

## Monumental Loss: Sandra Faase

She awoke on the veranda, a calico screen surrounding her. The steel bed groaned as she shifted her aching body on the thick, starchy sheets. She looked out into the slice of bright daylight in front of her and saw the turquoise water fringed by craggy brown rocks and unfamiliar foliage. A rough-hewn cairn partially obstructed the view.

She rubbed her eyes, her memory seeping back as she stared into the bright distance. Her eyes came to rest on the rock structure. She gasped and hung on to the bed railings. George. Where is my George? She launched off the bed but slumped back, the steel frame shrieking.

The nurse came rushing through the calico. "Now settle down dear. Have a cup of tea. I thought you would awaken today. You've not been well since you landed three weeks ago."

She drank from the faded cup, her hand shaking uncontrollably. She heard unfamiliar bird calls which filled the air with promise.

The nurse came back with a bowl of soup. "Here. You could do with something in your belly. You're all but skin and bone."

It was chicken soup. She swallowed down a spoonful. Her stomach twitched but she was hungry and managed to down most of it.

The nurse came back through the calico. "Lovely day for you to wake up." She knew she'd have to tell her patient the news and was stalling.

Of the 332 emigrants on the ship, many had died at sea on the 71-day voyage, and nearly as many again in the quarantine infirmary: mainly children. The nurse found it the hardest to break the news to mothers.

The next day Marianna awoke mid-morning and had enough strength for the nurse to take her for a short walk to sit on the far side of the veranda overlooking the harbour. A light breeze rustled nearby shrubs. Two magpies were warbling on the grass.

"Where are they?" Marianna asked the nurse. "My little George, my Eddie. Can I see them?"

The nurse took Marianna's hand and looked into her dark, pleading eyes. She could wait no longer to inflict the news. "They both didn't make it, my dear Mrs Wynne. The ship came in with typhus and TB swirling like a menace."

A scream stopped animals in their tracks and the spirits of the ancient landscape shifted uneasily in the trees.