

# CLOSER OCEANS

BY JACOB HAMILTON

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The Grange Publishing

ISBN: 978-1-3999-4726-8 (paperback) and  
978-1-3999-4814-2 (ebook)

Published in the United Kingdom.

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Cover designer: Rafael Nobre

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CHAPTER 1

**INTO THE  
WORMHOLE,  
BENEATH THE  
FLOORBOARDS**

My aunty was a public librarian in a town where reading levels were consistently of the lowest in the country at a time when books were being digitalised and the libraries themselves moved to more crass buildings or replaced with hotels. I knew her as an ex-librarian because of this, and outside her house a private mobile library would visit on Wednesdays from which I collected books, while on Fridays I went to a private library that had been built in protest of the nationwide pulping. These literary expeditions ironically only happened during my days-off school and were attributable to illness in the beginning. To thereafter be frequently absent, I learned, the escapist must employ genius in the theatre of bunking if he is to be a dedicated skiver. Goldfish first, then hamsters, my stricken grief at their short lives passing was remedied each month through my absenteeism, as to push the bite of death away from a child, and the ratio favoured four goldfish to every haggard hamster (for I would implore my parents to buy the most run-down, last-chance-saloon looking hamsters in stock). My illness accounted for the untimely survivors and certainly living next to an aquarium was serendipitous in being able to browse fishes for deficiencies or adding ground crackers to their feed, and thus accumulative time was gained in libraries. Silence became a tendency that separated me from my classmates, who



never went to question my routine absences, and on one Friday I woke up to a belly-up fish and within the hour was at my aunty's door. She greeted me not with her usual look of inconvenience, but sullenly told me that the library had burned down during the night. It was not then understood how, though half a dozen irretrievable collections from local authors had been destroyed. Slightly off-site, she had precautioned a cage where stowed away were mint edition classics that had circuited private libraries as to preserve them: *Don Quixote*, *The Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, *Robinson Crusoe*, what have you, as well as obscure titles by unknown authors in defunct languages with exotic cloth covers and indecipherable patterns and frayed bookmarks and in one instance even a book with pressed butterflies inside its cover. Woe betide my unchecked happiness at these stoic survivors though, because as if nature hadn't proven its distaste enough, it threw another element their way when an undredged river adjacent to her house overflowed and destroyed them.

Years passed and I grew out of my skiving, but continued visiting my aunty to collect her books and play chess. I became an 18 year old who was lost between thinking of girls and classic literature. The remainder of my time was spent being a handy-man, far from the literary canons, when one morning at my aunty's house I began work on the boiler pipes underneath the floorboards, oblivious to the discovery that would determine the course of my life.



The underground crawl space formed a tunnel that connected to the street's neighbouring houses and water damage was evident everywhere despite years of drying. After a clueless evaluation in my inexperience, a few prods here and there, my good intentions were wasted and I composed my excuses for leaving. Exactly at the moment before resurfacing, my torch shimmered at something behind the drop-down ladder, which on inspection was revealed to be an enveloped package, wedged into a rotted beam. My aunty thought nought of it, seeing how old WWII letters were being continually found and was as one of her generation who lived in the past but resigned the war to the unspoken pre-past, then beginning to light candles to counter the sporadic blackouts.

These introductory remarks have been of my recollections; I have aged, I have aged eight years since then. This will be my 21<sup>st</sup> Christmas, a holiday diluted by age and one lacking surprise. I have found the unwrapping of any mysterious object to reignite that fleeting childlike wonder within myself though. And call it underhanded, sneaky or innate, but discovery is enjoyed most in private, like a mountain lion feeding in its cave. Many discoveries are superfluous or immediately exploitable and squanderable, however some are needed for the universe to survive; they are its lifeblood and belong to everyone. Therefore to anyone reading you must understand the weight that such a discovery bears on young shoulders, average ones, as I try to translate one man's *raison d'être* and perhaps mine also; these revelations remarkable to the youthful mind and the sagacious one.



I had locked the package in my grandfather's garage, on top of his workbench beside tool catalogues, appliance manuals and miscellaneous receipts and letters and then forgotten about it. Figuring it solitary, it is in this misting space I have spent subsequent winters turning over its contents: documents, or rather a manuscript, bound together by nylon under the unextraordinary title '*I heed Mr. A. Bloom*'. The papers are a tinged yellow and written in flammable ink, dated at least 90 years by my estimate of their typography and in intact condition. My research has concluded that no records attest to their existence which leads to my belief that they are original scripts. It is due to a fear of being unable to express them fully, through my lack of qualification and some words being unrecognisable to any lexicon, that has restricted my task to translating their contents unabridged and providing grammatical clarification. The better judgement of authors of colossal importance to not write before 30 is being ignored; they have to be told. I promise to not lose a second more to explanation.

