

## Book Summary

Fan doesn't want to go to Fremantle. But her mum has decided the family must move out west to look after a mysterious grandfather named Edwin Salt.

Edwin mostly hides away in his room, and Fan tries to strike a friendship with him. Edwin seems to be hiding something, but what? And what's so special about the box of papers he keeps beneath his bed?

Ever curious, Fan takes on the role of amateur sleuth, trying to piece together Edwin's past. But she soon stumbles upon secrets she wishes weren't true.

This engrossing mystery takes the reader across three generations, between England and Australia, as we discover the truth behind Edwin's transportation to Australia.

## About the author

Sharon Booth was born in Yorkshire and emigrated to Western Australia as a child with her family in the 1970s. She has worked as a professional writer for more than 25 years. She has a PhD in Creative Writing and her creative work has been published in *Southerly*, *LiNQ* and *The Australian*, as well as being broadcast on ABC Radio. *The Silence of Water* was shortlisted for the 2020 City of Fremantle Hungerford Award for an unpublished manuscript.

1. What does it mean when Cath says to Agnes, 'now you can swim and you'll always be safe' (p.37)?
2. When Edwin is a young man, he is told the railways will bring opportunities and that the queen needs men like him. What qualities in Edwin would have been useful as an excise man?
3. Do you feel sympathetic towards Annie for kicking Edwin out?
4. Does Edwin's crime disrupt the common conception of convict's crimes being petty, such as theft and vagrancy?
5. Could the contemporary term 'gaslighting' be used to describe Edwin's way of relating to Maryann? He blames her problems on her drinking habits, but what other factors are involved in her suffering?
6. Ernest makes up a poem about his family history (p.90-91, 120-21). Do you think he knows the full scale of Edwin's crime? Does he choose not to tell Agnes as a way of protecting her from the truth?
7. If you were in the jury on Edwin's trial, would you deem him guilty, not guilty, or not proven?
8. Towards the end of the book, Agnes and Fan travel to Victoria Park to visit Annie, however Agnes does not knock on the door. Why do you think she decides not to visit Annie? Can you imagine what Agnes might have said to Annie?
9. 'No wonder Ernest invented something that could have been sung by a drunk sailor. The truth wasn't fit for telling.' (p. 219) Do you think that some truths are not 'fit for telling'?

10. 'Mam was like a weathervane for Da's moods ... ' (p. 36). How common do you think it was, or is, for women to be quiet predictors and accommodators for the moods of men?
11. Edwin sees himself as wrongly accused. Does this ring true for the way perpetrators of domestic violence are sometimes portrayed in the media today?
12. Does Edwin hide his box of letters and memorabilia because he is ashamed of his past? Do you think he feels unable to integrate the many different 'versions' of himself?
13. In the end, Agnes brings Edwin's dinner, rather than let Fan serve her grandfather. Do you think she feels closer to her father by knowing his secrets? Does she wish to protect Fan from her grandfather's past?
14. How do you think the descendants of this family might be affected by Edwin's crime and the silence around it? How might trauma become intergenerational?
15. Maryann, Agnes and Cath all suffer through the deaths of children. What support and help might these grieving mothers have benefited from?
16. What does 'the silence of water' mean? Is it the silence that Fan finds, a 'peace she craved' underwater (p. 192)? Might it refer to a silencing that happened when convicts were transported to Australia? Was the passage across water a symbolic silencing of their past that you 'turn your back on' (p. 157)?

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Amanda Curtin, *Elemental*, UWA Publishing, 2013.

Kiera Lindsey, *The Convict's Daughter*, Allen & Unwin, 2017.

Leigh Straw, *The Petticoat Parade: Madam Monnier and the Roe Street Brothels*, Fremantle Press, 2021.

Josephine Taylor, *Eye of a Rook*, Fremantle Press, 2021.