The Passenger
Ben Davie, Tasmania

Isaac stood nervously with his mother in the hold of George III, gripping a wooden beam against the swell of the D’Entrecasteaux Channel. He could hear the shouts of men striving to keep the boat on course as rain thundered down upon the deck. The storm seemed to last an eternity, until a massive crack shattered the night, heralding screams from the convicts below-decks as the black ocean flooded the ship.

“Mother!” Isaac cried. “We have to escape!”

“Isaac, listen to me. Take the locket. I know you can swim, so you have a better chance than I. Remember who it came from,” Elizabeth said. The silver glinted in the light of the lone lantern that creaked as it swung with the rhythm of the waves.

Isaac nodded, but Elizabeth had a terrible finality in her voice, as if she had already lost hope. “Mother, don’t give up. We must get back to London!”

He placed the locket around his neck and led his mother through the turmoil to the railing. But as he jumped overboard, Elizabeth’s hand slipped through his grip and she remained stranded on board, a dark silhouette against the tapestry of night.

He screamed and called for her to follow until his voice was hoarse. His shouts were in vain – she would not be a hindrance to her son. Her shape disappeared from the deck as the ship was slowly chewed up and swallowed by the ocean.

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"Ah, beautiful. Silver?"
"Yes."

The two kept walking, the convict and the official joining forces to survive. The unfamiliar forest weighed on their spirits, and both wanted nothing more than to escape. Soon the darkness took hold, and the survivors slept fitfully.

The next morning, they rose and walked again. Soon, cresting a hill, they saw… Hobart! After months away from civilisation, they had finally found it, in this southern corner of the world.

"Ah, Hobart! I tell you, Isaac, things aren't always what they seem! eh? We survived!"
"Yes, a stroke of good fortune. I almost can’t believe it, myself. But I must leave this place, or they'll convict me again."

Isaac considered his options as they reached the stone buildings of the town.

They walked together for a while. Hobart was a small town, mimicking the great cities of Britain in its architecture, but the surprisingly bright light gave it an almost comic or artificial look.

"I'm sorry, Isaac." John said regretfully. As Isaac looked at him, confused, John called out: "Thief! Stop, thief!" and leapt for Isaac, but Isaac tore away and ran. He cursed under his breath, but knew that if it was John’s word against a convict’s, he would never prove his ownership. "He stole my locket!" John called.

Passers-by stopped to watch or joined the chase. He ran through streets and alleyways, over hills and across bridges. A few times, Isaac thought he had lost them, but always the sounds of pursuit followed. Eventually, he was caught and thrown to the ground. The locket was torn from his neck and went to John, after he had caught up. Isaac threw a bitter look at him.

"Why, John? I saved you!" Isaac called. But there was no response.

He was taken to a cell, then later received news that he was to be taken to Port Arthur as a repeat offender. They had connected him with the shipwreck.

And so, he was taken across the sea once again, to the infamous prison. An inescapable hell-hole which no man should endure. Menacing guards threw him into a dank, dark cell with a blanket and bucket. Soon it was night, and he lay under the rat-bitten blanket, attempting sleep. But all he could think of was John Holland; his deceit, his betrayal, and his words:

Things aren’t always what they seem.