

Sister Heart

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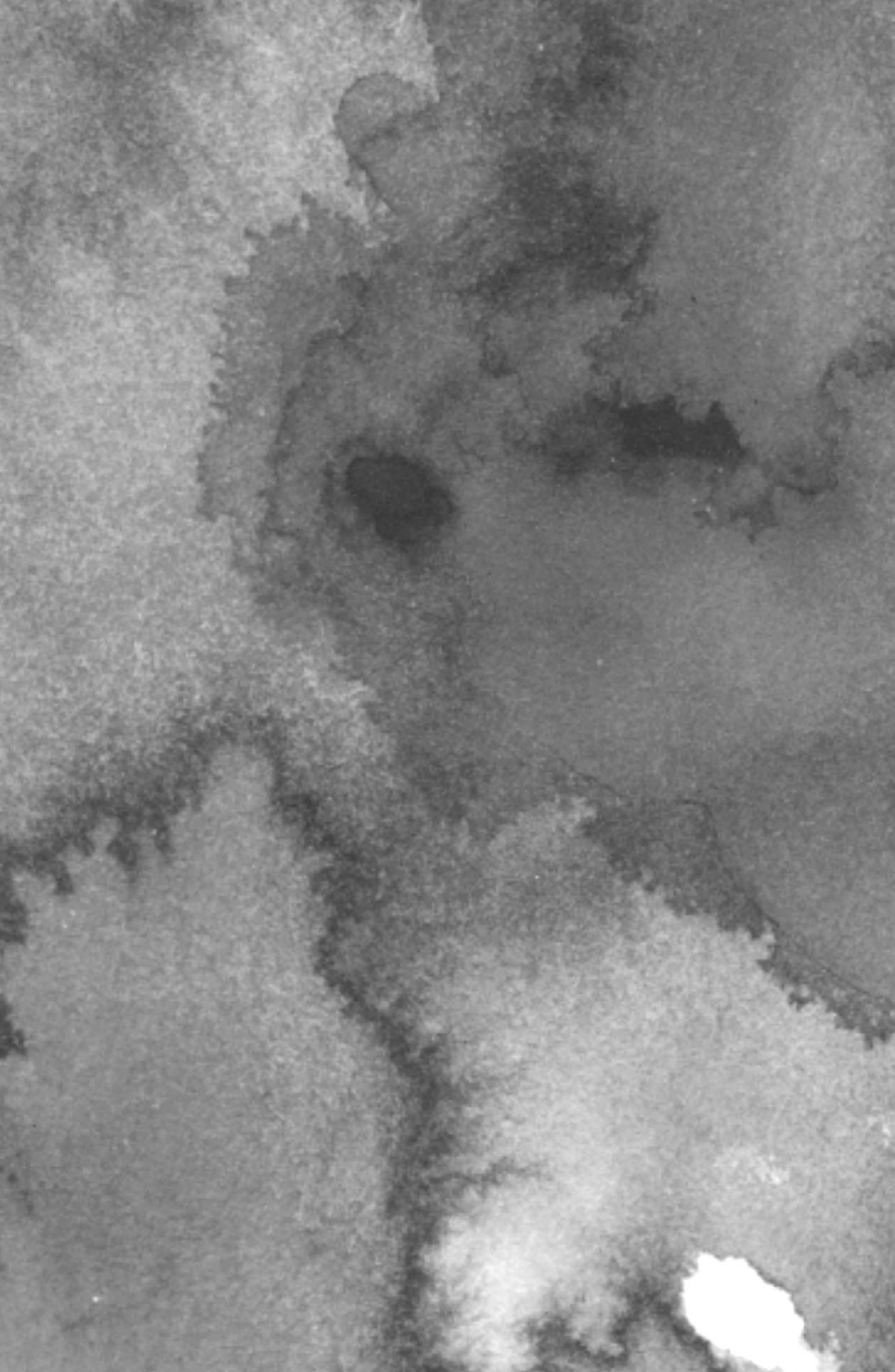


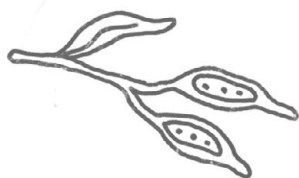
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one



Here I am
curled in the corner
of a cold stone room
with no one to hug
but me

A too-high window
throws shadow lines
on the moonlit floor

Shadow lines
Hard lines
Straight lines
Barred lines

Like lines on a map
slashing hills and creeks
ridges and plains
rocks and spinifex

Old people laughed
when Mum told them
about the Boss's paper map

Grandpa Mick shook his head
Hills won't move for a line
Trees won't bend for a line

Granny Rosy flicked her hand
Pah — inside the lines
Outside the lines
It's all our country!

But here I am
Trapped by lines
walls
window
door
shadows on the moonlit floor

Fencing me in
Cutting me off
Slicing me away

Making me cry
cry
cry
for home



Morning light streaks
through the too-high window
tickles my sore eyes
teases my skin

Bully boots
thud, thud, thud
Big keys jangle
clink-clank clink-clank
Door gives a rusty warning

Right you — out!

I shrink
small as a spider
press my face to the wall

He yanks me up
like a sack of flour

Fist opens
Here – eat this

Not from him
No bread from *him!*

I spit on his bully boots

He drops the stale bread
Clouts my ear

Been hit before
Been hit on the station
when I spilled tea on Boss's visitors
when I got in the way
when I asked Boss a question

Policeman sneers
*Why the Government's
wasting schooling on
ungrateful kids like you
beats me*

He pulls me forward

Out!

Where is he taking me?

Where is my mum?



Rough hands
hurry me
down a sandy track
empty of Mum
empty of anything
except a swarm of flies
buzzing a dead bird

My ear throbs
chest aches
sobs bubble inside

Down
down
down
the track
to the big saltwater

Mum's not here
I look around
She's not here
not there
not anywhere

Policeman yanks my chin up
Look at me!
No tricks
do you hear me?

I - will - not - look - at - him

If I look
I hear myself screaming
to be let out of the store room
hear Aunty Adie begging
hear policeman telling Boss
Thank you for confining this child

He straightens up

About time!

My heart jumps

Mum?



A stooped stranger
plods forward
shooing flies
with a stiff straw hat
Is this the girl?

*She's all yours, Reverend
Got the manners of a camel!*

Reverend says
Can she speak any English?

*She can speak it alright
but don't bother talking to her
she won't answer
I've got more important jobs
than babysitting kids!*

Reverend says
God holds us all to a higher duty

He reaches out a plump hand
I kick
squirm
try to free myself

Policeman shakes me
Hey – I said no tricks!

Reverend grasps my other arm
I'll take charge of her

Hold her tight
policeman says
She'll run like the wind
if she can
These kids are fast

I am caught between them

Reverend leans close
My name is Reverend Dale
I'm sailing on the ship too
I will look after you at sea

He points
See that ship out there?

Far out
something rides
the wrinkled water

Is it a ship?
I don't know
I've never seen a ship
I'm a freshwater girl

It looks small from here
but it's huge
That ship can travel a long way
It will get us safely to our destination
He gives me an impatient smile
So you see
there's nothing to worry about

I gaze at the thing floating far out

If it is a ship

it won't take me home

No big saltwater to travel in my country

If it is a ship

it will take me somewhere else

Why can't I go home?