

Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset

by Stephen Carleton



A Playlab Publication

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Foreword

The play's inspiration for me stemmed from being a child of the Australian 'Deep North'. I was born in the Atherton Tablelands. I was raised in Darwin, and was six when Cyclone Tracy flattened our house – and much of Darwin with it; and I subsequently grew up with a sense of the fragility and precariousness of 'permanent' settlement in that region of the world. Darwin's been routinely devastated by cyclones and war-time bombing over the duration of its 140 year history, and I've become kind of romantically fascinated with doomed settlements, ghost towns, and transitory European attempts at 'civilisation' not just in Australia, but across the broad span of imperialism's reach.

Questions I asked myself when setting out to write the play were:

What, from the perspective of someone coming from within the broad Anglo-Irish community (and whose relatives arrived in Far North Queensland around the time this play is set), is our legacy in terms of state- and nation-building? What were the various conflicting dreams, visions, aims and ambitions of those settling the northern frontier, and why did so many of the settlements on the far north Australian coast fail? What happens when dream/vision/fantasy and the harsh reality of tropical life (heat/disease/white ants/cyclones/distance/isolation) collide? What is the 'true' nature of this underwritten and under-acknowledged multiracial northern frontier between not only black and white Australia, but between Australia and Asia? How does this past continue to haunt us today? I love the notion of cusps and frontiers: not just physical or geographical frontiers, but the grey areas between cultural certainties and preconceptions about space and history.

It's not incidental that the play is set right on the brink of Australian nationhood. These pivotal moments in history are always about choice: in defining our nation permanently, constitutionally, at this moment in history as one thing, what are the range of other things that we are choosing not to become? What values and principles do we jettison when we attempt to articulate a national ethos? 'Constance' is as much a fiction about what it is we chose not to become, as it is an allegory for a violent history conservative commentators are presently trying to convince us we never had. In a parallel universe, there is a great happily multiracial northern state out there somewhere. In some ways – at some times – I think this state actually exists, and that we just haven't divided the nation's borders up correctly to indicate where it is this other Australia resides. There's a pretty cool and genuinely representative government in the Northern Territory at the moment: as many indigenous MLAs as there are Aboriginal people in proportion to the Territory's population; lots of women (female leaders of both the Government and Opposition); a Greek MLA representing Darwin's Greek suburban enclave;

a Chinese opposition MLA in Alice Springs. This ‘diverse’ version of the North sits in and around the redneck North, and Queensland’s rural religious North too. All versions of the North are contiguous and true.

I hope ‘Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset’ urges us to look further back than the present debate surrounding immigration, Black-White relations and nationhood and to ask what lessons are to be learned by investigating (albeit fictive renderings of) our origins as a discrete political and geographical entity.

I chose the melodramatic form for ‘Constance’ because it was so popular during the time in which the play is set. Australian audiences flocked to melodramas like contemporary audiences flock to Hollywood blockbusters in cinemas today. We articulated our national caricatures and cultural stereotypes through these shows, and created an Australian bush full of goodies and baddies along reasonably predictable cultural lines. Blacked-up white actors played loyal and patronisingly amusing blackfellas; the baddies were often either English toffs or scheming Chinamen and Japanese intent on infiltrating and taking over the nation through the North Australian portal. Hop Lee, for instance, is a character I’ve taken directly from Randolph Bedford’s “White Australia; or The Empty North”, first produced in 1912. I’ve tried to give him an agency and outsider’s insight that he wasn’t allowed a century ago. Fortitude and Hope are straight out of nineteenth century Gothic literature: haunted children dressed in white, who have a special relationship with death and the Underworld. Father Angelico is based on a living character I came across in a Frank Clunes account of the (aborted) Port Essington settlement on the Coburg Peninsula in the Northern Territory. Catholic priests really did go mad under the Northern midday sun. Professor Crabbe is the voice of Southern Australian patriarchy: interested in the North as an anthropological phenomenon and a source of profit; but ultimately disinterested in a genuine cosmopolitanism if it means sharing power and resources. His treatise on the evolution of a distinct type of White Man in the tropics comes from Sir Raphael Cilento’s study on the topic. And Constance is a strangely contemporary heroine for me. She could run for Premier now and I’d be happy to have her around. Well, perhaps before the rot set in ...

Stephen Carleton

June 2006

Acknowledgements

Thanks first and foremost go to the Queensland Theatre Company through the Premier's Award 2004/5, under the auspices of which this work was developed. What an inspiration to be living in a state that values and promotes theatre as a forum for civic debate. Bravo Peter Beattie! That process brought me in touch with Ursula Dauth, Leticia Cárceres (two of the play's early supporters to whom I'm immensely grateful), and the inimitable and incorrigible Peter Matheson, Constance's chief dramaturg. Peter's uncompromising stewardship forced me to work through the same brick wall I'd previously faced at a key point in every play I've written. I understand dramatic form better as a result of my relationship with Peter. I had a conversation with him 12 months earlier at the JUTE Playwrights' Conference in Cairns and mentioned that I'd not found 'my' dramaturg up until that point – someone who understood what it was I was trying to say and how I wanted to say it. I now consider Peter my dramaturg (if he'll have me). Thanks also to Chris Mead (my chief protector and erstwhile architect of a crucial turning point in my career), Marion Potts (Constance's first official Director! A dream choice!), and everyone associated with the Patrick White Award at STC and the ANPC in 2005, where the play received invaluable public workshopping and feedback. Thanks to all the actors involved in the play's development – and to Barbara Lowing and Tracy Mann for their wonderful interpretations of Constance during that time. Thanks to Michael Gow for spearheading the ANPC development, and for programming the play in the QTC 2006 season. I'm eternally grateful. Thank you to the glorious Kathryn Kelly, dramaturg and Executive Director extraordinaire at Playlab Queensland. Thanks to Ian Lawson for professional support, understanding, and being my lead drinking buddy. Thanks to Lisa Beilby for giving birth to Hugo during this process (!) and being such an accommodating co-parent during the tumult. Thanks also to Mum and Dad and all the friends and family who have flown across the country to witness the readings and premier season of the play. And finally, thanks to all the staff in the Drama area at the University of Queensland, and particularly to Ass. Prof. Joanne Tompkins for introducing me to the wonderful world of post-colonial theatre.

First Production Details

Constance Drinkwater and the Final Days of Somerset was first presented in full production by the Queensland Theatre Company and opened at the Bille Brown Studio, on July 13, 2006, with the following cast and crew:

PROFESSOR CORNELIUS CRABBE
FATHER ANGELICO
CONSTANCE
FORTITUDE
HOPE
HOP LEE

Robert Coleby
Michael Futcher
Caroline Kennison
Jodie Le Vesconte
Emily Tomlins
Darren Yap

DIRECTOR
DESIGNER
LIGHTING DESIGNER
COMPOSER/SOUND DESIGNER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
ASSISTANT DESIGNER

Marion Potts
Bruce McKinven
Matt Scott
Brett Collery
Nic Dorward
Kieran Swann

STAGE MANAGER
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Rachel Bourke
Sophia Dalton

Characters

MRS. CONSTANCE DRINKWATER	Wife of the Government Resident, Captain Wilberforce Drinkwater
MISS FORTITUDE DRINKWATER	
MISS HOPE DRINKWATER	Her Twin Daughters, Aged 9
FATHER ANGELICO	A Priest
PROFESSOR CORNELIUS CRABBE	An Anthropologist
MR HOP LEE	A Businessman and Traveller
MR BARNEY SANDILANDS	A White Trader

Fortitude and Hope can be played by a female and a male actor, respectively, of south-east Asian, Aboriginal or Chinese origin. The intention here is to subliminally people the world of the play with accurate C19th Far North Queensland racial demographics, and to facilitate the double-ups that the script intends.

Setting

A year late in the Nineteenth Century. The Government Resident's House in the Settlement of Somerset, on the far northern tip of Cape York in the Colony of Queensland.

The entire action is set in the main living room of the Residence, which is a stone and corrugated iron building decorated in an attempt at tropical colonial grandeur: potted palms; wicker furniture; tiled parquetry; a large Chinese ginger jar; a chaise longue; and a combination of other English and Oriental fittings and furnishings.

Although the doomed settlement of Somerset did briefly exist in the late 1800s, this is entirely a work of fiction. The characters and the circumstances of the settlement's demise are a product of the author's imagination.

Act 1

SCENE ONE

Midnight, Monday. A wild gale rages outside. The sound of curlews shrieking. Children's voices, moaning. The distinctive noise of wood yawning and splintering under pressure – like a tree falling, or a wooden structure cleaving in two. There is an urgent rapping at the door. ANGELICO is visible on the other side of the door with two indiscernible, wet and bedraggled survivors of a shipwreck. CONSTANCE enters.

ANGELICO *[off]* Lady Drinkwater!

She remains silent.

Constance! Open the door. There has been a shipwreck.

CONSTANCE What's that you say?

ANGELICO A shipwreck. I have two survivors. Will you let us in?

CONSTANCE Where have they come from?

ANGELICO Port Darwin.

CONSTANCE And the ship?

ANGELICO What does it matter?

CONSTANCE Where has the ship come from?

ANGELICO They are in urgent need of shelter and medical attention.

CONSTANCE *[firmer]* From whence has the ship come, Father Angelico?

Pause.

ANGELICO Batavia.

CONSTANCE No.

ANGELICO Lady Drinkwater, I implore you.

CONSTANCE Absolutely not.

ANGELICO It is our Christian duty.

CONSTANCE Then take them to the Church.

ANGELICO The Church is made of weatherboard. The entire structure could blow away at any moment. Please, Lady Drinkwater, it is our duty, under... [*Searching. Under his breath, to CRABBE.*] Under what?

CRABBE Maritime Law.

ANGELICO It is our duty under Maritime Law to provide shelter and assistance to any ship in distress –

CRABBE/
ANGELICO Or the occupants therein –

ANGELICO [*struggling*] As they ... may find themselves being so ... dependent upon us for...assistance.

CONSTANCE My duty, Father Angelico, is to the health and well-being of my daughters and to the future of this settlement. My duty is to Somerset.

ANGELICO The Professor says he knows you.

CONSTANCE What's that?

CRABBE Yes, Lady Drinkwater. I am Professor Cornelius Crabbe. I visited you not eighteen months ago. I was here for two days. You and Captain Drinkwater were kind enough to –

CONSTANCE Professor Crabbe?

CRABBE Yes.

CONSTANCE Is it really you?

CRABBE The same.

There is a pause as the men outside the door wait to see the effect this recognition has on CONSTANCE. She takes a moment to consider, then frantically straightens up her appearance and straightens up a few items in the room. The following passages of speech take place during this action.

CRABBE Er - when last we met, I was most impressed by the Chinese market garden and the excellence of your fortified wine collection. Your youngest daughters – the twins – were notable for their precocity in the literary arts and the accuracy of their imitation of curlews. I was also quite taken by your-

CONSTANCE [*harried*] Yes, yes. I remember you Professor Crabbe. It is wonderful to hear your voice. Under ordinary circumstances I would be most grateful to receive you. You must understand the nature of the dire circumstances that have since befallen us.

CRABBE I can assure you, Lady Drinkwater, I am as trustworthy now as I was at that time.

CONSTANCE It is not a matter of trust, Professor Crabbe. It is a matter of sanitation.

CRABBE Oh, we are quite clean.

ANGELICO I can vouch for that.

CRABBE A little unkempt, perhaps, given the ordeal we have just endured. But we are certainly clean and free from any disease that might be passed on to you or your daughters.

CONSTANCE Who else is with you?

CRABBE One gentleman.

CONSTANCE Is he clean?

ANGELICO/
CRABBE *[overlapping in rapid endorsement]* Oh, yes. Quite clean.
Very clean. Yes.

CONSTANCE The fever...

CRABBE He shows no sign of fever.

ANGELICO Quite remarkable under the circumstances.

CONSTANCE The fever comes also from Java.

CRABBE He is from Port Darwin.

She casts one final frantic eye of scrutiny around the room. She is troubled by the presence of the ginger jar, but cannot do anything about it.

CONSTANCE Well, on your word, and your word alone, Professor Crabbe, I am willing to take this risk.

CONSTANCE finally opens the door and allows them into the room. She continues talking as they venture slowly, one by one, into the room: ANGELICO enters first then ushers in Professor CRABBE and, finally, HOP LEE. CONSTANCE continues talking in an unbroken stream as this takes place. She is still engrossed with CRABBE when HOP LEE enters.

Welcome, Professor. It is such a relief to see a familiar face. Please forgive my trepidation. You must understand we are a cordon sanitaire. Not just for the North, but for the entire Colony of Queensland. I thought at first you were – well, I don't know quite what I thought. Perhaps I thought you were natives come to –

There is a sudden frozen shock as she fully regards HOP LEE for the first time.

CONSTANCE

What is this?

She pulls out a handkerchief and puts it immediately to her nose and mouth.

CRABBE

This is Mr Hop Lee – a businessman and fellow traveller. I can assure you, he is entirely reputable. He has quite a standing within the business community of Port Darwin. Mr Lee – The Lady Constance Drinkwater.

HOP LEE

[Bowing deeply] Pleased to meet you, Lady Drinkwater.

CONSTANCE

You didn't tell me you had a Chinese with you.

CRABBE

I didn't think it would matter. I seem to recall you and Captain Drinkwater regaling me about Somerset's pluralistic nature with some pride.

CONSTANCE

But the fever...

CRABBE

Hop Lee is a man of culture and education. He is Singapore-trained in English language and literature. He is a fine tailor: a successful prospector and entrepreneur – and, I might add, something of a poet. Despite the latter, he is no more fever prone than you or I.

Pause. CONSTANCE slowly removes the handkerchief from her mouth. She is not convinced.

HOP LEE

A mother cannot be too protective of her children.

CONSTANCE

You may both shelter overnight in this room. We will arrange transport to the Quarantine Station on Horn Island when the storm abates. In the meantime, I must regretfully forbid any contact with my daughters.

HOP LEE

Of course.

CRABBE

Thank you, Madam.

ANGELICO

God Bless You, Constance.

- CONSTANCE Are there any other survivors?
- CRABBE We are not sure. We were separated from the Captain and his mate when the ship went down. Mr Lee and I shared one life vest; the Captain and his Macassan shared the other.
She nods. Fr. ANGELICO genuflects.
- CONSTANCE I will fetch blankets and provisions.
She heads out of the room. As she reaches the door, HOP LEE sneezes. CONSTANCE freezes, then slowly turns around and pinions him with a formidable glare.
- CRABBE It is just a cold, Madam. From the water.
She slowly turns around, then exits. The men remain frozen in silent trepidation for a moment.
- ANGELICO You must forgive Lady Drinkwater's hesitation. It stems from patriotism, you know. The fever lurks and stalks us. Settlement by settlement. Burketown has been wracked by fever. Abandoned entirely.
CRABBE and HOP LEE exchange glances.
- CRABBE Eh?
- ANGELICO A smoking ruin.
- CRABBE The township has been rebuilt.
- ANGELICO They were stiff competition for a while. But all that is in tatters now. Somerset will prevail.
- HOP LEE Professor Crabbe is trying to tell you that the settlement is flourishing again, Father Angelico. We've just been there. It's as lively as it's ever been.
- ANGELICO No, no. You're quite mistaken.

- CRABBE Are you calling me a liar, sir?
- ANGELICO But you're not to blame for that. The North is a mirage for many men. We can be whatever you wish us to be, Professor Crabbe. There is no other authority here to corroborate or dispute your view.
- CRABBE I am reporting to you what Hop Lee and I have seen with our own eyes! Our schooner put down in Burketown –
- HOP LEE News is perhaps slow to pass through Somerset.
- ANGELICO As you wish.
- An awkward silence. CRABBE surveys the room, re-familiarising himself with it. He strides around, examining the furnishings and accoutrements in forensic detail. He appears to be searching for something specific, and finds it in a small box.*
- HOP LEE How long have you been in Somerset, Father?
- ANGELICO Oh, many years now. Three. Perhaps four.
- HOP LEE How many parishioners do you minister to?
- ANGELICO Ten. Perhaps twenty.
- HOP LEE That's a wide degree of divergence for such a small community.
- ANGELICO The islanders come and go at whim. It is hard to pin down precise numbers. You know what the blacks are like.
- CRABBE Ah!
- He opens the box, places a substance from it on his little finger and snorts it.*
- CRABBE Drinkwater's snuff! Anyone else? [*Offers it to HOP LEE, and immediately thinks better of it.*] Perhaps not.

CONSTANCE Where does he keep the wines? He has a rather fine line in French brandy, as I recall. I could do with a cognac now.

ANGELICO You mustn't touch things that don't belong to you.

CRABBE Strictly medicinal, Father Angelico. You're a Catholic, aren't you?

CRABBE hands out the drinks, which both men refuse. CRABBE drains his and refills it. He runs his finger along a line of dust.

The maid seems to have abandoned her chores. Pretty little thing, as I recall. Well-trained, for a gin. What's her name again?

ANGELICO Evangeline.

CRABBE Eh?

ANGELICO Or Majella. One of the two.

CRABBE Ivy! It's 'Ivy', isn't it?

ANGELICO Ah, yes. Perhaps so.

CRABBE Her name is either Ivy or it isn't.

ANGELICO Yes, I remember now. Ivy the Aboriginal housemaid. Yes, you're quite right.

CRABBE And the governess ... [*Testing, plucking a name at random.*] 'Clementine', isn't it?

ANGELICO That's right.

CRABBE I just made that up!

ANGELICO No, no. The governess's name is certainly Clementine.

CRABBE Gammon and spinach!

ANGELICO I see Port Darwin has rounded out your vocabulary.

- CRABBE I call matters as I see them, Father. And I'd thank you to do the same. Really, sir. What's wrong with you? Have you received some kind of blow to the head since my last visit? When I passed through here on my study tour, I distinctly remember the maid's name being -
- ANGELICO *[manoeuvring him away from the governess and maid]*
Ah, yes. Your studies. Perhaps you could elaborate a little on those.
- CRABBE I don't know if this is the time...
- ANGELICO I'm sure I'd be fascinated to hear all about them.
- CRABBE Well, the University of Melbourne has sent me up here -
- ANGELICO The University of Melbourne, you say? Fascinating.
- CRABBE - to determine exactly what -
- ANGELICO Fascinating. Yes.
- CRABBE To determine exactly what it is going to take for the White Man to survive in the tropics.
- ANGELICO And what are your findings thus far?
- CRABBE Adaptation. Adaptation to and acceptance of local conditions.
- ANGELICO You're a Darwinist?
- CRABBE So if you're lying to me about the governess and the maid, perhaps it is your perception that lying is necessary for your survival here.
- ANGELICO An evolutionist, I suppose.
- CRABBE And what, I am inclined to ask, does that in turn say about your immediate environment?
- Beat.*

ANGELICO The longer you stay in the North, Professor, the more apparent it will become to you that survival here is every bit a testament to faith as it is to physical and mental adaptation.

CRABBE It'll take more than faith for you to outlast hurricanes, fever and malnutrition. It's as if the very elements themselves conspire and refuse to allow a certain kind of Englishness from taking hold. Hop Lee's compatriots are the only ones to have any luck with crops. They outnumber the white man eight to one in Port Darwin. Adaptation, you see? Survival of the fittest. What do you say, Lee? What's the key to Somerset's future? Faith or Science?

CONSTANCE appears, unobserved, at the door with blankets and a pail of water.

HOP LEE Ingenuity, perhaps. Diligence. Constance?

CRABBE Quite, quite. 'Constance'. A fine pun, Mr Lee. Most colonies could do with a touch of Constance, eh? So, tell me Angelico... if you're able. Where is the Captain? Not the sort of night to leave a woman and children to the elements I'd have thought.

ANGELICO *[spying CONSTANCE]* I am unable to say.

CRABBE Unable or unwilling?

ANGELICO It is not my prerogative to tell you.

CRABBE Tell me what? He hasn't gone combo, has he? Done a bunker with Ivy the Housemaid.

CRABBE has found a cheroot and matches. He lights it and inhales deeply.

CONSTANCE He is dead, Professor Crabbe. And I must ask you to extinguish that cheroot immediately.

She crosses to CRABBE, who splutters on the cheroot, and whisks it from him and extinguishes it in the pail of water.

CRABBE I apologise, Madam. Most profusely.

Pause.

CONSTANCE This water is now unfit for consumption. You will have to make do with the brandy and the blankets.

She places a cover sheet over the chaise longue.

[to HOP LEE] You may recline here now.

He does so. She throws a blanket over him.

[sardonically] We can't have that 'cold' developing into something more pernicious.

ANGELICO *[looking out window]* Diebus ac noctibus -

CRABBE I had no idea about the Captain's fate, Lady Drinkwater. Please accept my condolences.

ANGELICO The storm shows no sign of abating. It may be best for me to seek shelter here also this evening.

CRABBE What happened? If you may permit me to ask.

CRABBE and CONSTANCE sit.

CONSTANCE We are not sure precisely. He went to Townsville to address a meeting of the Separatist Movement. After that, he headed to Brisbane to petition Governor Palmer directly. On the journey home, however, natives set upon Wilberforce's ship. We do not know why. Apparently, he alone, amongst all the crew, was murdered. In cold blood.

CRABBE Barbaric.

HOP LEE Sounds unusual to me. I've only heard of attacks like that as a means of retribution.

- CRABBE And yet you remain here, madam? Surely you are awaiting collection and escape?
- CONSTANCE No.
- CRABBE You remain here by choice?
- CONSTANCE Somerset was our mutual vision, Professor. I intend to see it realised. In Wilberforce's memory. I cannot leave. I will not.
- Beat.*
- HOP LEE Tell me more about this vision, Lady Drinkwater. The Professor has lured me here on the whiff of opportunity. I'm intrigued.
- CONSTANCE I think I would like to hear a little more about you first, Mr Lee. What exactly brings you to Australia from China?
- CRABBE Hop Lee wants to become an English gentleman.
- HOP LEE I want to be a comfortable and private citizen of a community in which race is immaterial. I came to Australia thinking I might find such a place in the North. In Singapore, I learned English language, culture and customs, but was a second-class citizen. In Port Darwin, I was free to set up trading emporia and to search for gold. Then, once I found it, I was suddenly required by your colonial government in Adelaide to apply for a permit, at no small personal expense, to venture more than 200 miles south of Darwin. Australia's boundaries started shrinking around me. I was a second-class citizen again, free only to cook, clean and tailor for the white man. I fear with Federation that I may soon become altogether unwelcome here.
- CONSTANCE It is true; the South is trying to impose whiteness upon the North.
- HOP LEE Then I met Professor Crabbe, who told me about Somerset.

- HOP LEE About your vision of a hybrid capital of a renegade Northern State. I have to admit, Lady – is it Lady Constance or Drinkwater?
- CONSTANCE Did they not teach you protocol in Singapore?
- HOP LEE I was not sure whether your Captain was also a peer.
- CONSTANCE He certainly was.
- HOP LEE ‘Lady Drinkwater’ then. I have to admit, Lady Drinkwater, I was fascinated. I’d like to hear more about your vision.
- Beat.*
- CONSTANCE We are at a pivotal moment in Australian history, Mr Lee. As you suggest, Federation will make or break the North. If we seize the moment and separate from the rest of the colony, Cooksland can become a vast and self-governing northern state within the new Federation. From this tiny satellite poised on the very fingertip of the nation, we see all. I have caught a glimpse of the twentieth century, Mr Lee, and it has Somerset firmly in its grasp.
- HOP LEE What does Brisbane have to say about that?
- CONSTANCE There is an over-riding absurdity in being administered from a capital located so closely to New South Wales. We live in a colony 1300 miles long. Would it be desirable that a man’s body become subordinate to his big toe?
- CRABBE Hear, hear.
- CONSTANCE Come Federation, Somerset will be the gleaming capital in a strand of lustrous pearls stretching from here across to Western Australia. Mark my words, gentlemen: We will dazzle. We will shine.
- CRABBE and ANGELICO applaud.*
- CRABBE Bravo.

HOP LEE And yet, Lady Drinkwater, for all your fine intentions, I can't help but find myself wondering whether I'm still to be a welcome but nonetheless subordinate minority within this utopian new state. The Chinese tend your garden here; the Aboriginal maid sweeps your floor and cleans your house. I got the distinct feeling when I arrived that you weren't comfortable inviting me as an equal into your home.

CONSTANCE The fever –

HOP LEE Yes, yes. This 'yellow' fever of which I'm meant to be a prime conveyor. I've heard the way politicians in this country talk about the Chinese. We're regarded as contagion, come to pollute the sanctity of White Australia. When you put your handkerchief to your mouth upon greeting me, Lady Drinkwater, it's more than a fear of actual contagion. The fear is partly symbolic, don't you think?

Beat.

CONSTANCE I have lost five daughters to fever, Mr Lee.

CRABBE Five? But there were seven not eighteen months ago.

CONSTANCE Five daughters, dead.

CRABBE I had no idea.

HOP LEE Please accept my condolences.

CRABBE But this is catastrophic.

CONSTANCE If I am initially wary of you, Mr Lee, forgive my prejudice. It does not stem from cultural superiority. It is a suspicion borne of painful recent experience. And you ask me how I can remain here, Professor Crabbe – how I can possibly call Somerset home. I have buried five children and one husband here. I think that is home by anyone's definition.

Beat.