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The Sinkings

Amanda Curtin
UWA Press, \$24.95



WILLA SAMSON IS an amateur historian delving into a murder mystery. Her interest is piqued by a mutilated corpse found in Western Australia in 1882. The surgeon responsible for the

post-mortem claimed the corpse was female. But it emerged that the victim was in fact a man known as Little Jock, a former convict turned sandalwood-cutter. The discrepancy in gender identification draws Willa to investigate but her interests turn out to be deeply personal. She is the mother of an intersex child and bears scars from the decisions she made when her child was a baby. Amanda Curtin brings empathy and sensitivity to her fascinating subject. When it comes to evoking the actual human drama at the core of her tale, the author can be remote and circumlocutory. The novel needs stronger characterisation, more arresting language and better dramatic structure to do justice to the material.