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On the first day, the men entered the river mouth and shot three black swans. They then proceeded up river in their wooden skiffs, a light westerly breeze, puffing the sails, aided their passage. They drifted in the centre of the river for safety, guns loaded and ready to open fire on the slightest flapping of wings. The black feathers and bloody carcasses of swans lay in the bottom of the boat, mingling with salt water and leather boots.

In the early March morning the river was a deep black colour, lit by the sparkling reflection of the pre-dawn sky. A beautiful bird song was heard careening across the water, yet none in the party could recognise the singer, or articulate its name. The breeze was not violent, just strong enough to propel the boats and cause the buttoning of jackets. Each member of the group was silent, still sorting out dreams from waking thoughts, trying to find some way of cataloguing what they smelt and heard, the strangeness for which they had no reference points.

The river widened out into a large open water, lined with limestone cliffs so ravaged that they resembled ancient castles, with turrets collapsing into the water. At least this is how the English saw them for there was nothing else in their imagination to liken them to. As the day broke open on the water they saw big trees wider than 10 peoples arms, standing amongst grassy parklands on the river flats. The river turned a greenish blue colour as the boats glided through flocks of swans, pelicans, ducks and waders, all mixing up a wild and raucous morning song.

As the group passed close to the river banks they felt watched. Occasionally smoke from distant fires indicated the presence of other human life. Were they the enemy? No one yet knew, but they carried enough guns and weapons to protect themselves if need be.

The leader of this group, the captain, stood erect at the bow of the largest skiff, his face open with wonderment and, underneath that, a tick tick ticking of plans, ideas, this will be there, that will be perfect! In his mind he was creating a layer of his own over the country, placing his own world in a collage, on top of the rocks, creeks and river banks.

That afternoon the boats ran aground on mud banks, and while his crew struggled waist deep in mud and water, the captain and his lieutenant climbed the nearest hill, where they admired the shimmering view, the river stretching westwards on one side, and snaking its way towards the blue mountain range to the east.

On the first day, like Jehovah, whatever the captain saw, he named; rivers, mountains, bays and spits, creating it all as his own with a word, and the word was law.

Then, driven by an overwhelming sense of duty to his family and his Gods, he swept up the whole coastal plain into his eyes, formed a frame around it, lined the staircases of his imaginings with great riches, and named it Hesperia, after Virgil, a land looking towards the

Western Star.

The group camped that night, stuck in the mud and besieged by mosquitoes. They lit a fire and roasted swans, feeding the fire all night and singing loudly, all the songs they could remember, to keep whatever it was beyond the firelight at bay. 'God save our gracious King, long live our noble King, God save our King...

On the second day, men appeared on the river bank gesturing angrily, shaking spears and yelling something that sounded like 'Warra, Warra.' The men in the boats couldn't decipher the language. They presumed it meant go away, but they chose to ignore it, as they were still heaving and pushing their heavy boats through the shallows in the river. Soon it became apparent that they were in great danger, men with spears stood on the cliff tops, pointing their weapons sharply at them, unprotected in the mud bank.

'Hello, hello' the captain yelled, and the sound of this foreign word echoed against the cliffs and bounced back foolishly, uselessly, to the men in the boats. As the river banks flattened out a group of about 30 men with spears gestured to the captain. 'Hello, hello', they mimicked, and burst into hysterical laughter. When the captain threw them the body of a dead swan, blood congealing on its black feathers, they seemed delighted.

One man took a great interest in the captain's hat, an ornate boat-shaped affair with golden braid laced around its edges. He tried repeatedly to remove the hat from the captain's head, until the captain, anxious to maintain friendly relations, took off his hat and offered it. The captain was surprised to see that the hat fitted the man's head perfectly. The man strode back and forth with the hat on his head, imitating the stiff stride of the captain, while the captain's crew tried hard to suppress their mirth.

On the evening of the third day the exhausted crew finally broke free of the mud flats, their clothes caked with mud. They built a fire and wrapped themselves in dry blankets. On the river flat the captain planted a garden, with potatoes, peas, cabbages and peach trees, which grew in his mind to the most fertile of orchards, with sweet fruit bending the branches almost to snapping point, the gardens bursting from the ground with the most flavoursome vegetables.

At sunset the captain's men floated out on the water amongst the flocks of black swans that gave the river its name. They were an easy target, unused to the sight of boats, or guns, or men in hats. The sound of the rifles' volleys, ricocheted like thunder across the water. The blood of swans mingled with salt water and leather boots.

Some of this story is loosely based on events recorded in the journals of Captain Charles Fremantle 1829, and Captain James Stirling 1827.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nandi Chinna.