


TWO UNFORGETTABLE WOMEN.
ONE SPELLBINDING STORY.

TEARS OF THE MOON



A NOVEL BY
INTERNATIONALLY
BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DI MORRISSEY

WIN A TRIP TO AUSTRALIA DETAILS
INSIDE

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DI MORRISSEY

TEARS
OF THE
MOON



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HIDDEN TREASURE

At the bottom of the suitcase was a blue velvet bag. Lily undid the drawstring and tipped out a strand of magnificent, fat, glowing pearls. She gasped as she fingered them, but what caught her attention was the strangely carved mother-of-pearl pendant that hung from the center. On it were carved parallel lines, a circle with smaller circles in it, and an X.

Impulsively she draped the rope of pearls around her neck. It felt smooth and cool and Lily shut her eyes as a wonderful feeling swept over her.

Other books by Di Morrissey

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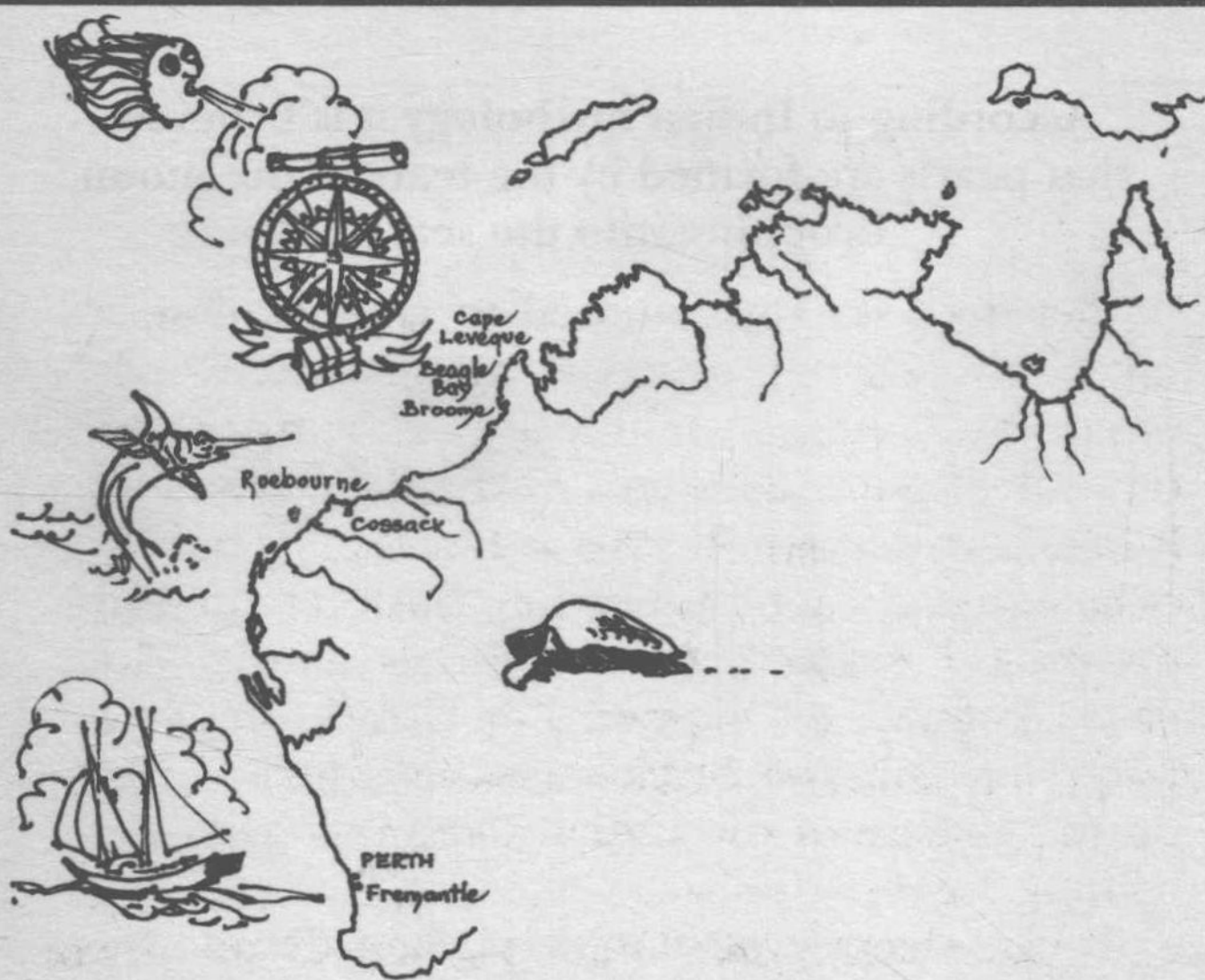
My mother, all my dear family and those who count as family.

And Uncle Ron Revitt for his terrific illustrations.

In memory of all those claimed by the sea . . .

According to Indian mythology it is believed
that pearls are formed by the tears of the moon
dropping into the sea . . .

WESTERN AUSTRALIA IN THE 1800s





PROLOGUE

Broome, 1905

The deep-sea diver moved in slow motion, a heavy weighted boot kicking up small clouds of gray sand. All he could hear was the hiss of air down the hose and his own rhythmic breathing as he was towed above the sea bed by the lugger. He exhaled, a cluster of bubbles pushing upward toward the surface, thirty fathoms above. The clear capsules of trapped hot breath smelling faintly of chili and black sauce, eventually burst on the surface of the Indian Ocean close to the drifting lugger.

To the sleepy-eyed tender, vigilant despite his slumped and somnolent pose, the steady cluster of bubbles indicated all was normal. Through his fingers ran the coir signal rope and life line which acted as umbilical cord between the two men of two worlds. Ignoring the clatter of the hand pumps, the noise and chatter of the shell opener, the tender followed the footsteps of the diver, guiding the drift and direction of the lugger as the diver explored below.

The Japanese diver worked alone, secure in his

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ability to stay deep, keep steady and "see" shell. He trudged across the sea bed, his rope basket almost filled with the broad, flat gray shells that were for some so difficult to spot. For nearly an hour he stayed in a world of intense strangeness and beauty, unaffected by the secrets and magic that unfolded about him. The novelty of the underwater world had waned early in his career. Inattention could result in missed opportunities or an accident.

The hiss of air was a constant noise in his head. Like a creature from some other planet, the bulbous form with the glass-windowed copper helmet made his way through water space, a stranger in an alien world.

He had been indentured for five years on Thursday Island, contracted for a further three here in Broome. He was a number one diver, one of the kings of Sheba Lane. The men who walked in the sea. The men who could stay deeper, work longer, find more shell than white, Malay or Aborigine. He had sold his share of snide pearls, done deals and profited from pearl finds and the shell take. But this was his last season. At lay up he would return to Wakayama Prefecture and Akiko san.

Was it the thought of the woman that distracted him? Was his ever-alert peripheral vision clouded for an instant with the rush of memory of the warm body, soft hair and sweet voice? Or had the gods decided this day, this moment, was his time? The small whale-bone charm nestling beneath the

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layers of flannel, rubber and canvas could not protect against the events that swiftly followed.

Out of the corner of his eye, he sensed a sudden movement, a glimpse of something large gliding close to him. Inadvertently, he expelled a rush of air, the burst of bubbles startling the silver shape. The huge swordfish angled away, its lethal broad sword slashing ahead of it. In its path were the dangling air hose and safety rope looping above the diver, but the monstrous fish barrelled on regardless.

The red rubber artery snaking above the diver was partially severed, the escaping air churning the water to a boiling cloud around him. He was dragged off balance by the force of the encounter, fumbling frantically to close his air escape valve and trap the remaining air in his suit, long enough to see him to the surface.

The tender was aware of some disaster, having felt the sudden drag and slackening of the air hose before the frantic signal from the diver to bring him up.

Normally the diver would be staged, resting at intervals to allow his body to adjust and prevent the build up of nitrogen in the blood. But the tender could tell from the wild signals of the desperate diver that he was losing air. Although the risk of paralysis would be high, he decided to bring him straight up.

Shouts aboard the lugger alerted the crew, and the men on the hand pump worked feverishly trying to force air down the hose and past the gaping leak

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so some breath of life reached the diver's helmet.

The diver felt the pressure mount. Burning pain seared through his joints as he swung like a puppet upward through the water, his body compressed and squeezed as he was dragged too quickly toward life-giving air.

In his last moments of consciousness he hoped they could swiftly patch the air leak and drop him back to a depth where he could be suspended for several hours while his body readjusted.

There are some miraculous stories of survival and just as many of the horrific fates met by divers of the deep. It was either death in the sea, by currents, whirlpools or hidden craters that simply sucked a diver into oblivion, or by unfortunate encounters with devil rays, swordfish, sharks or whales. Above the water, beri beri, cyclones, shipwrecks and mutinous crews could kill just as quickly. A diver might survive, only to be sentenced to a life ashore as a blinded, twisted cripple. The streets of Broome were haunted by the relics of men who'd wished they'd died a diver instead of living as one of the "bad luck ones."

They knew the dangers, but they took the risks.

The lugger lurched as all hands leaned over the side. The dripping diver was heaved on to the deck, his metal boots and helmet crashing on the planks.

The men shook their heads at the glimpse of the black skin through the glass. The helmet was unscrewed and the awful face greeted them . . . eyes bulging, one eyeball popped on to a cheek, blood pouring from ears, nose and mouth. Where

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some bodies have been squeezed up into the corselet and helmet and had to be cut free, this diver could have some life left yet. They reattached the helmet, bound the air hose and slid him back into the sea while there was still a chance of saving him.

The number two diver went with him and waited, floating in the eerie silence of the tomb-like sea. He adjusted the air pressure in the suit and helmet in the hope the blackness would fade to pink skin, that the damaged head might lift within its metal casing.

The two divers hovered, side by side, as an hour passed. Finally the number two diver signalled to ascend. He hoped should his time come beneath the sea, that his own death would be swift.

The body was hauled from the suit, and as the lugger left the fleet to return to Broome, the shell openers returned to their work on the deck.

The first shell opened from the dead diver's basket showed a perfect roseate round. Its beauty would grace some privileged woman in a distant city, but it had come at a high price.



CHAPTER ONE

Sydney 1995

Lily sat on the floor of her mother's bedroom, feeling like an invader. Drawers of underwear, personal papers, jewelry, and two hat boxes filled with travel souvenirs and memorabilia were scattered around her. Piles of clothes and shoes buried the bed. Her mother's perfume, "Blue Grass," hung in the air and Lily wished she could cry.

She had put off the sorting of her mother's belongings for as long as possible. But now the apartment was on the market and several weeks had passed since the funeral, so she could delay no longer.

Lily noticed that dusk was settling in so she got up, switched on the light and went to pour herself a glass of wine.

How had it happened that she'd never been really close to her own mother and never noticed she had no family? She'd loved her mother, she was different to other mothers it seemed, and now Lily wished with all her heart she'd known her better. Truly known her—what important things