



# The Lieutenant

*Kate Grenville*

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As a boy in England, Daniel Rooke was always an outsider. Ridiculed in school and misunderstood by his parents, Daniel could only hope—against all the evidence—that he would one day find his calling. His affinity for and ability with numbers takes him away from home and narrow-minded school, winning him a place in the Naval Academy where he becomes obsessed with Euclid and Kepler, with their concepts and theories of the orderliness of the world where everything—including a misfit like himself—has a place and purpose.

When he fails to secure an observatory position with Astronomer Royal, Dr. Vickery, Daniel enrolls in the Marine forces and is assigned as a Second Lieutenant to the *Resolution*. His travels with the Marines expose Daniel to a world he'd thus far only read about in books. A journey to Antigua brings him face to face with slaves—real, flesh-and-blood human beings not unlike himself, perplexingly compared to objects and animals by his previous acquaintances in England. He loses his virginity in a bordello and any remaining sense of innocence soon follows suit when a battle with a French fleet turns deadly. Daniel watches as his friends and compatriots fall all around him, bloodied and mutilated, until a brutal blow to the head knocks him down as well, bringing him within ¼ inch of losing his life.

The war ends and two years pass slowly by as Daniel lives at home once again where he makes a meager living at tutoring math and sciences. Stirred crazy at his relative idleness and inadequacy, Daniel seizes on an opportunity to travel to the remote and unknown shores of New South Wales. The British have begun exporting the overflow of convicts to the faraway continent, and Dr. Vickery recommends the soldiers travel with an astronomer—he can help navigate the seas and the land, and document a comet that Vickery has predicted will once again appear within the next few months. Despite his age and inexperience, Daniel takes the position with the hopes that he will be able to erect his own observatory and examine the sky from an angle none of his colleagues have ever seen.

At first, his observatory is met with resistance from the leading officers. There are only 200 Marines to control 800 convicts—no men can be spared to help build Daniel's station. But they soon relent, and Daniel is allowed to begin his studies at a dark, secluded point far removed from the rest of the men at Sydney Cove, where Daniel sits with his rifle loaded, unaware of how close the aborigines tread.

When the supplies crew fails to arrive in Australia, food becomes startlingly scarce, forcing the soldiers to reach out to the elusive Aborigines who have met their previous attempts at introduction with indifference and distrust. Along with Silk, Daniel's old friend from the *Resolution*, Daniel volunteers to track down natives who might be willing to help them find a sustainable source of food. While the men—including a prisoner, Brugden, whose meant to hunt—trek through the rugged, untouched landscape, most find the country a barren wasteland, but Daniel sees a beauty that makes his convenient homeland seem inhospitable. He marvels at the undiscovered species of flora and fauna, at the clarity of the sea and the unfamiliar arrangement of the stars, and he finally—for the first time in his life—feels at peace with his surroundings.

Though the expedition brings no food back to the camp, the crew does stumble upon a stretch of fertile land where they might grow produce and build a second post. They also fail to return having made significant contact with the native tribes. In fact, as Brugden is out hunting one evening, he claims a clan of Aborigine men attempted to attack him. Without waiting to see if he left any injured or dead, the prisoner fired his rifle

into the thick of them and ran back to the soldiers. Their failure makes the Governor u...

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