

At the end of each week Sal would count up the takings, from Thornhill's work on the water and from her own selling liquor, and hide them away in a box under the bedding. Then they would get the children to sleep in their corner. Thornhill would fill his pipe and pour them a good tot of Mr King's best French brandy—the very same that the Governor enjoyed in his grand house on the hill—and they would take their ease on the bungwall, their feet resting on the lump made by the box of coins.

One of the pleasures of those murmured times was telling each other about their future. A person who was willing to work, and who did not piss it all up against the wall, could make good in no time: they saw that all around them. Captain Suckling, once commander of the *Alexander*, was one such. In London, Suckling was nothing but one more hard-faced sea captain with the toes sticking out of his boots, but he had got himself land here and swaggered around the place now in a silver-buttoned waistcoat. He had filled out, his face shiny with good living, clean-shaven to a purple gleam.

Even men who had started out as felons could work their way through the system—from assignment to ticket of leave to pardon—within a few years. He saw them standing on the wharfs, looking about them as if they owned the place: men no better than he was, who had got their freedom and made their pile, and now could look anyone in the eye.

By and by, the Thornhills told themselves, they would have enough put aside to go back to London. They would get a little neat house in the Borough, the twin of the one in Swan Lane except that they would be sure they owned the freehold. Out on the river, there would be a wherry sound as a pippin tied at the wharf, and a good strong prentice to row it. They would take their ease by the fire in a warm parlour, a stuffed armchair cushioning their bones and a girl to bring in the coals. *My word, Will, Sal*



would whisper, curling herself in against him, *I can just about smell the butter on the toasted muffins she'll have fetched us!*

Two wherries, why not, and a couple of prentices.

*One of them paisley shawls from India,* Sal whispered. *And never do my own washing ever again.*

Thornhill could see himself taking his ease in the Anchor with a plate of whitebait and a tankard of best bitter, and the kind of look about him that came from having gold put away safe in the bank. Men in a smaller way would greet him as he strolled down to the river with his pipe after lunch. *Good-day Mr Thornhill! Fine day Mr Thornhill!* He knew he would make a good rich man, having had so much practice as a poor one.

A little luck, a deal of hard work: with those, nothing could stop them.

~

Out on Sydney Cove pulling an oar, Thornhill could imagine himself back on the Thames, but Sal could never for a moment stop seeing the differences between that place and this. She was astonished every time at the rain, no gentle drizzle that misted everything over soft and grey, but lightning and thunder loud as cannon-fire, and water hurling itself down hard out of the sky, trying to make holes in the ground. *By God, Will,* she would say, *have you ever seen anything like it?* and by the livid shocks of lightning he would see her eyes wide, as if at a circus where some trick was being performed.

Their hut swarmed with creatures they had never seen before: bold lizards that eyed them unblinkingly, sticky black flies, lines of ants that could reduce a lump of sugar to nothing in a night, mosquitoes that could sting through cloth, creatures along the lines of a bedbug that buried their heads in skin and swelled with human blood. Sal learned from their neighbours how to deal with them, setting the legs of the table in dishes of water against the ants,