

22nd November 1852

Dear Diary,

I've been on this hateful ship for four months now. I was sent to Australia for stealing lace. There is a rumour that there is a murderer on the ship. I have to sleep in a narrow bunk, sharing a ship's hold with twenty other women, girls and babies. There is a particular baby, Annie Smith, that always cries, and her mother never gets any sleep. I was in Dublin, with the name Kataline O'Scarin. Everyone on the ship calls me Fire Head because of my flame red hair. It's better than Bettie Simons's name. She is so thin that she is skin and bones, so her name is Boney Bettie. This ship came from Galway. We have to make do with two meals a day. Gruel at 8am and bread and dripping at 6pm. In a day we usually have to do chores or sleep. I cannot run around and my legs are always cramping - I probably won't be able to walk when I get to Sydney. The Indian Ocean is full of high winds and storms. Liz, the captain's wife, comes down and tells us a story every night. She takes care of us orphan girls. My parents died when I was little, and my big sister died of fever because of the horrid famine. Liz tells us that she sees waves as big as churches. A week ago there was a big storm, the waves were so big that the cabin went sideways, water sludged around the floor, and a girl named Peggy drowned. Liz told us that the Bass Strait, that's the water surrounding Victoria, is much, much worse because of the rocks and coastal storms.