but I cannot help but wonder if it all would have happened without the role played by his brother.

University of Cape Town

I have been more than usually drawn out in prayer of late – the Expedition, the cares for my family, the fear lest B's representations of my conduct may injure the work of Christ. The hopes that I may be permitted to open this dark land to the blessed gospel. I have cast all before my God. Good Lord, have mercy upon me.

– David Livingstone, journal, 6 March 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, April 1859

Four women are spreading plaster on the floor of the verandah. The material appears to be some sort of soft clay from nearby which contains lime. They are on their knees and they spread it with their hands. The women wear the typical dark blue cloth, wrapped around their bodies and tied with a sash. They are working from one end of the verandah; I am sitting on the other. I will have to move at some point, but for now I can remain here.

This is now the third or fourth day that I have been free of fever, the longest time in weeks. It is a month since the launch left, and I have been sick for much of that time, as has Rae. Charles was the only one who could look after us. I would come to from a fevered dream and see his face, and my heart would sink. The reality was as bad as the delirium. I wished that Kirk was here.

After a while, Charles succumbed too, and then whoever was best able get to his feet would see to the others, making sure they had taken their medicine. Tito sent men to check on us, and often visited himself, but Charles refused their attention, believing the medical knowledge of the Portuguese to be inferior to the English, which is doubtless true, but no reason to shoo them from one's room. It was strange, when I went to Charles's bedside and saw him lying there, at my mercy, so to speak. Of course I did not take advantage, but, as I looked at his helpless face, I could not forget how he had abandoned me, when I was at my weakest. It is because of him that I am not with the others now.

One of the women stops rubbing the floor and sits up straight. She arches her back, as if in some discomfort. This prompts the others to stop too. They remain still for a minute or two, and then resume their work.

I look out at the river beyond, flowing eastwards, slowly but inexorably.

At some point every day my mind wanders, in fevered delirium or quite conscious desire, to the *MaRobert*, wending its way up the Shiré. Every day I find myself wondering where the others are and I wish that I was with them, instead of here, in our unhealthy sanatorium.

I've asked Rae about it, what it was like, how it compared to the Zambesi.

He told me stories, some of which I had already heard from Kirk, others which were entirely new. He told of an occasion when they were shooting at an elephant, the beast standing in the shallow water and facing them, with an aggressive stance, making a tremendous trumpeting sound.

I painted the scene in oil, the elephant in the foreground, its ears flared, its trunk raised high and curled at the end; the strange floating object in the distance, from which come little puffs of smoke, and splashes in the water about him, and searing pain on his thick skin. It is not something I usually do – painting something that I haven't seen with my own eyes – but it was a stirring story, and what else am I to paint, if I am unable to move beyond this verandah?

'May I join you?' Thornton stands at the doorway.

'Shouldn't you be in bed?' I ask.

Thornton has also been ill. He was away when the launch left, overseeing the coal mine. Sometimes he is there, sometimes back here, depending on his health. On this most recent return, a few days ago, he complained of a severe headache and nausea – all the symptoms that I know so well. Crab was happy to see him, wagging his tail and licking his master's face. When Thornton is away from Tete, Crab remains here with me.

'I'm feeling a little better,' he says.

He watches the women for a while, assessing their progress. They have plastered a quarter of the verandah now. We will have to move at some stage, but there is still time. He sits down and gazes out at the river.

Thornton has been the worst affected of all of us, because he has been out in the field. When he returned, he tossed and turned in his bed, and moaned constantly. In the morning his bed was soaked and he was shivering uncontrollably. He complained that he had not managed to sleep at all. The next night I gave him opium from the medical supplies so he would sleep. It seems to be working. He is getting rest at least, and he complains of headaches less often. He is taking a long time to get his appetite back.

He has had a hard time of it. He's been overseeing the blasting at the coal fields on the Morongozo River, half a day's march away. Although he's been ill, he has been obliged to visit the site of the mine and stand over the men to get any work out of them. Whenever he returns there after any absence, he finds things exactly as they were when he last left them. The men say that they do not belong to him and that he is not the one paying them for their services.

Thornton has grown something of a beard now. When he started on the expedition, not quite a year ago, all he could manage were scraggly wisps. Now the hair covers his jaw, with just here and there a few patches of boyish fuzz.

'Charles will want me to go back soon.' He slumps back in the chair. 'I can't bear it.'

The women have halted their labour again. One of them stands up and another wipes her brow.

‘Not until you’re ready,’ I say.

I open my tobacco box and start filling my pipe.

‘Do you know how difficult it is to procure meat there,’ he says. ‘And when I do, it goes bad almost immediately. I have to roast it right away, and even then it does not last long.’

I light a match and draw in the smoke.

‘It’s unhealthy out there,’ he says, ‘but what does *he* care?’

Charles lives in a room at one end of the residencia. I live in a room at the other end, which I share with Thornton when he is here. Rae’s room is in between. The Portuguese come to my side of the house, and bring me gifts of fruit and meat. Senhor Pascoal, in particular, is most generous, in gratitude for his portrait. But I am good friends too with Generoso, Raposo, and of course Major Tito.

Charles has no friends among the Portuguese, and consequently no visitors. It is as if he is staying here on sufferance, wishing all the time that he was somewhere else. He has taken to collecting birds, and spends much of his time on that pursuit. He is forever ordering the Makololo around, or teaching them songs and prayers, but he leaves me pretty much alone.

I have returned to my work on the whaleboat, which suffered some damage on Livingstone’s previous trip up the Shiré, when the *MaRobert* struck a rock. My progress has been slow, thanks to my repeated bouts of fever, and the scant help that comes from the carpenters Tito has lent me, who seem to know nothing about boat building. But it is satisfying work, sensible work, to mend a splintered piece of wood, to carve, to plane, to restore.

Rae has been setting up a sugar mill some way out of the town. This too has taken a long time, but he is at it again now. It is intended to show the natives the benefits of machinery.

‘Mr Thornton,’ says Charles after a long silence. ‘You appear to be ... much better now.’

Thornton looks straight ahead. ‘I am, Mr Livingstone. I am much improved. Thank you.’

It is teatime, the hour of the day when we all gather in the dining room. Other than this I hardly see Charles at all.

‘It may be time soon,’ Charles says, ‘to return to the coal fields.’

Thornton nods slowly, and looks down at his plate. 'I suppose,' he says softly, and mumbles something I cannot hear.

The room is cut with shafts of sunlight filled with dust. Flies buzz about the food. I'm aware of the slow clacking of silverware on crockery. The servants hover quietly in the background.

I need to clear my throat, and do so as quietly as I can, lest it sound like a prelude to saying something. Charles looks up at me; I drop my gaze to my food.

Minutes go by in silence. Why do we put ourselves through this every day?

'Will you ...' – Rae is reaching towards me – 'pass the salt?'

I push it across the table.

'No more news, I suppose, about the governor?' says Charles.

It has been rumoured for some time that a governor will be sent to rule over the Tete area. He would, of course, move here, into the residencia, and we would have to move out, as would Tito, who, as military commandant, occupies this house only because there has been no governor here for some time.

'I have heard nothing,' I answer.

'No. The Makololo have no information either.'

Because the Portuguese tell him nothing, Charles relies on the Makololo for his intelligence – and, to an extent, on the rest of us. But no one knows anything about this, not even the Portuguese, except that change of some sort is coming.

I wonder if it's a reaction to our presence. Tete will now be one territory, under a governor, Quilimane and Sena another. As it was a long time ago. The Portuguese may be trying to entrench their position here.

'Would you ...?' Thornton says, proffering the wine bottle.

'Thank you,' I say, and he refills my glass, and Rae's too.

'Mr Livingstone?' he asks.

Charles holds out a hand in refusal. He hardly ever drinks anything. Always so serious! Sitting there with his long face, never smiling, never drinking, never smoking, and always so superior about it all. I take a sip. The pleasing warmth of a Constantia cabernet. Ah well, all the more for the rest of us.

Another minute passes in silence.

'How are you getting on with the sugar mill?' I ask Rae. He has been away for a few days.

'Mm,' he begins with a mouth full of food. 'Good. Good. We have made a start, extracting juice from the sugar cane. It's a good engine.'

Charles nods. 'Very good. I must come and have a look. I take it the natives are impressed?'

'The natives are delighted,' Rae says, still chewing. 'They've never seen anything like it before.'

Charles nods again, to signal his approval.

'I wish, though,' Rae adds, finally swallowing his food, 'that I was looking after a boat's engine.' He tilts his head in the general direction of the Shiré.

'Yes.' Charles closes his eyes. 'God's speed to them.'

'I wonder where they are now,' I think aloud.

No doubt all of us would rather be out there, rather than here, doing little other than waiting.

'What of this trip to the north?' Rae asks.

'We can do nothing until there's been some progress with the coal, can we?' Charles says, pointing his fork at Thornton for a moment.

Thornton looks down and the room is quiet again, but for the buzzing of the flies.

'I will be glad to leave this diseased town,' Charles says. 'Sick people everywhere, every second one with syphilis. If they haven't inherited it they make sure they catch it from someone else.' He puts down his knife and fork with a clatter. 'Disgusting place.'

Crab is pretending to be asleep, his head resting on his paws, but I see him opening one eye.

'There is talk of a famine,' I say. 'The crops have not been good this year.'

'But we have plenty of food,' Charles says, 'do we not?'

'Preserved food – yes, we have some, although I can't say how much, the stores being as they are. But fresh food—'

'I'd hope,' Charles interjects, 'you could tell us exactly how much we have in the stores. That is, after all, what you're supposed to be doing – storekeeping.'

'You know as well as I do that it's impossible to say. I don't know what's still left at Sena, and is anything still at Shupanga? And how am I to know what has been consumed when I haven't been present?'

'You had better be careful, Baines.' Charles waves a finger at me. 'The stores are your responsibility.'

I ignore him and top up my wine.

The stores. What a curse they are. Objects strewn all along the river, much of it stolen no doubt, destroyed by white ants, damaged by rough transport. Since they were hurled aboard the *Pearl* there has been no order. And Livingstone has not exactly encouraged

any. And yet his brother feels he can speak to me about it as if I were a schoolboy. Pah! He should try!

Charles is about to say something else, but is suddenly distracted. 'Ow,' he whispers, clenching his eyes tight and placing his hand on the side of his jaw.

I say nothing. I certainly have no sympathy to express.

'Anything wrong?' Rae asks.

'My tooth,' Charles says. 'It's nothing.' He rises to his feet. 'You will excuse me. I must get back to my reading.'

The Makololo servant gives a little bow as Charles moves towards the door and then stops. 'Mr Thornton,' Charles says. 'It is time for you to get going again.'

Thornton nods. 'Mr Livingstone.'

A minute after Charles has left, Thornton turns to look at the doorway.

'Damn,' he mutters, 'back to the coal mine.'

'Will you be all right?' I ask.

'I'm better now, yes. But it's unpleasant work. Constantly standing over the men. But, yes, it must be done.' He shakes his head. 'Do you know, they think there's some magic in my surveying instruments? When I set them up on a hill, they think I'm charming the clouds away and preventing the rain from coming. I am to blame for the drought!'

The following day Thornton is packing his things.

'Is there anything you need?' I ask.

He shrugs.

I open the medical supplies. 'Here,' I say, 'take this.' I hold out a vial of opium. 'In case you need it – to sleep.'

He nods once, frowns, and takes it from me.

Early the next morning, even before breakfast, the heat is blistering. Thornton puts off going to the mine until the following day.

The next morning when I wake up he is gone.

Though it gets hot most days, autumn is well advanced now. Many of the trees have shed their leaves; those that remain are brown and yellow. The sun sets at 5:30 in the evening.

It is now five weeks since the launch left, or is it six? There is little to mark the passing of time other than my journal entries, which are brief, since not much is happening.

The days take an age to pass, but then one finds a week has gone by without notice, and then another.

When the Portuguese come and visit, they always, at some point, ask me to paint their portraits. Usually I can satisfy them with a quick sketch. Some of them are pleased with this; others refer to the oils I have done.

One man I cannot refuse is Tito himself. He is, after all, the most important man in the town, and the one who has been most generous to the expedition. In the same way that Livingstone wanted me to paint Senhor Manuel, he would surely want me to paint Tito's portrait. And so I agree. And, as long as I am working on this portrait, no one else will bother me.

We work on the verandah, Tito sitting with the river behind him. His head is turned slightly to one side. I sketch the line of hair high on his forehead, his heavy eyebrows, his intense eyes.

'What of this new governor?' I ask him.

He shrugs. I can see he would gesticulate more flamboyantly, but he realizes he must keep still for the sitting.

The news from Lisbon is not certain, he tells me. A new governor is to come, but he does not know who or when. Perhaps when the news finally comes, the new governor will come with it.

And then we must vacate the residencia quickly, I say. I mean us – Charles, Rae and me – but of course Tito will have to move too.

He shrugs again, and this time his arms cannot resist a wave.

There will be time, he says. The message will come from Quilimane quickly. And, besides, who knows when this governor will arrive. Lisbon works slowly, when dealing with this outpost.

And what will Tito do?

There is talk, he says, that they will make him governor of Ibo. But, as with all things from Lisbon, he can never be sure.

For days there have been great preparations for Easter. It was expected, some time ago, that the new governor would have been here by now, so perhaps special effort was put into this year's ceremonies. Perhaps it is always like this.

A huge cross, twenty feet high, has been set up in the archway of the church, and an effigy of Christ has been tied to it. Above him, on a white sign, are the letters *J.N.R.J.* – Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, I presume.

On Saturday evening, the people of Tete gather at the church, Portuguese, half-castes and many of the natives – though the difference is sometimes hard to spot. I join them, my sketchbook in hand. A ladder leans against the cross; the effigy of Christ has been taken down and placed on a wooden platform. Above it hovers a dark sheet, propped up by four long poles, each held by a man, giving the effect of a four-poster bed.

All around are people dressed in white robes, men and boys, holding long sticks topped with large candles. They form two lines facing each other, a few yards apart. Between them a procession forms, with the padre at the front, staff in hand, and two men on either side of him. Near the front, someone holds a tall cross, with a white cloth draped from the crossbeam, forming the shape of the letter U, mimicking exactly the cloth hanging from the main cross from which the effigy has been taken. The bed is raised on the shoulders of four men, pallbearers in this pantomime. Some way behind, an effigy of Mary, somewhat larger than human-sized, is lifted behind her fallen son. There are soldiers in their blue shirts, rifles slung on their backs, and women dressed in black, their faces veiled. Are they real widows, or acting the part for the crucified Christ? A banner of sorts is lifted, near the front of the procession, on which has been painted the face of Jesus, a crown of thorns atop his head.

Slowly, to the sound of sombre hymns, the procession begins moving.

I sit a little distance away and sketch quickly. There is so much to take in: the faces, the robes, the candles and crosses, the atmosphere of the thing.

The procession moves out into the dusk, and I take a new position outside and begin another sketch, this time from the back. The people in the front are silhouetted, those closer are more distinct: with their blue soldier's uniform or their flowing white garments.

I watch all of them pass before closing the sketchbook and joining them. I move my feet to the same slow rhythm as the men and women before me. Their shoulders move with a lilting, swaying motion.

The procession snakes through the town, becoming longer all the time as people appear and join it.

The sound increases in volume. There seem to be several hymns being sung at the same time, but their harmonies weave together in a way that I find extraordinarily beautiful.

We come to a stop a little distance out of the town, where a grave has been dug in the earth, and into it the effigy is buried, as the padre intones in Portuguese and the people wail and sing.

A young woman near me has tears streaming from her tightly shut eyes. She looks a mixture of Portuguese and African, perhaps some Indian too, as is not uncommon here.

It is unlike any religious service I have witnessed, and I feel strangely moved.

A memory bubbles up in my mind: choir practice in the dusty church near my school in Lynn. My voice had broken and I'd become aware of it. I could hear it, slightly out of harmony with the general sound. Before then, it had all come so naturally.

Father Harding waved his arms up and down, side to side, with his characteristic vigour. Whenever he looked in my direction I'd glance away, never to meet his eye. Behind him was the door to the stairs, where I would never venture. Never again. Church had become a cold place. Not like this.

The people have begun to drift away. I make my way back to the house.

As soon as the morning light is good enough, I take out my sketches and on a clean sheet I begin a watercolour, showing the procession forming before the cross in the archway. It is important to do it now, while the colours are still fresh in my mind: the golden glow of the candles, the varied blues of the soldiers' shirts, Mary's robes, the dusky air.

I am busy with a second one, showing the procession moving through the town, when Charles appears. I am painting in black the silhouettes of the cross and the people accompanying it up the hill.

Charles stands close behind me, a little too close for politeness, I think.

'Hm,' he snorts. 'And they think these ... *objects* will mark a way for them into heaven.' He points to the bed that bears the effigy of Christ. 'And this?' His finger is disconcertingly close to the wet paint. 'What on earth is this?'

I look up at him. 'It's part of their ceremony,' I say. 'I don't ask what it all means.'

'No. And best you do not, because it will probably make no sense at all.'

'I'm just painting what I saw,' I say.

'Yes,' he says. 'Of course. It's a bit odd, though – don't you think? – that you spend time painting this ... *attempt* at civilization by the Portuguese. The people in England will be much more interested in the natives and the natural landscape. Do you not agree?'

A little later Senhor Raposo appears at the house. 'Vem! Anda!' he beckons.

The procession has formed again, and again it moves from the church to the gravesite. The atmosphere is less sombre now; people are talking among themselves. But when we get to the grave, everyone falls silent.

The grave, covered the night before, has been dug up. There is a hole there, and no sign of the effigy of Christ.

A cry of celebration comes from the padre, and suddenly everyone around me is whooping with joy, some of them jumping around exuberantly.

Raposo slaps me on the back and gestures with a tilt of his head that I must come with him. It is a time for feasting.

I return to the settlement among a surge of people. As we come to Raposo's house I see Charles, standing on the side of the road, glaring at me.

University of Cape Town

I must go back a little way now to tell you that ever since I arrived at Tete, the Dr. and I have not agreed at all, and his brother, who commonly goes by the name of 'the long one' had an old grudge against me because I would not let him have all his own way in the *Pearl*, and have not since shown him quite as much respect as he liked. Since Christmas he has (except when the Dr. was at Tete) been commanding officer at Tete; he has lived in state at one end of the house while Baines and myself have lived in one room at the other end. We only saw each other at meal times. Well, neither the Doctor nor his brother are liked by the Portuguese, so that he got no visitors, while lots came to our end; also presents of fruit etc., were generally sent to our end, so he got spiteful, and set the Makololo to spy after all our doings indoors and out. Now the Makololo get lots of cloth etc., from Mr. L., whilst if they came to our end of the house I always turned them out, so they wildly exaggerate any of our doings and 'the long one', who keeps the public journal, added his own exaggerations and writes all off to Senna for the Dr. and by the time the Dr. arrived in June had a long and bitter account against Baines and myself.

– Richard Thornton, letter to his sister Helen, 22 July 1859

Tete, May 1859

The first time Charles accused me of stealing – properly accused me, and of theft, rather than poor storekeeping – was on a cold night before the windy season. Our relationship – if that word can be used to describe our interaction – continued to deteriorate as time went on.

There had been insinuations before. One day, for instance, we were packing our possessions, anticipating the move from the residencia, and, because I'd used up many of the things I'd brought with me, I found that two of my large boxes were no longer necessary. I could pack most of my effects in the remaining three, and for the rest I took two empty biscuit boxes, which were smaller and more efficient.

'And what do you need those for?' he said.

I ignored the question. What business was it of his? Only later – five, six months later, when Kirk and Rae came for me – would I realize the significance of it.

At this stage I was used to Charles finding fault with me whenever he could, and with Thornton too. He made it his business. So I did not feel it necessary to give him any answer.

Thornton returned from the mine again, carried in a machela that he had sent for. His legs were covered in sores, large festering sores. He had been badly bitten by mosquitoes, and had made things worse by scratching. He was weak and unable to eat. The poor boy was in a terrible state.

He moved into my room, as before, and for a few days he lay on his bed and did not move from it. It would be three weeks before he was able to wear a shoe. Soon after he arrived he came down with another very bad cold.

He had, he said, been struggling with the men, who would do nothing that he ordered, unless he screamed and shouted and forced them to.

A fortnight or so after his return, Thornton was able to move around and began to get some of his colour back, and some of his humour too.

But then, one morning, his voice roused me from my half-sleep.

'I'm going home.'

'What's that?' I wasn't sure if he was speaking from a dream, or whether the fever had seized him again, but he was in fact quite sensible. I could see, as I sat up, that he was lying on his back with his eyes wide open, staring at the ceiling.

‘I’m going home. I’ve decided. I’ve had enough of this. I want to go back to Bradford and see Mother and Annabelle and Octavia and Kitty. I’ve had enough.’

He had wanted to throw up his appointment before, in March, when the Doctor had used strong language to rebuke him. But Kirk had dissuaded him from pursuing the idea. Now, once again, he wanted to resign.

‘You’ll need to give it some thought,’ I said. ‘Perhaps you will change your mind when you’re feeling better.’

‘When will I ever feel better?’ he exclaimed, turning his head towards me. ‘This climate. This wretched climate. I’m sick all the time.’

‘Just give it a little more time,’ I said. ‘This is an opportunity that might never come again. Don’t do anything rash.’

‘That’s what Kirk said the last time.’

It was unthinkable that he should go. I realized then that he had become my closest friend on the expedition. Or perhaps my memory is being influenced by later events.

‘At the very least wait for the Doctor to return.’

‘Oh, I will. I wouldn’t dream of raising this with Charles.’

It had a strange effect on me, hearing him say he was going to throw it in. I too was unhappy, and had been unhealthy, and had been badly treated. But for me to resign was not a possibility. In my life there had been too many failures, half-successes, and I was much older than he. I did not have the degrees from university. Thornton would be able to start again.

If he decided to pack it in, I thought, I would not try to dissuade him. But I hoped he would not. As it turned out, he never got the chance.

Food had become scarcer than it had been in previous months. The famine had come. The poorest people were of course affected the most. The Portuguese with whom I was friendly had enough to get by, and they shared with me generously, and I was able to buy whatever else I needed.

Charles found it harder to obtain provisions. He’d be told that there was nothing available, as there was a strong feeling in the settlement against him. If they could make life unpleasant for him, people thought, he would be gone from there much sooner than if they treated him well. It was left to me to procure what was required for the dinner table, and this, I must confess, gave me a certain sense of power, that I was able to survive in this world, and he was not.

It was not the same with Thornton or Rae. Rae had an abrasive element in his character, but it did not come from any kind of snobbishness. He would often shoo the natives away (children, mainly, but sometimes adults too) when he didn't want to be bothered, and with his rough voice and fiery red hair he seemed to elicit more fear among them than the rest of us did, Dr Livingstone excepted. But the locals were fascinated in him because of the machines that took shape and sprung into movement under his hands, and they risked his temper to see what magic he could create next.

Thornton was even more popular. While I was good friends with some of the older Portuguese, whenever Thornton was around, a younger group would come and visit. His Portuguese was better than mine, or Rae's, and he would often act as translator.

Quite often the two of us, and sometimes Rae, would take a bottle or two of the mess wine (Charles never drank any anyway) and walk with our friends to the riverside, where we would eat and drink and talk as much as our shared vocabularies allowed. There was a clearing a short distance from the houses, under a giant baobab that was covered in thick creepers, which gave shelter when it rained.

I would play my accordion and sing an old traveller's tune, which none but Generoso could understand – not the words, in any case, but the mood was clear enough. There was a fair amount that we could communicate without language.

They were a mixed bunch, the Portuguese at Tete. Most of them were soldiers. Some of them were very civilized, others much rougher. Most had native wives, or half-caste, the product of an earlier union of Portuguese and African. Part of the population was Indian, from Goa, and their blood also was blended in with the population's.

There were few white women, perhaps none who were entirely white – it was difficult to tell, because the Portuguese of Europe were fairly swarthy to start with. What were the men to do, if they lived here and wanted to get married?

Rae would sometimes comment when he found a woman attractive. He'd narrow his eyes and nod, and say, 'Mmm. She is pleasing to the eye.' Often he'd pick on Thornton: 'What do you think, Mr Thornton, do you fancy her?' Thornton would usually blush and dismiss the question, but sometimes he'd play Rae's game and say: 'Yes, she'll do' or 'She's all yours.'

'I could do with a bit of pleasure under the covers,' Rae would say. This usually silenced Thornton entirely: out of prudishness or desire or guilt I cannot say. I certainly never found any of the women of Tete appealing in this way.

The Portuguese all owned slaves, but it was not the kind of slavery that had existed in the English colonies, or still existed in the Americas. It was a kindlier institution, though

of course we as Englishmen would never want to approve of it. Their slaves were more like servants, really, and some of them owned slaves themselves, like young Shibante, Major's Tito's slave, who had voluntarily sold himself into slavery and used the money to acquire his own.

He was a fine-looking young fellow, with a slender build and a boyish face that made him look younger than I think he really was. I would paint his portrait at a later stage. It was probably the best portrait that I painted on the Zambesi.

I got on well with Thornton and Rae, and they were friendly most of the time, but sometimes they become irritable with one another. A certain wildness seemed to have come over Thornton. He started speaking his mind more freely.

I recall one day he made some disparaging comment about Charles. 'But what do you expect from a Scotchman?' he added.

'What do you say?' Rae asked.

'Ah, Mr Rae, I forgot. Our other Scotchman.'

'What do you say?' Rae repeated.

'Ha ha ha ha,' Thornton laughed. '*Wae doo ye say?* Go on, Baines, do your Scottish accent.'

I said nothing. Rae looked unamused, and somewhat aggressive.

'Come on, Thomas.' Thornton clamped his nose with two fingers and thrust his elbow up and down as if playing bagpipes. A mock-version of some highland tune came from his mouth.

Rae walked up to him and prodded him in the chest with his finger, pushing him back a little and putting an end to the ditty. 'Listen, you. Put a stop to it or I'll knock your block off.'

I think I managed to calm them both down. It was pointless to fight among ourselves; Charles was trouble enough. I tried to keep peace with everyone. We were, of course, imposing on the hospitality of the Portuguese, and I gave some things to them in return. I gave sardines to Senhor Raposo, just as I had given to Tito in return for his help ferrying me up the river the year before. The Portuguese, in return, shared what they had with us and invited us to their feasts.

The Portuguese would hold a feast for the flimsiest of reasons. Sometimes, for an important birthday, or a wedding of course, it would be a feast worthy of the name, with large quantities of food. Other times the victuals were more modest, and the event would be an excuse for drinking and merrymaking. They were great drinkers, the Portuguese,

from the lowliest soldier to Tito himself, who more than once had to be carried home from such events.

Charles, of course, was never invited, and he did not approve. For the rest of us, it was one of the few pleasures open to us. And of course this too would get us into trouble later.

We were at a feast at Senhor Pascoal's house. His daughter, Victoria, had become engaged to Senhor Torrezao. His other daughter was already engaged, so there would be a double wedding later in the year. There was brandy to be drunk, and we brought some of our mess wine.

I noticed Thornton in conversation with a woman, his age perhaps. She was, like so many of the people here, the usual mixture of blood from various continents. She was attractive, a fact that was not lost on Thornton, who was laughing at some joke with her.

'This is more like it, isn't it, Baines!' he called out. 'This beats living in a tent trying to get lazy good-for-nothings to work on the coal mine.'

I raised my glass but did not go any closer. Rae, who was nearby, did not share my hesitation, and was quickly beside them. As I turned away I could hear his raucous laugh.

We each reacted quite differently to liquor. After a few drinks, a warm fuzz would come over me, and I would be quite content to sit in the most comfortable seating I could find, and sit and watch the goings-on, participating as much as I could from my recline. Thornton became filled with exuberance, and his shyness fell away. With Rae the change took the longest. But after a time one would notice that civility was stripped away, and he became ... more coarse.

But I'm remembering Thornton here. His Portuguese seemed to become more fluent when he was drunk. He was standing on a chair, holding forth about something or other, glass of wine in hand. It was late. Even Rae was by now ready for sleep and returned to the house; I followed him soon thereafter.

The next day we asked Thornton, when Charles was not in earshot of course, what happened after we had left.

'I have no idea!' he laughed. 'None at all. I woke up this morning, in my bed, and I have no clue how I got here. My head feels dreadful, but at least it is the wine and not fever.'

Rae chuckled. 'You sound like a sailor,' he said, 'don't you think, Mr Baines?'

'Aye aye,' I replied.

This wildness of Thornton's: when had it begun? He had seemed just a scared boy in the early part of the expedition. Perhaps it was the Doctor who kept him in check. Certainly it had something to do with his decision to throw it in.

In the afternoon Thornton and I were sitting on the verandah when Charles appeared.

'Do you plan to loaf here all day, doing nothing?' he said.

'We're not feeling well,' Thornton said.

'No? I wonder why.'

'I haven't recovered from my sickness out there,' Thornton said. 'Not properly, whatever you might think.'

'It seems to me that the whole town is recovering. It's a bit much, don't you think, that you go on skylarking, carousing with the Portuguese and doing nothing constructive, while earning a government salary?'

'Mr Livingstone,' I said, 'I hardly think you can say I've been doing nothing constructive. I've taken my observations this morning, and, if you'd been near the harbour, you'd see I've been doing good work on the boats.'

'Oh have you now? I'll go and have a look at those, and see what kind of progress you're making.'

I struggled to stifle a snigger. Charles would evaluate *my* work on the boats? He wouldn't know a rudder from a gunwale.

'And you, Mr Thornton, all I hear about you is that you spend your life drinking.'

'And what of it?'

'You are supposed to be out at the coal – have you forgotten? You have seemed perfectly well of late, so I can't think why you are still here.'

Thornton slumped back in his chair. 'I am not well: not when I am out there. Dr Kirk will confirm when he is back.'

'Oh really. I would imagine your sickness is entirely self-inflicted. And a disgrace to the English name. I am busy writing a letter to my brother at the moment. It would be remiss of me not to mention this to him.'

It was the only real weapon he had: to report us to Livingstone. Livingstone was back at Sena now, on his way to or from the sea, and was in communication with his brother. Who knew how much Charles was exaggerating? Well, later on it became fairly clear, but at that stage we could only suspect.

A week or so later, Thornton received written orders from the Doctor to go out into the field again. He would visit the coal mine, but he would also work at a geological survey

of the area. 'Ah, well,' he said, 'this might be the last I see of this part of the world for a while. I have a theory I would like to test.'

He was packing and then he was gone, and I was alone in my room. I worked at the boat and took my daily observations, and tried to stay out of Charles's way. But I could not always do so.

And so the day came, when what had been bubbling under the surface finally came to the top. I was in my room, enjoying a cold evening that marked a welcome change in the seasons. Charles appeared in the doorway. He did not knock, to let me know he was there; he simply spoke.

'Mr Baines. I know what you are up to.'

I asked him what he meant.

'What are you getting in return?' he whispered. 'Tell me that. Is it money, or do they pay you in some ... underhanded manner?'

'Excuse me?' I said.

'You know exactly what I am referring to.'

I said nothing, because I did know. The diminishing stores. He had been hinting at it for weeks.

'I'm keeping stock, Baines,' he threatened.

'Mr Livingstone,' I replied. 'You accuse me of stealing. How dare you?'

'How dare *you*, Mr Baines. How dare *you*! Did you think you would get away with it, filching our things – Her Majesty's things, truth be told – when you're the one supposed to be looking after them?'

I didn't realize then that this ludicrous claim would grow into the thing it did, that it would result in my being here now, and not there. I thought it was yet another act of ridiculousness on Charles's part. I did not take it seriously, but, alas, he did.

'I have given things to the Portuguese, yes,' I said, 'as I'm sure your brother would want me to.'

'Oh, really. You know what my brother would want.'

'I know he would want me to have given to Major Tito, and I did. Twenty tins of sardines – which is a small token for the aid he gave us, getting me up the river when I was on the pinnacle.'

'And what else?'

'What else? Senhor Raposo. Two tins of sardines. In return for the food he has given us, food which you have enjoyed at the dinner table, I must add.'

A smile broke on his face. 'Very clever, Baines.' He held up a finger. 'We will talk more about this.'

Who knows if that night he lay awake and realized he had created a way of getting rid of me, seeing the top leaves of a little shoot peeping through the earth and knowing that it would grow into something. Or had he been nourishing it secretly all the time before?

I cannot know. But I do know that the plan was now in place, and he would take advantage of the others' absence – wherever they were on the Shiré – and wait until I was at my weakest to launch his attack.

University of Cape Town

We close the letters for England. Our Kroomen are grumbling a lot. I suggested to the Doctor that if we kept no account of the dates, when rum and other things to which they are entitled, run out, they will give us some bother settling up afterwards but does not seem to approve of it for he only ran off on their taking more sugar at first than the ration and passes that to Baines, as storekeeper. Baines is not cut out for storekeeper, that is certain, but the Doctor's own utter want of method in these matters, it being his practical principle that when a thing is done, why there is no more, would completely confound any one in keeping exact lists. When Baines is at Tette, under Mr. L. and if one believes what they hear, then it is utterly impossible.

– John Kirk, journal, 5 June 1859

University of Cape Town

I must go outside. Must I not? Why, why must I? I am stumbling down the staircase. My head is booming. If I run, will I escape the noise? I pass the houses of the settlement, then the huts. It is pitch dark and no one is about. Who is making such a racket at this hour?

It has started raining. This is no good. I am not well, and it won't do me any good to get wet. I find myself making my way to the large baobab, to the clearing.

Someone is there, just beyond the bushes. They need my help. I want to cry out, 'Help is at hand!', but I cannot form the words out of the dusty fragments in my mouth. Perhaps it is best that I approach silently in any case. The element of surprise. In case their distress is the work of some troublemaker. Though surely they would be able to hear the drum that beats inside my head. Is it possible that I am the only one who can hear it? So loud.

I take a few steps closer, and I'm able to see into the clearing.

Oh God.

The woman is on all fours. She is facing away from me, but her head is turned back a little, so I can see part of her face. Do I recognize her? Was she at one of the feasts, talking to Thornton? The man – his trousers are pulled down to his knees. His skin is so white next to hers. Red hair. On his arm a tattoo.

Good God. Rae.

Above the booming inside my head I hear the slapping sound of skin as the man – Rae, good God, can it be? – pulls her thighs towards him with each thrust of his own. They are moving rhythmically, and ever faster, a frenzy.

She has seen me. Our eyes lock. My heart leaps up into my throat. Is it possible to choke this way? I cannot be here.

I take a few steps back, stumbling. I turn and run, away from the baobab. They are after me: the shadows. I lose my footing and fall headlong onto the ground. I must be sweating excessively, because the soil forms muddy patches on my skin. I stagger to my feet and sickness wells up from within me. I vomit on the ground.

I cannot stop here. They are after me, from all directions I can hear them. Run. I must run. The sound of my breathing is deafening; I can hear nothing else any more. Does this mean they are no longer there? I reach the huts – but I cannot stop – then the houses – and I continue. I must be safe. They cannot have followed me here.

I approach the house and hesitate outside. I cannot go in like this.

There. There is someone. It is Shibante, Major Tito's slave.

'Agua,' I say to him. 'Agua.' I need water to wash myself.

He darts off and someone stirs from the house. I hope it is Rae. What a relief it would be if Rae were to walk out now.

But no, it is Charles.

'Mr Baines, what the devil—?' He comes closer. 'Good heavens, man. What is the matter with you? What have you done to yourself?'

'I—' What do I say to him? I have no idea. 'I—'

With a patter of footsteps Shibante returns with a pail of water. Scooping out the water, I wash my face, then my arms.

'Yes,' says Charles, 'clean yourself. You're not coming inside in that state. What *have* you been up to?'

By the time I am finished he is gone and I can go to my room in peace. I close the door and collapse on the bed.

I throw off the covers after a few moments, burning with heat. I lie there, tossing, turning.

The staircase looms before my eyes, and I start climbing it again. So often climbing that staircase, but I never reach the top. I don't want to find what is there. Not again. Always I am pulled away, or I pull myself.

But this time I climb higher, higher. I reach the door. Do not open it, Thomas. You know not to open it. But I do. Father Harding turns, a quick flick of the neck. The expression on his face is so furious, so shocked, that it strikes me like a punch. It takes me a moment to recognize the boy at his knees. Stevenson. Hector Stevenson!

I turn and run. Run down the stairs before the shadows can catch me.

In the morning, the headache is still there, but otherwise I don't feel as bad as I have been. I must have fallen asleep quickly; I did not hear when Rae came to the house.

Getting to my feet is about all I can do. I am weak.

My clothes from last night – filthy – are lying on top of a pile of trousers that I've worn once or twice. Everything is dirty now.

'I'd like these washed,' I say to Jacinta, the woman we pay to clean for us.

I look in the cupboard. My shirts have a musty smell. They haven't been washed since ... not since the roof fell in, some even longer ago than that – I don't know when. I'll have everything washed. It is a warm morning, with a slight breeze.

‘Un momento,’ I say, holding out my hand. ‘Espere.’ I want her to wash everything. She nods and hurries out of the room.

I close my eyes and quickly open them again.

The woman returns with a large basket, into which I fling my clothes – everything, except some clean items for the day.

‘What’s going on?’ It’s Rae, standing at the door.

I glance at him but immediately look away. I cannot look him in the eye. Can I be sure, that I saw what I saw? It’s unthinkable, now, in the daylight. Was it the fever? It has worked strange effects on my mind.

‘Laundry,’ I say. ‘I’m having these things washed. Do you have anything that needs cleaning?’

He murmurs, and is gone. He returns with a shirt, trousers and underpants, and drops them in the basket.

‘Is that all?’ I say.

‘Mm. The rest is fine.’

When he is gone, I peer at the trousers lying there. Are they the ones I saw around his knees? If I *did* see. What colour were they? Did they have a colour, or did I dream it?

The woman is back, so I retreat from the basket. We negotiate a price.

There is a light sweat on my forehead, even though the day is not yet hot. I feel dizzy. The fever is not yet gone. I must rest.

My condition worsens in the afternoon. There are sores around my mouth, and very quickly – can I feel them with my tongue? – they spread, inside my mouth, on my tongue. It is agony to swallow. The fever returns, and draws all colour out of the world. My mouth burns, my head beats, my stomach retches and I spit out long strands of saliva.

I don’t know what time it is when someone knocks on the door, what day. It is one of the Makololo, who, seeing me, vanishes instantly, and then Charles is there. I must say that seeing him brings some relief, in spite of ... everything.

I try to speak. ‘Water.’

What a strange croaking sound my voice makes.

He shouts to the doorway, and a servant appears with a glass of water.

I drink, deep, deep gulps.

‘Well, Mr Baines,’ he says. ‘What a state you are in.’

What a state. State.

‘What were you doing up there, Thomas?’

I flinch at his angry voice.

‘What were you doing? Breaking in, were you? Trying to break in?’

I shake my head rapidly, my chin rubbing against my chest.

‘Good thing I was there, isn’t it, Thomas? Otherwise who knows what you would have done.’

I say nothing. I don’t know how I would begin to make a sound.

‘You mustn’t lie, Thomas. You mustn’t tell lies. You’ll never be a real man if you’re a fibber.’

I force my eyes open again, to drive out the vision, his trousers around his knees, white buttocks moving in and out of shadow.

‘But we understand each other, don’t we, Thomas? Or do I have you wrong?’

‘I’m not,’ I cry, finding my voice somewhere.

‘What’s that?’ he says.

‘I’m not a fibber!’

His voice is gentler now. ‘No? Then tell me the truth.’

The truth. I forget exactly.

‘You were stealing, weren’t you?’ he says.

What did I see? The boy. The tattoo. Down the stairs. Only when I am at the bottom do I remember the girl. Where?

Charles explains it to me and tells me not to worry. He asks me to explain it back to him to make sure that I have understood.

But I’m not sure I have. The details have all drifted away. All I’m left with is the feeling I felt when I saw it.

One evening at ten he sat muttering a little to himself then said 'Mr. Livingstone I want to say that I gave Tito 20 boxes sardines, Raposo 2 etc., I also gave cheese, hams, oil' and he was about to confess something worse when he stopped and said 'Oh dear, I wish you would put me in confinement!' Why? 'Because I have such thoughts and such feelings.'

– Charles Livingstone, letter to Harriette Livingstone, 26 June 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, June 1859

I don't remember the words I spoke to Charles. My head was affected: how could I? If I recall anything about the incident it is that he accused me of certain things and I – in my delirium – I repeated them back to him.

'You have stolen from the stores.'

'Stolen from the stores?'

'You have given away sugar.'

'Given away sugar?'

It would have gone something like that.

Whatever the case, he took it to be a confession, a declaration that I had done wrong, and he used it against me.

There was also, of course, the trouble with the whaleboat. We had moved by now, into the house of one of the merchants – because news had come that the new governor was on his way, although there was still no sign of him. The new house was smaller than the residencia. More than before, we lived on top of each other.

The whaleboat, you must understand, was my escape. It enabled me to escape physically from the confines of the settlement. But, more importantly, it put me back on the river, on the water. I am a King's Lynn man, so it is when I'm on the water that I feel closest to nature, and to my history.

Thornton was away, but I was happy going on my own, perhaps happier. A feature of the landscape would present itself to me, a certain play of light and shadow, and I would drop anchor and take out my sketchbook, and with pencil or watercolours I would give it another life, one that would survive the passing of the day or the shifting of the seasons, even – the thought crosses my mind often – one that would outlive me.

I was still not yet well, but the worst of the sickness had passed. An excursion on the boat did not require me to exert myself too vigorously, and the fresh air did me good.

I came back one afternoon having taken the boat a short distance upstream. I'd taken sketches and I wanted to colour them, before the light faded.

I was deep in my work when I noticed the wind. The windows were rattling. A storm was coming.

The boat!

I leapt to my feet. I had left the mast standing.

'Come! Come!' I cried to a couple of Makololo men who were standing outside. I ran towards the shore, turning now and then to make sure the men were keeping up. A few locals were following, drawn by the excitement.

As I approached the shore I saw what I feared. The wind had caught the mast and capsized the boat. It lay askew, the starboard side submerged, the mast floating in the water, away from the shore. The water was churned up by the squall, waves beating against the stricken vessel.

Should I jump in, I wondered, and try to right her? No, the water would be too cold, and there was no warmth left in the day. I would make myself deathly ill – and the worst of the damage had already been done.

I sent a man to climb onto the deck and fix a line to the mast. Slowly, with the help of those around, we pulled the mast round to the shore side, so the boat would be safer.

Charles had arrived, summoned by one of the Makololo. He was standing there slowly shaking his head. He looked up at me and said nothing. His expression was stern and important, but I could see the glimmer of a smile beneath it. Or am I imagining it?

The next day I was ordered to stop working on the boats. Now I was stuck in Tete with Charles and Rae.

Rae told me how difficult Charles was, that he was always moaning about something or other. Rae said he couldn't wait to be accompany the launch again and escape this place. But then I would see him in Charles's company, looking quite content. Rae must have understood he had to stay on the right side of one Livingstone to remain in the good books of the other.

I kept away from Charles, and so did Thornton when he returned from his survey. The two of us lay low, keeping out of trouble. And so we managed for a week or two.

Everything changed, of course, when they returned.

On landing at Tette, we found all well but there had been a good deal of sickness in our absence and things had not gone on smoothly. Poor Baines has had many touches and his head seems often to have been quite out of equilibrium. He has done many things which, without this excuse, would have been very difficult of explanation.

– John Kirk, journal, June 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, 23–29 June 1859

There is something about their expressions, when the *MaRobert* comes close enough for me to see, that says they have achieved something. At no point until now have I seen that kind of expression on any of us. And I cannot say it pleases me.

Livingstone is standing tall at the bows. He is not smiling – I’ve hardly ever seen him smile – but his face seems animated with a look of pure determination. His eyes pass over me, as I expect them to, and search for his brother, perhaps, or his faithful Makololo.

Kirk is at the paddle wheel, with Walker beside him, and some of the Kroomen. He meets my gaze. There is some sort of distance between us now. Four months is a long time to be apart. It would take days simply to relate our experiences to one another. He, of course, would have much more to tell than I would.

There is commotion as the launch docks and they disembark. The expeditionary Makololo are greeting their settled fellows. The Kroomen are working to secure the boat. Charles is beside the Doctor.

Kirk approaches me. His beard is ragged, his hair wild, and there is fire in his eyes.

‘Welcome back,’ I say, and attempt a smile.

He nods. ‘Is all ... well?’

‘All well,’ I say, though it is not true. ‘All well. And this journey – it was a success?’

Kirk’s attention is pulled away by one of the Kroomen, who stands at the gunwale with an elephant tusk on his shoulders.

‘No, leave that there,’ Kirk orders. ‘Leave it onboard. But bring the rice down.’ He turns back to me. ‘A success, yes. We’ve found a great lake, and just beyond that there is another, a greater one, where we will go next.’ He is smiling, but it seems he is putting effort into not smiling more broadly.

I see that Rowe is hobbling a little as he climbs off the launch. I must be looking at him quizzically, because Kirk says: ‘I’ll tell you later.’ And then he is off.

The Livingstone brothers pass me. ‘Meddling?’ the Doctor is asking. ‘What meddling?’

My body jolts as I hear this, but quickly I realize they are not talking about me.

‘A Proclamation, brother, drawn up during your absence. It prohibits free persons of colour from carrying arms in and near the Villa.’

They walk off the same way as Kirk but I can still hear Livingstone's voice for a few moments more. 'I shall write to Tito about it this very day. My men shall not be subjected ...'

Tom Toby comes towards me. He is beaming a smile and nodding his head.

'How are you, Toby?' I ask.

He grimaces and shrugs. 'Hard work,' he says. 'Me good. Me good.'

Even Toby has been out exploring.

Rae has discovered the cause of Rowe's discomfort before I have been able to. He is laughing so much that he can hardly get the story out to Thornton and me.

'And then – and then' – he makes a slashing movement with his hand.

Rowe, he tells us, had absent-mindedly sliced branches of a *Euphorbia* tree with his knife while attending to a call of nature. The sap had run on his hands and he'd wiped it on his skin.

'Mostly,' Rae points downwards, 'on his little fellow. Next thing it was on fire! Kirk says it was covered in blisters for days.' He wheezes with laughter. 'He says it lost all human form. Rowe had to spend all in his time sitting in a tub of water!'

I can't resist a chuckle myself. Serves him right for going out exploring without any knowledge of the environment.

'It took days' – Rae is in convulsions now – 'days before he could put on trousers again! He's been wearing the Highland costume until now!'

In the afternoon, the launch is offloaded. There is a great quantity of native rice, which will be welcome here. Kirk has made an extensive collection of plants and seeds.

'You'll need to watch out for the white ants,' I say. 'They attack everything.'

'Nothing can be worse than the cockroaches on the *MaRobert!*' Kirk replies.

I see Livingstone and his brother standing at the damaged whaleboat. Charles is pointing at its deck. I'm too far away to see Livingstone's expression, but I imagine he is frowning with disapproval. Damn Charles!

It's a squeeze in the house now that we are all together again. There is not as much space here as there was in the residencia. But Livingstone plans to be here for a short time only.

'We must waste no time here,' he says, at dinner. 'There is nothing worth while here. Two weeks. If we can leave again sooner than that, so much the better.'

It is the first time we have all gathered for dinner in months. Kirk and Livingstone look exhausted but spirited. Charles and Rae are full of questions about their journey, about the lake they reached, Lake Shirwa.

‘It is magnificent,’ says Kirk. ‘If you stand on the shore you may as well be looking at the sea.’

‘Lake Ngami is a pond compared to it,’ adds the Doctor. ‘But this is the smaller of the two. The other ... well; it is the Nyassa of the old maps, reaching all the way to the equator.’

Thornton sits silently. I notice Charles peering at him, and when I’m not looking I can sense Charles staring at me.

‘And the people,’ I ask, ‘have they become friendlier now?’

My voice sounds strange to me; it sounds, in a strange way, hollow. How much has Charles said to Livingstone? Does my voice sound like that of a guilty man?

‘If one makes a brief appearance and then returns some time later, they become used to one.’ Livingstone speaks as if he is giving a lecture to a stranger, not talking to me. ‘It’s how I have always won the trust of people in Africa.’

‘They were friendly,’ Kirk adds. ‘This time they put down their arms, and some of the braver ones came on board the launch.’

They had gone as far as *MaRobert* could go, and then Kirk and Livingstone struck out overland, reaching the lake after a fortnight’s march. The land, Livingstone says, was immensely fertile, with cotton growing abundantly, and people could be seen all about spinning and wearing it. Even the chiefs were seen picking it. They had then gone back down to the river mouth, in the hope of meeting a ship with salt provisions, but none came. Livingstone’s letter must not have reached the authorities.

There has been, however, a small mail, which came down from Quilimane, including a despatch from Lord Malmesbury.

‘It seems there is an earlier mail that’s still on the way,’ Kirk says.

Livingstone clears his throat. ‘Bedingfeld, apparently, has declared the difficulties of the Zambesi to be “insurmountable”. It seems it is now fashionable for naval men to boggle at difficulties – ever since the affair of the Baltic fleet. Our naval heroes used to go at difficulties, and that is what I mean to do.’

They will leave as soon as they can to go back to Nyassa, which Livingstone has learnt is separated from Shirwa by a narrow strip of land, only five or six miles wide.

‘Not,’ Livingstone adds, ‘the lake that Senhor Candido claims to have visited. The directions he gave me were in a completely different direction. I don’t know which lake he could have found, but it was not this one.’

‘If he found any lake at all,’ Charles snorts.

Rae nods and grins. Thornton sits quietly. He looks unhappy.

Livingstone takes a deep breath. ‘The Portuguese want to lay claim to all our discoveries. They plan to build a custom house at Luabo, after *we* were the ones who proved it could be used as an entrance, and they want to start a settlement at the confluence of the Shiré, to lay claim to all discoveries to the north. And that after they have *never*’ – he taps the table to emphasize the point – ‘had any presence on the north bank before. Whatsoever.’

‘And there is,’ Kirk adds, ‘this plan of the Germans.’

‘And the Germans,’ Livingstone mutters.

Charles grunts indignantly. I wonder what this is all about, this matter with the Germans, but I don’t ask.

‘But,’ Livingstone says, ‘we shall concentrate our efforts on Lake Nyassa nevertheless. If Burton has beaten us to it, thanks to our naval donkey, at least we have a lake of our own and a shorter route to his.’ These last words are murmured, as if to himself. Now he looks up and speaks more clearly. ‘Nyassa. That is where we must put our efforts until our new steamer comes. We cannot tackle Kebrabasa again until then.’

Kebrabasa? What is he saying?

I look up and meet Charles’s gaze. He knows as well as I do that Kebrabasa cannot be passed. Livingstone knows it too. No new boat will alter that fact. Charles’s expression is fierce, as if challenging me to – what? – speak my mind and say what he knows I am thinking? I look away. Am I to be considered the same as Bedingfeld, one who boggles at difficulties?

‘In the meantime we shall continue toiling, cutting wood until it is the death of us, while others sit here doing *nothing*.’ He does not look at me as he says this, but I feel the force of it, like a punch in the chest. I look down; my cheeks are burning.

Well, blast you, Dr Livingstone. I would go with you. I would far prefer to be painting these great vistas rather than be stuck here with Charles.

After a moment’s silence, a moaning sound comes from Thornton. All eyes turn to him. He is hanging his head slightly.

‘Will you excuse me?’ he says softly. ‘I’m not feeling well. I think I should go to my room.’

He seems to have deteriorated all of a sudden. Charles, I see, is peering at him through slitted eyes.

‘Off you go,’ Livingstone says, ‘if you must.’

‘Thank you,’ Thornton croaks, and shuffles slowly out of the room.

I doubt he is really feeling sick now, not as sick as he seems. He still wants to be invalided home, so he can be discharged honourably. Perhaps he is re-enacting his symptoms so the doctors can see how bad it has been.

‘Hmf,’ Charles snorts, and looks knowingly at Livingstone.

‘I’d best have a look at him,’ Kirk says. His words are addressed to Livingstone, but the Doctor’s eyes are tightly closed. He says nothing for a while, and no one else says anything either.

When Livingstone speaks it is a relief and a shock. ‘That boy has done nothing to provide us with coal, or with geological knowledge of the country. How – I ask you – are we supposed to proceed if we don’t have coal to fuel our vessel? Between him and the sham boat builders in Liverpool and Bedingfeld who forced it upon us ... how are we supposed to get anywhere, without chopping down forests of wood!’ With this he thumps the table, and I flinch.

His face is fiery red, and a few dots of saliva are caught in the sides of his moustache. He breathes deeply. No one else in the room moves a muscle.

I look down at my plate and sit as still as I can. It is an eternity before Dr Kirk breaks the silence. ‘I will have a look at him. In the meantime we will do everything we can to set off again swiftly.’

‘Any news of this new governor?’ Charles asks quietly.

‘No,’ Kirk replies. ‘Only rumours.’

‘Well,’ Charles says, ‘they must have been strong rumours, because we were turfed out rather abruptly.’

He winces and clutches the side of his jaw.

Kirk frowns. ‘Should I take a look at that too? Tomorrow?’

Charles nods rapidly.

‘A woman was taken by an alligator a couple of days ago,’ Rae says. ‘On the bank, doing washing, and then – whump! – she was gone. And she’s not the first.’

‘They do nothing about it,’ says Kirk. ‘A fence – some sort of barrier – a little way into the water, and all this would stop.’

‘Ah, but they explain it by their superstitions,’ Livingstone says. ‘They believe that a woman, if she refuses the advances of a man, can have a curse put on her, and the alligator will take her.’

Everyone is shaking their head.

‘This is why the good Lord’s Gospel must be spread among these people,’ Livingstone adds, ‘to put an end to such primitive beliefs.’

The next day, Livingstone tethers a dog near the waterline. It is tied to a metal chain with a large hook at the end, by which, it is hoped, an alligator may be caught. The dog is bait.

I watch it from a distance, yelping as it tries to free itself. Best not think about it. It was a wild dog, I’m told, a stray, and had been preying on the villagers’ chickens. But it troubles me, that it is tied there, waiting to be snapped up by those terrible jaws.

I walk to the house and into the room and see Thornton sitting on the bed, with Kirk standing over him and peering into his eyes.

‘It doesn’t sound like anything to me,’ Kirk says, shaking his head. ‘Your symptoms ... well, they don’t make any sense. Are you sure you’re not ... willing yourself not to be able to work?’

‘I’m not making it up, Dr Kirk. I haven’t felt well. And what about these spots before my eyes?’

‘That, I’m afraid, may have a different explanation.’ Kirk glances at me briefly before returning his attention to Thornton. ‘I’m told that you have been indulging rather heavily with the Portuguese, even to the point when you remember nothing the following morning?’

Thornton looks at me, no doubt thinking this is something I told Kirk.

Kirk has what looks like blood on the sleeve of his coat. He sees me staring at it.

‘Charles’s blood, not Thornton’s,’ he explains. ‘I pulled a tooth of his this morning. It was in a dreadful state.’

I nod. Kirk returns to his current patient.

‘You, Mr Thornton, need to be careful about your health. If you carry on going to these kinds of feasts, and indulging as you have been, you’re going to do damage to your eyesight. That’s what those spots in your eyes tell me. *Muscae volitantes*. You might even lose your sight entirely.’

On Sunday we have a service at the house. The left side of Charles's face is all misshapen, and he looks thoroughly miserable. When his brother looks at him he manages a smile.

Livingstone is speaking to him and Kirk. 'I've received official thanks from the Governor General of Mozambique for the medical work done by Dr Kirk at Shupanga,' he says. 'It came to me from Admiral Grey in the Cape. Well done, Dr Kirk. It befits us well when we act as Englishmen should.'

'What of this proclamation, brother?' Charles whispers, with a gesture towards the Portuguese fort.

Livingstone nods. 'It refers to a licence for arms – to furnish the means to build this custom house on the Luabo. I have written to Major Sicard this morning, requesting that my Makololo not be included in the general population of the country.'

Thornton appears, looking a little better than earlier.

Livingstone continues. 'And I hardly think we should contribute to something that passes the benefit of *our* discoveries to the Portuguese.'

I glance at Kirk. He does not seem convinced by the Doctor's words, but he hides his feelings.

'Mr Thornton,' Livingstone says, 'how good of you to join us. The good Lord must be immensely pleased that you have sacrificed the comfort of your bed to come and worship him.'

Thornton smiles sheepishly, but there is no smile in the Doctor. His expression is hard with disapproval.

In the evening, quite late, I go for a walk by the riverside. The moon is close to full, but there are clouds in the sky, sometimes obscuring it, revealing its light when they pass. I can see the water glistening. They are off to Lake Nyassa. The fabled lake. How far from our original objectives. But what I would give to join them for the next part of the journey! Is it possible? No. I am to be left here, again. Confined in this outpost.

I am close to the water now: I must be careful.

The moon vanishes again and so does the path in front of me. I hear a moaning sound. It is the dog.

As I approach, it growls, a low growl. I move closer and reach out my hand and it begins to whimper.

It is a ragged-looking creature. I can't quite tell if those are strange markings or dirt or mange on its back. The water laps against the grassy bank a few feet away.

Poor creature, I think, and turn away.

But I can't walk very far. In a moment I'm back beside it. The rope is tied firmly around its neck and chest. The knot is tight and well tied, and it takes some time to loosen it. What on earth am I doing? If someone were to see me: Charles, or the Doctor! Even one of their Makololo. Anyone!

My hands have become clumsy. I glance about. The danger from the land is now as great as the danger from the water.

The thump of my heartbeat, this fear ... I am a boy again, running down the stairs, pursued by the shadows, hiding in the dark. 'Thomas?' comes the Father's cry. 'Thomas? I know you're there.' His voice is far away, but comes closer, and the footsteps. Tap. Tap. Tap. 'Boy?'

I hear a sound from the bushes nearby. The moon has come out from behind the clouds. I am probably quite visible to anyone now.

My fingers are shaking, slowing me down as I unfasten the last loops of the knot. Quickly now, quickly.

There! The dog is free. It bucks and lurches forward, and without a look back at me, it bounds away.

I look down at the two strands of rope in my hands. What now? There will be all sorts of commotion about this. Who untied the dog?

The shape of the rope still shows exactly where the knot was. I start tying them together again. The same knot – it was a bowline knot, and I can tie it exactly the same way, left over right, right over left ...

There, it is done. No one will know the difference. Still crouched down, I back away from the trap and scurry towards the cover of the bushes.

Somewhere, in the night, the dog is running free.

It is after breakfast when someone notices the dog's absence. One of the Makololo comes running to the house, crying out and pointing towards the river.

Without a word, Livingstone is striding towards the river, followed by the others. It would do no good if I remained behind, it would look suspicious, so I join them.

The chain lies like a snake on the ground, the rope attached to it, with my knot on the end. In the light of day I can see what looks like a footprint – my footprint – near the scene, so I step to the side and put my foot upon it. I look around for others.

'Could it have been taken?' Charles says, looking at the water.

'There would surely be blood on the rope,' Kirk replies.

'Has it been untied then?'

'No,' says Rae, fingering the rope, 'it is still knotted.'

'I wonder,' Livingstone murmurs, 'if the witch doctors had something to do with it. They were opposed to our ... intervention.'

'But they would have needed to tie the knot again,' Rae says. 'This is a bowline knot. They wouldn't know how to tie a knot like this.'

Oh no! Have I made a mistake with the knot? I should have left it!

'Could the dog,' I suggest, trying hard to control my voice, 'have pulled itself free?'

'Unlikely,' Rae says. 'I tied it too tightly for that.'

So Rae was the one who tied up the dog. Of course. I should have recognized it as the work of a sea man.

'There is some mischief here,' Livingstone says, and takes a deep breath.

Something inside wishes me to blurt out: *It was me! It was me! I freed the dog!* I begin to fear that I will give myself away, with some reaction, some facial expression. So I look down at the chain, and avoid looking anyone in the eye.

I am relieved when the party disperses and I can go off on my own. I wonder where the dog is now. It had better not return. What if it recognized me, the scent of the one who saved it, and came to me in trust?

In the afternoon, when the sun is low in the sky, I find Thornton sitting on the river bank, throwing stones into the water. I can see from his demeanour that there is some heaviness about him.

He glances up as I approach, and then looks down again.

'Well, the good doctors did not want to hear about my sickness, but I've been separated nonetheless.'

Surely I have misheard. 'Separated?' I say.

'Separated from the expedition,' he says. 'For not doing my duty.' He holds up a letter that he's been clutching in his hand. 'I have my discharge, but there is nothing honourable about it.'

'I don't ...' I'm not sure how to reply. I cannot believe it. *Dismissed?* Am I to be next? 'It's that bloody Charles, isn't it?'

Thornton shrugs.

'What ... what are you going to do?'

'He said – Livingstone – he said I was dismissed but that if I continued to work it would be better for me.' He looks up. 'I don't know. I don't think I will leave

immediately. Perhaps I can observe the landscape – but on my own, without ...’ he gestures to the settlement ‘... answering to *him*.’

I cannot believe that it has come to this. First Bedingfeld and now Thornton. How could Livingstone dismiss his geologist? Charles must have poisoned him against us. I must watch my step.

‘But I shall not stay here any longer,’ he says, standing up. There is a wildness in his eyes.

‘You are ... going?’ I say.

‘Away, yes. For a while. Away from them.’

With that he strides off towards the house.

What is he going to do? What will *I* do if I am dismissed? It is unthinkable. The disgrace would be unbearable.

Next morning, Thornton is finishing packing. He has secured a guide from Tito.

‘Will you be all right?’ I say. ‘Are you not leaving too hastily?’

He shakes his head. His brow is pulled in a frown. ‘Look after Crab,’ he says.

I nod. ‘Yes, of course.’

At midday he leaves, and I feel very much alone.

Tette, 25 June, 1859

Sir,

On our arrival here in November last I gave you in addition to my written instructions an order to proceed with the geological examination of this district as a starting point and, the order not having been obeyed, I made every allowance for your suffering from prickly heat and other little illnesses. But at a subsequent period I urged on you the necessity of your making some exertion to fulfill the object of your appointment as mining geologist, and both Dr Kirk and I were of opinion that such exercise would have benefited your health. You were also informed that Major Secard was ready to send you to all the interesting geological points in the district and I gave you written orders so that there should be no excuse.

According to your own report you did as little geology as possible, though your people had orders to take you to all the coal seams already known. Seeing you disinclined to work at general geology, I set you to run a shaft into one of the coal seams to ascertain the quality at a proper distance in, which you told me was 20 or 30 feet. I visited you on the 14 March last and you were ordered to proceed with this work. You returned from it on the 3rd of May, having with the people employed accomplished only 13 feet nine inches. And, though in perfect health, you have continued idle ever since. Hearing that you were remaining here idle, I sent an order from Senna for you to go on with the geological examination of the district. This you have not attended to. I am therefore compelled, by your repeated disobedience of orders, to inform you that your salary is stopped from the third of May, the date at which you retired from one duty and declined beginning another. It is with great reluctance that I take this step but your failure to do your duty forces me, however unwilling, to do mine to H.M. Government and separate you from the Expedition.

I am etc.

David Livingstone

Tete, June–July 1859

First Bedingfeld, then Thornton. I was next. I was certain of it. Did I behave in a way that brought this about? Perhaps. Livingstone would claim that I acted as a guilty man. No. I acted as a man in fear.

I did not see very much of him. He was busy: visiting the coal mine, arranging places for the stores, preparing for the next trip, packing, writing.

Then he was before me. It was a fortnight or so after Thornton had left.

He stood there, his consul's cap on his head, and looked down at me, a frown on his brow.

'Mr Baines,' he said. 'I must have a word with you.'

I hoped – because a man always hopes – that I would get orders to accompany the expedition to Lake Nyassa, that all the troubles of the previous months would be waved aside. But above all I feared that I would be sent off. Was this the moment?

'A word, Dr Livingstone?' I managed to say.

'About the stores.'

A cold chill came over me. I had to defend myself.

'It is not true, Dr Livingstone, that I have stolen anything.'

'No? But things have gone astray, have they not.'

'I believe things might have—'

'Government property, Mr Baines.' He raised his finger to emphasize the word.

'Government property. You do understand how serious this is?'

'I am sorry, Dr Livingstone ...'

'Sorry?' He stared at me for a few moments, and then looked down. 'And what are you sorry for?'

'That things have gone ... astray. I haven't stolen, but I am ... sorry.'

'Yes ... But how, Mr Baines, do I explain this?'

'Explain this?' I asked. 'How do *you* explain ...?'

'To my ... To the government. To the Foreign Secretary. How do I explain what has happened to government supplies – that were under *your* care?'

'You know, Dr Livingstone, that I have not always been well enough to look after the stores properly. There have been times when I have been unable to leave my bed. Who knows what could have happened then?'

‘Who knows?’ Livingstone echoed. ‘Only the good Lord knows. But what can we do, since the stores are your responsibility?’

I had to find a way of making good, to stop him from doing what he’d done with the others.

‘If I knew what is missing,’ I ventured, ‘perhaps I could ... pay for it?’

‘That,’ he said, holding out a hand, ‘will not be necessary.’

‘No?’ I said.

‘I know, Mr Baines, that your head has not been right.’

‘Thank you, Dr Livingstone.’

‘I have seen it before on this expedition.’

‘Yes.’

‘Your last trip to Kebrabasa was ... too much for you. It struck me that you saw things there that only a wandering mind could have seen, and not all you remembered about it was reliable.’

What was he saying? That I had reported falsely? But I did not argue with him. My position was too fragile.

He explained that he had arranged a place for the stores, a room rented from the padre, and that I was to keep an eye on them while the party was away. If anything happened to me, if I felt the fever return, I was to tell Major Sicard so that he could take charge.

I thanked him and told him I would do so.

‘And Mr Baines.’

‘Yes, Doctor.’

‘You will paint no more Portuguese likenesses. Is that clear?’

‘Yes, Doctor. No more.’

My relationship with Kirk had changed. There was a formality about it now, both of us being conscious about his position as second-in-command. Now that Thornton had gone, Rae was the only person I had left to talk to frankly. Rae, I knew, kept on the right side of Charles – and Dr Livingstone. He was a difficult fellow, Rae, but he was my most important ally now.

Rae told me that he and Charles were to go on the next trip, and that they would leave in a day or two. I was now the only one to be left here – me alone – to guard the stores.

The stores! What a curse they were. I wanted to travel. I wanted to sketch, to paint! But I was stuck here, looking after oil, butter, sugar and calico, engaged in a futile battle to keep the white ants away from it all. But at least I had escaped dismissal.

I told Rae what the Doctor had said to me, that he seemed to have overlooked Charles's accusations and that he had decided to keep me on. I told him how much I wished to accompany them on the next trip. Should I speak openly to the Doctor, I asked Rae. If Tito could find someone to look after the stores if I became sick, could he not do so for the whole time I was away?

Rae pulled a face, as if he had bad news that he was reluctant to give me.

'What is it?' I asked.

He looked around to see if anyone was in earshot.

'Be careful,' he said. 'Charles will do anything to have you removed. He may try something. I would be careful about making any demands. Just watch yourself.'

Rae was right, and I was glad for his advice. Whenever I saw Charles, which was as seldom as I could, he would look at me with a hateful expression. He was clearly disappointed that his brother had not sacked me too. Would he manage to convince him to do so?

It was an uneasy time, and I could not wait for them to go. Whereas before, whenever the launch had set off without me, I had been unhappy about being left behind, now the time could not go quickly enough before that happened. I feared that Livingstone would change his mind, under the pestering influence of his brother, and send me the same way as poor Thornton, who had done no more wrong than I.

So it was with a feeling of heavy dread that I received his letter.

It happened as they were loading the launch and getting ready to set off. They were about to leave, but before they did, Livingstone called me.

'Mr Baines.'

'Doctor,' I answered. He had in his hand the thing I feared most. A pale blue envelope with my name written on it.

You must understand that I was certain this was a letter dismissing me from the expedition, and that this was my last opportunity – for when I broke the seal the game would be up – to defend myself before Dr Livingstone. I had no doubt that I had been misrepresented and mistreated, but I believed still that Livingstone was of a reasonable nature and that the injustice against me was more his brother's doing than his own. It's strange what happens to you in moments like that. A certain clarity comes over you, a light that illuminates the narrow path that might just lead to your survival, casting aside

all other concerns – the luxuries of comfort and pride – no, not pride; dignity, decency even. You're not concerned about being treated decently, you just want to survive, and in that moment that's all I wanted, to survive, to stay on the Zambesi, with or without the niceties of approval or admiration.

Bedingfeld and Thornton had got into trouble with the Doctor, but both of them had wanted to resign before they were dismissed. I had to make sure the Doctor knew I did not.

'Dr Livingstone,' I said, before he could say anything. 'I will stay on.'

He tilted his head to the side and frowned. But he said nothing.

'I will stay on,' I repeated. 'Even if I have to remain without pay, I would stay on. If I may remain in the country, and carry on painting. I would be prepared ... if it was necessary ...'

'Well,' he said. 'Would you indeed?'

'Yes,' I replied, my voice a whisper.

I hoped he would withdraw the letter. I looked up, away from it and into his eyes, those fierce, sad eyes. But he held it up and gave it a little rustle. I had no choice but to take it.

Livingstone turned away immediately. All around was commotion, as the *MaRobert* departed once again, once again without me, and there I stood with my letter in my hand.

Livingstone had left with Kirk, Charles and Rae, Walker and Rowe, the Kroomen and thirty-three of the Makololo. I was now alone, for the first time since my journey on the pinnacle the previous year.

I waited for as long as possible before opening the letter, keeping my fate at bay. I don't know how long it was – an hour maybe. Probably less, but it felt like an hour. It became heavy in my hand, its contents clamouring to be read.

What if I burnt it, or threw it in the river? Would I be saved by ignorance? (Ah, but how differently I would feel later about living in ignorance of a letter's contents.)

I walked to the rock where I had spoken to Thornton, and there I opened the envelope and read.

Tette

11th July 1859

Sir,

In leaving you again in charge of the goods of the Expedition it is necessary that I should inform you that, while disposed to overlook the fact of your having given away

considerable quantities of public property (by your own confession) to Generoso and others, on the ground of your head having been affected by fever, a renewal of such conduct will at once incur the stoppage of your salary, and it will be imperative on me to invalid you. If I find that you again go off skylarking with the Portuguese, as you did, taking the whaler with you without authority and very materially damaging the boat, or if you spend Expedition's time and materials in painting Portuguese Portraits, I shall have no option: however much I should like to favour you, I must do my duty.

I'd been wrong. It was not a letter of dismissal; it was an official warning. I had been spared. I read on.

It is right that I should inform you that Cap. Bedingfeld complained twice of your incompetency, saying Old Baines knows nothing about store-keeping. I never altered my conduct in the least to you in consequence, but now having seen the stores left to anyone who chose to steal them, and Thornton even allowed to take what he liked in your presence, I hereby caution you that, if what I have taken the trouble myself to arrange, so that you can easily examine them every day, and Sr Secard has arranged to take charge when you are ill, be not properly attended to, I must perform the painful duty of separating you from the Expedition.

You are required to furnish me on my return with a series of portraits of natives for the purposes of Ethnology, giving them, if necessary, in groups, so as to shew the shapes of the heads and bodies as accurately as you can. You have not yet got their colour nor in the drawings I have seen is the native countenance depicted except by exaggeration of certain features. By care I have no doubt you will be able to make drawings which will do credit to the Expedition. Birds and animals alive are also required. I gave you orders verbally before leaving last time not to do more at boat building than merely shew the carpenters how to do it, as a little exercise for yourself. I now repeat that nothing is to be done in boat building at all.

David Livingstone

There was more:

No rations are to be give to more than two Makololo, except in case of removal. I shall pay the two on my return. Mr Thornton's rations for four months you have already taken.

D.L.

I was filled with relief, even overlooking – for a time – the insult to my artistic talents. I had miscalculated, and my offer to remain without pay would do me no good, for Livingstone would take it as an admission of guilt.

University of Cape Town

I find from Mr Rae that while Baines made so free with the goods of the Expedition, he took very good care of his own and was both sharp and mean. Gave soap to every one that asked for it; made away with the wine of the Mess, treating the Portuguese with it, yet held back from paying more than his share; wished to make Rae pay half of his washing, Baines having 90 pieces and Rae only four. Has a piece of serge in his possession belonging to Rae, gave away some dozens of bottles to Generoso etc, so that, while I gave him the benefit of the doubt as to his sanity while squandering Expedition property, not many would be so indulgent. 11th July. Left him 46 or forty seven yds of calico to buy meat.

Baines said to me, on delivering the aforesaid letter, he hoped I would let him stop and work on, though his pay was stopped.

– David Livingstone, journal, July 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, August 1859

The days at Tete have begun to blur, and the weeks. There is not much to do. I keep an eye on the stores, doing what I can to save them from the ravages of the white ants. For the rest of the time I am free to come and go as I please, when the fever allows me. To the Portuguese I have become one of their own. Often they address me in their language for a few moments before stopping, remembering that I am not Portuguese myself and my comprehension is still limited.

Now and then I have set off on an excursion some distance from the settlement. This time I am with Senhor Pratt, the young officer. He has taken me to a coal seam at Nhamacasi near the Revuvue River, a few hours from the settlement, and here I have taken some promising sketches. It is late in the day and we are making our way back to our temporary encampment.

A boy has appeared and is talking to the men, pointing.

'Senhor!' he calls out to me. There follows all sorts of chatter that I do not understand, until I make out the words 'Vapor Inglese'. He is pointing in the direction of the river.

The launch? Can it be?

'Livingstone's boat?' I say. 'The *MaRobert*?'

'Sim! Sim!' he replies. 'Vapor Inglese!'

Livingstone.

Livingstone has come. We must go back.

But we cannot. It is too late in the day. I'll have to wait until tomorrow morning.

They have only been away for a month. What does this mean, that they have returned so soon? Does the launch need some repairs that can only be done there? That might be the reason. But I can't shake the idea that this has everything to do with me. Has Livingstone come to accept that he has wronged me? Does he wish to reconcile with me and take me with him now? Has he realized that he cannot do without an artist?

I return to my tent. A boy brings me a bowl of food. Rice and fowl. Senhor Pratt joins me, but we sit in silence most of the time. My attention is no longer here.

Perhaps they had some sort of conversation about me. Charles, of course, would have had nothing good to say, but the others would have been more reasonable. Has he been outnumbered now that they are all together again?

Senhor Pratt takes his leave and I climb under my blanket.

Perhaps Livingstone lay in bed before sleeping, as I am doing now, and weighed it up. Let me give him another chance, he thought. Forgiveness. Let me show him forgiveness, as God has shown forgiveness to us all.

And how much better this is, since I have not asked for it myself.

'Where is Baines?' they would have asked Tito when they landed.

'He is at the coal fields,' Tito would reply. 'Painting the local people and their customs.'

When they entered the house, they would have seen the paintings from these weeks, of my trip to the sugar farm. Paintings showing the natives' technology, primitive but ingenious (and I have to say that the syrup I tasted, though not as sweet and pure as our white sugar, was pleasing to the palate).

There are also the paintings of the wedding feast, Pascoal's daughters, when Thornton returned briefly before his trip to Zumbo. But Livingstone will find no portraits of the Portuguese. (Did he intend to trick me, to sneak in while I was away?)

I struggle to fall asleep. Livingstone's face takes form in my mind, vivid form, his expression stern, expectant.

'Yes, Dr Livingstone. I have been spending my time productively. I have added to my folio of sketches, the *expedition's* sketches.'

He might nod, but would remain silent for a while before speaking. Perhaps he would shake his head, but reluctantly this time. 'But what of the other matter? What of the stores?'

'I haven't,' I'd say, 'I haven't stolen from the stores. You've been wrong about me. I've sold nothing, given nothing away for favours. I might have had a large share of certain things, more than my share ...' No, I would not say as much as that.

'We've realized, Baines, that we need an artist. Between you and me, Dr Kirk draws a good little sketch, but our discoveries will only be properly served by your talents.'

And there, in the background, Charles would stand, glowering at me, if he were there at all. He might have gone back to the boat, or taken himself on a walk some distance away, to spare himself the unpleasantness of my reunion with the others.

Sleep finally comes in the early hours, and when I awake it is already light. I emerge from the tent and look for Senhor Pratt.

He is already at the mine, the people tell me.

I gather my things as quickly as I can, and I head off there.

Today. Today is the day that I will see Livingstone again.

Ah, Mr Baines, Senhor Pratt calls. Good morning.

We must go as soon as we can, I say.

Yes, yes. But first we must have breakfast. A man cannot travel on an empty stomach.

Breakfast. Yes, of course.

I don't have much of an appetite, but I eat as quickly as I can. Fowl again. Always fowl, for breakfast, lunch and supper.

Perhaps Livingstone is not there. Perhaps he has sent the others instead. But then surely there would be instructions. What if Charles is there and not the Doctor? What if Charles is in charge?

It takes an age for the party to prepare to set off. Why are they taking so long? But then, eventually, we are on the move, making our way towards Tete. It is eleven o'clock. We should get there around two.

Perhaps they will leave before I return.

We follow the left bank of the river, crossing it much lower down than before, in a leaky canoe. On the other bank we come to a farm belonging to Senhor Pascoal. A carpenter and smith are at work, and they exchange some words with our party. Only when we are about to walk away do I notice the carpenter has misshapen legs. He is a well-built fellow, but his legs are those of an infant, drawn up before him like little sticks.

That young boy in the Eastern Cape floats into my mind. It was near Fort Beaufort. His legs were similarly deformed. Hopeless. What became of the wretched soul?

I'm aware, now, of my own limp. It does not hamper me – I've never let it. I walk as quickly as the rest of the men. I walk in front and make sure we maintain a good pace.

We walk through dry landscapes dotted with baobabs, each surrounded by yards of solitude. We are getting closer now.

As we approach the river I can see them. There in the distance are the masts of the *MaRobert*. I increase my pace.

Then, after a while, I stop. No, it would not do to arrive out of breath. And I must not appear over-eager.

But I'm desperate to know who is there. All of them? Livingstone, surely.

I smooth down my beard and make sure my shirt is tucked in. Then I set off again, not too quickly, not too slow. My view is obscured for a while by a ridge in front of me, but I keep the same pace as the party.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I will say, my hand outstretched, ‘it is good to see you again.’

No. Too bland. Not memorable enough.

‘Dr Livingstone, what brings you here?’

Too familiar.

‘So, Dr Livingstone, you have come to your senses.’

No, of course not.

‘Dr Livingstone, I am prepared.’

As I approach the top of the rise I quicken my step slightly so I am a little ahead of the others. At the crest my view of the river is restored, and I can see: it is not the *MaRobert* at all. The masts belong to two lanchas, lateen rigged.

I hasten towards the water, leaving the party behind. Generoso is at the bank. ‘Ah!’ he cries. ‘Senhor Gauvea is here!’

‘There has been no other boat?’ I say.

He looks at me, curious, and shakes his head.

I give him a quick smile and walk towards the water, where no one can see my face. The current ripples past, flowing away from here. I feel a strong urge to jump in, to flow with it. How far would I get, by the end of the day? If I took the boat, the pinnacle, what then? Would I make it as far as the Lupata gorge, the defile? And then what? Where are they? So far away. They have not come for me. They are so far away, weeks away, if they are at Nyassa now, making their discoveries, securing glories for themselves by pointing, sketching, measuring, naming; putting themselves on the map.

Something is welling up from deep within me and I want to cry out, to scream at the water, the sky, the scrubby trees on the opposite bank. I clench my eyes tight and breathe deeply, slowly, to calm myself.

I turn (the others are still there, but I walk past them) and make my way to the house.

I waited a day for a man I had sent to Tete for powder, shot, provisions and cloth, etc. He returned the second day with nothing, not even a line saying that he had delivered the note, and then was sent back and that the launch had left Tete. I thought that this was some more of the 'long one's' spite so returned to Tete to get a new outfit. There I found Baines all alone; the rest had left in the launch and were not expected back for four months.

– Richard Thornton, letter to Helen, 22 July 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, July–September 1859

For three months I was all alone at Tete, apart from Crab, who was the only other ‘English’ presence. Thornton left him at Tete for fear of tsetse fly where he was going. Thornton had returned briefly, a few days after Livingstone and the others left, before embarking on his long journey.

It was, it so happened, the day before the wedding of Senhor Pascoal’s two daughters, which turned out to be a fine feast, the biggest celebration during my time in the settlement. It also so happened that Senhors Clementino and Manoel were preparing to leave on an expedition to Zumbo. The two of them visited Tito the same time as Thornton and I, and they asked if Thornton wanted to join them.

The wedding went on for several days, each day grander than the next. Thornton attended much of it, but he also spent a lot of the time packing.

He had a certain look in his eyes as he filled his bags with the necessities for travel. A determined look.

‘No plans to go home then?’ I said.

He shook his head. ‘I am here now, and I have some ideas to test.’ Then he smiled. ‘Zumbo! As far as the Portuguese ever settled. And then beyond, to who knows where. Why don’t you come with me?’

It was a wild idea, but appealing. ‘I can’t,’ I said, ‘I’m still ... I have my orders.’

‘You’re still a member of the expedition,’ he nodded. ‘What a shame it keeps you here.’

He’d grown up, in the year and a half since I’d met him. He’d been so unsuited to travel on the *Pearl*, so nervous when he first set foot in Africa. Now here he was, setting off to the frontier that the Portuguese had long since shrunk from.

‘Good luck to you,’ I said. ‘I hope this journey brings you good fortune.’

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘Now get back to the feast. I’ll see you there later.’

But soon the feast was over and Thornton was gone, and things became very quiet in the settlement. I spent my time painting when I could. I had sketched some scenes from the wedding, one of which I worked into an oil, showing the pillars festooned with garlands, the smoke from the guns, the procession of townspeople.

I travelled short distances from Tete and obtained some good views – of a native sugar farm at Katipo, of a coal seam near the Revuvue – and back at the settlement I turned my sketches into oils.

On one of those trips a report reached me that the launch had returned, so I returned earlier than planned, because I was naturally anxious, for many reasons, to meet the commander and the party again. But, as it turned out, it was not him.

No.

There was a strange isolation at that outpost. Rumours would reach one and there was no way of telling whether they were true or not.

At one point a mail of three bags arrived, but I had to get Tito to send it on to Livingstone. I thought of opening it and trying to seal it again, but I would have been found out. It gnawed at me, like food before a starving man. What was in there? Letters from Mother, from Henry? From friends at the Cape? Newspapers with information about what was happening in England, in Europe, in the world beyond? But only Livingstone could open the mail bags. That was the rule.

I was celebrated by the Portuguese as the artist among them, the man who could make the world appear on paper. I was, of course, unable to paint their portraits, but I could paint *scenes* in the settlement, such as the wedding. I could also paint Africans, though usually these were not portraits in the strict sense of the word. They showed the natives in groups, or in their customary habitat. But there were exceptions. Conde was one, and, as I've mentioned, Shibante was another. I could hear Livingstone's disapproval as I worked: that the pictures were too 'artistic', that they were not 'scientific' enough, and certainly did not serve the interests of ethnology.

But such distinctions, such requirements, meant nothing when I was sitting with my pencil and sketchbook and a subject was before me. In that moment it seemed entirely odd that to paint the portrait of an Englishman was appropriate, while that of a Portuguese was forbidden and that of a native unsuitable. No. In that moment, I was faced with a man, and my job was to capture the fire in his eyes, the movement of his jaw, the line of his neck, the general mood that his presence conveyed. And in that moment, such distinctions fell out of my mind.

Senhor José was the most insistent about having his portrait taken. I was at his house one night, with my sketchbook and pencil, having returned from a short excursion on the pinnacle. He had asked before for a portrait and now he did again. By his gestures I could see he meant to say: Who would know?

But I was equally insistent that I was unable to paint any Portuguese.

He opened another bottle of brandy. The first had been half full when I'd arrived.

But you can, he said, paint our slaves.

Yes, I suppose I could.

And I had, and would. But this was something different. He called out. '*Magda!*'

I was familiar with this girl. She often drew water from the river, and she had been among those who wailed and then danced at the Easter ceremony.

I had never really looked at her before, looked properly. She had individual features that were acceptable enough, but the overall effect was not attractive. One might even, if one were being uncharitable, have called her ugly. Her eyes were too close together, her lips too full.

She was African, mainly, but there seemed some Indian blood in her too, and, who knows, perhaps there was also some Portuguese, from a long time ago.

She stood awkwardly, not knowing what she had been summoned for. Her eyes darted nervously from Senhor José to me.

José burst out into laughter. 'No, no,' he bellowed, and followed this with words I did not understand. He made the gestures of an artist waving his brush, and the girl seemed to understand.

Now he turned to me and waved his hand flamboyantly as if giving me permission to commence.

As I sat down and arranged my sketchbook, José said something to the girl. She tensed and looked down at the ground. He barked the order again.

With stiff movements the girl untied the cloth that covered her body, first the shirt, then the skirt, until she was standing naked before us.

What a shock I felt – though it was made somewhat less sharp by the brandy.

Her skin was mottled, and on her left side there was an ugly scar, a jagged black line across her brown skin. Her breasts were small, her arms somewhat muscular from carrying water to and from the river, and who knows what other burdens.

I felt slightly sickened.

'Aa-aah?' José exclaimed.

I said nothing but raised my pencil.

I was, I have to say, deeply uncomfortable with what had transpired all of a sudden.

But why? It is quite common to paint natives in their natural nakedness, and I have done so many times. Is it somehow different when the person has been wearing clothes a moment before?

But, no. It's common too for artists at home to paint unclothed people. Nudes. Even young students, those, like Henry, who attend formal art classes, paint naked models – not savages, but men and women who have been wearing shoes and coats and hats an hour before.

How strange that the unmentionable, the unthinkable – a woman's body, naked body – loses its indecency before an artist's brush.

There was that day, at the art gallery with Emily. How long ago: I was half the age I am now. It was one of the first times I had visited London.

We stopped at a portrait of a nude, a woman reclining on a chaise longue. One could see her breasts, the point where her legs met, all somehow acceptable in this place, though I must say it did make me blush.

And then Emily said, 'Would you paint me like that, Thomas?'

I must have given a little gulp of shock.

What did she mean? Did she wonder if one day I might paint her as a nude, or did she intend for me to do so then? We were in the capital, after all, where so many of life's rules seem to be removed or twisted.

'Perhaps when we are married,' I said.

She took a step back. 'Married?' The word came out as a quiet shriek. Then she spoke more normally. 'Does an artist have to marry his model before he can paint her?'

I must have laughed, or mumbled something silly. I doubt I had a witty response.

'I'm only joking, Thomas,' she said, and walked to the next painting.

The way she had repeated the word *married*. It had been a shock to her to hear me say it. We had uttered it when we were much younger, but not since we had ceased to be children.

But of course I would marry Emily. I had known her all my life. A man has to marry someone, and for me who else would it be but her?

It was never in doubt. Until that day.

José poured himself another glass of brandy and returned to my side to see the progress of the painting. The second bottle, I noticed, was halfway down, and I'd had hardly any of it.

I was drawing dark lines to render the girl's scar. The skin around it was creased and crinkled. It repulsed me but fascinated me. How had she got it? José made a strange sound, almost a growl, as he saw what I was doing. Did he mean that he wished me to omit it? Had he been responsible for it?

I had, after that day in the gallery, painted naked people, although mainly men, and mainly in the wild. Mostly, though, my subjects had worn some semblance of clothing, even if just a loincloth to hide their private parts. This felt unusual, dangerous even.

José had collapsed on his couch and his eyes were closed. I looked at the girl. She looked at me. There were a few moments, his breathing fitful, when he might have woken up, but that time passed. His snoring became heavy and regular.

Something altered in the room, but the spell was not broken. The girl remained there, standing there now for me only, for the painting.

When I drew the last lines, I gave a nod, and she quickly went for her clothes and dressed herself. She was leaning towards the door, but I beckoned her over.

‘Look,’ I said. ‘Look at yourself.’

She gasped as she saw the picture, and put a hand to her mouth. She looked at me with an expression of amazement and, mixed with it, fear. As she held my gaze for a few moments she seemed to realize that the fear was not necessary.

José was deeply entrenched in his sleep. I would not leave the picture here. He would have to ask me for it. It was something we decided together, the girl and I, wordlessly. I waved her away, released her from her duty.

He never did, Senhor José. He never did ask me for the sketch. Perhaps he forgot the events of that night. Perhaps he regretted them. No, that was not his nature. The drink must have obliterated the memory.

I must admit it took me a few moments, when I saw the sketch the next morning, to piece it all together.

And so it would remain a secret, between me and the girl.

I did not mention it in my journal and I have told no one. But I dwell on it in my mind. It seems important that the memory lives, as long as I do.

Livingstone, of course, would not have approved. Not in the least. But it did not matter what I did or didn’t do. His letter to me had already been written. All the time, while I was at the sugar farm, at the coal, in Tete, painting or going out with the pinnace, my fate had been sealed, in an envelope that was – where? – somewhere in the wilderness but on its way to me.

Found that a piece of serge belonging to Mr Rae had disappeared and was in Baines's box. He gave away the mess wine to the Portuguese whenever they called on him. I saw him once myself and then, when he had finished it, declared it had been fairly drunk at the mess table. He uniformly took precious sharp care of his own things while secretly giving away the goods of the Expedition. Painted the portraits of Generozo, Pascoal and Albino without authority and then, when he had quite destroyed the whaler, declared that she was none the worse – 'not a whit'. On reflecting on the matter I resolved to send the following and did so by Augustus, requesting Sr Secard to take charge.

– David Livingstone, journal, July 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete, September 1859

'Senhor Thomas,' the old woman calls.

I've been dozing. Dreaming. A siesta.

'Senhor Thomas, há uma carta para si!'

A letter. From England? From Livingstone?

'Sim, sim, já venho,' I respond, putting on my shoes. Has there been a mail boat, I ask her.

Yes, she tells me. The canoes have brought it from downriver.

It's from Livingstone. The envelope is grubby and the ink is smudged. The last letters of my name have vanished, as if Livingstone were addressing Bain the road builder.

I make a rough tear with my finger, and remember to thank her before returning to my room.

The page is filled with the curls and loops of Livingstone's handwriting. The first thing I notice is the date. It must be an error.

Senna, 21st July, 1859

Mr Thomas Baines

Sir,

On further examination of your conduct in my absence, in order to have materials ready for a proper report to my superiors, it appears that, while making away with large quantities of public property, you took very good care of your own private property. So though, as you are aware, I was inclined to take the most lenient view of the case, and even overlook the serious breaches of trust on medical grounds, the fact I have mentioned renders it quite impossible that I should do so. I am in duty bound to report the whole of your conduct to H. Majesty's Govert and I have no doubt as to the opinion that will be formed thereupon. You will therefore consider your salary stopped, and yourself as separated from the Zambesi Expedition from the 30th July next, and give over to the charge of Major Secard all public property and all paintings, drawings, &c, &c, properly secured. My previous orders are cancelled.

If you wish you may have the use of the artists materials, and your usual rations after the four months' rations now in your possession are expended, but I shall take the earliest opportunity my other duties allow of sending you home. I have, &c.,

*David Livingstone, Consul,
Commanding Zambesi Expedition*

I am struggling to breathe. It takes effort to force my throat open and draw in air. There is more to the letter. An afterthought.

P.S. The failures of duty which I am obliged to report against you are neglect of duty as storekeeper of the Expedition in not only leaving stores exposed to be stolen, but by your own confession in giving away large quantities of them to Generoso and others, a fact which lays you open to prosecution; leaving your duties entirely and without leave in order to skylark with the Portuguese, in doing which you took a whaler without authority and very seriously damaged it; wasting artist's materials in painting the portraits of Pascoal and Albino without any authority, &c, &c, from the officer left in charge. It is with deep regret that I have to make such a report, but I am unable to find an excuse for the serious failures of duty enumerated, and must therefore perform a painful duty.

D. Livingstone

My fingers are clutching the letter, pressing patterns in the paper, smudging the ink. I look again at the date. Twenty-first July. It's September. The fifth or the sixth. Six weeks ago that he pressed his thoughts on this paper. '*Separated from the Zambesi Expedition*'.

Separated.

He wrote this ten days after they left. Ten days after his previous letter, in which he warned me but spared me. Ten days! What changed in ten days? Charles. Charles got to him. Pestering, pestering. My brother, my brother. *My brother*.

Damn! The paper makes a splashing sound, but floats to the ground, and lies there, slightly crumpled.

They had only gone as far as Sena; they still had far to go. Still on the *MaRobert*, the chugging sound of her invalid engine, all of them squashed together, Charles always beside Livingstone, pestering.

I smooth the scrunched paper. '*By your own confession.*' Why is Livingstone invoking this now? I told him I didn't know what I was saying, and he seemed satisfied with that. But now he is using it against me. Damn Charles.

I read the letter again, going over the charges against me. There's nothing new. He said it all before, and found it sufficient to warn. '*Took very good care of your own*

private property.' That's all that's new. That I took good care of my own things. A triviality. Am I to be dismissed for that?

I am dismissed. Six *weeks* ago, and I did not know it.

Why has it taken so long? Why has it come now? Twenty-first July. Six weeks ago. What was I doing then? Where was I? Who was I with?

I sit down on the bed. July 21. Was there anything, that day, to make me aware of the date? Let's see, two weeks after Livingstone had left, what was I doing? I find mornings, and dinners, and sketches, and hot afternoons. But I can't find myself. I can't locate myself on the calendar.

I am dismissed.

This is what Thornton experienced, then. He and I. And Bedingfeld. But it was different with both of them. They wanted to be sent off, although not in the manner they were. How can Livingstone do this? How can he be justifying this? Bedingfeld, Thornton and I. What would Washington make of this? Murchison, Lord Clarendon. What would they make of this letter, this absurd letter? He cannot mean it. Livingstone, he can't mean for it to go that far. There must be a way.

Thornton. Young Thornton. He's been here, this place, where I am now; he's gone before. And he is, away somewhere, getting on with it. He hasn't been called back, and sent away. If only Thornton were here now.

What now? What am I to do now? When will Livingstone come for me? What will I say to him when he comes? If I can get him away from Charles. If I can talk to him directly, man to man ... Where is he now? Where can they be now? Six weeks, since he wrote the letter. *Why did it take so long?*

What are they seeing? What lies before their eyes – now, this still afternoon? What obstacles have they met, what have they overcome? What stories will they have, when they come back? What will they show me? Is someone sketching it? Kirk? Is Charles taking photographs, that they will lay on the table before me? Look, that is the lake, that is the extent of it. There, the near shore. That patch of grey is verdant green, lush Euphorbia. That dark shadow, a hippopotamus.

And that, there – another hippopotamus?

No, that's an island; look, it's further in the distance. That patch, you see, was green; that one, the hippopotamus, was grey, as it is here; grey, with a tinge of brown.

And that?

No, that's nothing, a shadow, a play of the light.

Just imagine: Charles strutting around proudly. Kirk would be there too, and no doubt he'd have played the greater role in capturing these images, mounted now on the wall, viewed by admiring crowds. And if a friend were with him, someone who'd play my part in the conversation, Kirk would smile, and shrug it away. 'There they are,' he'd say, pointing to the photographs, 'they speak for themselves.' And I'd know what he meant by it. He'd been a part of it, and he'd be satisfied with that. He and Livingstone and Charles and Rae. All Scotsmen. Returned from a glorious adventure.

'I was part of it,' I'd say to those around me – Mother, Emma, Henry, Mr Wallace. Not at the exhibition – I'd not have been invited. Back at Lynn perhaps, a newspaper spread over the table. 'I was part of it. In the beginning.'

'What went wrong?' someone will ask. There'll always be someone who I have to explain it to again. 'Why were you not there? Why were you sent off?'

The letter rustles in my hand. 'Making away with expedition property', 'skylarking', 'wasting artist's materials'. But, in the end, I took good care of my things.

'Senhor Thomas,' the woman calls, 'there is food if you are hungry.'

I make my apologies.

What now? I may not have much time. I must talk to everyone who has knowledge of my doings. Everyone who can say, with certainty, that these charges are false, who would know if they were or not. Senhor Tito, certainly; Livingstone would have to listen to him. And others, whose testimony Livingstone would have to respect. But who? He's inclined to distrust the Portuguese. I'm up against his brother; who will speak against him? Everyone. Absolutely everyone here, but that'll do no good. Livingstone already knows Charles's position with them; Charles seems proud of it, as if it is to his credit, while my position here somehow counts against me. 'Skylarking'. One of my crimes. I need evidence from them, not expressions of friendship.

If only Livingstone's wife were here. She would defend me. You're a gentleman, she said to me, and you'll remain one.

Imagine Magda addressing Livingstone. Imagine her saying, No, Dr Livingstone, you are wrong. Senhor Thomas is a good man, he is not capable of these things. You are wrong about him, you are mistaken; you've been away, so how could you know? You must listen to me, not your brother.

Would Livingstone become aware of his pockmarked cheeks, his tired skin? Would his eyes fall on the strength and innocence of her demeanour, and be taken in by them, the unrestrained gestures of her arms, and realize that he'd fallen under a tainted man's spell?

And Charles. Would he fall silent before her, realizing the game was up? Or would he whisper some protest into his brother's ear, manufacturing an argument that I cannot hear? Livingstone nodding slowly, not taking his eyes off the girl. Pausing for a moment, then saying: What is your relationship to Mr Baines? You speak of truth and innocence; but how are we to know that you know of these things? Is it in your nature to tell innocence from guilt? The truth. Do you believe in Truth – the real Truth?

She does not try to find words that will answer him; perhaps she has none, knows that words will not do. I realize when it is too late; I cannot stop her. She is looking between my canvases, and there she finds the page from the sketchbook. She holds it up and says nothing. It is unmistakably her, and unmistakably mine, even though I have not signed it. Innocence and truth; she understands these words, but this is her answer, her likeness, her body made flesh with strokes of the pencil.

Charles is agitated; he turns away from the picture with a 'hmp'. Livingstone's gaze is stern, then he looks at her, and makes to speak.

What would they say?

Tito shakes his head. Yes, of course he will write down what he knows. Relief. I feel relief in his disbelieving declarations. Would I say that again? He is not sure that he has understood. Relief and comfort.

It is the same with all the locals. This was not my doing. My gratitude for their support is tempered only by the thought that Livingstone would disapprove. So much for my worry that they would look at me with embarrassed stares and whispers when they were behind my back. A child pointing with a singsong chant, his mother pulling him up with quiet admonition, making an example with her sympathetic, slightly embarrassed look. It has been nothing of the sort. I considered keeping quiet about it, saying nothing; I certainly didn't present myself to them, and invite their judgement.

But they all know about it; the story has filled the settlement within an hour of my telling it. I don't know who's told it to whom, whether Senhor Pascoal told it to the customers at the market, or whether he heard it from one of them, Generoso perhaps, or Gauvea. I don't know what tone of voice was used to pass it from person to person, whether the tone differed with various articulations, or whether the manner of telling it was crystallized early on, and attached itself to the tale as much as the facts themselves. Their reaction is unanimous: I have been unjustly treated; Dr Livingstone is wrong about me, and they know better. Their opinions about Livingstone vary: some say he has judged

harshly and will change his mind. Others say he is cruel by nature and they always knew it.

I am glad for the differences, for they prove that I have not made them think what I want them to think. But in their verdict on me, their show of support, they all agree. The words of the few who know any English, the tone in the voices of those who do not; the expressions, the gesticulations, the firmness with which they grasp my hand, or grip my shoulder – they all agree: I am a good man, there can be no truth in the charges against me, I am not guilty of any wrongdoing.

And so it must be.

It takes several drafts to compose my letter in reply to Livingstone's. When I am finished I read over my defence.

University of Cape Town

Tete
10 September 1859

Sir

I received your letter dated Senna, 21st July, on the 6th of this month, informing me that my pay is stopped and myself separated from the expedition from the 30th of July, also that I am ordered to deliver to Major Secard the property of the expedition in my charge. I have delivered it according to your order and have requested him to let it be looked to occasionally for preservation from insects. I am ignorant of any large quantities of public property given by me to others and I have requested Major Secard to send for Generoso and ascertain whether I have given him or any other inhabitants anything belonging to the government.

It is true that when I was left behind in the pinnace I gave ten tins of sardines and a cheese to Major Secard, telling him, as I believed at the time, that I had no doubt you would approve my doing so. I had at different times had orders to do such things and, considering myself left in your place, that the assistance he was giving me was rendered not to me personally but as a member of the expedition, I acted as I thought you would have done in the circumstance. I find the following entry in my diary at that date, 'The major, his friend and myself mess together. Of course I contribute whatever is in the pinnace', and but for the length of time that elapsed before we met I should no doubt have mentioned it to yourself.

Since I have been at Tete I have also done the same sometimes by order and at others in the case of small things without, but in this I did not think I was acting contrary to your wishes. Besides this I believe I once gave two tins of sardines to Raposo and this is the largest I can charge myself ever having given to any one. Of the five portraits I have painted those of Manoel and Major Secard were by direct order. The request from Mr Pascoal was referred to yourself and had you expressed the slightest disapprobation I certainly should not have undertaken it, as I did not wish from the first to engage in anything of the kind.

I think I may appeal to yourself that while my health lasted I exerted myself as much as possible to preserve the property of the expedition and whatever care I may have taken on my own I have never hesitated to use any portion of it, when requested, for the public service.

I observe that, in what I take to be the principal charge against me, mention is made of my own confession. This you were at first considerate enough to attribute to the affliction of my head by fever. I do not wish to claim undue shelter from such a cause, but if it should be found that at such a time I said more than the truth against myself, I cannot think that you will attach more weight to my words than actually belongs to them.

If you intend to send me home for prosecution of course I do not object to it, but I protest against being sent for any other purpose being perfectly willing, as I have mentioned to you before, to serve without any further remuneration than that of being allowed to sketch whatever may be of interest in the countries we pass through.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant.

T. Baines

Tete, September–October 1859

After I received Livingstone's letter I went straight to Tito. I had to deliver to him everything that belonged to the expedition, apart from artist's materials, which I was still allowed to use. But my purpose in going to him was to ask him to make inquiries into these charges against me. If I had given away expedition property, people would know about it. Let them come forward and give evidence against me.

Charles had made up lies against me. They would not stand up to the testimony of witnesses. What could anyone say against me? What wrongdoing could be proven, by someone who saw me doing ... what? I was, at that stage, ignorant of what exactly the charges were. What was this property I had stolen?

I asked Tito to find out if any of the population of Tete had seen me give away anything.

And then all I could do was wait.

It was a strange time. I was completely isolated from what was happening elsewhere.

I'd hear rumours, which came up the river on canoes, and made as much sense as little fragments of torn paper that must be reassembled to be read, some missing, some too smudged to mean anything.

Some said that Charles had departed for England, others that Kirk had gone to Quilimane, also to leave Zambesia. Shibante arrived from Quilimane and said he'd seen the steamer with the Doctor and the Makololo only. Had all the others gone?

There was no sign of the mail bags that had arrived in August. Was there anything for me? There was no news from the world outside, apart from two old American newspapers, one of which spoke of another war looming in Europe, which England wished to avoid, the other filled with local American news and long revolutionary tales.

Oh, yes, there was a letter from Thornton in Zumbo. He'd reached there safely and was planning to go even further, to Mombas to the west, and asked for some things from his supplies – stockings and boots, paper and pens, things like that – to be sent with whoever next travelled in his direction. He said he was enjoying his mode of life. It was the happiest he'd sounded at any stage of the expedition. Strange: he'd wanted to go home, but instead he'd struck deeper into the interior, and this seemed to satisfy him. Perhaps I should have done the same.

That was the last I heard from Thornton. As for the rumours concerning the others, I had no way of knowing what was true and what was not. The thought that Charles might have departed swirled around in my head. It was possible. Of all of us, he was the least cut out for African travel. But it seemed too good to be true, that my enemy, the one who had caused my dismissal, should have left before me, that I should have outlasted him, that I could talk again to his brother the Doctor without his poisoning influence. Oh, how I hoped it was true.

And so I lived, in isolation and uncertainty.

The brown winter gradually became punctured by green shoots and blossoms. The river began to rise, and one saw more alligators drifting down the stream.

At times my fellows were uppermost in my mind, as was my separation from them. I'd wonder where they were, and what they were seeing. Other times they were as far away from my thoughts as they were in reality, and my cares would not stretch far beyond the bounds of the settlement.

And so, amidst the uncertainty about what would happen next, part of me felt somewhat settled when they came for me.

Dakana Moro Island,
River Shire
October 17th, 1859

Dr Kirk

Sir,

You are hereby required to pass overland with Mr Rae to Tette in order to bring away two persons, lately members of this Expedition, in order to send them home by the Man of War appointed to meet us at Kongone Harbour in the middle of November next.

As Mr Thornton, one of the persons referred to, has been honest, and failed his duties as geologist chiefly from ignorance and a want of energy, he is permitted to take the geological specimens with him but on the understanding that they are Government property and must be handed over to the Geological Society when required. He must give you an acknowledgement in writing to that effect. Otherwise, they are to be retained at Tette.

The other individual, Mr Baines, referred to, having been guilty of gross breaches of trust in *secretly* making away with large quantities of public property, and having been in the habit of secreting Expedition property in his private boxes, it will be necessary for you to examine his boxes (after ascertaining whether my order to him to deliver up to Major Sicard all paintings, drawings and other public property, has been complied with) the more especially as he had only three *private* boxes on leaving the *Pearl* and these are now increased by the appropriation of 'biscuit boxes' to which he has no right – no permission having ever been asked or granted.

It will be proper for you to ask him in the presence of Mr Rae, what he did with five jars of butter which he took out of a cask and never sent to table or for cooking. What he did with five barrels of Loaf sugar which he was seen opening and drying but were never used in the Expedition. The answers to these and other questions to be put down in the storekeeper's book as soon as convenient and signed by yourself and Mr Rae. Take possession of this book – of another book of mine in his boxes, *The Plant* – specimens of brass rings and of everything else you have reason to believe does not belong to him. If he declines your offer of conveyance, he is left to his own resources.

I am etc

David Livingstone

Tete, October 1859

This time it is no rumour. This time they are indeed here. I can see, as I approach the settlement, there are Makololo milling about, Makololo who went with Livingstone. Kaniat is there, and that one whose name I don't know but who always stands with his hands on his hips, elbows out. Tito is nearby, outside my house. And there, standing beside him – Kirk!

But the *MaRobert* is not anywhere to be seen. How have they got here?

I approach my old friend and hold out my hand. 'Kirk,' I say.

'Baines,' he greets me in return. He does not smile as he usually does.

'Where is the launch?' I ask.

'We came overland.' He looks fatigued and gaunt.

'From where?'

'From the Shiré. Seven days' hard tramping.'

Rae appears at the doorway. He too looks haggard from the journey.

'Rae,' I say, 'it is good to see you.'

He smiles, and glances across at Kirk – nervously, I think.

'And the others?' I ask.

'They are on the Shiré. Walker has been invalided home. And the Kroomen, of course. Tito tells me Thornton is away.'

'The Kroomen are all gone?' I say.

'Yes,' Kirk says. 'Sent away with the *Persian*. They weren't good for anything any more. Thornton: where is he?' Kirk's tone is curt, officious. They have come to do me ill.

'And Charles,' I say. 'Is he away too?'

Kirk tilts his head slightly. 'Charles? No. Charles is with us.'

'Charles is here?' I look about.

'No. On the Shiré with Livingstone. Now, Thornton. When is he coming back. Tito tells me he has gone upcountry.'

'He is at Zumbo. He's been away since July.' How much should I tell him? 'He wrote to me and asked for provisions. I sent them ... just a few days ago. Four days, five days.'

'He is out of reach then,' Kirk says. 'We won't be able to bring him down.'

'Bring him down?'

‘Our orders, Baines’ – he looks at me directly – ‘are to bring you down to the Doctor at Shupanga.’

To the Doctor. What is this?

‘And then?’ I ask. ‘To what end?’

‘I cannot say, Baines. That is the Doctor’s business.’

Does Livingstone intend to send me away? Or will this be an opportunity to defend myself? I must speak to Tito. He must write down the result of his investigations.

‘Baines,’ Kirk says. ‘I must ask you one more thing. Your boxes. I will need you to give me all your private boxes. Our orders ...’ – he drops his gaze for a moment and then looks me in the eye again – ‘are to search your boxes.’

‘You ... you wish to search my boxes now?’

‘Not now. Tomorrow. We will need to ask you some questions. But I must request you to give them to me now. Please.’

A knock on the door startles me from sleep captured late. I’ve had a restless night, wondering what questions I am to face, and imagining over and over again my meeting with the Doctor at Shupanga House, rehearsing what I will say to him, trying to anticipate what he might ask me.

Shupanga House: where I first arrived ... so long ago. We’d just come up from the Battle of Mazaro, Livingstone and I. The stench of danger was still in our nostrils, and we had made our way through it, with pluck and courage. Surely he will come to reason.

It is Conde at the door. ‘Doutor Kirk está chamá-lo,’ he says. The sunlight is already fierce.

‘Tell him ...’ I begin. I must compose myself. ‘Cinco minutos.’

I wash my face with water, more to wake myself up than out of any need to clean myself, and quickly dress. What does this day hold?

When Kirk arrives I am a little readier, though how much sleep did I get? My eyes feel sandy. My whole body does.

Rae is with him, but always slightly behind and to the side. Rae is my friend. He doesn’t want to be part of this ... whatever it is that this is. Kirk, I know longer know.

His eye falls on an oil painting on my easel. It is on its side and Kirk tilts his head slightly.

‘Shibante?’ he says.

‘Yes.’ I nod.

‘A good likeness.’

'Thank you.'

'Shall we go to the stores?' He gestures to the door.

I take a deep breath. What is about to happen? Are they going to check all the stores? And my boxes. He wants to search my boxes.

We make our way the short distance to the house where they are kept. Here, in the front room, are my boxes on the ground, and, on a table, the store book.

'Coffee,' Kirk says. 'Would you like some coffee?'

I nod. 'Please.'

He snaps an order to Katura, who is quickly off.

'Shall we sit down?' Kirk says, with a gesture towards the table. The store book lies open.

I sit, where directed, and Kirk and Rae take their seats on the other side.

I look towards Rae, but he won't look back at me.

'Look, Kirk,' I say. 'What is this all about?'

'We must,' he says with a grimace, 'ask you some questions.'

'Questions? Then ask me. What ...?'

'About the stores,' he says. 'I must question you about the stores.'

'About the stores that I have supposedly stolen,' I say. 'You don't believe ...'

Katura is at the door with a rattle of coffee cups. He pours a cup for me.

Kirk has pulled the store book closer. He is flipping through, page after page.

'What are you looking for?' I ask him.

'Butter,' he says. 'I'm looking for butter – when it was used – but I can find no account of it.'

Butter. Is that what I am accused of?

I grip one side of the book and, though he continues holding it, I turn it a little so I can see the page. *5 jars*, it says. *3 boxes*. I can make little sense of it. Who knows what more pressing activities were going on when I scratched down those notes.

I let go of the book. 'This is not going to tell you anything. The butter has all been used in service. Some was damaged, of course, but we used the rest. What do you expect to find here?'

'Please.' He holds up a hand. 'Is that your answer ... about the butter?'

'My answer? What do you mean?'

'Is that your official response? I must write down what you say.'

So, Kirk, my friend, has been sent to interrogate me. To seek evidence into Charles's accusations.

‘That’s right,’ I say. ‘Whatever was not damaged was used in service.’

Kirk repeats my words as he writes them in the store book. Then he starts flipping through the pages again.

‘What are you looking for now?’ I ask.

‘This will be easier,’ he says, ‘if you let me investigate first and then ask questions.’

I look across at Rae, who is sitting slightly behind Kirk. He drops his gaze immediately. This must be deeply uncomfortable for him. Kirk too. Doing someone else’s dirty work.

I wait in silence while Kirk pages through the book, looking for God knows what.

How has it come to this? Kirk, who I walked with in the gardens in Sierra Leone, and taught to paint flowers. Kirk who looked after me at the house in Shupanga. Kirk with whom I fired at hippopotamuses on the way to Kebrabasa. And now he is looking for evidence against me.

‘The sugar,’ Kirk says.

‘Sugar,’ I repeat, perhaps a little too quickly. I glance at Rae, but he is looking down at the table.

Kirk turns back a few pages and then flattens the paper with his hand.

‘There is an entry here for ... four ... nearly five casks of sugar. What is left of that?’

I shake my head. ‘All fairly eaten.’

I have, perhaps, had more than the others.

‘What is the accusation?’ I add. ‘What? That I have sold it?’

‘I’m not here to judge you, Baines. I’m simply asking for your account of things.’

‘Well, I did not,’ I say. ‘I did not profit from it, from anything. You can ask anyone here.’

‘And ... your confession. You said to Charles ...’

‘I said *nothing!*’ The word comes out as a wild cry, and both Kirk and I are taken aback by it. I measure my tone now, but still stress the word. ‘I said *nothing* to Charles that meant anything. I was sick with fever, my mind was wandering. He said things and I repeated them. Put words in my mouth, and my mind was not fit enough to deny them.’

‘So what then is the truth?’

‘The truth. The truth is what I told the Doctor. I gave two boxes of sardines to Senhor Raposo and things to Tito after the journey on the pinnacle. Livingstone knows about this. Look – Kirk.’ I gaze up at him, my eyes appealing to the decency in him.

In his eyes there is a fierceness. Is he angry at me, or at the circumstance that forces him to interrogate his friend? I can’t tell. He looks away.

'I must,' he says, 'I must search your boxes.'

How distasteful. To be treated as a thief. Thank God that Charles is not here to gloat. Too much of a coward to do the dirty work himself.

Kirk begins with the two biscuit boxes, shuffling things around. Occasionally he takes something out and puts it on the table. A book. Nautical and astronomical instruments. Some shirts. In one of the large boxes he finds my artist's materials and unpacks brushes, paints, canvas.

'This is all your own?' he asks. 'It doesn't belong to the expedition?'

'My own,' I tell him.

'There is a great deal of it.'

'I am an artist.'

Kirk has a list with him – of the artist's materials that were supplied to me at the beginning of the expedition. He runs his finger down the list, checking it against what he's found in my personal stores.

'There's more in the store room,' I tell him. 'Most of it is in the store room.'

'This canvas has a blue stripe,' Kirk says. 'Is this not how the canvas supplied by government was marked?'

'I don't know. Look, I brought a great deal of artist's material, as you've said. This one, I think, was left over from the Australian expedition – and given to me, I might add.'

Or it might be from this one, but is this important? I've used so much of my own material on expedition business. Was I to keep my canvas and the government's canvas separate? If I needed to paint something I'd take what was closest to hand. All for the good of science in the end.

Kirk checks the expedition canvas from the store room. He unpacks it all, and now he is consulting the store book.

'There is ... more here than is recorded in the book.'

'Yes, exactly,' I say. 'Because I brought materials of my own, and most of it I've used in government service. Please write that down in the book too.'

He raises an eyebrow. 'I shall, I shall.'

Kirk takes Bedingfeld's chart, which I kept with me, and a book of Livingstone's.

'I never claimed this was mine,' I tell him. 'The Doctor lent this to me.'

'I know, I know,' he says.

Good. Next thing someone will allege that I tried to steal Livingstone's book.

'And this,' Kirk says, holding up a bag of copper nails. 'These are yours? You have, I think, some—'

'They're not the expedition nails, if that's what you think. I returned those to Rae long ago. These are different. They're longer and thinner.'

'And these brass rings.'

Oh, for God's sake. 'I bought those at the Cape.' Did I, though? I can't quite remember. Must I really account for every trifle?

'These shirts. All yours?'

'Kirk, this is too much. Surely you've asked me enough?'

There is discomfort in his eyes. 'Very well. I think that is all. We will stop now. If we have more questions we will call you.'

As I stand up, Kirk adds, 'But the shirts are all yours?'

I nod my head but cannot manage any sound from my mouth. When I'm out the door I glance back and see Rae speaking to Kirk. Hopefully he is talking some sense into him.

The people of Tete are quickly aware of why Kirk and Rae are here. Generoso tells me that everyone is talking about it. Pascoal says that Kirk should be ashamed to show his face here.

Kirk instructs me to get my private luggage ready and to be prepared to leave in a few days. The planned rendezvous with Livingstone is two weeks hence.

Of course I cannot leave immediately. I must get a statement from Tito, stating his findings after investigating the charges against me.

Kirk is looking for materials to fix the bottom of the launch, which is on the Shiré with a leaking hull. How angry the Doctor was, in those early days, when Bedingfeld had insisted that her rivets needed looking at. Bedingfeld – where is *he* now? Was he right to be concerned about the hull then, or has all the damage been done since? The trips up and down, hauling her over sandbanks; the ventures to Kebrabasa; each time our prospects a little more closed than before – *my* prospects, certainly, since now she goes without me.

Tito tells Kirk that there is difficulty in getting canoemen to help us downstream. He says Kirk should consider using some of the Makololo.

The next day there are still no boatmen to be found. Not a man can be found who will help Kirk take me away from here.

Among the Doctor's Makololo Kirk has little success either. Only two have volunteered, which is not enough, even if we take the pinnace only. They say they are land people and cannot work the boats. If Livingstone were here they might respond differently, but Kirk does not have the same power over them.

On Sunday morning, after the church service is finished, I see Kirk and Rae, striding towards Tito's house.

What business do they have? No doubt it is about me. If so, I must be there.

I reach the house a few minutes after they do, and open the door without knocking.

They all turn as I enter the room. Tito looks uneasy, as do his visitors. I am right: they are talking about me.

'Ah, Senhor Thomas,' Tito says with a smile. 'Welcome.'

Kirk's smile is thin.

'Tito – Major Sicard,' I say. 'I have asked you to make a thorough inquiry into this whole affair. I must please ask you again. I cannot leave here without evidence.'

'Yes, yes,' Tito says. 'I have asked the people of the town. I am satisfied that the charge is ...' he shakes his head '... not true.'

'That it is a calumny,' I say, looking at Kirk.

'But,' Tito holds up a hand, 'it is not a Portuguese case, so I cannot ...'

'You cannot take public cognisance of it,' Kirk says.

'But you can say what you have just said,' I appeal. 'Give your word. You can write it down. Will you write it?'

'Yes, yes,' says Tito. 'I will write it.'

'And what about a crew?' Kirk says. 'We must be off.'

Tito shrugs. 'I do what I can,' he says, 'but the people, the people are ...'

'We must be off,' Kirk insists. 'We must meet the Doctor at Shupanga, and there are only ten days now, which is little enough time.'

I leave the house and find Generoso and Candido outside. Candido is pointing towards Tito's house and talking quickly. I join them and we walk a little way away, so as not to be seen if the others come out.

'He says the English doctor came to question him,' Generoso tells me, 'about the lake he visited.'

Candido interrupts in Portuguese, waving his arms as he speaks. Pascoal joins our circle.

'He was full of questions,' Generoso explains. 'Was it this direction? Was it that direction? Did a river flow out of it? Did Candido really go to this same lake?' He spits a bit of tobacco from his lip. 'The English doctor does not believe it.'

'Nao há uma pessoa em Tete que os ajude,' Pascoal hisses. 'Nem uma!'

They will find no help from the people of Tete. Generoso doesn't need to translate.

‘Are your boxes ready?’ Kirk asks, standing at the doorway. It is clear that they are not. My things are lying around as they always are.

‘I am not taking them.’

The edges of his mouth move apart, as if he is smiling. But it is not a smile. ‘We are leaving soon. Do you understand that? As soon as I can find men to work the boats. You’d better pack quickly.’

‘I’m not taking my things, Kirk.’

‘And what exactly do you think is going to happen to them?’

‘I’ll come back for them.’

He rubs his hand against his cheek. ‘And what if ... What if you don’t return?’

‘Why should I not return?’

‘Bring your things, for God’s sake, man. I don’t know even if the rest of us will ever return to this ... place.’

‘Then I’ll have them sent after me. But I’ll not behave as a guilty man, Kirk.’

Yes, I shall go down and meet Livingstone. But if he accuses me, I’ll demand that he come back here, and hold a hearing here, with the locals as witnesses. Otherwise what case does he have?

If he refuses, and holds that I am still dismissed, I will return here, and do as Thornton has done. I’ll make my own way. At least now I will be able to paint portraits of the Portuguese, and pay my way in that manner.

Tito suggests that Kirk wait a few more days. Perhaps, he says, a canoe will come from Mazaro.

‘It is out of the question,’ Kirk says. ‘Six men. I only need six men. Surely that is possible. I have two Makololo who have any experience with boats. There must be plenty of others among your people. Have you asked everyone? Surely!’

I return to my room. The delay is gratifying. No one wants to help Kirk take me away. But how long can it last? I look around at the walls, the bed that I have slept in for the past months, my easel, the paintings against the wall. Tito has not yet responded to my request for a letter, so I write a note to him.

Tete, October 31st, 1859

To Major T. A. Secard,

Commandant, Tete.

Sir,

Having been accused by my chief, Dr. D. Livingstone, that being in charge of the provisions and other stores of the Zambesi Expedition, I have disposed of large quantities of provisions to favour certain persons in this town, and as in consequence of its small number of inhabitants, you as chief authority of this place may easily know what has passed in it. I have to request that you will inform me on your word of honour, whether you know or have heard that I have given any quantity of provisions belonging to the Expedition, to any person resident here.

*I have the honour to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,
T. Baines*

Tito's reply comes later in the day. Generoso brings it. It is written in Portuguese. 'Snr Thomas Baines,' it begins. '*Declaro voz e afianço ao vosso Chefe, Snr Doutor Livingstone que ...*' Generoso presents me with a second letter, in his own hand. He has translated it into English. I read it quickly.

I declare myself to you and I shall affirm to your Chief, Dr. Livingstone, that I did not hear nor do I know that you might have disposed of any quantities of provisions belonging to the Expedition to present to any person in this town, and I give my word of honour to assure this declaration.

'I hope Livingstone will take note of this,' I say. 'He must trust Tito's word.'

'I hope so,' Generoso replies. 'It will be sad if you do not return here.'

'My friend,' I say, 'I am in your debt.' And then it strikes me. 'I am properly in your debt. I owe you money. Seven pounds, if I remember correctly.'

'It is true,' he says. 'But how can you pay me?'

'How indeed, if I have no salary? But then Livingstone must pay you, since he has stopped my salary unjustly. I will present him with a bill.'

Rae has fallen ill and is lying in bed. I've had no opportunity to talk to him properly, so I make my way to his room. He is lying on his back, motionless, but his eyes are open.

'Rae,' I whisper.

There is no response from him.

'Rae,' I whisper a little louder.

'Yes,' he says, without turning his head.

'Rae, what is going on?'

‘Nothing,’ he says. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Kirk. These questions. Checking my boxes. What’s going to happen?’

A strange sound comes from Rae, and it takes me a moment to realize he is coughing. It goes on for a while. My question seems forgotten.

‘You should have seen him,’ Rae says.

‘Who?’

‘Livingstone. You should have seen him, when he first clapped eyes on Lake Nyassa. He was the first of us to see it.’

No doubt he wants me to ask what happened, but I don’t. I remain silent. Rae talks again after a while.

‘When he saw the lake, Livingstone cried out, “Hurrah, my boys! Our journey is ended!” Things were very different than on our previous journey.’

‘What previous journey?’

‘Earlier in the summer.’

What is he talking about? ‘But in the early summer you were here with me,’ I say.

‘Was I?’ He shrugs. The coughing begins again.

Another day passes with no crew for the boats. Rae, who is a bit better now, is working on the pinnace, making sure it is ready for the trip down. Kirk is becoming desperate. When he visited Tito this morning, I learn, he said that if no crew can be found, he will go overland to Shupanga. I doubt he means it. The last journey was nearly the end of him and Rae.

In the afternoon I take myself for a walk beyond the settlement. How much longer can this delay last? I look at the river flowing past. There are no boats on it. One seldom sees more than one or two canoes, but at the moment there is nothing.

When I return, there is a strangeness about something. None of the Portuguese are to be seen, on the street or on their verandahs. I knock on Generoso’s door to find out what is going on. There is no answer. Where is everyone?

I walk towards Tito’s, and when I am a little distance away I can hear voices, just around the wall before me. I creep a little closer, until the voices become clear. It is Pascoal speaking. He sounds angry. I cannot make out the meaning of the words.

‘I know what you are up to.’ Kirk’s voice now. ‘You are trying every trick in the book to delay us. I blame you, sir, as much as anyone here.’

I peer around the corner until I can see. Kirk is pointing his finger at Pascoal. All the Portuguese appear to be there. Tito, Generoso, Albino, Gauvea, the padre, Senhor Pratt, everyone. I don't see Candido.

Pascoal is saying something in reply to Kirk. His tone is indignant.

Generoso translates. 'He says you will find no sailors here.'

The Portuguese have formed something of a huddle. Tito, I notice, is standing slightly apart and is saying nothing.

'We will go,' Kirk says to the others, 'whether you like it or not.'

I withdraw a little. I am in danger of being seen. I don't want to blame to be laid at my account. But it pleases me. Oh yes, it pleases me.

I arrive at the house in the morning.

Kirk is addressing Kaniat. 'Those men,' he says, pointing about. 'We want to help Dr Livingstone but they stop us. They stop us from helping the Doctor. Are there no more men – Makololo men – who can work the boat? No men?'

Kaniat pulls his mouth into a grin and shakes his head. 'No men,' he says.

'Go and ask them one more time.'

With that he ushers Kaniat out. 'Baines,' Kirk acknowledges me gruffly. He turns to Rae. 'I could try forcing them as a duty of the Doctor's,' he says, 'but I'm not sure how much good it will do.'

Rae gives a slow shrug. He looks at me but his face is expressionless.

'I think it's time to make an official demand for assistance, ordered by the government of Lisbon. Should the major then refuse, the conversation in his presence last night would put a very ugly interpretation on the motive.'

I walk out the door, and make my way to Generoso's. Everyone I pass in the street looks at me intently. Most give me a nod. I knock on Generoso's door and he answers a few moments.

'He is going to write an official demand to Tito,' I say. 'He will report to Lisbon if Tito does not help them.'

Generoso spits. 'What do we care about Lisbon?'

'Tell Tito,' I say.

He nods.

When I return to the house, Kirk is at the desk writing. He glances up but returns immediately to his paper. I stand there for a while, watching him.

There is a knock on the door. It is Generoso. 'The commandant would like to see you,' he says. 'The men are ready. You can leave today.'

'Well, well, well,' says Kirk, looking up at me. 'How astonishing.'

He stands up, takes a few steps and stops in the doorway.

'Baines, get your things.'

With that he is off.

Generoso remains standing there. 'Here,' he holds out another letter. 'This one is from me, for Dr Livingstone. Please give this to him.'

'What is it?'

'Some of us have known Livingstone for a long time. It was years ago that he first came here and ... enjoyed our hospitality.' He shrugs and says no more. Am I supposed to have understood his meaning?

'I'll not forget your money,' I say. 'But I will be back here.'

University of Cape Town

Fancy our great gawky naval officer possessed on the idea that instead of coming to seek Afric's weal he had come to discover the "Ten Lost Tribes". As if, of all things in the world, we had not Jews enough already ...

Between ourselves the only person we are likely to lose by death is the artist whom I was obliged to leave at Tette. He took to drinking and debauchery in my absence and if he lives I send him off.

– David Livingstone, letter to Frederick Fitch, 28 October 1859

University of Cape Town

Tete to Kongone, November 1859

They battled to find men for the pinnacle. The Tete people wanted nothing to do with Kirk once they understood the nature of his duties.

Livingstone, of course, would say that I had turned the townspeople against him. But would I really have gained anything, if we'd been stranded there? Could I really be expected to know how events would unfold?

But they gave us men, in the end, and two canoes to accompany us. Kirk came to me – he merely glanced at me, his eyes cold – and gripped me by the elbow. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘come.’

I had no time to say goodbyes. Generoso was on the shore. All I could do was raise my hand. My mind could think of no words.

The weather was hostile when we left. There were strong winds and rain storms, and thunder and lightning at night. We had only a sail awning to protect us, but the rain found its way through, and everything was always damp.

Everyone was sick: Kirk and I when we left, and most of the men came down with it at some time or another. At no stage was half the crew in a fit state, and this was what slowed us down at the beginning. Later on, the river would join the conspiracy.

We sailed through the Lupata Gorge, where the river was deep. I had last come up here accompanied by Tito's men, when Tete was still a word to me, and Kebrabasa a promise. I'd been sick before and I was sick again. The steep banks towered above our little boats, making them seem like the miniatures I'd build as a child.

On the other side of the gorge the river widened and the groundings began. The crew seemed to know the river as well as it could be known, and always found the deepest part. But sometimes this was little more than a foot of water, and hours were spent dragging the boats over sandbanks and shoals.

The route was torturous, from side to side, a zigzag course that was double, three times longer than a straight line would have taken us.

Rain fell on us and thunder sounded in the distance.

The days blurred one into another. Afternoons and mornings became confused. I awoke from a sleep and saw a man walking on the water before us. And there to the side,

another, and others still ... all around us. Men walking on the water. They cried out and signalled with waving arms.

'No deep water anywhere,' Kirk muttered. 'We'll have to haul her.' He stood up and shouted to the men. 'Voltais! Voltais!' And they came back; I recognized their faces.

Hands were raised up and things were passed to them. I joined in and handed them a box, a cask. Much of the heavy cargo was moved from the pinnacle and large canoe and put in the small canoe. Then began the dragging. The water was little higher than my ankles. I heaved and pulled with the others, and the boat would shift a foot or two, its bottom grating on the sand and resting again.

I'd look out, every now and then, for alligators breaking the surface. I'd see a disturbance on the water, and fix my eyes on it. It would be a branch, or a ridge in the bed rising up to the water level. But I kept looking.

We heaved and heaved, and the water came up to my knees. The pinnacle came alive again, freed from the riverbed, and in I jumped, but wondering how long before we'd be stuck again.

We travelled the reaches above the Island of Pita, where I had begun my journey on the pinnacle. I remembered, as I saw those landscapes again, how I had felt on the way up, when I had put my hand to the tiller and inched upstream, when Livingstone had met me and told me I was doing good work. I woke up once, from sleep or from fever, thinking that I was back then, approaching Tete for the first time, and that all that had happened in between had been a dream, a bad dream. But the pinnacle was pointed in the wrong direction, and it was not my two Kroomen before me, but Kirk and Rae.

In my mind I could see the map that I had drawn of these reaches. Where was it now? Livingstone had it. I had drawn, with red lines, the course of the channel, snaking to and fro around the sandbanks. But it was different now. The channels had altered since the last time I had navigated them; the banks had shifted. The river had shrugged off its old course. Our maps were useless.

We stopped near Sena, at Nyaruka, and walked over the sandbanks to the town. There was no sentry to meet us this time; part of the stockade was left open. The town itself was emptier of people, who had been gathering here for protection from the war.

The church was damaged. Rae pointed it out to me, making sure no one was looking. 'They fired a cannon into the air to celebrate the end of the war,' he laughed. 'The ball landed on the wall of the church. Idiots!'

Senhor Ferrão came to meet us, and sent men to repair the boat and gave us provisions. We slept in the same house where I'd slept alongside Livingstone the time before. He'd spoken so gently to me then. Was that real? Could it happen again?

In the morning we found that four of our crew had fled. Where had they gone? Perhaps they were in the huts of other natives, in one of the nearby villages, waiting for a canoe to bring them back to Tete. Or perhaps they had set off overland, leaving the river to the mad Englishmen. What would have happened if I'd done the same: struck off on my own, into the wild, far from the angry cries of my bewildered escorts?

Ferrão gave us livestock – a sheep, a pig and fowls – and our boat became filled with distressed noise. All day and night they bleated and cried. I looked at the eyes of the sheep. The poor creature was terrified, somehow knowing that it was being brought closer to its death. Every now and then it would look back at me, into my eyes, before its gaze darted elsewhere.

We were close to Shupanga, where Livingstone was waiting for us. I thought again of the men who ran away. What would I have done had I gone too? I could have waited among the trees. Not gone too far away, not into the danger of the wilderness, but far enough that they wouldn't be able to find me.

When we reached Shupanga the Doctor was not there. The *MaRobert* was gone. Kirk leapt from the pinnacle before we reached the landing place, and waded ashore. He returned from the house with a letter in his hand.

'They have gone to the bar!' he shouted. 'The launch is in a leaking state, and they have gone down before she sinks completely!'

I wasn't sure if this was good news. I'd been dreading the meeting with Livingstone, and now he was not here. I had a few days' respite. But now we'd have to continue, in our unhappy little flotilla, the rain seeping into our slumber. And now I'd be taken all the way to the bar, where the sea loomed beyond, where a ship might be waiting.

There were some letters for Kirk from the mailbag I'd touched with my hands some months before, and one for Rae. Nothing had been left for me.

At Shupanga Kirk engaged new sailors and procured more provisions, and then we were off again, sailing by day, moored by night. We passed Mazaro, but we didn't stop there. I watched from the pinnacle and tried to locate the place where Livingstone and I had landed and stumbled upon those dead bodies, the hut where Livingstone and I had met the governor, who had been so sick with fever. I imagined again the sight of Livingstone carrying the governor, who flopped over his shoulder like a limp scarecrow.

And there, as we floated a little further, I saw the spot where I'd sat, near the Mutu, to sketch the scene.

The sun circled us again. Downriver we went. Down, down.

We passed Expedition Island, stripped bare of any sign of us. A year and a half before, the iron house would be standing there, and our three tents. Kirk or I would be about to start our guard duty. Charles might have been packing away his photographic equipment. Before everything went wrong.

Soon we were in the lower reaches, once again under the influence of the tides. I looked for the spot where the *Pearl* had grounded for the last time. Bedingfeld and Duncan had been at each other's throats here, and Livingstone. I'd tried to stay removed from it. But that had done me no good in the end.

We threaded our way down the Kongone channel, where the banks were narrow and birds exploded from the trees as we passed. The stream was dotted with mangroves here. Devil sticks. That's what Jumbo had called them.

As we came closer to the sea, Kirk and Rae started talking about this ship that they expected at the bar. Would it be there already, they wondered, with provisions and more mail?

We arrived at the camp in the morning. The first sign of it was the flag, the Red Ensign, atop a long pole, flapping in the wind. Nearby, I could see the *MaRobert*, lying on the sand. She had finally been beached. There were a number of huts, built of wood, some way up from the water.

In three weeks I had repeated, in reverse, a journey that had taken nearly half a year when the current – and everything else – was against us. I had come all the way back to where we had started. Here I would meet Livingstone again, and he would pass his judgement.

We are all in excellent health. Have [illegible] Baines our dishonest artist & storekeeper. The rascal has made away with one fourth of our 2 yrs loaf sugar. Can give no account of it and then cooked his accounts to square the remainder making us all consume about 3 times more than we did. According to his account 4 of us used a loaf 16 lbs in six or 8 days in our tea & coffee only, as we did not use it in cooking & we used a good deal of brown besides. Of course he has been dismissed. It is amusing to see how papers prophesy. Last year the British quarterly which we received this month said 'Come what will Lord Palmerston never will be prime minister again.' He is now prime minister. The Saturday [illegible] also fails in prophesying. The Portuguese are mortified at our making the discoveries. They are awful liars. I hope my dear little children will never tell a lie. It is so shameful & wicked. All good people speak the truth. Our dear Saviour loves the truthful children who always speak the truth & try to please him by doing right always.

– Charles Livingstone, letter to Harriette Livingstone, 28 November 1859

University of Cape Town

Kongone, 22–23 November 1859

A damp wind is blowing. They have built structures out of wood, three small huts, with upright walls and pitched roofs, a little way up from the high-tide level. The roofs are covered with sail cloth to keep out the rain. Another hut has been started on. A little lower, on the sand, lies the *MaRobert*, out of the water at last. There is no sign of a ship.

Rae is on his way to have a look at the launch, and Kirk has gone to the camp to announce himself to Livingstone. I've given him the bill for Generoso, and the letter Generoso wrote to the Doctor. I have Tito's letter still. I shall give that to him personally.

Rae disappears around the far side of the launch, and now there is no sign of anyone. Nothing is happening. Just the whistling of the wind. I approach the hut and wait outside. It is a relief to find some shelter.

I can make out Charles's voice. 'So Baines is alive. We had heard otherwise.'

Have I heard correctly? Is that what he said? He thought I was dead?

I cannot make out Kirk's response. I move closer, until I can hear: '... no sign of it?'

'None,' says Charles. 'It is a concern. There was a letter from her captain, saying she would call here in six weeks or two months. But that was written at the beginning of September, so we're worried she may have called before we got here.'

'Let's hope not,' Kirk says.

I, of course, hope the opposite. I hope the ship has come and gone and is somewhere off Natal now.

'Where is your brother?' Kirk asks.

'Out hunting for meat,' Charles replies, 'with the Makololo. Our provisions are not going to last too much longer. He'll be back this afternoon.'

Above me, I notice, is a board, with words painted on it in red: *Mount Pleasant House*. It surprises me that someone would take the care to do such a thing.

They thought I was dead?

'Where shall we set up camp?' Kirk asks. 'Is there any room?'

'You'll have to wait. The men are working on a hut for you and Rae. David and I have this one. The others are full with things from the launch. You will have to sleep in the boat. You have ... sails and tarpaulins to keep the rain out, do you not?'

'Yes, we've been sleeping like that for the past weeks,' Kirk says. 'It is a little cramped, but I suppose we can manage a while longer.'

'There is a whaleboat over there,' Charles says. 'Why don't you send Baines over there?'

'I hope this ship comes soon,' Kirk says. 'How long is the Doctor prepared to wait?'

There is silence for a moment. Are they coming out? I take a few steps away from the door.

'What's this?' Kirk speaks again.

'The rest of your letters, and Rae's.'

'And what about Baines?'

'Oh yes. He's lucky we kept them. Somewhere here.' A pause. 'I must tell you, Bedingfeld has been spreading all sorts of lies. But the Doctor is putting the record straight.'

Kirk's voice remains inaudible, but Charles's response is clear.

'Yes, here they are. Oh, and good news,' he adds. 'A letter came from the Doctor's wife. He has a daughter!'

A daughter. I had forgotten. Mrs Livingstone was with child. But that was eighteen months ago. She must be – what? – a year old already, this daughter. And Livingstone only hears of it now.

'Anna,' Charles says. 'Her name is Anna. Anna Mary.'

I move away from the hut before Kirk comes out. He has a small bundle of letters for me. I sit in the lee of one of the huts and turn over the envelopes. Most of them are from Mother, and Emma and Henry. There are some from friends in England and at the Cape, and a few from more formal acquaintances – men who want to engage with me as a member of Livingstone's expedition. I recognize their seals on the envelopes but I do not open them. Even the letters from home are difficult to read. They are addressed to a man who I can no longer claim to be, who stands at a slight remove from where I am now. We're so proud of you, Thomas, they say. You must be doing glorious things. We hope that when you come back to England you'll make time to see us.

Most of them I leave unopened. I cannot take too much of this.

Kirk has gone in search of the Doctor, and Rae has come up to the hut. I make my way to the *MaRobert*, now that there is no one to see me. She is beached on the sand, tilted slightly to one side. Her hull is in a terrible state, ridden with little holes, like a disease.

I heave myself onto the deck, treading as lightly as it is possible to do, listening for the full extent of the creak before stepping again. She is stable; my weight will not upset her, as long as I don't go too far to starboard.

I run my hand along her gunwale. This is where I stood when we first started exploring the delta, filled with such excitement. Where I stood when we all set off for Kebrabasa. When the Victoria Falls lay ahead of us, beckoning, beckoning.

I approach the cabin and open the door. My eyes take a few moments to become accustomed to the darkness, though it is speckled with light from the holes and cracks in the woodwork. What is that sound? That scratching sound? Is she listing from my weight?

And then I see it. The floor, the walls, every surface ... is moving. Shifting, heaving, seething, glinting from an infinity of black carapaces, boiling out of the vessel's belly.

Cockroaches. Millions and millions of cockroaches. The cabin is alive with them. I glance up and they are there too, above me. One is on my shoulder, I brush it off, and another. They are climbing up my boots – good God! – and onto my trousers.

I lurch backwards and lose my balance. I am tilting towards the wall, and there is nothing for my hand to grasp that is not covered with the vermin. I jut out my elbow and touch the wall with my upper arm, my shoulder breaking my fall. Immediately I push away, my arm covered with the writhing devils. The sound around me becomes deafening, as if they have found a way inside my ears.

The brightness on the other side of the door is a paradise. If I can only get to it. One step, then another, and finally I am there, in the open air, where I can breathe again.

They are here too, in the shadows, scurrying here and there. I can see them now. But it is nothing like that hell inside there.

She is a corpse, the *MaRobert*, being fed on by maggots. This is a grave. The grave of our dreams, the dreams we had when we entered here, hoping to steam upriver and through the rapids and into glories unimaginable.

It has all gone to rot.

Kirk returns with the Doctor after dinner time. I watch them from afar. They are like rough pencil figures in a quick sketch. The Makololo are with them, and a white man – oh yes, that sailor, Rowe. The Doctor's stance is unreadable. From this distance I cannot see any clues as to how he will deal with me. I finish off some salted pork in the whaleboat. I will stay here now, keep my distance for a while.

I secure a piece of sailcloth to keep out the elements, and then I wait. Livingstone's voice rings out in my mind – pouring anger upon me, reaching in out in forgiveness, expressing disappointment, soothing me with understanding, demanding atonement – so it takes me a moment to react when I hear his real voice.

'Mr Baines!'

I sit up quickly.

There he stands. His hair is blowing in the wind, flapping above his head like a loose sail. His eyes blaze below his frowning brows. His skin looks even more ragged than I remember. It is more than four months since I last saw him.

'Mr Baines,' he says again, waving a piece of paper. 'What the devil is this?'

His words echo about me. It seems the only thing I have ever heard Livingstone say to me. *What the devil is this?*

'You expect me to pay this?' he says. 'Money that *you* owe the Portuguese? Here.' He holds out the bill. 'You will take this back. You know very well that I have no money of yours in my possession and no authority to draw your salary.'

He holds the paper at arm's length. I rise to my feet but I stand there frozen. My voice will not make a sound.

'You did know this when you gave this bill, didn't you?'

There is a patch of skin on his left cheek that is inflamed, festering. Perhaps a scratch that has not healed, the bite of an insect, or even a sign of some disease. He has asked me a question, has he not, but still I cannot find any words.

'You will present yourself before us tomorrow, and answer the charges that have been laid against you. Do you understand?'

I nod. 'Yes, Doctor,' I manage to whisper.

Livingstone turns away, takes a few strides and then stops.

'Mr Baines, I must ask you something.' His voice is softer now.

'Yes, Dr Livingstone?'

'Your journal. You still have in your possession your journal of events from September last year until now. As the property of the expedition, and for any way in which it might aid our future ventures, I would ask that you hand it over to me.'

My hope wilts. Is that all? All he wants from me? I thought I'd seen a flash of something, something civil, in his expression.

'I can certainly ... I'm not sure how it would ... Most of it is about my time in Tete, where you ... And the parts on Kebrabasa can be of little use, if the expedition is not to return there. I presume—'

‘Do not presume, Mr Baines, do not presume.’

There is no reason to anger him. Particularly if he is going to hear my case tomorrow.

‘Will the copy be acceptable?’ I ask. ‘The original I shall send on to England.’

‘Both of them, Mr Baines. You will give them both to me. The original and the copy.’

‘But my journal,’ I say. ‘The way I’ve written it – it’s addressed to my mother. She should surely—’

He raises a hand to stop me. ‘When the ship comes ... then we can see. But for now I would advise you not to withhold something that belongs to the expedition.’

I have no choice. ‘Very well,’ I say, and crouch down at the box I have brought down with me, with a few precious things. I turn the key and open the lid. There, packed safely on the side, is my journal. At the bottom, wrapped in canvas, are the loose pages of the copy.

I take the book in my hands and hold it out to him. He takes it from me, and flips through the pages, stopping every now and then to read a phrase or sentence. I have the copy in my hand. He reaches out and I give that to him too.

‘Thank you,’ he says, taking a step back and then clearing his throat. ‘And, Mr Baines, I would ask you not to bring me ... *impudent* letters from your friends among the Portuguese.’

With that he turns and is gone.

I return to my whaler, and climb under the protection of the sail. The wind rages around me. Everything is sticky from the sea air.

So. Tomorrow he will question me. Will he allow me to explain myself or is his mind an unchangeable thing? Is this to be a proper hearing, the kind that is set up when the army is out in the field, as happened in the Eastern Cape? Will he consider the evidence? Kirk found nothing when he searched my boxes. Nothing to prove the case against me. Presumably he has written a report. And I have Tito’s letter, his findings after thorough investigations throughout the settlement. That must count for something, for a good deal. Livingstone will surely listen to Tito.

Charles. Charles will be there. He, no doubt, will accuse me to my face. Or perhaps he is too cowardly. What proof will he present? He has nothing.

It is quickly dark, but I cannot sleep. I cannot lie still, but turn over and over, trying to find a more comfortable position. In my mind I keep imagining what Livingstone will say to me, and how I will respond.

‘Can you tell me why I should keep you on, Mr Baines?’

‘I can, Dr Livingstone, if you will please hear me.’

Now a voice comes from outside the boat. 'Thomas.' It is Father's voice. I can hear from the crunching of the sand that he is close.

'Do you want to come inside?' I ask.

'No, no. I'm all right out here, my boy.'

I remember him saying that to me one night when we were caught at sea in a squall. He ordered me below deck, and remained up there to steer her safely through it. 'Come inside, Father!' I called, for I could hear the waves beating against the bows. But he would not. 'I'm all right out here, my boy,' he cried.

I would like to sit up and see him (it's been such a long time), but my body cannot move.

'Quite a day you have tomorrow,' he says.

'How do you think it will turn out?' I ask him.

He takes some time before he replies. 'Is Livingstone a fair man?'

'He ... I don't know, Father. I think he is ... Although the way he has treated me, and Thornton ... I think it's his brother. If I can just talk to the Doctor ...'

'And are you sure that you are worthy of forgiveness?'

Who is this? That voice is no longer Father's. It sounds like Livingstone's voice. Livingstone, when he is giving a sermon.

'Not everyone will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who repent of their sins and accept Him as their lord and saviour.'

Where is he? Is he with Father? I wish I could look out of this boat, but the sides of it rise up like mountains.

'Greater love hath no man than this,' Livingstone intones, 'that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.'

He seems to be circling the boat as he speaks, moving swiftly, like a bird.

'Have you repented, Thomas?' The voice is different again. It is an older man's voice. It makes my body cringe. 'Have you told God how sorry you are?'

I try to wriggle free, but still my body will not move. I twist and pull – I have to get out of here, before he catches me – and finally ... I am falling down the dark stairway, falling, falling.

'I must remind you, Mr Baines, that you need not say anything that will incriminate you.' Livingstone sits across the table from me, with Charles to one side of him, Kirk and Rae on the other. Morning has brought the inevitable, the moment when all possibilities must

now converge here, in this temporary hut at the mouth of Kongone branch of the river Zambesi.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I acknowledge with a nod.

So. It is to be a proper hearing. Good. I look across at Charles. With your lies and hatred you have tried to undo me. He looks back with calm eyes.

‘Before we begin with the charges against you, the charges for which you were dismissed, I would like an answer from you about this other matter more recently arisen. You gave Generoso an order upon me to pay seven pounds. Can you explain why you did so, knowing full well that I have no authority to draw your salary?’

Why is he bringing this up? This has nothing to do with anything. My mouth will make no sound; my mind is filled with noise. Surely you understand why, Dr Livingstone. You stopped my salary, so what money did I have to pay the locals for the things I needed? I couldn’t leave with any debts to them. Don’t you understand that?

‘You’ll remember,’ Livingstone goes on, ‘that I lent you five pounds at the Cape and advanced you another five, while your agent at home is drawing your salary. Can you please try to explain why you gave an order as if I had funds of yours in my possession?’

I take a deep breath and clear my throat. Somewhere I find my voice, though it is only a whisper. ‘I wished,’ I say, ‘to leave Tete ... honourably.’

‘What was that?’

‘I wished to leave Tete honourably,’ I say, a little louder now.

‘Honourably?’

I keep silent now.

‘Well,’ Livingstone says, ‘let us examine this ... honour of yours. Let us consider ...’ he looks up at me ‘... the honour of a thief.’

A thief. Is that what I am in his eyes, even before he has heard me answer a single question of his? No, this is not a proper hearing at all.

‘Let us look at the artist’s materials,’ Livingstone says. ‘This canvas’ – he holds up the piece with the blue stripe, the one Kirk queried – ‘you appropriated this, and yet you told Dr Kirk that this was from a ship that you sailed in, or from the Australian expedition. But I saw you take it out of the launch myself.’

This is a farce. Surely they can all see it. All I can do is laugh. ‘Oh yes,’ I say, ‘I took this canvas out of the launch myself.’

Is Kirk part of it? Did he claim that I had stolen the canvas? Or did he just mention it in his report, giving Livingstone something to seize upon?

‘The mark is that of government,’ Livingstone says, ‘and could not have been in the Australian expedition as it – this particular mark – was not in use then.’

Perhaps, in this case, this is the truth. But it is a trifle. Am I to be undone by a trifle?

‘And what of my own canvas that I used in the service?’ I say.

‘What’s that?’ Livingstone asks, leaning forward.

‘My own,’ I say. ‘How am I to know exactly where this piece or that piece comes from? I have used so much of my own canvas, with so many different marks. Is that not reason enough why I should not know this one?’

Livingstone is writing something down. My words, presumably, but is he rendering them as I said them? I cannot see. He pulls the store book towards him. ‘Now,’ he says. ‘The matter of the sugar.’ He turns to his brother. ‘Mr Livingstone and Mr Rae, did you consume sugar to the amount specified by Mr Baines?’

Charles takes a deep breath, as if he is pondering the matter. ‘We did not.’

The bastard.

Rae is shaking his head. What is his part in this? Is he just going along with Livingstone to keep out of trouble?

‘Anything like that amount?’ Livingstone asks.

‘No, sir,’ says Charles. ‘The sugar said by Mr Baines to have been expended by us was not consumed by us. We were sick and often ate nothing. And’ – he raises a finger – ‘we used considerable quantities of brown native sugar at precisely the time that Mr Baines put down a large expenditure of white sugar.’

Livingstone raises his chin. ‘What do you say to this, Mr Baines?’

It seems an impossible thing to be looking through my own eyes. I view the scene, instead, from the rafters of the hut, looking down at the proceedings, seeing myself sitting there, the way I do when I put myself in a painting. I’m telling Livingstone that the sugar was, as far as I am aware, all eaten fairly.

He asks me about the entries in the store book, about credits and debits, barrels and casks. The questions come at me: dates and numbers and calculations buzz around my mind.

I try to explain to him how I’d open a cask and note the remainder in the book. Perhaps he is misreading what I have written, adding the cask and its contents rather than subtracting one from the other. I tell him that I disagree that the amount consumed is excessive. I, certainly, had my fair share. And, I add, perhaps I have erred in not noting every time a cask had been finished. And how could I know what was consumed when I was not present or when I was sick?

But Livingstone is having none of it. He raises the store book with both hands and shakes it before me. 'You have cooked the book!' he declares. 'You have made it appear as if four pounds of sugar were consumed per day, when it couldn't possibly have been.'

'But then,' I say, 'where is the evidence? If I took the sugar away, where is the evidence? Who saw me? Let me be tried by evidence.'

Livingstone sits back in his chair. 'Mr Baines, the sugar was placed in your charge and is not now forthcoming. Your statements in the book as to expenditure have been contradicted by the members of the expedition and are contradictory between themselves. What other evidence could I possibly want?'

The letter.

'Wait,' I say. 'I have a letter.'

Livingstone puckers his nose. 'A letter? What letter?'

'From Tito. From Major Sicard.' I pull it out from my pocket. 'He is satisfied ... his investigations ... he found that there was no way I could have taken—'

'I am not interested in this.' Livingstone waves it away, as one would an insect.

'What?' It is a shrill cry. A challenge. The sound of it startles me, and I notice Livingstone flinch.

He sits up a little straighter and draws in breath. 'Keep your letter,' he says.

But, no, he cannot disregard it like this. This is going too far. All the time that Tito took to question the inhabitants of Tete. The effort it took me to make him write down his findings. Is all this to come to nothing?

'But this is *evidence*,' I say, standing up. 'This is evidence from the people who were there. Not like this' – I gesture the rest of them sitting at the table. 'Tito spoke to the people who *knew*, who could have *seen*—'

'Sit down, Mr Baines!' Livingstone bangs a hand on the table. 'I am not interested in what you have convinced the Portuguese to say on your behalf.' He prods a finger at me. 'I am aware of how you have turned them against us.'

My heart is thumping in my throat. My mouth is dry and my mind is a whirl. I want to shout – the desire wells up from deep within me – I want to cry out: *Damn you, Dr Livingstone! I have gone to the ends of the world for you, and now you cast me aside!*

But I do not. I sit down as I am told.

There are more questions, about the portraits I painted, about the accident with the whaleboat. The words make sense in themselves, but after a while they break apart and float in various directions.

Charles sits with an expressionless face. I'm sure he is hiding a smirk beneath that look of ... self-importance. I glance across at Kirk. He holds my gaze for a moment. I can see something in his face. His mind is full of thoughts, thoughts about me. But what is it that I see? Is there some sympathy there? Is it pity? Or disappointment? Rae is not looking directly at me, but he appears uncomfortable. Livingstone continues with his interrogation.

I reply to the questions. I hear words coming out of my mouth, but my answers are irrelevant. Livingstone will not listen to them if they do not agree with whatever he has determined to be the truth of the matter. 'I have done no wrong,' I say. 'I have worked as hard as anyone else to achieve the goals of this expedition.' But his eyes are narrow. He is not admitting much into them from outside his mind.

'Mr Baines, when I left Tete for the Shiré in July of this year, you said to me that you hoped to remain with the expedition though you receive no salary. Why would you say that, if you thought you had acted fairly? I, certainly, had not made any mention of cutting you off.'

Why did I say that? Do you not knowwhat it is like, to live in that sort of uncertainty? Such fear for one's future? Do you not know what it's like working for you, Dr Livingstone, not having any idea what one is supposed to do, not knowing what you are planning to do or what your opinion is about ... me, or anything at all? Do you not understand what that is like ... being certain one moment that you are about to be cast aside, the next moment believing that you have perceived some clue that you are to be spared?

But I do not say any of this.

How can I explain what I was thinking at that time in Tete? It is difficult even to recall it exactly. So much of that time is lost in the fog of fever. 'My mind,' I say at last, 'was in a different state then. I was ... you know, Dr Livingstone ... I was not well much of the time.'

'Ah, yes, as you were when you confessed your theft to Mr Livingstone. How very convenient. But I was there to see you with my own eyes on the second occasion, when I was about to leave for the Shiré. I think you were quite well then. Dr Kirk, your medical expertise will be appreciated here. Do you think Mr Baines's head was affected at this stage?'

'I do not, sir.' Kirk looks at me. I can see the expression in his eyes now. It is a look of disappointment, even anger. *How could you?* his eyes seem to say. Damn you, Kirk, that you believe all this. You were my friend.

‘And Mr Rae?’

‘I cannot say, Doctor, that I have any evidence of his mind being unstable at that stage.’

‘No. Indeed. Thank you, gentlemen.’

‘But Dr Livingstone,’ I blurt out. ‘You surely know how sick I was then. You can’t believe that what I said to Charles ...’

But there are impassive faces around the table. No one is looking me in the eye, except Livingstone, whose expression is cold.

I stumble to my feet. ‘I went all the way to the cataract for you!’ The words blurt out from my mouth. ‘I went, sick and exhausted, to do your bidding, and this is your way of thanking me!’

Livingstone stands up. ‘Mr Baines!’ he commands. ‘Sit down!’

I stagger back. I speak much more softly now, my voice choked to a whisper. ‘I saw it. I saw what we came here to see.’

‘Perhaps,’ he says, ‘you *were* too sick to know what you saw. But I have heard nothing to disprove the charges for which you have been dismissed. Gentlemen’ – he turns to the others – ‘I thank you. Mr Baines, you will wait until the ship comes to collect you. You will be allowed to eat from our provisions, but I will not have you join us at this table for meals.’

I stare at him, searching for ... something. Something that will explain why this is happening, or what I must do. But there is nothing. He points to the door.

‘Off with you.’

I lie in my whaleboat and drift in and out of sleep. When I wake I can’t tell what time it is. Some time in the afternoon. My ears are filled with the whistling of the wind and the thumping of canvas.

A spider is spinning a web in the corner of the boat. There it goes, spinning and spinning, until a gust of wind undoes some of the work it has done. Every time it starts again, spinning, spinning.

I hear a voice outside. Or is it just the wind? I peer over the edge and there is Macomocomo. He is carrying a bowl and cutlery.

I sit up straight and he comes closer. It is my dinner.

So, Livingstone was serious. I am not allowed to join the others for dinner. I am treated as a leper.

Macomocomo closes his eyes and gives a gentle nod. Then he turns and makes his way back to the others.

The wind has made the food cold, and there is sand in it. But I am hungry, and I devour it.

What now? I have no company. Not even a glass of wine.

I look for my tobacco (this too is running low) and fill my pipe. I strike a match but it quickly goes out. I turn away from the wind and try again. No luck. The wind penetrates every space. I cover my head with my blanket and light another. The flame stays alive and I take quick draughts. The warming sensation of smoke fills my chest, once, and then again.

When I draw again, there is only air. The pipe has gone out. The tobacco is too wet.

I have no journal to write in. But what would I have to say if I did?

The spider is still at it, spinning its web.

I am to be sent away.

My only hope now is that the boat does not come.

University of Cape Town

Your idea of Dr. L. is pretty just. He is a man who takes small intense hatreds and is therefore a more dangerous enemy than useful friend, but he and I get along nicely. When he has no insinuations put forward, he is easily pleased so long as one does work but with idleness he has no patience. We have certainly been unfortunate in our men. Bedingfeld was not the man at all, he was a very incompetent person, Thornton was far too young and turned out lazy. Baines was a very queer fellow. I don't understand him at all. He was very low, that's a fact and for a storekeeper, quite incompetent.

– John Kirk, letter to his brother Alexander, 30 January 1860

University of Cape Town

Kongone mouth, December 1859

The *Lynx* appeared a few days later. There was some commotion on the shore: screaming and shouting. I looked from under my boat's sail awning and saw the others – Livingstone, Charles, Kirk and Rae, amidst a throng of Makololo. They were all leaping and waving and making whooping sounds. I looked towards the sea and saw a low grey cloud, a trail of smoke from a ship's engine. Following it to its source I could see, in the distance, appearing intermittently among the swell, the masts of a man-of-war. She had come.

Livingstone pointed back towards the hut and Charles went running there. A moment later Kirk followed him. They returned a few minutes later with a long tube and stuck one end of it into the ground. They were going to send a signal.

With an eruption of flame and smoke, the rocket erupted into the air. It shone bright in the dull sky as it rose and rose before curving downwards and then disappearing.

All was quiet for some minutes, and then a trail of light shot up from the sea. The man-of-war had responded.

The men on the beach jumped and hollered. I sunk back into my boat.

I was now done for. All that was left was for Livingstone to usher me on board. Was there anything more I could do? I thought of Tito's letter, lying unread in my jacket pocket. If I could make one last appeal. But how?

To the frustration of everyone else, the wait went on even longer. For several days the man-of-war's boats tried to cross the bar, but they were unable to. The wind was strong, sometimes a gale, and made the bar impassable.

The others were desperate. There, tantalizingly close, was the vessel that bore provisions, mail, perhaps news of a new steamer. Every morning they would gather on the beach and remain there for a long time before dispersing to their tasks. Rae had men dig up the sand on one side of the *MaRobert*, to incline her so they could get to her bottom. Kirk went off hunting with the Doctor.

Livingstone set up a flagstaff to guide the boats, but still they could not enter. I saw him standing there, once the others had left. His eyes were fixed on the water, and he appeared to be talking to himself. He was, of course, unaware that I was watching him. Now he held out a hand and raised it up. It was a prayer, an appeal to his God.

And I? I busied myself too, when I felt well enough, going out with my sketchbook and pencils and paints. I sketched the mangroves with their buttressed roots, the doum palms near the river mouth, the orange fruit that Kirk had eaten with me when we first arrived here, a year and a half before, and I finished them in watercolour. I noted the manner in which the mangrove seeds fell and entered the soft mud, the number of segments into the orange fruit split.

I'm not sure I knew what they were for, these pictures. Did I intend to impress Livingstone with them, so he would realize at last that he needed an artist and change his mind – or would I at least make him regret getting rid of me? Was I making sure that I did not leave empty-handed, that I had something of mine to present to the scientific community, something to show for my being here? Or was I simply doing the thing I do, because I am compelled to do so?

Coming back one afternoon (this was three or four days after the *Lynx* had appeared), I saw wreckage on the beach. Lying just above the waterline was a curved piece of wood, the stave of a barrel. And there, just beyond, another and another.

I walked a little further and saw, dancing in the surf, a thwart of a boat. There had been an accident. A boat from the *Lynx* must have come to no good.

I walked a little further and found a bottle. The label was damaged, but still legible. *Smith & Co. India Pale Ale*. This must have washed up too. I found more bottles, half a dozen – more – and I took a few. I put them, not in my boat of course, but nearby, among the detritus that the sea washes up, where no one else would see them. I opened one, when I was sure no one could see me, and took a sip, the warm pleasure of ale down the throat.

There had been no loss of life. This I learnt the following day, when boats from the *Lynx* finally managed to cross the bar. A boat had capsized, but all aboard were rescued by the boat accompanying it. I heard this from Rae, who was the only one of my fellows – former fellows, the rest of them – who would come and talk to me.

But there was a precious cargo that *had* been lost: one of the mail bags that had been aboard the boat. There was mail up to September, but all letters since then were lost, washed out to sea or sunk to the bottom.

They patrolled the beach in hope that it would wash ashore. I did not join them. I remained in my whaleboat and enjoyed another bottle of my salvage.

The *Lynx*'s commander, Captain Berkeley, had come over with the boats. After the first crossing, they managed it frequently, and brought provisions for the expedition, and men to help with the *MaRobert*.

Once their work was done, there was nothing preventing my removal. I would have to appeal to Livingstone again, put Tito's letter in his hand. Livingstone had refused to look at it when he had interrogated me, but now I would give it to him and make sure that he read it.

I wrote him a letter of my own, a long letter. I put everything down on paper, because I knew he wouldn't listen if I spoke to him, because he wouldn't otherwise take my words seriously; he'd watch as they dispersed in that merciless wind, grains of sand that sting the skin and then vanish.

I wrote what I'd said before, and what I'd say again. That there was no evidence; that I could not possibly have made off with the stores if I'd wanted to; that I had no motive for doing so. I ended it with my demand:

I have to request that I may be taken, or allowed to proceed on my own resources, to Tete where the offence is said to have been committed, and where alone evidence respecting it can be obtained. If I am then found guilty let me bear whatever punishment the law provides; but if not, I protest against the stoppage of my pay and the separation of myself from the expedition at least four months before I had an opportunity of speaking in my own defence. And I feel that in justice to myself I must protest most especially against being obliged to leave the only place where it is possible for me to disprove the charges brought against me.

I have, &c.,

T. Baines.

With my letters in hand I set off in search of him. There were people standing at the *MaRobert*, so I made my way there. The sand dug out from under her, she was leaning to the side now, and Rae and a man from the *Lynx* were working on her hull, patching the holes. Kirk was standing there, but Livingstone was nowhere to be seen.

'Kirk,' I said. 'I need to talk to the Doctor.'

'I believe he is hunting with his brother,' he replied. 'What is it that you want?'

'I must speak to him,' I said, 'before he puts me on that ship. I must put a stop to this.'

Kirk stood there shaking his head. 'You're wasting your time. He will not listen any more.'

'But you will tell him,' I said. 'You'll tell him that I wish to speak to him.'

Kirk took a deep breath of air and breathed out again. 'I will tell him.'

He came in the afternoon. Kirk was with him. Livingstone began addressing me from a distance, so that at first he had to shout.

'Mr Baines!' he said. 'It is time! Time to get your things ready. You are going aboard the *Lynx*.'

'But Doctor,' I said, holding out Tito's envelope. 'You have not read this.'

He looked at the envelope as if it was a piece of putrid flesh. 'What is this?' he said. 'Must I read another wretched letter?'

'It is from Tito,' I said. 'The letter I told you about. He says' – I pressed the letter towards him – 'he says that he investigated my case and found no proof.'

Livingstone made no move to take the letter. 'I am not interested in this. I am finished with your case. And Sicard has no authority over an *English* expedition.'

'Then take me back there, and investigate yourself.' I held out my own letter now.

'And what is *this*?'

'Please. A request.'

'A request,' he snorted. 'What is it now?'

'To go back to Tete,' I said.

'Ha!' He gave a mirthless laugh and shook his head.

'If you are sending me away for stealing,' I said, 'for stealing sugar, then you must prosecute me for it. Prosecute me properly. You cannot send me away from the place where this ... crime is supposed to have—'

'Do you think we have time' – Livingstone interrupted me – 'to go back to Tete and prosecute you? Are you so important that we must leave our work to attend to you? We've offered you an opportunity to explain yourself and your explanations have been unsatisfactory.'

I looked into Livingstone's eyes and saw what I had seen from the beginning with him, what I always knew. That he would not bend. Perhaps this is what made him great, what had made me admire him so. Me, and the rest of the world. It was nothing but the stubbornness of an unkind man.

'Then I will go back there myself,' I said. 'All I need is to be taken up to the entrance of the Kongone canal.'

‘You will do no such thing!’ Livingstone looked across at Kirk. ‘Imagine what that would turn into. That we abandoned Mr Baines in a wild country. A fine story that would be.’

Kirk shook his head, his mouth pulling in an awkward way.

‘You cannot send me away when my things are all at Tete,’ I said to Livingstone.

‘You should have thought of that when you came down with Dr Kirk! Why didn’t you bring them down with you?’

I looked to Livingstone, then to Kirk. ‘It’s going to stick to me for life, the imputation, if I am not prosecuted properly.’

‘You should have thought about that too, Mr Baines. What did you think you were doing, wasting expedition time and materials painting portraits of the Portuguese, doing everything else that you did wrong? What did you think would happen?’

I denied again what he said, but Livingstone just shook his head. He would listen to no appeals; my letters remained unread.

‘My things at Tete: you will at least look after them.’

‘I will not, Mr Baines. I can take no responsibility for your personal effects. If you are so careless as to leave them in a rough country ...’

He and Kirk turned away from me and started towards the huts.

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I called out again.

He stopped and, after waving Kirk on, took a few steps back towards me.

‘I grow irritated, Mr Baines ...’

‘Dr Livingstone,’ I said. ‘My journal.’

‘What of it?’ he replied.

‘You still have it.’

‘Do I?’ He glanced over his shoulder.

‘I gave it to you. When you asked me ...’

‘Yes?’

‘I would ... Can I ...?’

He peered at me, but said nothing.

‘I would like it back,’ I said softly.

‘Oh, would you now?’

‘You said you would consider ... You said when the ship came ...’

‘You would take what belongs to Her Majesty’s government,’ he said. ‘Have you not done enough of that already?’

‘But you have the copy and the original. Surely you can let me have ...’

Livingstone turned away. 'No, Mr Baines, I'm afraid you cannot have everything that you desire.'

'It's a letter,' I said. 'A letter ... to my mother.'

But he did not hear.

There was nothing more I could do. I would have to board the *Lynx*. I was going to be taken away.

What now? Livingstone, no doubt, would send despatches to the Cape condemning me. I needed something to help save my reputation. I had Tito's letter. But something from an Englishman ... Kirk had stood at Livingstone's side. It would do no good to ask him. Charles, of course, was the cause of it. Rae. I would get Rae to sign something for me. He, after all, was with me in Tete when I was supposed to have stolen the sugar.

I looked for him the next morning, with a letter in my hand.

Kongone River, Dec. 10, 1859

To George Rae, Engineer,

Dear Sir,

As you lived in the same house with me in Tete during the time in which I am charged with having given away large quantities of public property, as loaf sugar, butter, &c., I beg you will inform me whether you ever saw me give away any of the provisions of the expedition in a dishonest manner, or have any reason to suppose that I have done so.

I am, &c.,

T. Baines.

The men from the *Lynx* were making ready to leave; there was little time. Rae was still working on the launch's hull.

'Rae,' I said. 'Will you help me? Will you sign something for me?'

I held out my note and he read it. He looked at me with a frown.

'Let me think about it,' he said.

'For God's sake, man, there is no time. They are about to take me away.'

He looked away and then down.

'Rae, please. I'm not asking you to say that the Doctor is wrong. I simply need to you affirm: Did you or did you not see me make off with the stores? Did you think I had a reason to do so? That is all.'

He still looked unconvinced.

‘And,’ I said, ‘I’ll make sure people know about the work you have done here.’

‘Very well,’ he said. ‘And you won’t say anything about me ... that would put me in a bad light.’

‘Of course not. I have only good things to say.’

‘A moment,’ he said.

‘Hurry, Rae. They’re going to take me.’

He did as I asked. He brought me a note which has been a help to me. (I would publish it in the *Advertiser & Mail*.)

Kongone, Dec. 10, 1859

T. Baines.

Sir,

I do hereby give you my word that I have never seen you give away any of the stores belonging to the expedition, neither have I any reason to think that you did so.

I am, &c.,

George Rae, Engineer.

And so I climbed into the boat, with my meagre possessions, and the men rowed to the bar and through the surf. I boarded the *Lynx* and found a place among slaves who had been freed from an Arab dhow.

There was a day of waiting, her boats crossing to and fro, carrying the last of the provisions to Livingstone, and specimens, reports, despatches for England. Her steam was got up and she weighed anchor in the morning, bound for the Cape, where Williams and his wife would take me into their home and I would begin to put together the shattered pieces of my health and my reputation.

As the *Lynx* drew out to sea, the mate and crew crying out as they raised the sails, I remained below deck.

PART VI

THE FALLS

We landed at the head of Garden Island, which is situated near the middle of the river and on the lip of the Falls. On reaching that lip, and peering over the giddy height, the wondrous and unique character of the magnificent cascade at once burst upon us.

It is rather a hopeless task to endeavour to convey an idea of it in words, since, as was remarked on the spot, an accomplished painter, even by a number of views, could but impart a faint impression of the glorious scene.

– David and Charles Livingstone, *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries* (1865), p. 270

University of Cape Town

Victoria Falls, August 1862

The old boatman, Zanjueelah, leads Chapman and me to the bank, where his long canoe awaits us. If one looks at the water before us, there is nothing to indicate that a short distance downstream it will plummet over the precipice with the force of a volcano. Only the sound gives it away, the constant roar that has filled our ears for more than a fortnight. And the vapour that rises from the east and turns the air to mist.

The old man beckons, and Chapman and I glance at each other. We are entrusting our lives to this fellow and his little skiff. He is, it is said, the only one who goes close to the edge of the Falls, and it was with him, and on this very boat, that Livingstone did so in 1855.

He has another chap with him, and the two of them take their positions at each end of the boat, while Chapman and I sit in the middle. Zanjueelah pushes off, and the boat drifts into the smooth but perilous current. We glide swiftly down the river, winding as the current sweeps round the islands and runs in races and rapids over the rocks. In many places the shallows extend nearly across the river, and, though we draw only seven or eight inches water, we ground repeatedly.

'Keep her on to the stream,' I say. I can't help it. But of course it is not necessary. Zanjueelah knows what he is doing. Standing in the bows with his pole, while his mate does the same astern, he guides the narrow craft, balancing and preserving her equilibrium by the mere pressure of his feet as she rushes down each successive rapid.

We are going to Livingstone's Garden Island, which juts out from the water at the edge of the precipice. When one looks at the face of the Falls, from the other side, the island appears like a turret atop a wall of snow, or ice, or some unearthly material. From that vantage point it looks too perilous to reach, but Livingstone has done so and we will too. It will afford us views that we have not seen since we first arrived here.

I have sketched dozens and dozens of views, quickly scratching the splendid spectacle before the paper becomes too wet. It has been impossible to use paints, but I have filled in colours afterwards, while the vision still burns in my mind. The pictures, which always look so inadequate at the scene, seem impressive enough when the magnificent reality is no longer there to shame them. This will be the last. Then it will be time to press on.

What a journey it has been to come this far. It has taken more than a year, longer by far than it took to reach Kebrabasa from the east coast. From the moment we set off from Walvisch Bay, nothing has gone as smoothly as we planned. We have passed through salt pans and desert, and when we finally reached Lake Ngami, it was dryer then ever reported before. We have suffered disease and extreme thirst, many of our men have fled, and we have lost oxen to tsetse or exhaustion. We have encountered hostile natives and been waylaid by tribes demanding extortionary tributes. Our supplies are depleted, the wagon is damaged, and – most concerning for our future progress – we have had to leave parts of the boat behind.

Our first vision of the Falls came unexpectedly. We had set up camp for the night, a night like any other, but when the noise of our men died down, we could hear it. A low rumble in the distance, like incessant thunder. In the morning we could see the glinting ribbon of the Zambesi, and, from a distant point along its course, vast columns of vapour rising high into the air. It looked like the smoke of an almighty fire, except that it rose to a certain point and spread no further.

We made for the river quickly, forgetting our weariness. We clambered over rock and cut through thicket until we stood at the edge of the gorge and beheld the Zambesi plunging down into the abyss. That first vision, in all its wild sublimity and grandeur – it would be impossible to describe in words.

Chapman became quite melancholy afterwards, lamenting the discovery he had lost when, two years before Livingstone, he had come so close to being the first to stumble upon this wonder.

We were met, inevitably, by men from the native overlords, who sought to know our business – and of course to demand payment for our presence in their territory. We were now in the country of the Makololo, whom I knew from Tete, and what a surprise – to them as much as to me – when I saw two of them I had known there. Masakasa was one of them, he who had always been so close to Livingstone. They came as emissaries from the headman, and viewed me with a mixture of bewilderment and suspicion. How was it, they wanted to know, that I had departed from the east coast and now I appeared here. Where had I sprung from? What brought me here?

Communication was rudimentary. But I managed to convey that I had come with Chapman all the way from the west coast, and that I was journeying to Tete, where my things were, and that I had business to settle with Dr Livingstone.

From them I learnt that Livingstone had brought them back here a year or two ago, that he had come with other members of the expedition. Which ones, I wanted to know.

But we shared too little language, and either I could not make my question understood or their answer was not comprehensible to me. The thought has filled my mind since then.

These Makololo – what had Livingstone told them about me? Did his lies about me spread all the way here, the remote interior? Were these men more suspicious of me because of it?

If only Macomocomo was among them. He I would trust, and he would trust me. I asked for him, spoke his name. But they shook their heads. Did they mean he had not returned with them? Or that he was here but they would not bring me to him? There is no way of telling.

Zanjueelah and his mate steer the skiff through the water. We pass hippopotamuses, but Chapman and I refrain from firing at them, lest we disturb the boatmen's attention. For all this time, the cataract has been hidden from the eye. One looks across the fissure and sees the land that continues on the other side. I wonder if some unfortunate souls have ever come this way in ignorance, realizing their doom too late. But now, a little further on, the edge of the fall becomes visible: the river comes to an abrupt stop. I glance at Chapman and he looks back nervously. The boatmen stand calmly and direct us with their poles. The sun, beginning to decline, imbues the eastern-most cloud of spray with prismatic colours, the base of an immense rainbow.

We are drawn closer and closer to the edge of the cataract, until, about ninety yards away, Zanjueelah quickly and skilfully changes course, and we glide into smooth water on the eastern side of Garden Island, where he sticks the boat ashore without fastening of any kind. Imagine if it were to drift away. The thought fills me with a chill.

We walk over rocks, bare up to the high-water line, and through the tangled little forest until we reach a small enclosure, surrounded by a circle of stakes: Dr Livingstone's Garden, planted when he came here on his first journey. There are a few peach and apricot trees, as well as rank vegetation which the moisture has caused to spring up, all of which is strange to me. Some beast has knocked down the stakes at one point and trampled on part of the garden. A hippopotamus? Was it able to swim back to safety from here, or did it plunge over the edge?

Nearby is an older tree, and on its trunk something has been carved. I cannot quite make out what it is, so I move closer. They are initials. *D.L. 1855* and, below them, a fresher mark, *C.L. 1860*, with the broad arrow of the government cut beneath them. I take a step back, and my body jolts as I lose my balance. I am too close to the edge; I feel it already, all my senses anticipating the drop; falling, falling, into oblivion. No. What am I thinking? There is solid rock beneath me. I am nowhere near the edge.

I take a few deep breaths to steady myself. Chapman, fortunately, is not watching. I approach the tree and run my fingers along the grooves of the letters, feeling the scar in the bark. So, Charles was here. 1860. There are only a few inches between the carvings, but five years, five long years, filled with events that have undone me. I could, if I wished, scrape away Charles's mark with a knife. If only, by doing so, I could also erase the intervening time, take myself, the world, back to 1855. But what would I do to make the outcome different?

There is no mark from any of the others. I wonder which of them were here. I do not add my own.

Chapman has gone ahead to the edge and I follow him. Looking down into the abyss makes me feel quite giddy. I can see, hundreds of feet below, my own shadow on the troubled eddying waters. The view from this island, towards the east, is magnificent. The island juts out from the precipice, so from the edge there is an unbroken view across the chasm and down to the depths below. Around me is a rainbow, glorious in its perfect loveliness, and forming, but for the small segment cut out by the shadow of the rock on which I am standing, a perfect circle, which is surrounded by another with reversed colours, softer and more indefinite as it approaches the edges and thinner spaces in the mist. I take out my sketchbook and begin my work.

Chapman has not brought his photographic equipment with him. He has been battling to photograph the Falls, and is now defeated. It is a mystery what is wrong. He would set up his camera with a clear view of the cascade, but something in the air – the moisture, the light – prevented the image from being captured. Plate after plate came out uniformly grey.

I wonder if Charles attempted it. Most certainly he did. The thought pleases me: his exasperation as one attempt after another ended in failure, Livingstone standing over his shoulder, goading him: *Come on, Charles. You must be doing something wrong!*

I have sketched the Falls from every possible position. The rising columns of vapour. The leaping water of the westernmost cataract. A buffalo herd teetering on the edge of the rock face. The jagged profile cliff of the gorge beyond. I have a substantial folio now. Chapman and I have measured the angles, boiled water to determine altitude, fired bullets to estimate distance, counted the seconds of falling stones to calculate depth. These tedious details now fall on Chapman, while I work at my sketch. But they are necessary. I have enough measurements to build a diorama of the entire gorge, and this I hope to exhibit.

But the crowning glory will be the oils. I can see them already; they are taking shape in my mind. The contrast of white water and dark vegetation, the energy in the lines and angles, the details of trees and animals that are dwarfed by the giant scale of the turmoil around them. I will show the broad sweep across the entire cliff: not that this view is visible from one vantage point, but I will paint it as if it is. They will be large canvases, impressive on the walls of the Geographical Society and other meeting halls. Some people will stand and admire the wonders that are shown there, others will acknowledge my skill in representing them, or appreciate the rigours involved in reaching this place. But who is the person who lurks in the corner, the light behind him, whispering to his fellow and pointing towards me? There will always be someone who has heard the stories, whose mind has been poisoned against me.

Theft, was it?

Yes, I think so. He is a thief.

This was supposed to be our destination. The Promised Land. No. Everything that was promised to me has been taken away. I do not thank God, Livingstone's God, for this vision before me. I find myself unable even to see Him here, in this most glorious of scenes.

My picture is not halfway finished, but Zanjueelah is becoming impatient. We must leave, he tells us. The day is waning. I hold up a hand to still him, and continue with my sketch.

Down there, beyond the plunge, twisting through the gorges, the Zambesi stretches – to Kebrabasa, to Tete (where my things are, whatever the white ants have not destroyed); and somewhere there, Livingstone is. Livingstone and whoever is still with him.

I've thought, every day, about meeting him again, about what I will say. There has always been a probability I'll be unable to. He might have travelled elsewhere now; I might miss him by weeks, even days. I've never properly doubted it, though. It keeps me going, a beacon summoning me forward.

And yet. We have had to leave parts of the boat behind, which will take a long time to reconstruct from wood. Chapman has, now and then, expressed some concern, some doubt that we will be able to go on at all. I put such thoughts out of my mind. It is unthinkable.

Our ferryman repeats his warning, each time more insistently. Paddling up the stream is long work, he says. It is not a road for men to travel in the dark.

The light will fade soon: he is right. And my paper is damp now. I obey the old man's summons, pack up my work, and turn back.

You were quite right in your surmise that Rae might be doubted on his return here and so it was but all was soon cleared up. I don't know how he and the Dr. settled the certificate licences he gave to Baines, for it quite nonplussed the whole proceedings and set Baines in a different light, for I believe it was on Rae's evidence partly that Baines was accused of dishonourable dealings. I now make a very wide allowance for Rae's statements. He states things as his stomach may be for the time. Things seem to change their aspect very rapidly in his imagination. He is a nice fellow, once you know that failing. When we went to Tette, there was no doubt of a deficit among the stores, but I should be very unwilling to accuse him of dishonesty, taking the nature of evidence into account.

– John Kirk, letter to Alexander Kirk, 25 August 1862

University of Cape Town

Norman Bedingfeld returned to England after his dismissal. He appealed repeatedly to the Admiralty against his treatment, to little avail, although he did succeed regaining some of his naval pay that had been withheld for debts incurred on his journey home. In late 1860 he was given the command of HMS *Prometheus* off the west coast of Africa, and he was promoted to captain two years later. In retirement he was promoted to rear admiral and vice admiral. He was seventy years old when he died in 1894.

Mary Livingstone was reunited with her husband in early 1862. She arrived at the Zambesi delta aboard HMS *Sidon*, which also brought a new steamer and missionaries to reinforce the Universities Mission to Central Africa that had recently been set up on the Shiré highlands. At Shupanga she contracted malaria and died on 27 April 1862. She was buried under the large baobab tree, and her grave remains there today.

After travelling to Zumbo, **Richard Thornton** joined the German explorer Karl Klaus von der Decken on an expedition to Mount Kilimanjaro, which they surveyed but were unable to summit because of hostile weather. In 1863, Livingstone reinstated Thornton as a member of the Zambesi Expedition. After making the gruelling journey from the Shiré to Tete, to fetch supplies for the starving missionaries of the Universities Mission, Thornton fell victim to malaria and died on 22 April 1863. He had just turned twenty-five.

George Rae travelled back to England in 1860 and returned to the Zambesi in 1862 aboard HMS *Sidon*, which brought Livingstone's wife and the new steamer, the *Pioneer*. Although he earned Livingstone's displeasure when the Doctor found out about his letter to Baines in the *Advertiser and Mail*, Rae was the last of the original members to part with him, remaining until the expedition's end in 1864. He died the following year.

David Livingstone received the order recalling the Zambesi Expedition in mid-1863 and returned to England a year later, his reputation tarnished. In the end, his expedition cost many lives, and it failed to provide a highway into the interior of Africa. His book, *A Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*, published in 1865, was not as well received as his earlier *Missionary Travels*. Though the book was illustrated with Thomas Baines's pictures, Livingstone never once referred to the artist by name.

In 1865 Livingstone left again for Africa, this time to search for the source of the Nile. After exploring for eight years, travelling to Lake Tanganyika and the headwaters of the Congo River, he died from malaria and dysentery at Chief Chitambo's village on 1 May 1873, at the age of sixty. His body, carried to Zanzibar by his porters, Chuma and Susi, is buried at Westminster Abbey, his heart under a tree near the place where he died.

Charles Livingstone was invalided home in 1863, shortly before the expedition's recall. He visited his family in America, returned to Britain, and in 1865 he took up an appointment as Her Majesty's consul to the island of Fernando Po in the Gulf of Guinea. He served there until 1873, with several leaves of absence for ill health, while his family remained in America. (He saw his wife again in 1871 during a furlough for ill health.) After handing over his consular duties, Charles boarded the ship *Ethiopia*, bound for England. He fell victim to yellow fever and died on 28 October 1873, six months after his brother, and was buried at sea.

John Kirk returned to England with Charles in 1863. In 1866 he took up a post in the consular service in Zanzibar, where a year later he was joined by his fiancée, Helen Cook, whom he had met in England, and they were married. Kirk remained in Zanzibar for twenty-one years, soon rising to the rank of consul general. In June 1873, he succeeded in persuading the sultan, Seyyid Bargash, to abolish the slave trade throughout his extensive

territory. Kirk played important roles on British and European committees around the time of the Berlin Conference. He was highly respected for his botanical discoveries, and several species were named after him. In 1881 he was knighted. Sir John Kirk died in 1922 at the age of eighty-nine.

Thomas Baines did not proceed to Tete after seeing the Victoria Falls. He and Chapman were forced to turn back, and Baines remained in South West Africa for another year before returning to the Cape. In 1865 he travelled to England, again hoping to confront Livingstone. But he would never meet the Doctor again and was never able to resolve his dispute.

While there was support for him in Cape Town, his reputation in Britain was severely damaged by the Livingstone affair, and he was never accepted on another expedition sponsored by the government or any of the learned societies. He was, however, employed by the South African Goldfields Exploration Company to lead two gold-prospecting expeditions to Matabeleland in 1869–70. He was offered no salary, only a share of the profits, and the expeditions were failures. Thomas Baines died of dysentery in Durban on 8 May 1875, aged fifty-five.

In 1866, in need of money, Baines had sold his entire stock of 127 paintings to his friend Robert White for £160. Today his oils are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The **Zambezi River** never did function as a navigable waterway. No town was ever built at its mouth. In the mid-1970s the Portuguese government dammed up the river above Tete, forming the Cahora Bassa (today Cahora Bassa) Dam, which provides hydroelectric power to the region. The rocks of Kebrabasa now lie deep underwater.

[I]n sending him away I did it in the mode least calculated to injure his future prospects. I *published nothing*, and had Mr Baines been advised by some of those of whom he quotes as friends to follow the same course the whole affair would long ago have been forgotten.

– David Livingstone, letter to Sir Roderick Murchison, 1863

University of Cape Town

Acknowledgements

The Zambesi Expedition produced an immense amount of documentation – in journals, letters, reports, maps, photographs, paintings and scientific specimens. The seven officers of the expedition were all required to keep journals. Those of Thomas Baines, David Livingstone, John Kirk and Richard Thornton have survived and have been published,¹ although there are gaps in all of them, and Baines's journal after 17 September 1858 is missing. Norman Bedingfeld's log of events from 16 May to 2 August 1858 (which Livingstone believed was written fraudulently, after the fact) is in the National Archives at Kew.² Charles Livingstone's journals are lost, though his letters to his wife are held by the Livingstone Museum in Zambia, and one of these includes a transcription of his journal from 14 September to 21 December 1858. George Rae's journals were lost in a shipwreck.³

In researching the novel, I consulted the surviving journals closely, as well as letters, reports, newspaper articles, maps and paintings, which I found in published books, on online sources, and by visiting the South African Library in Cape Town, the Royal Geographical Society in London, and the National Archives in Kew.⁴ I also looked at documents written by people who had dealings with the expedition; official government correspondence about it; the published *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*; and David and Charles Livingstone's *Narrative of an Expedition to the Zambesi and its Tributaries*, as well as Thomas Baines's *Explorations in South-West Africa*.⁵

¹ J.P.R. Wallis (ed.), *The Zambezi Expedition of David Livingstone, 1858–1863* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956); Reginald Foskett (ed.), *The Zambesi Journal and Letters of John Kirk* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1956); Edward C. Tabler (ed.), *The Zambezi Papers of Richard Thornton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965); Edward C. Tabler (ed.), *Baines on the Zambezi, 1858 to 1859* (Johannesburg: Brenthurst Press, 1982).

² Bedingfeld also appears in the *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* in November 1859 and in the second edition of *Dr Livingstone's Cambridge Lectures*, edited with a 'Life of Dr Livingstone', by William Monk, published in 1860, and drawing from a manuscript provided by Bedingfeld.

³ The only surviving document from Rae is a piece that he wrote when he visited England in 1861: 'Last News from Dr Livingstone', *Chambers's Journal of Popular Literature Science and Arts*, 30 March 1861.

⁴ Online sources include Livingstone Online (www.livingstoneonline.ucl.ac.uk) and ALUKA (www.aluka.org). Collections of letters include Timothy Holmes, *David Livingstone: Letters & Documents* (London: James Currey, 1990) and Maurice Boucher (ed.), *Livingstone's Letters, 1843–1872* (Johannesburg: Brenthurst Press, 1985).

⁵ The documents include a report by Francis Skead in the Royal Geographical Society library, and reports by the Foreign Office and the Admiralty in the National Archives in Kew.

My method in writing the novel was to follow very faithfully events as they appear in the historical record. I started by comparing the various journals, letters and other sources and tried to reconstruct what happened on a particular day or series of days. In many cases I had Baines's pictures to give me a visual sense – and, with a few exceptions, the scenes in which Baines is sketching or painting are based on real pictures.

Sometimes events are richly described in the journals, with overlapping accounts by several of the participants, which reinforce rather than contradict each other.⁶ In other places the course of events is unclear, or the accounts contradict. Sometimes I had to piece events together from scant records. And of course there are periods that are not documented at all. From 17 September 1858, when his journal ends, Baines appears in the record only through the eyes of other people, apart from a report to Livingstone about his journey to Kebrabasa, an article about Tete for the *Cape Monthly Magazine*,⁷ several letters that he wrote (most published in the *South African Advertiser and Mail* of 6 February 1861), and of course his paintings.

Regardless of the richness or paucity of the historical documentation, writing the novel involved a degree of imaginative reconstruction. Not only did I have to fill gaps in the historical record, but I had to delve into more personal territory than Victorian history reveals, recreating thoughts, dreams and emotions. I also found it necessary to tweak the story here and there to serve the demands of novelistic and narrative conventions. Baines's childhood memories are made up, as is the scene with Rae and the woman in Chapter 43. Most of the time I worked by trying to follow clues in the journals.

Occasionally I have shifted events in order to benefit the flow of the story. Baines's incorrect naming of a subject as 'Zeno', for example, happened when he was still in the Luabo, not at Expedition Island, as I have it. Livingstone's reaction to this error is made up. Livingstone's use of a dog as crocodile bait happened several months earlier than I have it in the novel, and the story that Baines rescued it is nothing but a story. The journals simply say that the dog was freed by someone.

I have attempted to be faithful to the language of the time, and have retained obsolete spellings such as Zambesi, Zoolu and koodoo. Where there are obvious inaccuracies in the journals – they speak of alligators and tigers, for instance – I have retained them.

All the letters and documents quoted between and within chapters are real and quoted verbatim (with the exception of the fragments on pages 283–284).

⁶ An example is 25 May 1858, when the *MaRobert* is exploring the Luawe (described in Chapter 13); another is 27 November – 1 December 1858, when the party is trekking to Kebrabasa (described in Chapter 34).

⁷ Both are in Tabler (ed.), *Baines on the Zambezi*.

To recreate Baines's voice and the discourse of his time, I have taken words, phrases and sometimes whole sentences from his journal and letters and woven them into his narrative in the novel. Where suitable, I have done the same in the dialogue of Livingstone and the other characters, drawing phrases from their writings.⁸

Using nineteenth-century terminology becomes uncomfortable when the explorers refer to the indigenous inhabitants they encountered. The word most commonly used in the sources is 'native', and I have used this most often in the novel. The word that provided the most difficulty was 'Kaffir', because of its explosively derogatory nature. In the 1850s, the word had two meanings, one of which referred to black people generally. But the other, more specific meaning referred to the Xhosa people, as opposed to, say, the Sotho or Tswana. It was used in this sense to describe the wars with the Xhosa (the 'Kaffir Wars', today known as the Frontier Wars) or the geographical areas that they inhabited (British Kaffraria). For the purposes of historical accuracy I have occasionally used the word in this sense, and I hope that by doing so I have given no offence. I have spelt it, as Baines did, with one *f*.

The documents that I consulted for *Livingstone's Cataract* not only provide a window on the events of the Zambesi Expedition and the ideas of its members; they are also part of the story thus viewed. The attempt to map and classify Africa was an attempt to control. As the officers fell out with one another, their journals and letters became sites of conflict as they tried to impose their versions of events over one another's. The historical record, left to speak for itself, illustrates most eloquently how that very historical record is constructed, manipulated, invented and imposed on mute reality or on people with less power to leave their mark on history.

The spark that inspired me to write this book was a lecture on Baines by Jane Carruthers at UCT summer school, after the publication of her excellent book with Marion Arnold, *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines*.⁹ While researching, I was helped by the staff of the UCT and Wits libraries, the South African Library, the Royal Geographical Society in London and the National Archives in Kew. I would like to thank Friday Mufuzi at the Livingstone Museum and Dominique le Roux for providing access to Charles Livingstone's letters, and to Lawrence Dritsas at Edinburgh University for help locating Gary Clendennen's thesis on Charles Livingstone.

⁸ Apart from the quoted letters and the speeches in Chapter 9, approximately 7000 words of the novel have been copied in this way, or slightly less than 5 per cent.

⁹ (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 1995).

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Robert Plummer

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