

# The Red Kangaroo

## And Other Australian Short Stories

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**The Red Kangaroo  
And Other Australian Short Stories  
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## **Preface.**

This book of Short Stories may enable many an hour to pass pleasantly. "The Red Kangaroo" and its companions show that Australian short stories may be racy of the soil and exciting to the point of actual thrill, and at the same time be as welcome on the reading-table of the suburban home as in the shearers' hut, or in the fo'castle of a coastal trader, or in the tent of a mining camp. Here are tragedy in the Australian bush, romance on the Australian station, the plunging of horses, the grim out-back loyalty of strong men, while here and there we catch a glimpse of the slim and graceful Australian girl, whose presence gives the inevitable love story to the collection. All the stories have appeared in "The Sydney Mail" — most of them upon the Australian Short Story Page. The contributors are the best-known and most able writers of romance in the Commonwealth.

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The Red Kangaroo and Other Australian  
Short Stories.

## The Saving of Wantagong Station.

### Bert Mudge

#### I.

“This thing will have to come to an end. There's nothing in it.”

Gray pushed back the papers he had been poring over and touched the bell near his side.

“Ask Mr. Clark to step in here for a few minutes if he is not busy, please.”

“Yes, sir.”

A few minutes afterwards Clark, the junior partner in Gray and Co., a well-known firm in Sydney, entered the neat office.

“Oh, I say, Clark, I've been looking over the accounts of Wantagong. I got Ralston to make them up for the last three years, and it is not good enough. We must shut down.”

Clark took the sheets up and examined them, while the other leant back and thoughtfully filled his pipe, continuing:

“I'm dashed sorry for Rowan. He and the dad are old chums, but the way things are going with this cursed drought anything in the west is dangerous.”

“Well, the matter has been in your hands,” replied Clark, tossing the sheets back on the table. “As far as I can see, things have gone far enough. What do you propose to do? Foreclose?”

“Umph.” Gray shifted uneasily in his comfortable office-chair, biting the end of his pipe. “I suppose that is what it means; but we must do it as nicely as we can, for the old fellow's sake.”

“Business is business,” answered his partner, curtly. “You have been too long in the Street not to know that, old man. Of course, we don't want to be brutes, especially in the circumstances. It's an old account. What do you suggest? You know surroundings better than I do.”

“Of course we can't allow sentiment to interfere, but the best thing to do is to put in a manager for a bit. It means the same thing in the end, but will ease things down a little.”

“Very good. Will you attend to it?”

“Yes.—Oh, I'll tell you what's a better idea. You want to have a look

at the country out back. How would it be for you to run up to Wantagong and examine things? Let Rowan see how we feel, and arrange for the new man."

"Just as you like. Things are a bit slow here, and, as you say, I want to see the west. I'll go up next week."

"Right; that's settled. Just drop Rowan a line."

"All right." Clark stopped as he was going out. "Oh, I say, are there any family there?"

"No. Rowan's a widower. He has a daughter, but she was down here at school the last I heard of her. Never saw her, anyhow."

"That's a good job. Don't want any aggrieved females about," said Clark, with a short laugh, as he went out. "I suppose you will look after getting the manager. Ralston was mentioning some fellow from Riverina way the other day."

"All right," answered Gray, turning again to his papers, while he muttered, "Tough old beggar, Clark. But he is right; there is no sentiment in this game. Poor old Rowan!"

Shortly after Clark, having sent the necessary letter, left the office.

As he slowly walked through the street he grimly reflected that once again his partner, the kindly, jovial Gray had passed the dirty work on to him.

It was a nice task telling a man he was ruined; but he dismissed the subject with a shrug of his shoulders. It had to be done.

## II.

The girl came swinging up the garden path, while a handsome sharp-nosed collie romped by her side.

Her arms were overflowing with a great bunch of cornflowers, poppies, and carnations — a gorgeous mass of crimson and blue dashed with green foliage.

Raising her arms to save the blossoms from the friendly onslaughts of her companion, her face was buried in the blooms, and the wealth of colour lined against her rich black hair, piled lightly, but with a careless grace, beneath the sunshade, made a brilliant contrast.

She was of medium height, with a lissome figure, full of health and energy, and glorious violet eyes, and clean-cut mouth and nostrils.

Scolding the dog merrily for daring to follow her, she passed into the cool, shady dining-room and laid the flowers on a side table.

Before starting her decorations she remembered it was time for the mail to be in, and tripped merrily over to the station office.

Her father looked up with an answering welcome to her cheery smile.

"Hello, Girlie! I was just going to call you over. I wondered if you could possibly forget mail-day."

She laughed as she nestled comfortably on the side of his chair, and eagerly searched for her own budget.

John Rowan was a type of the west. A tall, wiry plainsman, with clear blue eyes and short grey hair, that clustered closely to the sun-tanned skin. The light muscular frame spoke of one who lived in large spaces, of the strenuous days on the broad plains, the crack of the whip, and the ring of galloping hoofs.

If the strong, bronzed face was seamed and marked with care — well, stand out at the home-paddock fence yonder, and glance across the sullen, burnt plains.

For the big drought held the west in its pitiless grasp, and the one green spot on Wantagong station was his daughter's garden, as the one green spot in his life was the girl herself.

Her mother dying when she was a child, they were comrades these two, more than father and daughter, and had grown into a sympathy that had strengthened as she had left school and taken up the charge of the old station home.

“Any news, Father?”

“Yes, dear. We are going to have a visitor. I have a letter from Gray's, saying that one of the firm, a Mr. Clark, is coming up to have a look round,” he replied. “So you will have to be affable and take care of him. I suppose he will be up for a week or two.”

Ellen had not a very clear idea as to who Gray's were, and their letters were too closely connected with her father's worries for it to be a pleasant one. But she quickly perceived that the matter was important, in spite of his carelessly-assumed tone. The Rowans were full of grit, and she answered, quizzingly:

“Is he nice, or some old nuisance that can only talk of sheep, sheep, sheep——” with an emphasis as she recalled some of the guests at the homestead.

Rowan laughed.

“To tell the truth, I haven't the slightest idea, as I have never met Clark. Old Gray and I are old friends, but this young fellow came into the firm when the old man retired. They say he is a very smart business man. As to sheep, you cheeky young scamp, he certainly ought to be able to talk about something else, coming straight from town.”

“I think it will be lovely having him here,” she cried impulsively. “We have not had many visitors these dreary dry months.”

“Well, my dear, old or young, Mr. Clark is an important gentleman to us just now, so I'm sure you will be nice to him, as, indeed, you always are to my guests.”

Involuntarily his voice had grown sober and thoughtful, and her heart was filled with the vague fear of impending evil. Throwing her arms around his neck impulsively, the girl passionately cried:

“Of course I will be nice, dearest. But if he is going to make you look worried and sad, I'll hate him——hate him — ” and she threw her dainty head back like a mother at bay.

“Tut, tut,” said Rowan, patting her heaving shoulders gently, and touched by the loyal sympathy, “there is nothing to get excited about, Girlie.”

The little gust of passion passed away at his reassuring words as quickly as it came, and, with a parting peck at the grizzly moustache, she skipped back to the house with a light song on her lips.

When she had gone, Rowan's face grew stern and sad. The despair of the beaten crept into his eyes as he read the crisp, curt note lying before him. Simple as it was, a gloomy intuition warned him of the end.

There were many hearts like his in the dry west, burdened with a debt that drought had brought to breaking point. The mortgage held by Gray's had been standing for years, and with any luck need never have been a matter of concern for either parties.

But the original amount had been heavily increased by necessary improvements, and with the coming of the drought a mountain of care lay on his shoulders, which he had zealously kept from his daughter's knowledge, while the fear of failure ever haunted him. Yet it could not be so much longer.

### III.

The dusty buggy pulled up in front of the verandah, where Rowan was waiting to welcome the visitor.

In the security of her own little room Ellen scanned him with interest. Since she had been aware that Clark was coming, idle speculations, influenced by an antipathy to Gray and Co., had decided that he would be old and horrid.

But the figure that wearily alighted from the buggy she could see was certainly not old.

A naive bashfulness, consequent on this discovery, kept her from the room when the two men entered. After a freshening nip, Clark welcomed the suggestion of a bath, for it was a luxury he had not anticipated from the depressing surroundings of the last few hours. Wantagong, however, its owner informed him, was fortunate so far in having a good house water supply. Enough at least to keep life in the garden and wash off the penetrating dust.

At dinner Ellen found herself introduced to a man the reverse of her conception.

Clark was a tall, clean-shaven man, of about 35, with the easy, confident carriage of one who was accustomed to succeed. He proved agreeable company, and she found the fears of the conversation

anchoring on the subject of sheep and rabbits were needless.

Clark detested "shop," and, in truth, felt at the present moment disinclined to touch on station affairs at all.

Coming up to Wantagong with the sole intention of obtaining a knowledge of local surroundings and getting a nasty mission over as soon as possible, Ellen was rather a shock. A pleasant one, truly, but as he took in the cool spacious room, with its tastefully-decorated table and dainty service, and his glance wandered to the sparkling eyes across the table, and rested on the rounded, delicately curved neck resting so firmly on the white shoulders, the matter did not seem so simple.

Ellen, for her part, as she appraised their visitor, and noted the straight blue eyes, the curly head, with a touch of boyishness that was forgotten in the contemplation of the strong face, with its firm mouth and the massive neck, concluded that she was going to like him.

Nor did matters improve for Clark when they adjourned out to the cool garden.

Mentioning a fondness for music, Rowan had persuaded his daughter to get her violin, and as they lounged in easy deck chairs, where the soft moonlight outlined the shrubs, while the perfume of the spring flowers filled the air, and listened to the beautiful strains of the sweet-toned strings, well ... mortgages and drought seemed a long, long way away.

Clark was not a woman's man, society occupying a small place in his life. which might have been the reason that in his own room the vision of his young hostess filled his thoughts to the oblivion of the pressing conditions of John Rowan's account in the stately ledgers of the firm. And that was a new experience for him, for the now neglected ledgers represented the monument of a successful business career, held the story of a keen struggle between rival brains for the supremacy of trade.

But a dainty figure danced recklessly across their columns, and the strains of a violin distorted the additions in an appalling manner. So much that Clark grew hot and angry, and wondered what the devil was the matter with him, and finally decided to get right down to business in no uncertain way as soon as morning came. And, being a man of purpose, he promptly did so, and after breakfast Ellen saw nothing of the two men till the midday meal, which proved a quiet one, neither being inclined to talk, and she felt the shadow of a disappointment that drew the tears perilously near her eyes. She had been filled with a great happiness since the previous night, a feeling she could not have explained, but with the glorious optimism of youth she felt that Wantagong would find no foe in Clark.

The matter and reason of his visit were vague to her, and the possibility that mortgages and loans were apt to ride roughshod over friendship, and even greater ties, was unknown in a happy ignorance.

## IV.

And the evenings came with their sweet moments.

Although his business was concluded as far as his visit was concerned, Clark still lingered on in the moonlit garden, and still listened to the strains, now gay, now sad, that floated through the heavy-scented air. And more than ever the fascination of the player enwrapped him.

Out of the comparison with other women he had known Ellen Rowan came out incomparable and alone.

From which it will be seen that his case was desperate, and calculated to cause wonderment amongst those who knew only the Clark of Sussex-street. A wonderment in which he himself shared. Even Rowan noticed how matters were tending, and almost felt fresh hope. Yet he knew the position was desperate.

To himself Clark made no secret that he was in love with Ellen, and the problem that filled his waking moments was whether to test his fate or not. In ordinary circumstances there would have been need for little hesitation. He was good to look upon, a clean man, and fitted materially to seek where he would. Yet he was reluctant, for there seemed something unfair in the relation he stood to the Rowans. And he had no idea how much the girl knew. His soul revolted at winning her through any influence but the supreme one. And he felt she might think he was seeking her through pity.

So the days passed till the responsibilities of life called him imperiously away. He was to leave early in the morning, so said good-bye the night before.

They stood at the edge of the wide verandah — he twining a spray of the virginia that clustered around the post, while she caressed the collie for whom he had entertained a week's sublime jealousy.

"I suppose I'll see you in town some day?" He felt the remark was trivial, and wished he were only game to speak the words in his mind.

She laughed, and replied, "Oh, I don't know. It's a long way from here, isn't it?" She spoke easily and carelessly, for a woman is ever able to dissemble at such a time, although her heart is throbbing with passionate feeling. And he fidgeted nervously, and felt a fool. Yet Sydney business men would have marvelled at Clark being nervous.

Well, old friend, you will let me know if you do come down, won't you? And, look," he added eagerly, "will you let me write to you? We have been good chums, haven't we?"

"You can, if you like; but do you really want to write to poor me? A busy man like you?" and she gazed at him mischievously.

"I'll write," he said gaily, "and mind you answer the letters."

They were silent for a few moments, and he added, "Don't think me presumptuous, Miss Ellen, but promise me if you ever want a friend, if

you are ever in trouble, that you will let me know.”

He spoke seriously, and took her hand in his. She looked at him with startled eyes, then answered in low tones. “I will, Mr. Clark; I believe you are a true friend of mine.”

“Thank you, little girl. Good-night, and good-bye.”

Another long pressure of her hand and he was gone.

As the buggy drove away in the early morning she again watched from her window, but this time she knew he was neither slow nor horrid, but that the memory of his voice and the vision of his strong, kind face would dwell in her heart for ever and aye — for good or ill. With a pure, true intuition she felt her love was returned.

## V.

The crash came suddenly, as is the nature of such things. After two burning, dry months, when the stock were rotting on the plains, and fodder was at a price that broke fortunes in the west and made them for the smart speculators in the east, Rowan was told the property must go into the market. In vain he pointed out the folly of trying to sell as things were. The answer was curt and definite — the first loss was the best. The firm could go no further. When her father told her as gently as he could that they must leave the old home Ellen was stunned. To leave Wantagong; her heart grew cold at the thought. Never to ride across the plains again on the starlit nights when her mind had been full of delicious dreamings. To leave the old home — her garden. In the depths of her sorrow her thoughts flew to Clark, and her heart was filled with a great bitterness. The bitterness of disappointment and failure in our ideals. The saddest of all sad broken dreams and hopes. There was no open bond between them; she had no claim. Yet in her young heart she knew there was an indefinable something mightier than all else in life — and she was forsaken.

After the first irrepressible abandonment to anguish her native nobility of womanhood brought her to her father's side. Come what may, they had each other, and in the shadow of their sorrow the old tie was strengthened with a sweeter sympathy. Rowan had written to Clark, but the latter told him he could do nothing; he was but the junior partner. But he strongly advised him to remain at the station till the place was sold. In his grievous bitterness it never occurred to him to show the letter to the girl.

An old-time neighbour and friend, whom in the happy past Rowan had often taunted with deserting the grand old west for the softer Sydney life, had offered them a welcome refuge in their trouble. Their old friends would be delighted to have Ellen, who had almost lived with them while at school, and the kindly letter was full of brave assurances and hopes of

doing something for Rowan amongst his many old friends and business connections. He need have no fear of being a burden. They knew the heart of this veteran of the plains.

So they drove out of the homestead paddock for the last time. In the early morning the cool breeze that ushers in those biting, burning days swept across the plain, and Ellen, as she looked back at the old deserted home, could restrain her feelings no longer, but, leaning on her father's ready shoulder, broke into the soothing tears of bitter grief. Rowan said nothing. He could but stroke her heaving shoulders gently with loving sympathy as he sat with drawn, tense face and quivering lips.

The end of fifty years!

But the rough, bearded station hand who was driving — remembering the old days of green, waving plains when he had held the girl on her first pony — lashed savagely at the unoffending horses, and cursed to himself with all the blasphemous elasticity of the western vocabulary.

## VI.

For Clark the position was a cruel one. The crisis had been none of his making, nor could he prevent it. And his distress was embittered by the knowledge that Gray's folly had precipitated matters.

A juggle on the racecourse, the half of a horse's head, meant that Gray wanted a considerable sum of hard cash at once. The firm were involved in weightier speculations, ultimately to yield a golden harvest. But money was tight, and while Gray was affably prepared to admit the foolishness of his way, the money had to be paid. And being paid, must be replaced as soon as possible.

Of course, Clark knew, and Gray knew, that by the terms of partnership the former could have refused to allow the money to be withdrawn, but that would involve a rupture and dissolution. And dissolution at that stage would mean a smash. And Clark could see the alternative, and was not surprised when Gray pointed out the necessity of getting rid of Wantagong. For the moment the cold business cloak that had enveloped him through years of ceaseless fighting was broken in the bitterness of his soul.

He could see the wounded eyes of the girl, feel the dumb, broken agony, as she learnt the end, and his heart rebelled. There was no disguise now. He knew that with all the passion of a man's life his whole being had gone out to the girl on those western plains. Such a passion comes but once in a man's life.

The old, careless, laughing criticism he had of women had vanished as frost before the sun in the remembrance of those honest, dear eyes, the music beneath the shade of the fern, and the last good-bye.

And he saw the young lip curl with contempt of the fair-weather friend.

Contempt that may grow to hate as she parted from one precious memento and then another of by-gone days.

Yet there was no escape. Dumbly he had to assent to Gray's cruel, hard arguments, sullenly admit from a business view the folly of continuing this terrible fight against Nature's odds in that drought-stricken land. And yet he had hoped and dreamed——

“It was like a cursed bottomless pit,” Gray had muttered, angry with himself for his utter folly, and anxious, as all of us are, to put the blame elsewhere. Rain — God knows when the rain will come, and meantime it's draining the very life-blood out of the business. Rowan can't blame us. We are not the Bank of England. A loss. ... Of course there will be a loss, a mighty big loss, too. But if we don't get our hands on some ready money the whole business will be lost.”

“Yes; but who the devil do you think is going to buy it, anyhow?” Clark had interjected, irritably. “Don't forget that.”

“Heavens! Forget it! That's the trouble. Anyway, we can have a try to find some fool who will. Hang it, you are so confident about a turn in the tide, why don't you buy it yourself?” Gray had snarled, with a sneering side glance at his partner. For he knew that Clark must have money put by. He was not an extravagant man, and his share in the business alone since he was a partner meant a good deal. And Gray felt a grievance that there had not been an offer from the other to increase his interest in the firm — a grievance that was accentuated because he guessed the offer was not forthcoming because Clark lacked confidence in his partner.

Clark had brushed aside the suggestion with a curt comment, and the matter ended with the sending of a notice to Rowan that the place was to be sold.

That night, in the solitude of his own rooms, the suggestion came dancing back across his angry thoughts in letters of fire. Why not? The difficulties of the old days at Wantagong seemed infinitesimally small beside those of now. Had he but put his fortune to the test, all might have been well. That his love was returned Clark never doubted, yet he knew that to go to her now was impossible. It might be that he could win her in the years to come by reparation. And there could be none surer and nobler than the saving of her father and the old home. Could he save Wantagong? The experience of the last three years might appal the stoutest heart. It was a bottomless pit, as Gray had said. He was not a wealthy man, but at the price the station would go he could buy it, all right. But to hold it. ... For how long? Might it not be well to let things go, and to plead his cause when the first sorrow had grown easier. Some day they might regain the old home if she wished it; by then, perhaps, another home would have grown dearer.

He smiled out across the bay at the thoughts of what might be, but dismissed them with a shrug of the shoulders. Idle dreams.

He knew without written word or spoken thought she had looked to him to keep all well. Bravely he had accepted the tryst, and now — Wantagong was to be sold.

And he was dreaming.

Long after the city had been wrapt in silence he sat through the lonely hours, figuring, hoping, yet fearing, till the rattle of the market carts in the early morning roused him.

And there was a look of determination on his face as he sought his neglected bed.

## VII.

The Merrywethers, with whom Ellen was staying, were kind-hearted folk, but it was hard to be reconciled to these circumstances. It was not home.

The first week in the city was a bitter one for Rowan. Previous trips in more prosperous days contrasted keenly in his mind and accentuated his position.

To a naturally proud man the position was intolerable. Therefore he gratefully accepted the offer of a position as traveller to a large pastoral company.

Anything was better than living on the bounty of friends, dear as they were.

Ellen watched him with a swelling heart as he marched away with braced shoulders and firm footsteps to face a new life. It was their first separation since she had returned from school, but the sorrow of parting was softened by the knowledge that he would be happier in not being dependent.

She had also been eager to do something. What the something would be was a hard question, as it always has been to the well-educated but hopelessly useless girl, commercially speaking. But Rowan was so hurt at the suggestion, made in all goodwill, and her hosts so pained, that the subject was dropped.

About a month later the station was sold at a ridiculously low figure, and Rowan felt the sacrifice keenly, although the loss was the mortgagees'.

The sale was completed in the name of a well-known city solicitor, and the actual buyer's name kept a secret.

Up to this time they had not met Clark since his first visit. Although they had been treated better than was usual in such cases, being given a longer time and chance, towards Clark both felt a sense of disappointment, tinged with resentment. Yet Ellen at times was filled with an intense longing to see him, and again she would that they should never meet. And she could not resolve on how to treat him if they did. It

was a case of man and maid where there was no tangible bond, but still one defying analysis yet of illimitable power. They “understood each other,” and when disappointment enters that understanding the wound gapes.

And Clark was in the same straits.

The first all-powerful impulse was to hasten to meet her. Then came doubt, and he wavered. For his was not an enviable plight. After all she might not care; what warrant had he? And the Rowans in such a case would hardly wish his friendship. They were human, and it might well be his company would be distasteful with its reminiscences. To go boldly forward, telling her what he had done in the inspiration of his passion, seemed more than ever appearing to try to buy what he wished freely given. And if he did not. ... Well, come what may, he would see her, and plead his cause, putting the past aside.

It was easily arranged; the first invitation Clark had accepted for months.

The girl felt the hot fire in her face when she saw him enter, and angry with her weakness her face hardened. It was then Clark saw her, and his heart sank.

How he managed he did not know, but late in the evening they were alone on the verandah, sheltered by the shadows of the clinging creepers. And he wondered at the folly of his hopes, for words were lost, and the few utterances stilt and trite.

And suddenly, whether it was the pathetic droop of the young head during the long silence, or a reckless longing to end it all, he knew not, but he found the hot words rushing with the force of his passion, and his soul was bared with a great nakedness.

The girl's face surged with a maddening colour; her bosom heaved with tumultuous longings. Her soul floated out to his on the stream of the tenderness of a great love, and this story would have ended but for the passing mention of one word.

Clark in his superb avowal swept aside the sordid surroundings, and the name of sweet memories fell from his lips without thought.

Wantagong! Like a thunderclap it woke her from the oldest dream on earth. Wantagong! An icy chill gripped her heart. She saw her father toiling and struggling — then failure. She saw him hopelessly wandering, an outcast, for a pittance. And her whole being revolted in an inexplicable resentment against the man opposite her. She felt a traitor that she should have listened in seeming acquiescence, and rose suddenly, with outstretched hand, commanding silence:

“Stop, Mr. Clark; I am sorry to have let you speak like this. It was wrong. After the proof we have had of your friendship” — and the scorn in her tone made him writhe — “it would be better if we had never met,” and she turned with erect head and set lips, and passed into the house.

Without another word or look. ... Had she seen that bowed, ashen, grey face. ... Ah, well, she dare not betray her own twitching lips and moist eyes, for duty is a hard master.

But in the solitude of her own room the hot tears streamed down the whitened cheeks, whilst she kept insisting she had acted rightly. ... But love laughs and mocks at more than locksmiths.

Clark, for the moment, was as one stunned; the shock was so sudden, so unexpected. Then came the reaction, and he was filled with anger, and the savage resolve of pique. Resolves to be dismissed by calm reasoning with contemptuous shame. It was unfair. ... He did not want to see her again. ... As to Wantagong. ... That was his business. If he could make it pay, he would, he muttered with clenched teeth, so much the better for him. But after a night of torment, a night when the world seemed asiant and life a wasted thing, his true self was king. Come what may, the girl would ever be the same in his thoughts, and perhaps in the days to come she would know what his friendship was.

He doggedly followed out his plans, and sent a bunch of instructions to the manager of Wantagong through his agent, that made that worthy sit up and get an extra hustle on his men. The smallest details were dwelt upon, and he noticed with a silent wonder the precise instructions about the care of the homestead. Nothing was to be neglected at all hazards, and of all things the garden must be kept in its former beauty, which seemed to the man of sheep and plains the most "sanguinary rot." Perhaps it was, but such rot makes the world green.

In the fight that followed against Nature's forces, Clark's manhood was at its best. He worked with feverish, untiring energy, and in the midst of it was grateful for the work that absorbed almost his whole thought.

Journals were carefully studied, and information extracted from every acquaintance that knew anything of the dry west. His few leisured moments were spent in the clubs where bush visitors mostly congregate.

## VIII.

Ellen heard little of Clark during these strenuous days. Once a magnate in the pastoral world, and the chief of the company for whom her father was working, mentioned Clark's name while they were dining at Merrywether's: —

"I saw your friend Mr. Clark the other day. By jove, that man is working himself to a shadow. If he is not making money he ought to be. Yet the game is not worth the candle," he commented with the easy complacency of one whose own position is too secure to worry over efforts.

Ellen lifted her eyebrows, and said icily: "Oh, I don't know that Mr. Clark is a particular friend of mine. Really, I know very little of him."

Her heart rebelled at the tiny white lie.

Her companion stared; then remarked, hastily: "Eh. ... I beg your pardon. ... I understand. ... Why — it was Clark that recommended your father to us. Er, merely a matter of business, I suppose."

He did not add that Clark, as a large shareholder, had practically created the billet, but hastily turned the conversation into other channels.

Then the rain came. No longer a mocking shower, but a solid fall for days over the whole back country. A fall that sent men galloping through paddocks, bareheaded, in a wild delirium of joy. For the first time for years the tanks were overflowing, the green grass sprang up in a night, and the troubles of a few days ago seemed things of a forgotten past.

Clark's fight was won. As he sat reading his manager's glowing telegrams his face was more of the conquered. The strain of the last few weeks as it relaxed left him broken and weary in heart and body.

For what was the good of it all?

After a careful scrutiny of his books he sent a letter to his solicitor that was to make that old gentleman wonder as he read and re-read it, whether he was in his right senses. After which he sat rubbing his glasses, and gazed with blinking eyes vacantly at the long row of legal works opposite, as he realised that chivalry was not yet dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

A happy little party sat in the comfortable smoking-room at Merrywether's, listening to the heavy, ceaseless rain. Out in the streets the arc lights shone on glistening pavements, where the water ran to riotous waste, on the hansoms splashing along the road with their macintoshed drivers bending before the downpour.

Inside the talk had naturally drawn to the West.

Ellen had withdrawn to one of the heavy-curtained windows, where she was half hidden, and gazed out into the dark night with aching eyes.

Too late. The pity of it.

The others had forgotten her presence.

"Poor old Rowan," said Merrywether, with a sigh, "this will be a bitter night to him in a way. To think of the difference of a few weeks. It seems cruel. Ah, well, life's a strange thing."

"By George, yes," added one of his companions, "it seems rough, all right. Why, to-day Wantagong must be worth three times as much as it was sold for. They tell me it has been wonderfully managed since Rowan left."

"By the way," interrupted a third, "talking about Wantagong, did you hear that Gray and Clark had dissolved?"

"No," said Merrywether. "That's news."

"Oh, yes. They dissolved about a week ago. Gray's been going the pace

a bit, and Clark wouldn't stand it. No wonder; there's no going the pace about him. That chap must be coining money. There is not a harder man at a bargain in the city. I believe there has been trouble in the firm ever since Wantagong was sold."

"I heard something about that at the time," said Merrywether, "but took no notice of it."

"It's a fact, all right. Clark, from what I hear, was dead against selling. He must be pretty sore now. They would have been more than safe with this rain."

"Well, we had better change the subject," replied the host. "Rowan ought to be along soon. He is coming home to-night."

Ellen had listened to this with a dull pain at first. Her cheeks flushed and her heart beat nervously as she heard of Clark. What did it all mean? The entrance of Rowan gave her an opportunity of slipping quietly out unobserved. After her father's wants had been attended to, and they were back in the "den," as he liked to call it, Merrywether took a letter off the mantelpiece and handed it to his friend. The other guests had gone.

"Here's a letter that came for you yesterday, Jack."

Rowan opened it carelessly. His correspondence was limited now-a-days to instructions from the company, and they were not interesting.

As he read it he leant forward with startled, whitened face, exclaiming, "Heavens! Am I dreaming?"

Ellen rushed anxiously to his side, while his friend leant forward in alarm.

"What's the matter, Jack?"

"Matter!" replied Rowan, with a strange laugh. "Read that."

Merrywether took the letter nervously, and with staring eyes read: —

John Rowan, Esq.,  
c.o. R. Merrywether, Esq.,  
Mosman.

Dear Sir,

I am instructed by my principal to inform you that you have the offer of Wantagong station, stock, etc., complete, at the price of purchase when recently sold, together with an additional sum, which you will find reasonable, for maintenance since that date.

As you will perceive, this is a very handsome offer, and I respectfully beg to congratulate you on your good fortune.

I may mention that I shall be very pleased to arrange the simple matter under existing circumstances of financing the purchase, if agreeable to your good self.

Yours respectfully,

HENRY MORRISON.

For a few moments there was a tense silence. Merywether leant back in his chair with a gasp of utter amazement, then slowly ejaculated: "Well, I'm hanged!"

He gave a long-drawn whistle, then added: "Morrison, one of the leading solicitors in the city. Jack, old boy, I'm glad — I'm glad." And he stretched out his hand, which the other silently grasped.

His emotion was too great for words. Ellen, with a glad cry, had thrown her arms around his neck, and the tears of happiness ran down her cheeks unheeded. And the silence that followed was sweeter than any tongue.

To Rowan this crucial turn in life's tide was a bewildering mystery. He could hardly persuade himself that it was not the phantom of a wearied brain, the torment of a tired man. But to Ellen, as she crouched in her room that eventful night, the joy of it all was mingled with a glimmer of sad comprehension. She knew. Vainly she tried to escape the punishment of her thoughts. Before the long sequence of her lover's self-abnegation she abased her soul in lowly homage. And she had scorned him — had taunted him. The magnitude of the man's love, the greatness of his charity of soul, while fulfilling her ideal, filled her with awe, and she could have crept to his feet like a dog seeking pardon. But the night passed with flying feet, for joy heeds no pendulum.

In the interview the following day Mr. Morrison was affability personified.

Apart from the lucrative prospect of effecting the transfer, accommodation, etc., there was an element of romance in the transaction which dived beneath the iron casing of his professionalism.

But to their inquiries as to the identity of their benefactor he was adamant. His instructions were emphatic and absolute on that point, he told the bewildered Rowan. Neither the latter's questions nor his daughter's entreaties could move him.

But there was a very small, but very sly, twinkle in his eye that brought Ellen back to his table as her father left the office, with one last appeal.

"You will tell me — only me in secret. Mr. Morrison, won't you?" she pleaded, with her eyes fixed earnestly on the old lawyer's face.

He shook his head.

"Really, Miss Rowan — my instructions — quite impossible, you know. Umph! — professional trust."

"Ah, but you were not told not to tell me, were you?"

"Ha, ha! Quite a point, I'm sure. No, in truth, your name was not specifically mentioned, but I know Mr. Clark—— Lor' bless me — there, I've slipped it out. Dear, dear!" And he gave a solemn little wink at the girl.

A glorious crimson crept round her eyes, and the music of a thousand birds seemed singing in her ears as she held out her hand.

“Thank you,” she said simply, and was gone.

“Ah, well, I don't think I will get into much trouble over that slip,” mused the venerable old match-maker, who had resolved on this course from the beginning.

And he turned to his work with a happy, satisfied smile.

## IX.

In the garden of the quiet old home he had secured on the bay Clark stood looking out across the ocean. The sun was slowly fading in the west, and the dying rays flashed on the distant water and on the man who stood with bowed head and folded arms. His whole attitude was one of utter weariness and hopelessness.

Well, it was done; there was nothing left. Since that fateful night, when her words had cut deep into his heart as only words from dear lips can, he had resolved never to seek the girl again.

An iron pride, foolish if you will — but who are wise? — had called out all the dogged determination of his nature to hand back the old home to her, and to keep secret the part he had played. His work was a triumph of silence. The work was done; nor did he care.

Convinced from her tone and manner that his love was hopeless, life held no stake worth the winning. The fight in the barren west had absorbed his thoughts and energy. It had been a grand fight. His face glowed at the memory. But the future was barren and empty. What had life to——

He heard a light footstep behind him, and turned in surprise, for visitors were few, and saw her stumbling towards him with outstretched arms.

The tears dimmed her eyes; her breath came in choking sobs as she murmured: “Forgive me——”

He looked at her with great wonder in his eyes.

For a moment, in a gust of passion, he swayed like a reed.

Something clutched at his heart, and the words he would have uttered were choked in his throat as he took her in his arms, for when the one love of a man's life comes, it comes with no half-measures, but grips his soul with the strength of a thousand centuries.

In that ineffable silence the sun for a second lit the earth with a great dying flash before giving way to the darkness of night.

But for those two the world was resplendent with the light of an eternal glory.

## By the Wayside.

“L.”

I had been taking a vacation with my brother at L——, a large country town, and he had given me a letter of introduction to his old friend, Archibald Glenlivat, of Boganbrae Station, some ten or twelve miles distant. When about half-way on my journey there, my horse (a hired and vicious animal) suddenly commenced bucking, threw me, and bolted. I was not much hurt, and concluded to wait awhile, in the possibility that someone might catch the runaway and bring him along. So I lit my pipe and sat down upon a fallen log to await results.

After awhile, a woman appeared, riding a very handsome dark-brown mare. Her clear-cut features were adorned by a profusion of auburn hair, knotted in the Greek style at the back of her head; she was attired in a tailor-made habit of some dark material, which was the perfection of fit, and display to advantage the graceful curves of her pliant figure; and she controlled her high-couraged steed with much skill.

I rose, made the customary salute, and inquired if she had seen anything of my frolicsome charger; but it appeared that she had not. In answer to her queries I told her briefly what had occurred, and whither I was bound. At the story of my capsize she laughed merrily; and I admired her fresh complexion, bright eyes, ruddy lips, and pretty teeth.

“I don't think,” she said, “it is much use for you to wait here on the off-chance of your horse turning up. Better get on to Boganbrae. Mr. Glenlivat will put a mount at your disposal to carry you home. One that won't drop you by the way this time,” she added, with another roguish but fascinating smile. “I can set you on your road, if you like; in fact, I'm going there myself. It's not more than a mile or two from here.”

I was much surprised to hear that, for I had supposed it to be much further (I had never been that way before), but I concluded that she probably knew a short cut, with which my brother, from whom I had received my directions, was unacquainted. So I accepted her offer, and we went on together. For some time, save for casual banalities, we proceeded in silence; but I noticed that she occasionally threw furtive glances at me, as though inquisitive about something.

“I presume,” said I, at length, “that I have the pleasure to address Miss

Glenlivat?"

"And you?" she inquired, smiling affirmatively.

"Harold Belfridge," I answered. "Perhaps you know my brother at L——?"

"In charge of the Paperweight Department? Oh, yes; I've frequently met him. But you are nicer looking than he," she replied in a matter-of-fact way.

I was somewhat confounded at this application of the puff-direct, and looked at her to see if she was jesting. But she preserved a perfectly serious countenance; as though the appraisal of my personal advantages were ordinary and natural comment.

"You seem surprised at my frankness," she observed. "I always say what I think. Unorthodox, but saves trouble in the long run."

"I am sure," said I (in a Gentleman's Guide to Polite Conversation style) "that that acrobatic animal did me a good turn when he threw me in the way of a lady whose charming disdain of conventionality is not her least attraction." May as well pay her back in her own coin, I thought.

"So good of you — I ought to say, I suppose," she replied. "But isn't direct flattery rather an obsolete weapon?"

"Yet you were pleased to compliment me just now," I retorted rather nettled.

"I? How so? I only said that you were better looking than your brother."

This was exacerbating. I smothered my resentment in a forced laugh, and muttered confusedly. "Of course — very stupid of me — hope to requite your kindness."

"Perhaps you may," answered she. "Though, candidly, I see no reason why you should be pleased to trouble yourself on my account."

"Why, I was in an awkward dilemma — I hardly knew what to do."

"Mightn't you have asked a policeman?" was her unexpected query.

"You seem to forget," said I, "that we are not walking down George-street. I had as much chance of seeing a policeman as of meeting Julius Caesar."

"Julius Caesar!" retorted the girl. "I wonder what he would say if he could see Sydney or Melbourne — what would he think of our Parliaments — or our trams?"

"Veni, vidi, vici," is what he would like to say, I suppose," I replied. "With regard to our Legislature *Omnia Gallia divisa est in tres partes* — for Gallia read Parliament. As for our trams, he would most probably observe, *Et tu Brute!*"

"You are not partial to trams evidently," laughed my companion. Then, perceiving that I was getting out of breath, she said, "I expect you will not be sorry if I restrained Donna Violante a little." She accordingly reined in; much to my relief, for the mare was a stepper, and keeping up

taxed me pretty considerably. I managed to assure Miss Glenlivat, however, that I was not at all tired, and only too happy to afford her an escort.

“Thank you very much,” she said, “but I assure you that I can take care of myself.”

“Do you often ride alone?”

“Oh, yes. You must know that I take a great interest in the cause of charity and benevolence, and ride about a great deal when I have collections on hand.”

“Collections?”

“Oh, dear, yes. You must not imagine that we neglect our religious duties altogether in the bush, even if it's only in the way of making a collection.”

“I don't understand,” said I.

“Why, you see, I have a subscription-list for the endowment of a Refuge for Aged and Indigent Stockmen, which we are anxious to institute; and with our scattered population I am not likely to collect much if I don't bestir myself.”

“By the greater gods!” thought I, “have I left the lady subscription-nuisance at the metropolis only to encounter her on horseback in the country? In town they usually hunt in couples.”

“Now, I can guess why you are looking so perturbed,” continued Miss Glenlivat. “You are afraid that I shall ask you for a donation — and you are right — that's just what I am going to do. You won't refuse, after your pretty speech just now.”

I laughed, and shook my head in a deprecatory way. “Regularly driven into a corner,” I thought. “No get away. However, she really is a jolly girl.”

She smiled as though divining my thoughts, and went on, “It is such a truly estimable institution that we propose. You have no idea how many aged and destitute stockmen there are on tramp, dragging their enfeebled limbs from one ration-store to another — lying sickness-stricken in obscure corners without so much as a drop of whisky to moisten their parched lips — their sole companion the faithful warrigal, that hunts sheep for their sustenance — often reduced to firing a run to obtain the bare means of prolonging existence — or selling pens of lively rabbits to squatters at fancy prices, with the alternative of turning them loose.”

“Well,” said I, somewhat confounded, “I should have thought such expedients as these are rather — er — eh?”

“You are quite right,” coincided this singular girl. “But then it all the more impresses upon us the necessity for removing the temptation to commit such deeds, doesn't it? You may imagine that, living on the run, as I do, I speak feelingly.”

“Yes, I can quite believe that,” said I.

“Then I may add your name to my list?”

I yielded a somewhat reluctant affirmative; for it seemed hard that I should have to pay in this way for any prospective hospitality.

As we progressed upon our journey the forest became more dense and entangled. The road had dwindled into a track that wound along the undulating base of a lofty hill; it was bordered on either side by golden-crested wattles and clumps of wild raspberry, amidst which the giant eucalypti were upreared. Through their branches, where not obscured by rope-like lianas and parasitic growth of staghorn ferns and orchids, glittered the radiance of the sun. There was no outlook.

Suddenly my guide pulled up, and exclaimed that her saddle was slipping. I hastened to assist her to dismount; and, declining my aid, she busied herself for a few moments with the girths and surcingle. Then, turning to me, she said, “It’s all right, I find. But now, whilst I think of it, may I put down your name for this little subscription?” And she proceeded to search a saddle-bag for her pocket-book.

An audacious idea seized me — not a novel one, I admit, for I had heard of such proceedings before. It was inspired, I believe, by her piquante countenance, as she regarded me with a coquettish smile.

“Let me offer a suggestion,” said I, “a little exchange, you know. Only fair. I’ll subscribe a guinea on condition that——”

“That what?”

“Why, that I have a kiss,” I replied, summoning all my hardthood — effrontery, if you like.

The girl recoiled a little and darted a glance of keen interest at me. “For what do you take me? Whom do you think you are addressing?” she asked in accents of withering scorn, to which her soft contralto voice lent the more emphasis.

“In the sacred cause of charity, you know — and in strict confidence —” I pleaded.

“What assurance!” she exclaimed. “What have I said — what have I done — that encouraged you to make such a proposition? Did you not consider the possibility of resentment — even chastisement?” she continued, her eyes flashing dangerously.

Well, I’m in for a front seat row now, thought I. Is she going to correct me herself, I wonder, or shall I have to settle with Glenlivat? Confound her prudery — who would have expected such a boiling spring as this? And visions of a burly termagant squatter demanding an explanation and intruding a hunter-crop or a stockwhip upon my observation rose before my mind’s eye.

She regarded me with unabated indignation.

“Great heavens! What could have inspired you to suggest such a thing?” she went on, her voice choked with emotion. “To k-i-i-iss me!” She stamped her foot. I muttered an apology, which she waved away

impatiently.

“To k-i-i-iss me! For a guinea! Now, if you had made it two, indeed——”

“Oh!” ejaculated I, much relieved.

“Why, in that case,” pursued this most versatile damsel, “in the sacred cause of charity, and in strictest confidence——”

“Exactly so,” I chimed in.

“Oh, dear — oh, dear! What beguilers you men are!” she murmured half shyly, looking down, and then stealing a glance at me beneath her long eyelashes. “Well — it's a bargain.” She extended her palm.

“No credit?” I remarked.

“I should think not, indeed,” she answered. “Humorous, that would be.”

Upon reflection I perceived that this was reasonable enough. I investigated my pockets, and made up the amount. “There!” said I. “And now — ”

“You audacious individual — . I didn't tell you to help yourself on that liberal scale. Release me directly, and assist me to remount. Sacred Psyche!” she added, as, having regained the saddle, she adjusted her skirt, “if anyone had seen us! The bare supposition makes me tremble.” She didn't seem to tremble very much, though.

“Now I think of it,” she said, as we resumed our way, “I shall not risk being found in your company, but will ride on and let them know you are coming. Keep straight on — you can't miss the road.” And before I could make any response she had lifted Donna Violante into a swinging canter, which rapidly carried her past a curve in the road, so that she apparently plunged into the forest and disappeared.

“Humph!” ruminated I, resuming my way. “Perfumed with good Egyptian; fragrant and rare. Most of 'em indulge on the quiet, I expect, Insidious habit.”

I arrived at Boganbrae, without further incident of note, about sunset, having found the distance much greater than my fair friend had led me to expect. Mr. Glenlivat made me heartily welcome. He pointed out it was useless to think of returning to L — that night, and I gladly acquiesced, for I had no intention to make any further excursion just then.

Mrs. Glenlivat was a pleasant middle-aged woman whose family, it appeared, consisted of two or three juveniles. I saw nothing of my quondam acquaintance, nor had she, it was evident, warned my hostess that I was coming; at all which I marvelled exceedingly, but from motives of discretion refrained from remark. It was evident that she was not Glenlivat's daughter. She was his sister, or possibly she was the governess, and took her meals with her young charges.

After dinner the squatter invited me into the billiard-room to smoke and beguile the time with balls and cues. Whilst so engaged a servant

announced that Inspector Klinker desired an audience. That officer was accordingly admitted. He was a tall, stalwart man, of semi-military bearing, but not wearing uniform. After inviting him to whisky and soda, Mr. Glenlivat inquired to what cause this unexpected visit was due.

“One that will please you, I think,” replied the inspector. “Do you remember the chestnut mare, Kelpie, that was stolen from one of your outstations about six months ago? Of course you do. Well, do you know where she is now?”

“Wish I did,” said Glenlivat. “I refused three hundred guineas for her.”

“Well, I think you'll find her in your stable.”

“You don't mean that!” exclaimed the squatter.

“Yes; and, moreover, I've captured the robber. Who is it, after all? Why, that young desperado they call Captain Flashlight. He gave me some sport for a long time; but I got on his trail at last, with two of my men in plain clothes. We came upon him this evening in a place where he had not expected us, and after a little fight (for he was game enough) he surrendered; and, to make a long story short, he's in your single men's hut now. I've come to ask the loan of a vehicle to take him to L——.”

“After recovering the Kelpie, Inspector, I can't refuse you anything,” said Glenlivat. He gave the necessary orders, and we strolled over to the hut to have a look at the renowned marauder.

“They say,” explained my host, “that he is a young fellow of good family, and well educated. Got into some scrape, and took to the roads, after the fashion of the romantic eighteenth century ruffians. His specialty has been the astounding manner in which he gets away after his exploits, and, after disappearing for a time, turning up in some wholly unexpected quarter. It couldn't last for ever, of course; but I will say for him that he has never been accused of a cruel or cowardly act.”

We arrived at the hut. There, to my utter amazement, not unmixed with confusion, I perceived, seated upon a bench and in a very bedraggled condition (the result probably of his interview with the police), my fair philanthropist of the afternoon! The removal of his wig, and the revelation thereby of closely-cropped dark hair, together with the abandonment of sundry portions of his feminine make-up, had totally altered his expression, but there could be no doubt of his identity. He was handcuffed, and a police-trooper in plain clothes sat by his side, whilst another lounged in a casual sort of way by the entrance. The prisoner smiled when he saw me — not a smile that I remembered, however.

“Ah, Mr. Belfridge, you found your way, then?” said he coolly. “I little expected that when we met I should be wearing these bangles — but you never can tell.”

“Perhaps you can tell who the owner of this property may be?” observed the inspector, producing, to my further astonishment, my watch and chain. I had missed them when making a hasty toilet before dinner;

but, from a habit of carrying them in a breast-coat pocket, had concluded that I had inadvertently left them in my room at L——. Now, I perceived plainly enough in what manner I had afforded “Captain Flashlight” an opportunity to acquire them. I became unpleasantly flushed, and probably, also, looked silly. However, I identified the articles and claimed them.

“Did you lose anything else?” inquired the officer. I hesitated. The robber and I exchanged glances. “No,” said I firmly. He looked at me again, as though to say, “I won't give you away.” I am afraid that if his liberty had rested with me he would have received it then and there.

“By the way,” said the inspector to Mr. Glenlivat, as we returned, “I dare say you won't recognise the mare at first; for those humorists stained her dark brown, and banged her tail. But she's the Kelpie all right — the brands, measurement, and so on prove that.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I had a confidential chat with “Captain Flashlight” in L—— gaol whilst he was awaiting trial. In male attire he was a slightly-built, smooth-faced, and rather effeminate-looking young man, but with a well-knit and evidently wiry frame, betokening strength and physique.

“It was the disguise that enabled me to carry on so long,” said he. “I had at one time great aptitude for amateur theatricals and female impersonations, and thoroughly understood the methods. After I had made a collection I used to feminise myself and travel into another district, sometimes by train or coach, sometimes on horseback. Of course, there was connivance; but nobody ever recognised me. I travelled once for several hours in a first-class compartment with an energetic police magistrate, who told me all about my latest performance, and wished I might fall into his hands. I was a shy, demure, nursery governess then, going to take up an engagement, and he procured refreshments for me, and was very civil, though he was not so enterprising as——”

“I hope you didn't ease him of any little memento?” I interrupted, hastily.

“No, when I was a lady I behaved as such. Oh, yes; but then, you see, you put the temptation so prominently before me — besides, the humour of the situation was irresistible. You saw the joke yourself, didn't you? Thought so. Well, that was the way of it. The game was exciting and exhilarating, but it broke down at last. I was given away to the police by a jealous woman.”

“That story is like Shakespeare — not for an age, but for all time,” I remarked.

“And now that she has done it,” he went on, “she would give anything

to have it undone, and is sparing neither money nor influence — and she has plenty of both — on my behalf. But I'm afraid it's useless.”

He explained that when he first encountered me he was somewhat perturbed, believing that I was a constable in disguise and my story “a plant;” but a little conversation undeceived him, and, being amused at my evident admiration, he resolved to humour it, not, however, anticipating the culmination.

Captain Flashlight's subsequent daring escape from L—— gaol brought his prosecution to a premature end. He has never been heard of since, and it is probable, therefore, that he has succeeded in putting the ocean between himself and the land of his misdeeds.

## **Alan M'Lean.**

### **Rambler**

A little over 20 years ago a Western train was about starting from Redfern, when the door of one of the smoking compartments was flung open, and Alan M'Lean, springing in, sat down with an air of contentment, and prepared to light up. He was a man of about 35, well "put together," fair, and full bearded; he had, besides, the "something or other" that draws the line between the man of breeding and another. He seemed, however, to be taciturn and reserved.

In the seat opposite was a man who looked about M'Lean's age, but in most other ways quite different. M'Lean was fair, he dark. M'Lean was reserved; he seemed to bubble over with a desire to have a chat with anyone. M'Lean looked gloomy at the first glance: he was clearly of the genial order.

Whilst M'Lean was enjoying his pipe, the other eyed him curiously. At last he spoke — almost involuntarily.

"I beg your pardon, but have I not the pleasure of speaking to Mr. M'Lean?"

"Yes; that is my name," replied M'Lean; "but you have rather the advantage of me."

"Mr. Alan M'Lean, and of Glasgow."

"Well, yes; but may I ask who you are?"

The other broke into a laugh that made the other passengers look at him and smile in sympathy. Then he laid his hand on M'Lean's knee, and said, "Come, Alan, don't be so high and mighty. You don't mean to tell me that you have forgotten Bob Sangster?"

Fifteen years were bridged over with their hand-clasp, and the glad greetings of "Bob!" "Alan!" It is good to see one of Sangster's stamp greeting an old friend, but when the heart of a quiet man like M'Lean is suddenly laid bare, and joy makes it forget that the eyes of the curious are on it, it is a revelation that remains with one.

Just here the train drew up to the Burwood platform, and Sangster said, "What shall we do? I get out here."

"Why, so do I," replied M'Lean. "That's just as right as it could be."

And the two old classmates went down the steps into the street,

thinking of the good days they had shared at school.

“Do you live here?” asked Sangster, hooking his arm in M'Lean's.

“Yes: I'm boarding in a place up the hill.”

“Oh, my house is up the hill, too,” laughed Sangster. “I hope that you remain here.”

“Well, I expect to be in Sydney for about six months. We can have many a pleasant talk in that time, can't we, Bob? But here we are. Come in for half an hour, and let us have a sort of ‘foreword,’ ” said M'Lean, leading the way to the verandah room.

When Sangster saw books lying all around, and the table covered with workmanlike papers and manuscripts, he said, “You have not been long in making things snug, and your den looks all right. You must have become quite a literary person, Alan.”

“M' — yes; you may put it that way, I suppose,” said his old chum, bringing out a box of cigars. “But you said that your house is up this way. Are you married, then? And how long have you been out in these parts? And what are you doing? Come, let us hear all about you, and then I may throw a little light on my doings.”

“Well,” said Sangster, “since we parted at St. Enoch-square life has proved not a bad thing. You know how I went into my father's business, and how you went to Edinburgh. We wrote to each other several times, as you know, and then you disappeared. For about eight years I jogged along, till it began to dawn on me that I wanted a certain little woman to be my wife. As she seemed quite willing to fall in with my idea, we became man and wife. She has told me since that she had got into the way of wishing that some idea like this would get into my head — bless her! Guess who she was? No? Well, Maggie Oliver became Mrs. Sangster, and will be delighted to see you to-morrow evening. There are two little Sangsters besides, who will hang about you, no doubt. You were always fond of children. We came out here, and I went into business in Sussex-street. I am doing all right, and am an Australian now. That's all; it's your turn now.”

“And so you married Maggie Oliver? I remember her well. But about myself. I am going, old man, to tell you some of my life that I have told no other man — at least, anyone I cared a rap about. But, between ourselves, you know, Bob?” Sangster nodded.

“My grandfather was, in plain language, a drunkard, and got my father to promise that he would never touch alcohol in any form. My father kept his word, and I followed his example until I was twenty-three. I didn't know my grandfather's story, but I had an instinctive aversion to the stuff. One evening in Edinburgh I went out for a stroll. Passing a public-house, and getting a sniff of the stuff, I began to feel curious as to how it tasted. I turned in, and, although I was unconscious of it, went home a done man. It was not long before I felt that it might be better to leave the

old country. I crossed the line, and lived an out-and-in life in several of the colonies. In fact, I was rapidly becoming what a half-educated blackfellow once called me, 'a nincompoop.' He had meant 'nondescript,' but he struck home all the same. About four years ago, when I had been away from my bane twelve months or so, I had a long talk with myself. I set to writing a 'yarn,' and got it published in London. It scored a few pounds, and this encouraged me. I wrote another, within a year, and took it to London myself. Considering it was the work of a new man, it did very well. Since then I have lived in London, but am out here to consult records for a book, which I have been commissioned to write. Since I had that long talk with myself I have not tasted of this 'magnificent gift of God.' And it may be that some of my words shall live a few years, and give a little pleasure to some of our harried race."

It was wondrous pathetic, the way in which M'Lean watched his friend's face, to see if there was any contempt creeping up to his eyes, and it would have made an onlooker's heart go out to Sangster to notice the loyal fellow — perceiving as he did his old chum's wistful look — endeavouring to appear as little different as possible. His struggle, however, was to hide his pity — he feared to hurt what self-esteem M'Lean had won for himself during the last five years; as for contempt, he had none to hide.

"Well done; let Glasgow flourish," burst in Sangster, with a smile on his face and tears in his voice. "But it is getting late, and I must be off. Half-past 6 to-morrow evening, remember. I'll just tell the presiding genius to expect someone — say, a stranger from London." And Robert Sangster got out into the night, when he might have been heard to say, "Poor old Alan!"

Next evening, when Alan stepped into the cosy sitting-room of his friend, he was introduced to Mrs. Sangster as M'Lean from London. She didn't seem to remember him. Turning to another lady in the room, Sangster said, "Mary, let me introduce you to Mr. Alan M'Lean, from Glasgow. My sister, Mary, Alan."

To M'Lean and Mary Sangster came back with a rush their sweet days of hope and love in Glasgow. They forgot their surroundings. The surging waters of their affection, dammed up for fifteen years, burst through the sluice-gates, too suddenly opened; the touch of their hands sent the blood throbbing through their every vein; man and woman, though they were, they reddened like boy and girl, and as they looked upon one another, like Miranda and her royal lover, they "changed eyes."

As for Sangster, he was a little absurd. "Ho, ho, old chap; you thought that you were to have a surprise party all to yourself, did you? If I weren't a sober, married man, and a town-councillor in the making, I would give you a real Scoto-Australian breakdown."

It was a good time to them all, but to Alan an ever-memorable one. He

was enswathed in the glamour of simple sensuousness — thought was nearly in complete abeyance. As he walked home in the starlight, the past was gone, the present a glory. He had been long among the choking mists of the valley; he was now revelling on the mountain-top.

He could do no work next day. He must away where he could be alone with Nature, and feel the tameless winds from the ocean playing upon his face. He went into town, thence out to the South Head. There, by himself, he spent hours. Thought was busy now, but the past had no share in it. The blessed present seemed to widen out into a more blessed future. As the sea-birds wheeled and screamed around him he scarcely noticed them, but saw his home with his love as its light, and his children as its glory. Amidst the booming of the waters dashing against the cliff that braved them, although they had behind them the impulse of an ocean, there arose his cry, “O, God, Thy world is a wondrous world, and a good world to live in. Make me worthy to live in it.”

During the next few weeks he lived in a state of wonderment. He had never thought that he could feel like that, love like that, be loved like that. His love, now and again, meant absolute pain — a pain he rejoiced in. Who was he that the love of a woman such as she should be his?

But there came a change. Mary saw it. One evening he would turn towards her, as some flowers do to the light; on another, he would be moody and unresponsive. In one short hour he would show several moods. She was perplexed, and felt somewhat piqued. But with it all she was assured that his heart was hers and no other's.

One evening little Davie hailed him with, “Hallo, uncle, where have you been this long time?”

“I'm not your uncle, laddie,” he managed to get out.

“Well, then,” piped Davie, “mother says that if you're not, you ought to be.”

For the life of him, Alan could not keep from looking towards Mary, who, of course, was studying very closely some work she was doing. It was all very uncomfortable. And soon he went home to his “work.”

To his work. But his work was not the book he was writing. He had something to do that would reach down to the very roots of his being.

When he had yielded without terms to the influence of his love for Mary Sangster, he had entered an arena where a struggle was to test his endurance to the utmost. There had flashed across his mind a terrifying thought. Dare he marry this woman? Might he not fall again? And even should he not fall, dare he risk making the woman he loved the mother of drunkards? Horrible thought! He shut his eyes to the vision, but it would not away. Their love pleaded with him against it. His hungry heart appealed to him. It urged: “What right had you to let her know you love her if this is to be the issue? You dare not draw back.” But he did. He decided to leave for London by next boat.

He went to bid the Sangsters good-bye, and gave them business reasons for leaving. He saw the wonder away back in Mary's beautiful eyes. Was he a man to withstand the impulse of his throbbing and wildly-rebellious heart? He hurried away, and Sangster walked home with him.

"Alan," he said, "what's the meaning of all this? You love Mary, and her heart is yours. What's wrong? Do you think I would object on account of the past? Speak out, man!"

And the tempest-tossed man told his friend of his great temptation, and of his decision never to marry. Sangster said it was quixotic, but in vain. He was as a rock.

Seven years ago M'Lean got a letter telling him of Mary Sangster's death. Mrs. Sangster had told her of Alan's struggle and victory, and she thanked God that she loved such a man. Her last words were, "Tell Alan that we will be comrades yet."

And Alan, once as he watched some children at play, muttered, "I am but a barren stock." But it is not so. The offsprings of his brain have been a joy to many. And perhaps his chief inspiration comes from the woman whom his higher manhood made him forego on earth.

## The “Jay Pays.”

**W. M. Fleming**

“Whoroo! Ahearn's bin made a joostice uv the payce. The noo list's out, and the name of Michael O'Shannassy Ahearn's amidst thim. Whoroo! Whoroo!” O'Grady was excited. Also, the town of Harkaway was excited; moreover, the whole district of Harkaway was excited. The time had arrived to pay off old scores, and put down those varmints who had sneered and jeered at Ahearn and O'Grady, and all their friends and relations, when O'Grady had been found with half a pig in his sty, reasonably supposed to have been stolen, “seein',” as the prosecuting constable put it, “that Mister O'Grady hadn't kept a pig these two years, and the half of a pig couldn't hardly have walked there, especially from such a distance as M'Nab's, where the two halves used to be when they was together, as a whole.”

But O'Grady and his brother-in-law, the new justice of the peace, had sworn that O'Grady, having got out of the habit of attending to a pig, had forgotten to feed the animal for two days, “and being onused to sich tratement, yer 'Onor, the one half had eaten the other half, and sure, that's why there's after being on'y 'alf of 'im.”

They won the case; it was talked of still. Now they hoped to win many more of like kind. No wonder O'Grady and all his faction were excited. They had not moved heaven and earth to put in their new member of the Legislative Assembly for nothing. There had been a distinct understanding that one of his first official acts would be the nomination of Ahearn for appointment as a magistrate. “Seein' the distric's so much in nade av 'im,” as O'Grady put it, when at the candidate's first meeting he asked the question point blank.

For years this had been the crux of every election; for which side would the candidate, if successful, nominate justices of the peace? Did he equivocate, or endeavour to please both sides, then away with him. Harkaway politics were of the decided order.

Up to the present, O'Grady's side had not been as strong as it might be. That is to say that while his side had only fourteen justices within a radius of five miles, the other had twenty-two. It is only fair to add that a number on each side were mere figureheads. Now, with the strong man,

Michael Ahearn, amongst them to stiffen them up, the whole fourteen could be relied on to act as one man.

Harkaway was an out-of-the-way sort of place, seldom visited by the local police magistrate, and never by any higher functionary of the law. Most of the cases, therefore, passed through the hands of the local justices of the peace. And Harkaway had terribly bitter factions.

So far, almost all the verdicts had been given against the O'Grady clique. Generally, it was just that it should be so, but many thought it was only the justices.

“Whoroo! It's the turn uv the wheel!” shouted O'Grady. “Come and let us drink success to the Binch and the noo Jay Pay!”

They did so.

M'Naught, the head and front of the other side, refused to join them.

“All roight, Mister M'Naught,” said O'Grady, “we'll see you agin later.”

At which sally all his supporters laughed approvingly.

M'Naught knew what it meant, but went on his way undisturbed, and when, a few days later, he missed one of his blood mares, rode straight over to Tim O'Hara's selection and took her out of Tim's yard. He had done the same thing before without any unpleasant consequences, for the justices, as well as justice, had been on his side.

This time Tim dared him to remove the mare. She bore M'Naught's brand as plainly as she carried a tail, and Tim held no receipt for her. But that mattered not; he had Ahearn.

“Touch wan 'air uv 'er, and I'll 'ave the law uv yer,” he threatened.

M'Naught understood the cause of his new-found audacity, and treated it with scorn.

“We'll fight it,” he said, and led the mare away.

O'Hara brought an action for trespass against him. He would have added theft, but was afraid the valuation put on the mare might be high enough to take the case out of the jurisdiction of the local justices. That would settle him.

All Harkaway talked of the coming trial. At every street corner a knot of honorary magistrates discussed it, and unhesitatingly decided in favour of the side to which they might happen to belong. There was no question of law or justice, only numbers.

M'Naught's friends went round and saw all the twenty-one remaining justices on their side. It was a pity, they all agreed, that M'Naught would not be able, as usual, to direct them in their deliberations. More than half of them promised unconditionally to be present, and M'Naught's friends reckoned the case as good as won.

But O'Hara and his friends knew a thing worth six of that. Not only did they obtain solemn promises, almost Bible oaths, to be present from all of their side, they set to work to see that most of the other side should

stay away.

O'Hara himself arranged for the absence of Brown and Gregory by the simple expedient of throwing open the gate between their respective stud paddocks, and boxing all the sheep, the night before the trial. O'Grady got a friend of his in Sydney to wire to three others that they were wanted in the city on urgent business. Two more he persuaded to go and have a look at a gold mine, just discovered, some forty odd miles away. This he did indirectly, employing a man whom they had no reason to suspect of treachery to inform them secretly of the wonderful opportunity of acquiring an easy fortune, and impress upon them that it was a case admitting of no delay.

These little tricks accounted for seven, making the numbers equal. They must arrange for at least three more, in case of accidents. They held a consultation as to how it should be done, and finally decided to light a big fire in the brush that lay at the back of Jackson's, Dick's, and Murray's properties. Then they could easily draw attention to the smoke, and the three opposing justices, in fear of the bush fire sweeping their paddocks, would be sure to leave hot-foot for the scene. By the time they had found out what had happened, and got back to the township, the case would be settled. The schemes, carefully planned, quietly executed, were completely successful.

Each side, having made all due arrangements, rested secure in the hope of victory. An hour before the case, the only one for the day, was to begin, the hall which served for a court-house was packed.

The justices began to arrive, not in ones or twos, but in dozens. The constable looked at them in consternation, gathered up all the chairs available, and placed them around the judicial table. But still they came. The constable raced around the hall and searched wildly for more chairs. There were none. In desperation he seized a form, and, apologising profusely and perspiringly, asked the magistrates to condescend to occupy it. They did so, and overflowed.

The constable's agony intensified. He looked at them in helpless despair.

"Another form," suggested one of them.

The constable rushed for it recklessly, and fell over Tim's yellow cattle-dog, which, like its master, was always prowling around to see what it could pick up. This time it picked up the constable, or part of him. He lay and looked back over his shoulder, his eyes bulging with fear lest the next bite should go deeper than his trousers. An onlooker came to the rescue, planting his foot in the ribs of the dog, causing him to leave in anger and distress.

The constable rose, brushed the dust off his uniform, begged pardon of the magistrates for the unseemly conduct of the dog, and planked the form down on Ahearn's great toe, the one with the bunion on it. Ahearn

remarked disparagingly on his breeding, and a great silence fell upon the court.

The case began. O'Hara's thirteen, O'Grady, of course, amongst them, had turned up only one short. The other side had only eleven. Flannagan went over to Murphy's public-house and told him Tim had won. Murphy, taking the same view of the case, asked him to have a drink. Whereby Flannagan scored.

The evidence, as the witnesses would have given it had they been allowed, was plain enough. But M'Naught's supporters, having duly counted noses, were sparring for time to gather in some more of their own. O'Grady and his twelve could not sit like dummies, and let it appear as though the other side had a monopoly of all the legal knowledge in Harkaway. Their vanity on this point caused them to assist their opponents, and when M'Naught's messengers returned one after another with the story of how his supporters had been tricked and led away, the fight grew fierce. Carlton took exception to a leading question asked by Ahearn, and for half an hour or more the learned lights discussed the point, or as near it as they could get. When that was settled M'Naught's side raised another. So the battle raged.

Ahearn tried another question. "Had yer bin thavin' the mayre, yer'd not have hed her in yer yarrd, wud yer, now?" he asked O'Hara.

The listeners in the court laughed audibly. Many of them had a shrewd suspicion that Ahearn knew better than that how to dispose of stolen stock.

"Silence!" roared the constable. The laughter inside the room died away, and someone guffawed just outside.

"Constable," said O'Grady, "go and remove the donkey that's braying on the footpath."

The constable looked to the Bench as a whole, to see if he should carry out the command, but the Bench was already absorbed in a fresh "pint." Carlton had again objected to Ahearn's line of questioning.

"How does the magistrate know what the accused would do with stolen stock, or what should be done with stolen stock?" he asked.

Again the listeners laughed.

"And whol shouldn't I know," asked Ahearn, indignantly.

"Well, perhaps you do," retorted Carlton, with asperity, having gained his object.

After that Ahearn asked no more questions. He did not even interfere with Carlton when he asked some of an even more suggestive character.

Someone jogged Michael up, and assured him his reputation was at stake. But Michael Ahearn was not to be beaten as easily as that.

"Hught!" he said, "can't yer be seein' thet it's our worrk to git the trial over as soon as possible, before any uv their min have time to git back?"

The word was passed round, and promptly acted upon, establishing

Ahearn's reputation more firmly than ever.

But already the case had been somewhat protracted, and Brown and Gregory having straightened up their stock in a temporary way, hastened to the scene of action. Their arrival made the numbers equal, and caused great consternation amongst their opponents, who immediately despatched a messenger for their only remaining supporter.

The two new arrivals were handed notes of the evidence. Gregory could not read a line.

But that did not matter; he knew how to vote, as it was generally termed in Harkaway. He held the paper upside down, and appeared to devour its contents with eager interest. As a matter of fact, his eye was on Ahearn, and he was wondering what had happened to him. To those who had heard, and been endeavouring to act upon Ahearn's wisdom, he appeared to be merely holding himself in check; to Gregory he looked fairly squashed. So much depends on one's point of view in these things.

There was a disturbance outside. The messenger sent by O'Grady had returned without his man, but evidently with something to say. O'Grady went out to see him.

"Is Quinn coming?" he asked, anxiously.

"Naw," answered the messenger, "he ain't."

"Ain't coming! Why not?" exclaimed O'Grady.

Their voices floated into the room, and the constable glanced uneasily at the door. The messenger did not reply.

"Yer sure yer told him?" asked O'Grady, fiercely.

"Course I did. Course I told 'im."

"Then why can't he come?" demanded O'Grady.

The whole Bench waited to hear the reply.

"E's fakin' the brand on M'Naught's chestnut 'orse, if yer must know," it came, angrily.

M'Naught jumped as if he had been struck, but did not move out.

O'Grady looked annoyed. "Might er picked another day to do that," he said sullenly, and stumped back to his place on the Bench.

M'Naught's brother looked at his fellow justices Questioningly.

"Better go" whispered one. "It's just on lunch-time. We'll keep the case going till you get back, and you'll catch him red-handed."

M'Naught's brother left, and did so. But that is another story.

Resuming after luncheon adjournment, Brown rose to the occasion, dragging the case out in masterly fashion. He asked one of the witnesses as to the possibility or otherwise of tracking the mare in question. No doubt had been raised as to the identity of the animal. Brown considered it necessary to place it beyond dispute, or said so.

His opponents, and even some of his own side, before they saw the drift of his doings, objected to his questions. Whereupon he stated definitely and with decision that he was not satisfied as to the identity of

the mare. The more sanguine, or perhaps foolish, ones on O'Hara's side began to consider the possibility of gaining one of the enemy over.

But Brown was a deep customer.

"You are quite sure the mare could not be tracked?" he asked.

"Quite sure," answered the witness. "Yer might as well try and track on that ther floor." Brown looked at the floor thoughtfully for a few seconds.

"And are you sure it would be impossible to follow a track there?" he asked.

"I'd like ter see it done," replied the witness, confidently.

Brown turned to his fellow magistrates. "I shall show the worthlessness of this witness," he said, and stepped gravely out on to the floor.

Stooping down with some dignity, he drew a tracing with his finger in the dust that lay there. Straightening up, he looked soberly at the Bench. "A blind man could feel it with a stick," he said.

The Bench stared at Brown, at the tracing on the floor, and at its collective self. This was a new procedure altogether. The Bench was non-plussed.

Ahearn took the objection that such a proceeding had no precedent, and could not be received. The point was argued at length, M'Naught's side being unanimous that it should be allowed, O'Grady's that it could not. It looked as though the latter must win, when Jackson, Dick, and Murray raced up to the court-house, their horses a lather of sweat, and took their places on the bench. Wild with resentment at the trick which had been played upon them, they argued fiercely in favour of Brown. Brown won.

He drew another tracing on the floor with great deliberation and dignity. Some of the justices said they could follow it, others swore they could not. Brown invited them all on to the floor to inspect at closer range. First one, and then another, dribbled down, till presently almost the whole number was gathered on the floor.

Ahearn swore he could not see the tracing.

Brown remarked that he must be getting shortsighted very suddenly, and suggested that he should go down on all fours, the way pigs generally look at things.

Ahearn missed the insinuation, and did as suggested.

Tim's yellow cattle-dog had returned to see how things were going. Having entered the room, he wandered round in search of something to do. Seeing Ahearn in that curious position, he found his object. He also found a soft and fleshy part of Ahearn.

Ahearn rose with a yell, and the dog, seeing trouble ahead, made for the door.

For the remainder of the trial Ahearn remained standing.

M'Naught's brother returned, having fulfilled his mission. It suddenly occurred to both sides that further evidence was unnecessary, the

opposing justices being sixteen to thirteen against O'Hara. Judgment was given in favour of M'Naught.

## **Life's Lesser Tragedy.**

**A. M. Waddell**

She stood on the wharf, her eyes wandering sadly, bitterly, enviously over the scene before her — the great ocean steamer, which with its living freight would in a few minutes leave the new world for the old. People crowded up the gangways, followed by laden stewards, friends, relatives. For a moment in the interest of the scene the girl forgot her own wild longings, and the sudden impulse which had driven her to break all former resolutions and make one of this little world. She studied the faces — read them as one reads a book. Here, the old traveller looking with a slightly bored air at the bustle and activity surrounding him; there, the young girl taking her first trip, joy and excitement glowing in her eyes. Voyagers and stay-at-homes thronged the decks. A babble of voices, the usual friendly wishes exchanged, sad faces, bright faces, flowers, gifts, officers darting here and there shouting orders, apparent confusion on every hand, gradually lessening, however. A bell sounded; slowly but steadily the gangways became crowded with a descending throng of people. How glad she was she had resisted the desire to go on board. It would have been too hard to come away again. Almost she hated those people on deck — that old man, this, perhaps, his second, third voyage. What pleasure could he find now, while she — ah—— The huge vessel began to move almost imperceptibly from its moorings. Handkerchiefs appeared, last looks, last words exchanged. In a dazed way the girl looked at those around her; several were weeping. Tears welled up in her own eyes, tears of sympathy and yet of self-pity.

Unconsciously she drew near the edge of the wharf, as if to follow the vessel at all costs. Then she became aware of someone speaking: “Excuse me, is this your property?” Mechanically she accepted the glove offered her. “Thank you. Yes; I must have dropped it.” With a strong effort she mastered her tears and emotions, and raised a pair of dark grey eyes, which yet failed to hide an almost painful longing.

“Poor girl! A lover or a husband left in the boat, I suppose,” he thought, and turned away. He did not understand; how could he? No lover, no husband, no friend, only the magic and mystery of the old world calling unto one in the new world, who had not the wherewithal to

satisfy that call. A wandering spirit of a wandering ancestry appealing to this one of her children. Perhaps some day, who knows?

## **An Elderly Romance.**

**Laura Bogue Luffmann**

Jean Armytage sat by her window reading and re-reading a letter in the fading light. Anyone might have imagined from the time spent in scanning it that it was written in Sanscrit, or in crabbed hieroglyphics. But no! The writing was clear enough. It was not the caligraphy — it was the subject matter that astounded, confused, dazzled, and bewildered the recipient. For this letter was nothing more nor less than an offer of marriage from Jean's old playmate, Reuben Grant — a man who had never spoken a word of love to her in his life — now living across the seas in far-off Australia, owning land, and cattle, and horses, and buggles (“what you call gigs, Jean”), all which seemed wealth to this lone woman dwelling in a quiet Highland village.

“It cannot be true,” she ejaculated. “Who ever heard of a woman of my age getting a love-letter?” And then with a pang — half of sorrow, half of indignation — she reflected that the letter contained no word of love! Reuben had set out the advantages that would accrue from her change of state, but never a word of his own feelings. It was as businesslike a proposal as that of any ordinary partnership. There was no room for sentiment in the matter. Wherefore Jean, being a woman, felt defrauded of her just due.

The habit of years led her to lay this matter — as she had laid all the former perplexities of her life — before the minister.

“I've got a bit letter here I'd like you to read,” she said, drawing the envelope with the Australian stamp from her pocket, and handing it with a fine blush to the arbiter of the village destinies. He read it through quickly, and, looking up with a face in which satisfaction and amusement struggled for the mastery, said, emphatically, “Well, Jean, I congratulate you! Many younger women would envy you this good fortune.”

“You think I'd better accept, then, minister?” Jean asked, anxiously.

“Accept! By all means! Why should you hesitate?”

Jean looked down. “It seems,” she stammered out, “more as if Reuben were looking for a housekeeper than for — a wife. There's no word in it, as if — as — if — he cared for me!”

“Why, Jean, I'm ashamed of you!” exploded the minister. “The idea of

a woman of your age expecting to be courted like a young girl! I suppose you want Reuben to write you poetry about hearts, and darts, and the like, eh? No, no, Jean; leave all that to the young folks! Be content with the good home this worthy man offers you, and the good bit of silver in the bank. Take your passage to Australia in the next boat, and thank heaven for this good fortune.”

Jean went home, unconvinced by the minister's logic, and yet, on the very next day, she wrote to the Orient office about her passage. What had decided her was the discovery of a few words hastily penned at the back of the letter. “There's no denyin', Jean, that I'm a bit lonesome — so write soon.” This was enough. Reuben was “lonesome,” and he wanted her! As for Jean herself, she had wanted Reuben all her life.

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The time arrived when Jean, after dressing herself with trembling hands in her best clothes, came out of her cabin to meet Reuben — a fine man in spite of grizzled locks and a wrinkled skin, tanned and stained by exposure to all weathers.

“Well, Jean, have you had a pleasant voyage?” he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. Jean's heart went down like a lump of lead, but she answered bravely, “Thank you kindly, Reuben, I've been a fine sailor!” And then, with the woman's subtle instinct for finding the right thing to say, she added, “And it's a beautiful country you've brought me to, Reuben. Everywhere I've landed the sun has been shining.”

“Yes, too much sunshine; you'll live to find that out,” answered Reuben. And then, the ice being broken, he proceeded to talk about Australia, comparing it with the old land, and to make inquiries for mutual friends in the Scotch village. This filled the time till Jean's modest luggage was brought to shore. Then Reuben called a hansom, and the affianced couple drove away.

“Jean, my place is far away in the country, and what shopping you want must be done to-day. Get yourself good clothes, and — and don't spare the silver. A man doesn't get married every day.”

Jean felt ready to die of fright when the lift whirled her up to the second floor of a large drapery establishment, where “ready-made” dresses and mantles and beautiful bonnets and hats awaited the purchaser. She made a feeble protest when Reuben pointed to a grey silk dress on a stand marked at a fabulous figure, and then a lace mantle, and a bonnet with white flowers, and bade her try them on. She emerged from the fitting-room a touching mixture of pride and shamefacedness. The reflection in the glass had been a revelation! Reuben glanced at the sum total, handed out the cash, and motioned Jean downstairs.

“Oh, Reuben! Am I to wear these grand things in the street — and of a

week-day?" murmured Jean. "Can't they be put in a box?"

"By-and-bye, when we travel in the train, you can put on your old clothes, Jean." (Her old clothes! Hadn't they been made by Mary McMurtie, the best needlewoman in the village?) "But now you must wear them, for this is our wedding-day. The minister will marry us at 4, and then we'll have a bit dinner and take the night train home."

Jean did not answer. The experiences of her first day were too bewildering! Clothes fit for the laird's lady — and Reuben's imperative masculine ways — and now, a wedding!

The cab stopped at the door of an hotel. Here Reuben ordered a meal, and afterwards Jean was left to rest till the time came for going to church. It was Reuben himself who tapped at the door. His eye rested approvingly on the well-clad figure, and then a sudden fear struck him.

"Would you have been wanting a white gown?" he asked, apprehensively.

"No, no, no!" cried Jean, shrinking back as if in horror. "What should I be doing in a white gown at my age?" This seemed to recall Reuben to his senses.

"No, you're right, Jean; we're not like a pair of young fools. We're just sensible folk," he said, slowly. "White gowns are not for the like of us!"

Jean could never recall clearly the marriage service. She went through it in a dream. The empty church seemed dreary and uncanny. Where were the women friends who should have stood by her at this supreme crisis in her life? They were thousands of miles away! In the vestry, after signing their names, Reuben kissed her formally. This act seemed to clinch the bargain. Jean, for some dark, feminine reason, felt a pang of disappointment. She had thought there would be ... more in a kiss ... than that! A tear rose to her eye, but she drove it back, remembering Reuben's words: "We're not like a pair of young fools!" She must leave the kisses, as well as the "white gown," to them.

It was in the clear light of early morning, and from the window of a railway carriage, that Jean looked out on the surroundings of her new home. Reuben had insisted on a sleeping berth, and, thoroughly tired by the many conflicting emotions of the previous day, she had slept soundly. She awoke fresh and bright, pleased to know the city's din was far behind her.

At the wayside station a funny old coach was waiting for the mail, and for any chance passengers who might come that way. But Reuben led his bride to a large, roomy buggy, harnessed to a pair of fine horses.

"Whose carriage may this be?" inquired Jean, speaking low so that the lad holding the horses should not hear.

Reuben turned his head and laughed.

"Your own, woman; your own," he answered brightly.

Jean fell back speechless. Why, this was as good as being a laird's lady!

The drive itself left something to be desired. Never in the whole course of her life had Jean been jolted and bumped in such a manner. As long as Reuben kept to the high road the pace was endurable; but when he turned off into what Jean called "the woods," and the buggy began to make flying leaps over fallen logs, and abrupt precipitous descents into dry creeks, she could not restrain a few panic-stricken cries.

"You'll get used to it, Jeanie, woman," Reuben said, kindly. "This bush track is a bit rough in parts, but there's many that's worse."

This was feeble consolation, but Jean had to make the best of it.

After a time the buggy emerged once more on the high road, and in the distance Jean saw a long avenue of pines and a winding river fringed with willows. Then came meadows, green with lucerne, and cattle luxuriating in the shade caused by bushy hawthorn hedges. Outhouses and barns were soon discovered, and at the end of the avenue a low white house.

"This is home, Jean," Reuben said, simply. He led her in. To her relief, the rooms were not richly furnished; no carpets that she would be afraid to tread on, or gilt clocks and statues such as she had seen at the laird's house. Everything was solid, and plain, and comfortable. Reuben then opened the door of a press filled with linen.

"Oh, the bonny, bonny things," Jean cried, running forward in ecstasy.

Reuben's face glowed. "I remember how you were sitting hour after hour mending your aunt's tablecloths," he said slowly. "I can see you at the window, with your head bent; your hair was black then, Jean."

"Ah, it's fast whitening now, Reuben," Jean said, with a little sigh.

"Well, it'll remind us that we're sensible folk now," returned Reuben, sturdily. "But, oh! Jean, your black hair was real bonny."

He stood silent for a while, watching Jean finger lovingly the damask cloths and snow-white sheets. Then he opened another door. "Here's a bit of silver for you, Jean," he said, indifferently.

If the linen had enchanted Jean, the bit of silver struck her dumb — a brand-new silver teapot, a cruet-stand, spoons and forks, wrapped up in tissue paper, and a dozen teaspoons marked with her initials.

"Reuben, you're too good to me," faltered Jean, the tears springing to her eyes.

"Nonsense, woman; only a bit of silver," Reuben answered, deprecatingly. "I remember how your teaspoons always shone, German silver though they were. Well, come outside now, and look at the cows."

They were going in to be milked — big, heavy beasts, with great, soft brown eyes. Jean, who loved all dumb creatures, took to them at once.

"Shall I be doing the milking?" she asked, timidly.

"Only if it pleases you, my woman. I didn't bring you here to work," answered Reuben, quickly.

Something stronger than herself impelled Jean to ask:

“Why did you bring me here, Reuben?”

“Oh, just that we might be two old folk going down hill together,” he answered, lightly. “Come and look at the creek.”

The creek — that was what Reuben called the river, fringed with willows. They went down to the brink, and sat in the shade. Some big, grey stones, standing out of the water, formed a natural bridge.

“I remember seeing you step across the brook in the Laird's Wood,” Reuben said. “One foot slipped in the water, and you cried out, and——”

“And you jumped in and caught me round the waist, and lifted me over,” continued Jean, softly.

“You remember it, then?” exclaimed Reuben, delightedly. “That was before my first trip, and when I came back I thought to meet you there again. And so I did, but there was another with you, Jean — Colin McNeil — so I turned back, and that night Mary McNeil said to me: ‘Jean is as good as promised to our Colin.’”

“She lied,” Jean struck in, fiercely, her eyes flaming. “She lied. I was never promised to Colin.”

“You were walking like lovers that night,” said Reuben, accusingly.

“He was asking me to marry him, but I said nay. I looked up and saw you by the bridge — but when Colin left me you had gone.”

“And the next day I left home for good,” said Reuben, gravely. “Lord, what fools we are! To think of the things that might have been, to think — Jean” — breaking off suddenly — “why did you send Colin away? Was there ever a one you liked better?”

“Yes,” said Jean, shyly.

A look of joy overspread Reuben's face. He opened his lips eagerly, as if to ask another question, and then the courage failed him. The man she liked better was probably Duncan McTavish. He had heard their names coupled together; it could not possibly have been .....

“It's green and shady here, Jean,” he said. “You don't see many such spots in this country. But directly I came here I planted the creek with willows. I got out rows of pines, and made hawthorn hedges. I knew you liked the green.”

“But, Reuben, that was years ago, before you ever thought of me,” cried Jean, astonished.

Reuben's face flushed.

“There never was a time that I didn't think of you, my woman — never — not since we were but children at school.”

“Oh, Reuben, is this true? Oh, this is better than houses and lands, and linen and silver! Oh, Reuben, why didn't you say it in your letter?”

“What should I be saying, Jean?”

“Why, that you loved me, Reuben,” Jean said, audaciously, with flaming cheeks. “Oh, Reuben, all your talk was of your land and cattle, and money — never one word — oh, never one word of love! I thought

you just wanted a housekeeper. I wouldn't have come if you hadn't written: 'I'm a bit lonesome.' Oh, Reuben, you may be a clever man, but you just — don't understand a woman!" Reuben's arm was around her now, and her tearful face was resting on his shoulder. His own eyes were brimming.

"Jeanie, woman, I've loved you all my life; I was going to tell you so the night I saw you at the bridge — with Colin! And I came away the morn because I couldn't stand the thought that you were promised to him. Later I heard that Colin had died, and the thought came to me: 'She's free now.' But, no! I couldn't take another man's leavings! So I just lived my life alone. But you were always with me, Jean. When I made that causeway in the creek, I saw you stepping there; and when I planted the trees, I saw you resting under their shadows; and when I built the house, I said: 'This is for her sticks of furniture, and her bit of linen.' 'Twas all for you!" Closer and closer Jean clung to him, devouring the story — the old, old story that rings ever new in the ears of each successive generation.

"But it wasn't till I heard that your father had died, and that you were alone, that the thought came to me of asking you to come out. And after I had written the letter a lonesomeness fell on me, such as I had never known before. If you had said me nay, Jean, I'd have left the place, and carried my swag to some other State. I couldn't have borne the house without you! And when your letter came, so prim and plain, I thought: 'It's the lonesomeness, too, that is bringing her to me. We must leave the fancy and the flutter to the young folk. We'll just be good companions jogging on the road together to the end of life.' I never thought you cared for me, Jeanie, woman! Was it — was it because of me you sent Colin away?"

Jean looked up, smiling through her tears. "I was just mad with Colin for keeping me on the bridge when you were waiting on the other side, and when I found you had gone I just sat down and greeted. And when I heard you had left the village, with never a word of farewell, my heart turned to stone. My youth went that day!"

"But it's come back, Jeanie, it's come back! For all your hair is touched with grey, there's a light in your eyes and a colour on your lips like a young girl. Jeanie, woman, is it the light of love, and is it for me?"

"There's never been anyone but you, Reuben, never! It's all for you." And then Reuben folded her in a long embrace, very different from the formal salute he had imprinted on her cheek in the vestry.

Together they sat under the green canopy of dipping willows, the golden Australian sunshine creating a vernal glory all round them, and casting flashes of glittering light upon the stream. A new earth had opened before the lone woman, a new and smiling country, where the sunshine was always golden, the sky always blue, and where love was

the truth of life!

It was the prosaic dinner-bell that aroused them from their idyllic dream. Lifting Jean to her feet, and slipping her hand under his arm, Reuben cried with a joyous laugh: "Why, Jean, we're no better than a pair of young fools, after all!" And arm in arm they entered the house that was now home to both.

## **A Casual Star.**

### **H. M. Somer**

Sky joined plain in a hazy line, broken only by a few short belts of pine scrub. The plain was green, endlessly green and flat, save where an occasional depression was covered by sad grey stalks of lignum. Scenic effect mattered little to the passengers on the heavy coach which lumbered and laboured on its leathern springs as it sagged into crabholes and rose over clay banks. The freight was mostly a dramatic company of ten persons, travelling to a town in which it was billed for a three nights' "season." The juvenile lead, the weary old stock-actors, the gloomy comedian, the faded pianist, the manager-proprietor, who played the gentleman-scoundrel, and kept his eye on the cash window and the ticket-taker.

The second scoundrel, with ponderous shoulders, large battered-looking face, and a dialect — a repulsive, blood-curling assassin on the stage, a too cheerful companion, with a marvellous capacity for beer, in private life. Three ladies. First the star, then the lady who played up to the star in the part of a country girl cruelly deceived by the manager-proprietor gentleman-villain, or struck out in a distinctive line as a clever, unscrupulous adventuress, according to the exigencies of the latest great Drury Lane success imported, according to the bills, with great extravagance of scenery and effects. Next the middle-aged actress, with a repertoire, who was sometimes the other half of the "comic relief," and sometimes a pathetic street-arab, who refuses to allow the juvenile male lead to give way under the most distressing circumstances.

The star was a tall, slender blonde, whose skin and features had not yet been wrecked by reckless dabbling on of "make-up." The mummers had begun the eighty-mile journey in listless mood.

Out on the wet plains they were roused to a very keen interest in their surroundings. Though the driver swung his team all over the wide stock route to keep in the soundest "going," the coach had been bogged, and "dug out," ten times before 10 o'clock. All the male passengers were cheerfully requested to get down and stretch their legs each time the vehicle came to a standstill.

"Might as well walk a bit, gents," the driver invariably added. "Warm

yer toes and give ther cuddies a charnst.”

So they walked in sodden boots, jarring their aching heads by jumping from clay-bank to clay-bank to miss the deepest pools in the crabholes and wheel-ruts.

“All aboard, gents,” cried the driver, when the coach overtook them. “There's a good bit of goin' ahead, and I'll let 'em sail.”

Letting them sail amounted to flogging, yelling, and reefing at the reins until the four weary horses broke into a dogged trot. Soon they slowed down, until a wheel, sinking behind a hard bank, brought them to a standstill.

“Out again, gents, if you please. Good job it's such a gran' mornin' for exercise, ain't it? Anyway, it ain't fer to the One Tree, and we change there. There's the One Tree just a'ead there. Hardly worth yer while gittin' in agen,” said the Mark Tapleyan driver, for the twelfth time.

Away out on the horizon could be seen the One Tree making a note of exclamation in the level line of outlook.

Among the outside passengers was a lean, flat-figured, yet strongly-built Australian, with the outback writ large from his brown forehead and keen blue eyes to his short, light boots. Each time the horses stopped he twisted himself to the ground and seized one of the spades thoughtfully provided by the stage coach people for emergencies. Others helped, in very shame, but the outback man always had a level track cut through the clay in front of the worst bogged wheel before much was accomplished by them. Then he would call to the driver:

“Right away, Bill! Get them going altogether.” Sometimes Bill preferred a walk, and then the wiry Australian swung himself on to the box seat, and seizing the reins, shook the team together and took them out of a bog in masterly style.

The star on the box seat, wearily endeavouring to forget her surroundings in slumber, began to feel a slight interest in the active fellow with the quiet, set face. It dawned on her that but for him all the shoutings of Bill and the bad language and suggestions of everybody else would not avail the company to reach their next town in time to take up advertised dates.

Her show of interest, slight as it was, kindled responsive feeling in the mind of the bushman. Never before had he been in actual proximity to an actress. Though the horses filled most of his immediate comprehension, he was conscious that a being outside his ken was regarding him. He knew she was different to his sisters in the old home away south in Victoria, and he was sure he had never met anybody just like her at the dances in the country towns.

The strong perfume of the dressing-room and the professional wardrobe was foreign and almost confusing to his senses out here on the sixty-mile plain. The sinuous swaying of her figure and studied pose of

her pretty head reminded him of no other creature in the world. When she said:

“You seem to be shifting the whole business around,” he could only stammer, “Oh, nothing much, nothing in particular.”

By-and-bye he began wondering if she were regarding him while he was digging. Once, looking up quickly, he caught her large eyes gazing sleepily at him, and felt a strange, almost uncanny tumult. It was as though a character he had been reading of had suddenly stepped out of the book and accosted him.

The One Tree was reached five hours after time, but when the rest of the company sat down to the brutal mutton and coarse bread in the wooden hotel, the star went to a rickety couch.

“What! Off your feed, Venetia?” said the manager-proprietor. “That won't do, you know. You must eat something.”

“All that I require at present, thank you, is to be deprived of the distinguished honour of your conversation,” she returned in a tired, affected voice.

Peter M'Leod, the outback man, wrestled with an overpowering shyness, until he finally conquered it. Then he sought the stout landlady and succeeded in having a pot brewed from the special tea she kept for her own tasting. A little goat's milk was also arranged for, but the landlady here reached the limit of her consideration, and declared she was “not going to wait on no hactress.” So he bore the tea into the dining-room.

“Thanks, awfully. How did you get it in this hole? And I have such a headache. What a place to be in!” added the star.

The coach should have proceeded on its up and down trip that night, but the passengers refused to undertake digging out in the darkness, and “All aboard!” was not called until daybreak early on the following morning.

At half-past 7 in the evening the six wretched quadrupeds staggered up to the post-office in the riverside town of Swandon. From all the hoardings and fence-posts glared the name of the star in large letters, but what most concerned that aching lady was the announcement beneath to the effect that the curtain would rise on “On the Roofs of London” at 8 o'clock sharp. All the passengers left the coach as hurriedly as stiff limbs and aching joints would permit, and repaired to the hotel, at which arrangements had been made at reduced rates for their accommodation.

Peter M'Leod, in the passage, clumsily offered refreshments as Venetia passed him, but she snapped out:

“Not for me; I am on in twenty minutes — orchestra's tuning up now.”

At 8 precisely he took a seat, two rows from the stage, and from the moment the curtain rose he followed every movement of the frantically impossible melodrama. As she appeared from time to time, the feeling

that he was not of her world grew upon him, until he entirely ceased to remind himself that they had been fellow-travellers during two very complete days.

On her part, Venetia was far too tired and much too cross to give thought to anything or anybody. She repeated her lines in the glad opening scene in a most dismal key, and it was not until driven from home, and starving in the streets of London, with a dummy infant clasped to her breast, that she appealed to the audience as the promising and powerful young actress heralded by the local newspapers.

Eventually fatigue was temporarily conquered by the excitement of acting to an applauding crowd, and the star remarked to herself that she was really pulling herself together. The arrival from the wings of the faithful old servant who had never deserted her, carrying some "property" provisions, reminded her that she had eaten nothing save two biscuits since midday. Her attention was arrested by Peter M'Leod's tanned face and Sunday clothes style of dressing, and the pale cheeks and neat vests and broad ties of two young clerks. The outback man had bounded into his best suit. The vest was cut low, and from the centre of an uncomfortable turn-down collar was tightly drawn a narrow blue tie, the ends pinned to his hard starched shirt, being but partly concealed by his vest.

The star thought that, on the whole, he would be the most likely to provide her with a good supper.

Peter M'Leod resolved that he would not attempt to keep up his friendship with a being who was evidently oblivious of his existence, but when, as she passed him in the hotel passage, she smiled divinely and hoped he had enjoyed the theatre, he began stuttering his praises of her acting and uncouthly removing her wraps.

The company assembled in the dining-room, and when Peter asked Venetia if she would like some refreshments, she simply murmured:

"Wine, I think, thank you. Make it a large bottle, like a good fellow, and all the other poor things can have a sip."

He was a little surprised when the waiter brought a large bottle of champagne, and at the direction of the star divided it among the ladies present.

Three days later he had learned to regard this proceeding as being simply part of a new, strange existence he had entered upon. The distance between them had decreased considerably, and he was not painfully shy, even when driving Venetia down the river in a hired buggy.

\* \* \* \* \*

How had it all happened? Here he was, Peter M'Leod, a member of a

church-going family, driving his newly-wedded wife from the nearest coach stop twenty-five miles from his homestead, and she was a retired actress.

“Removed from the promise of a brilliant career in Australian cities, with London and New York in the immediate distance.” That was the way a bright young man had put it in the local paper.

Peter had told her he was sure she would find the life dull and lonely out there, in what had been his bachelor quarters. But she had said it would be just splendid to have a good rest in a quiet place after the awful time she had put through going about the country, and playing every night.

Even the stolid bush hands were surprised into animated exclamations and discussions when the glorious creature from stageland descended daintily from the buggy and walked on to the hot verandah.

Peter was more astounded than ever when he saw her seated in the meagre dining-room, and endeavouring to make the best of black tea, salt mutton, and soda damper. She was very evident to him, but the homestead and his holding, the woolshed and the sheep, everything that had seemed so intensely material two months before, was now in the background of insignificance. The was there, and being there, was so utterly out of touch and sympathy with all else that his comprehension could not ally the two, and so the surroundings faded till they were ungraspable.

Peter M'Leod had been a great reader, and his otherwise bare wooden home would, to a kindred soul, have been glorified into a palace of poetry and reason. Venetia was also a reader, but the place held no literature to her taste, save the theatrical notices in the belated weekly papers, and an occasional yellow-back which had strayed into the house from the men's quarters.

So it fell that, her conversation being all of the stage and his all of the bush, the poets, and history, some half-a-dozen evenings exhausted what they had to say that was of common interest. Then the retired actress began to dread the long days while he was out on the run, and again the long, silent evenings in the unattractive sitting-room.

A certain heaviness had settled on Peter's spirits, yet he knew when he entered the door on the fourteenth day after his return that something more depressing than usual had happened to the place.

She was gone.

Just a friendly letter to say she was tired of the bush, and had accepted an offer from her old manager to tour New Zealand on a good salary. She hoped to see him some time in Melbourne or Sydney, and she thanked him for all his kindness.

As he raised his head from the table, whence it had sunk, the homestead, the fences, and the sheep, and all, returned to him again, and

he was once more Peter M'Leod, a struggling outback squatter, but with a wonderful memory in his mind, and a heavy ache of loneliness in his heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty years later the Hon. Peter M'Leod, M.L.C., sat in a box of a Melbourne theatre, regarding with a show of interest a drama of the slow-moving kind, a play with a moral above reproach. By his side sat his daughter Elsie, a bright, pretty girl of 18, who, released from a finishing school for that special evening, followed the play and enjoyed it, impulsively clasping her father's broad palm at every intense scene.

Mr. M'Leod was gazing at the stage without seeing it or the actors. Despite the brilliant scene his mind would most perversely insist on a review of his career. He had reached the current week, and could see his wife a well-preserved lady of society, standing on the steps of the magnificent house he had built on his Western district property, purchased with the money made in a few good seasons outback in New South Wales.

At that moment a tall, fair woman, very much made-up, walked to the footlights. He was first aware of her feet, which were large, and then her face came to him with startling clearness.

Strangely enough, the shock mercifully left him for a few moments, saying to himself that he had never previously noticed how very large were Venetia's feet.

Through a blur he saw the curtain descend on the first act, and almost immediately an attendant entered the box, and handed him a note. "Please meet me Treasury entrance to Fitzroy Gardens to-morrow, 10. Yours, V."

Disgrace! Pentridge stockade! Peter M'Leod walked miles that night, knowing but vaguely where his steps took him, and caring nothing. His position in society! The Governor and his lady were coming to his station home next week. Elsie was to come out next year, and her first ball would be at Government House. He was leading the Upper House, and had stood out as an able, active member of that somnolent body, who had succeeded in crippling several socialistic measures. Next week a great debate and a crucial division were expected, and he would be — where?

At 10 o'clock next morning, haggard and now desperate with a determination to buy the woman off at any price, he appeared at the gate. Twenty minutes later she came.

"Sorry I'm late," she said. "Well, how have you been getting on? I suppose I shouldn't have troubled you, but I said to my husband——"

"Your what?" gasped M'Leod.

"My husband! We are going to London, and I thought you might do

something to get our boy into a place. He's 19, and he writes a good hand."

"Certainly! Certainly!" shouted the M.L.C., in a high, unnatural voice. "I'll fix him up to-day."

"You always were a kind old thing," said the star, affectionately.

## Sweet Nell. — The Brumby's Story.

### Albert Dorrington

Not one of us carried a station brand; Silvertail was the only filly that had seen the inside of a stockyard, or felt the pinch of bit or spur. We were a band of outlaws, hard-living, sure-footed, kings of the ranges.

There was grass in the gullies, and we drank our fill where the steep torrents thundered into the pine-shadowed ravines. None but “stayers” could live with us. The wasters were generally cut off and yarded by the men from Yarabba station. We were not flat-racers or hurdle-jumpers, but we took the gullies as we found them, and they were rough enough to sharpen the horns of a goat.

We trooped warily through the morning mists, the dams with their foals running behind or in the centre of the mob. Sometimes our readers skipped round on the edge of a spur, with ears flattened and eyes staring across the grass country below.

Rock wallabies and hawks about us, dwarf oaks and bottle-brush. The coast wind lifts into the face of our old Gulf leader, Beno. Lowering his head, he browses on the edge of the range. All is well.

Twenty miles away, where the bush sprawls like a blue haze, we see the mail coach trundled up the thin red road that lies like a wound under the waist of the hill. Too far away to hear the lead bars or the rattle of whip and chains, but each brumby fees the heart of the mail horses beating at their work.

Jim Jams, a dish-faced outlaw, whinnied peevishly. “It's galling work for those fools hauling that coach, all the year round,” he said. “I'd sooner work for an undertaker — a horse does get a change of scenery and a few nice clothes.”

“What's that sneaking up the hill?” coughed little Silvertail, with the white chest and the Arab head.

We swung round in a body and sniffed the wind. A strange horse was creeping up through the boulders like an old mountaineer.

“It's a camp-horse,” neighed Beno, from the look-out. “I can see his brands — two bars across W. What's he after, I wonder?”

Gambolo, a fiddle-headed Riverina outlaw, poked his face to the front, and stared at the approaching stranger. “Looks a bit of a warrior,” he

whispered. "Pretending he's got stringhalt. Hush, not a whinny!"

The camp-horse walked up and up, picking a bit of grass here and there, without seeming to notice us. Shoulders, thighs, and buttocks, he was fit to carry seventeen stone. There was a star-blaze on his face. He smelt of saddle-sweat and men's clothes; there were blood-gouts on his sides, where the spurs had been.

He looked at us sorrowfully and sighed. "I thought there were a few bunches of sweet grass up here," he said, flicking his short tail. "I've met nothing but boulders and blowflies so far."

The band of brumbies gathered round him curiously. Jim Jams lowered his ears wickedly. "I've seen you cutting out cattle, my good fellow. I've heard that you drive horses from the Queensland pastures, and yard them for the sales. You deserve to be branded on the face," he snapped.

The camp-horse flicked his ears. "I've no sympathy with cattle," he said; "I've been gored in the yards and trampled on. Besides, I like a bit of honest work. Honesty is my strong point."

"Don't deny that you have rounded up horses so that they could be broken to bit and saddle," cried Jim Jams.

The camp-horse shuddered. "Some of you fellows would round up your own mother if you were ridden by a man with a hand of iron and heels like swords. Wait till some of you taste whip and steel."

"Traitor!" The mob of outlaws wheeled round him in a circle of thundering hoofs. "You have caused hundreds of free horses to be yared and branded like sheep. You shall not eat grass with us."

The camp-horse remained quite still, watching the foaming brumbies with tired eyes. "Kick the traitor into the gully!" snorted little Silvertail. "He is only fit for dingoes."

The smell of the saddle sweat and the blood on his girths made us sick. "Why does he come here, with his station airs?" shouted the mob. "The star-faced renegade!"

The camp-horse shook himself wearily. "Gentlemen outlaws," he began, "I am a horse with feelings, like yourselves. For ten years I have carried a hulking fourteen-stone drover. Up and down, through big scrub and plain, from the Diamantina to the great southern cattle routes. In my young days I brought beef to the goldfields — store mobs from the Flinders to the Castle-reagh. My fetlocks ache now through stumbling about the spewey camping grounds of the Gulf. I have crossed the Poison Country, where the plant killed hundreds of sheep and cattle. I have galloped through black spear-grass that would have lamed a buffalo. Don't be too hard on a comrade," he grunted.

"Do you know where there is any sweet grass, sir?" whinnied a colt from the rear. "I'm tired of eating wood and stones."

"Sweet grass!" The camp-horse shook his tail. "I could take you to a place where it lies fetlock-deep, and sweet as lucerne, I only strolled up

here for a breath of air.”

“Why didn't you say so before?” Silvertail pranced round and round excitedly. “Is the sweet grass inside a sheep-wire fence, or just open country near a creek?”

“It isn't half an hour's run from here,” said the camp-horse, reflectively. “When I come to think of it, the grass is more like barley than lucerne.”

The brumbies followed him eagerly down the ranges. He never skipped or stumbled once. Beno and Jim Jams didn't like leaving the hills. The camp-horse had an oily tongue, they said. But they ran behind him sulkily, until they came to a creek where the water lay stagnant between rocks and ferns. On the opposite side we saw sheep-wires running towards sunrise.

“Where's the grass?” demanded Beno, “that stands over your fetlocks and is more like barley than lucerne.”

“Half a mile down the creek,” neighed the camp-horse. “You never tasted such grass.”

“Taste the sheep fence,” sneered Jim Jams, “and the stockwhips. Yah!” He flew round suddenly with a neigh of disgust. At that moment a couple of boundary riders mounted on clever station horses almost leaped from the scrub towards our flanks.

“Trapped!” screamed little Silvertail. “Back to the hills!”

“See where the star-faced spieler has led us!” cried Beno. “The foals and dams are goners. Look out for yourselves.”

I ran with flying strides side by side with Silvertail, hoping to reach the hills. As I turned, a long snake-like whip struck me across the face. The sound was like a pistol-shot, and the pain almost blinded me. I turned, with the clever station horse on my flank, and the long evil whip boomed on my ears and hips.

“Yarded and done for!” choked little Silvertail. “They are driving us towards the wings of the yard. To-morrow we shall be branded and flogged. Good-bye to freedom and the hills.”

The station horse and the snake-whip clung to us until we reached a gully. I followed Silvertail down the jagged slopes over boulders and fallen timber. Down, down we leaped, with never a falter or spill; stones flew past, boulders rumbled after us, but neither wombat holes nor gaping fissures could stay us. The station horse and the terrible whip were left far behind. As we ran up the opposite slope we saw twenty of our brother outlaws being yarded at Yarabba station.

We had lost most of our dams and yearlings. That night, as we crossed to our look-out on Blue Spur hill, I heard the mothers crying for their foals.

A brumby soon forgets a lost comrade, and there was no time to lament. A big drought held the land, and we had to travel far to find safe water and grass.

We came up with a silk-coated riderless mare one night, running like the wind at the back of the hills.

“Ho, ho! my little lady!” shouted Silvertail. “Where are you going?”

She was a beautiful creature, if I am a judge of a lady, bitted with a silver-plated snaffle. Her saddle was the smartest bit of pigskin work outside a gentleman's stable.

“Where's your owner, my pretty friend?” snorted Jim Jams. “Why are you running about the country with a saddle and bridle on?”

She pulled up, curving her pretty neck and pawing like a picture horse.

“Oh, dear,” she whinnied, “I didn't see you in the dark. I was stolen from Gunoon Downs yesterday. The black police captured me and Dick Manners this afternoon. I'm so sorry for Dick. He isn't a bit like a horse thief.”

“Thought he might have cut you out of a picture,” sniffed Jim Jams. “What did he steal you for — the photograph trade?”

“Don't be rude to a lady.” Beno lashed out at Jim Jams' ribs. “Is it likely she'd be scampering about the hard ranges with her pretty clothes on for fun, eh?”

By this time the little lady had quietened. She merely champed her bit and shook her head violently.

“I'm called Sweet Nell,” she said. “Dick Manners is only a boy — not 20 yet. He knew me when I was a yearling. After I was broken to saddle I got quite used to him. He is a gentleman, and a friend of Nat Howit, the station manager at Gunoon Downs. Both of them are in love with Phyllis Chalmers, a girl who lives over the Victorian border. Dick was always worrying old Howit — he is 60 — to sell me to him. But Nat Howit wouldn't sell; he wanted me for Phyllis, across the border, and he knew that Dick wanted me for the same reason.

“Dick used to come into my box and whisper in my ear: ‘Nell, Nell, some day I'll steal you — steal you. You shall go south and see Phyllis.’ I would have kicked anyone but Dick — poor Dick.”

“I'd have torn his arm off if he'd put a bit in my mouth,” cried Jim Jams, passionately.

Sweet Nell shook her head and danced from side to side, her pretty trappings ringing like bells in the cold night air. “You don't know what it feels like to be thoroughly broken,” she said, “to hear a human voice calling you by name, to feel yourself flying across the earth, to be fed and groomed until your blood sings for work and pace.”

“Give me freedom,” snorted Silvertail.

“Freedom!” whinnied Sweet Nell. “You are only prisoners after all: wandering like terror-stricken rebels from gully to ridge, shirking your duties and living the lives of dingoes and wild cattle.”

“Tell us about the boy Dick who stole you,” put in Beno.

“Ah, Dick,” she went on; “he came to my box at midnight, after the

station hands had turned in. He unlocked the door, saddled me without a word, and we stole away towards the south.

“We halted at daybreak and refreshed ourselves at a bush hotel. Towards afternoon we heard a couple of troopers coming behind. It was no use racing them; there were others ahead. They came up quickly and arrested Dick for stealing me. We were taken to Yarraba, in the hollow below. The black tracker threw my bridle over a post outside the lock-up. I switched it off while they were reading out the charge against Dick inside. And,” she struck fire from the rocks with her shoes, “here I am.”

“Dick will get five years, and you’ll be an old lady by the time he comes out of gaol,” tittered Silvertail.

“If they haven’t got me how can they prove the charge?” she asked, piteously. “I don’t want Dick to get five years, because he is so young,” she whimpered. “And Phyllis — oh, my! oh, my! I think my heart will break.”

She fretted round and round the hillside, her stirrup-irons pounding her sides mercilessly. “Five years in gaol will break his heart and Phyllis’s. He used to read his letters to me. Oh, dear! or dear! I’m only four years old myself, and his voice was more loving than anything in the world.”

“You’re worth fifty guineas, anyhow,” yawned Jim Jams. “What’s your best time for a mile?”

“One minute fifty seconds. But what does it matter? I can’t run as fast as a telegram.”

We wandered through the gullies, and Sweet Nell followed with her clinking snaffle and stirrup-irons. Her pace was different to ours. We sprang and jolted over the ground; she bowled like an india-rubber ball, and passed us easily one after another.

“Her time’s all right,” panted Beno. “No fuss about her pace, either. Wonder if she would steal the Summer Cup?”

All that night she fretted over the bleak ranges, nibbling a bit of grass here and there, and pawing the hard ground with her tiny feet.

“Worrying about that young scoundrel, I suppose,” coughed Gambolo. “Doesn’t know when she’s well off.”

“He stole her for his sweetheart,” snapped Beno. “Can’t you distinguish between a common horse-thief and a cavalier?”

It was a long and bitter night-watch. I seemed to grow old waiting for the mists to roll inland with the dawn. My long coat kept me warm, but I knew that the dainty stable-bred Sweet Nell was quaking with cold. Giant clouds stole up from the east, black and sullen, and heavy with rain. There was no sun that day. The storm broke across the hills in pelting slopes of rain. The earth grew soft, and the torrents sprang down the hillside in loud murmurs.

“The ducks are making for the back creeks!” shouted Gambolo, “which reminds me that I put my foot into a mallee hen’s nest last year. Couldn’t

stop to apologise. I'm sure my foot was all over egg-yolk. Why don't those mallee hens put up a notice board?"

Sweet Nell champed her silver bit, and fretted all day like a queen in love. One moment she was standing near the look-out staring at Yarabba gaol, the next found her nipping the grass and whinnying all over the ranges.

The night came up black and squally; the rain spilled over us in sheets. At midnight the moon broke through the banked-up clouds, and lit up the hills.

"Listen to the creeks," whispered Silvertail. "Flood, flood, lap, lap; that's how the water talks. All the animals and insects understand — the ants, the snakes, the little bears, and the 'possum. I don't know how the rabbits get on, but the wild geese knew all about this rain three days ago. I heard them preaching the news when the sky was grilling like a fire-bar."

"Whinny, ninny!" screamed Beno, from the look-out. "Something's in the wind." He trotted round and round with ears twitching and nose in the air.

"Someone is coming!" gasped Silvertail. "A man — I can see his white skin through the boulders."

"Cooley!" The sound broke faintly up the steep hillside, and died away in the gullies beyond. Sweet Nell bounded forward like a Cup starter, her head towards the voice.

"Cooley!" It came again, clearer, and almost at our feet.

"I'm off!" gasped Silvertail. "No more men for me. It's a stockman soothing those villainous camp-horses round the hills to trap us again."

"T'sh!" Gambolo whisked round uncertainly. "Let's stay and see the fun."

Sweet Nell stood apart from us; then she began to pick her way down the hill, stopping at times to listen.

"Nell, Nell!" It was a boy's voice that called. We saw him climbing among the boulders. His face was white, and the rain had drenched his hair until it hung like a wet mask about his brow and eyes. He listened for a moment as he caught the clink of curb and bridle. Then he stood like a ghost on the hillside watching her.

"Nell," he whispered. "My pretty Nell. Steady, my girl, steady."

She flew round with the white moonlight in her eyes, and the rain flashed on her silk coat. The rebel madness was on her. What horse can speak to us without getting it in his blood?

"Ah!" coughed Gambolo. "He's done for, anyhow. Broke gaol, I suppose, and now he's putting his trust in a horse, like many a man before him. He, ho, he!"

The boy stood, white-faced and irresolute, on the hillside, not daring to breathe. Then slowly he took a half-step forward, his stroking hand held

out. "Nell," he whispered, "give me a chance, old girl. I swear they won't take us again. To-morrow we'll be over the border. My people will make things right with Nat Howit. Steady! Whoa, Nell!"

He half crouched to the ground, and held up his hand.

Down below we heard the sudden champing of bits, the voices of troopers scrambling up the hillside. We were watching Sweet Nell, and I saw the boy creeping towards her.

"Nell, Nell!" he choked, "for the sake of Phyllis give me this one chance. It's gaol or the border for me now. They are coming. Listen!"

She stood like the statue of a racing queen, her Arab head bent towards him.

"Gee Wilkins and Kafoozelum!" snuffled Silvertail. "Look at that, now!"

The boy's fingers stole to her quivering flank, then his bridle hand touched her mane, and in a flash he was in the saddle.

"Heigho for the troopers!" guffawed Beno. "I don't know much about the tracker's mount, but I'm game to make a bet."

We ran with Sweet Nell until she cleared the boulders. "Oh, those troopers! Look at 'em!" cried Gambolo. "They won't give the little lady a chance!"

The troopers swept across the hillside in full cry; their hoofbeats rang like axe strokes on the basalt slope. Down, down they thundered. Then we heard the cry of a man and horse plunging forward over a wombat hole.

The moonlight streamed over the plain; beyond the wide patches of silver grass we saw Sweet Nell racing south for the Victorian border. A solitary trooper crawled down the hillside; his horse limped, and after examining her feet, he returned to the hills to pick up his fallen companion.

From our look-out we saw the last of Sweet Nell. The boy turned in the saddle, looked back at the hills, and waved his hand.

"That's good-bye to us," coughed little Silvertail. "I suppose she thought us a rough lot. Hang it! I hope they pull through all right."

"These youngsters get into awful scrapes over horses," laughed Gambolo. "We aren't worth it."

"He nearly got left, though," said Jim Jams, spitefully. "The breaking of a stick would have sent her skeltering across the mountains."

"Take a pull, old dry-as-dust," chuckled Beno. "That was only the way of the lady."

# The Telegram.

M. Forrest

Brisbane, Queensland.

Across the desolation of waste and silent land,  
Above a narrow bridle-track grooved in the clogging sand,  
And into ridgy country, where stunted grass trees grow,  
And by the shallow-bedded creeks where muddy waters flow —  
It flies, to move the stoutest heart to sorrow or for weal,  
The message of the written thought along the wires of steel.  
In hottest night it speeds between the clearings in the scrub,  
Along the main road, where the lights are flaring in the pub,  
Over the scented timber flats, by sandalwoods in bloom,  
Where wallaby flit silently, grey shadows in the gloom;

Or, climbing high the crested hill, it moves along the line  
Where bush fires swept the grassy slope about the blackened pine;  
And where the bark-walled farmhouse lies, and where the sorghum  
grows,  
And where the wash-pool drafts out sheep as white as mountain snows,  
Until by plains of waving grass and bush roads hard and brown,  
The message of the wired thought has reached the humming town.  
It clicks and clatters to the ears of an impatient clerk,  
It leaves upon the running tape the import of its mark,  
And once again the pregnant words on paper gathered down,  
The message of the written thought goes out into the town.

In uniform of blue and red, the youngster rides the street,  
By the smart car and shabby 'bus he hurries, sure and fleet,  
Till, where dark firs across the road their slender shadows cast,  
The message of the wired thought has found its goal at last.  
The hand that grasps it hesitates, the heart that waited fears,  
A moment, ere the die is flung for laughter or for tears —  
The loved one grasps at life again, and all the dread is o'er —  
The dear one who went far afield will touch our lips no more —  
So, each day, through the drowsy air, the word that binds or parts

Is flashed across the wind-swept bush to heal or break our hearts.

## **The Brand Fakers.**

### **Broda Reynolds**

The sun was nearing the zenith; a soft breeze sang in the branches of the newly-budded fruit-trees; a score of bees droned their busy song as they flitted from flower to flower in the rugged garden of the selector's home; while over the far-stretching paddocks was spread a verdant carpet of luscious grass, thickly bestudded with pink and white clover heads. Spring, beautiful spring, was on the land, by the creek, in the air. Everywhere you heard it sung — everywhere you inhaled its sweetness.

Jennie Benson, the selector's wife, stood at the door, and gazed out on the fair face of Nature. She had eyes for the picturesque, this busy, and perhaps not wholly happy, woman.

Beyond the sliprails, near the pig-stye, her husband was at work — hard, too; and yet he would not let her help him — would not have her near him, or allow her to steady the rail, hand him the axe or saw, or any other implement he might be using. This troubled Jennie more than her husband ever guessed. “Other women have had to learn,” she told herself, as she watched him delving away at the post-hole. “I wouldn't be long — I know I wouldn't; and it'd be jollier than staying in the house when I've got the dinner on. See, there! The post lops to one side when he starts to shovel in the earth. I could hold it, and do the ramming. He knows I can use the ramrod, and dig, too. My hands!” She looked down at them and sighed. “Too small and soft, he thinks — not fit for the wife of a selector. He doesn't know me, that's all; he can't understand what a hand might do when the heart is willing.”

Her gaze travelled along to the stockyard, where a fine fat beast was imprisoned. “Poor big, red bullock,” she murmured. “How calmly he stands there awaiting his end!” Her thoughts dwelt on the animal and his impending fate for a time, then she looked back at the husband so busy preparing the temporary slaughter-shed for the poor brute. “It'll be a good job if they pass an Act compelling people to get a license before killing their own bullocks,” she thought, meditatively. “It isn't worth the trouble for the little beef we use. I'm sure Bert could make as much by selling the cattle fat to the butchers. I'll tell him so — I'll propose it. He can't think me stupid or ignorant as to the way he strives to get on. Can he be of the

opinion it's money a woman wants to make her happy?"

The big man, whose giant strength and grave demeanour had first attracted this fair, delicate girl, happened to glance towards the house at this moment, and there at the back door, framed in sunlight, he saw her standing gazing regretfully into the heart of the deep bush, as he thought. He set his teeth, and struck harder at the post he was morticing. "If she learns the truth she'll hate the place worse than ever," he said; "hate it, and me, too!" He stopped for a moment, powerless at the thought, then he redoubled his efforts, and worked with a greater will than ever before. "She won't learn it! She sha'n't!" he vowed. "Two years at the outside, and I'll have paid him his share; the selection will be mine."

"I — I thought I might help you with the posts, as Ted is away," said a voice close beside him. "They're very wobbly. I could hold them till you filled the earth in."

He straightened his back and looked at her.

"Found the house dull, and strolled across to break the monotony," he thought. Well, he couldn't wonder; but his pride rose at the idea of what his neighbours would say if they saw or heard that she was seen helping him with the fencing. He tried to laugh, but his nerves were a bit out to-day, and the attempt was a failure. "Not with those hands, surely," he returned, with a furtive glance towards the far-off hills. "Is dinner nearly ready?" he then inquired, with no thought at all of his appetite.

"Yes, very nearly," replied Mrs. Benson, with mistaken comprehension. "I'll go and hasten it on."

"Do, Jennie; I'll be home in about half-an-hour. Will that be all right?"

"That'll do," she said, and retraced her steps.

"Didn't seem over-anxious to hold the post — satisfied to go back now that she's had the walk," he murmured sadly, and picked up his spade again.

"If only he would not show me so plainly how useless he thinks me," remarked Jennie to herself, spreading the cloth, and selecting the things for the table from a rough dresser in the kitchen. "We're not married twelve months yet — he ought to give me a chance. I think he's worse since Lucy Brown told him about Fred Thompson's wife doing all the burning-off and harrowing, and then the milking and separating in the evening, while he was laid up with the grip. I don't think I could plough or harrow, but I believe I'd learn to fence in time — and milk; and I'm sure separating's easy."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Ole Small's takin' a mob of clean-skins through to Barrabbong to-morrer mornin'," Ted informed his cousin, Bert Benson, next day, as both were busy about the slaughter-shed again. "They pass here about 8

o'clock."

Bert frowned. "Well, what of it?"

"He's takin' 'em through."

"I s'pose he can do as he likes with his own?"

"They're clean-skins," repeated Ted.

The suggestion seemed to irritate his cousin. "What if they are?"

"Oh, nothin'; they're clean-skins, that's all."

"Well, let 'em remain clean; and you'd better keep clean hands where his mob's concerned," returned the other, as though the information annoyed him.

"Oh, very well. I thought you'd be pleased."

"Look here, Ted!" Bert swung round on him with sudden determination. "You know better than I can tell you how I first came to consent to this kind of thing. It was for her sake!" He jerked his head in the direction of the house. "You taunted me, so did lots of my mates, with the idea she'd never have married me only she believed this place was mine. We're partners in this selection. You want a certain sum to clear out — you'll get that sum honestly, or you won't get it at all."

The other left off work and looked at him. "What the blazes are you talkin' about?"

"I'm done with everything crook from this out. I'm not going to see her head bowed in shame for my crime! There hangs the last of the game, and don't you forget it! I want to hear no more about clean-skins or brand-faking, either."

Ted went on with his work. "By gosh! I don't know that I ain't glad to hear it, old man. It's deucedly risky, and——"

A dog that had been keeping watch over the dead bullock sprang up, barking noisily. Benson looked nervously about. Descending the hill near the boundary was a horseman. The cousins exchanged glances, then instinctively their eyes ran rapidly over the scene around them. Hanging from a cross-sapling was the fat bullock they had killed the evening before. On the grass, a little further down, lay the head and horns, while spread out close beside it was the hide, wrong side up. Another glance at the approaching rider and the men turned pale.

"By gosh! it's the trooper," said Ted.

"The skin! My God! What — what——"

"Gimme the knife!"

"There's no time! To try and burn that now would be to——"

"Shut up!" and grasping the knife, with a quick movement of the blade Ted slashed a jagged corner out of the hide. As Bert observed where he hid it his colour returned, and he breathed more naturally.

"It's the young cove they're got up from Sydney to try and catch the brand-fakers," went on Ted, with another side glance at the trooper, who was yet some distance off. "They say he's as smart as mustard, too, and

twice as red-hot. You walk away round the shed there. I'll deal with him while you're recoverin' a bit."

Bert obeyed, and the trooper rode up. "Good day," he cried, pleasantly, as he drew rein before Ted.

"Gud day! Gud day!" returned Ted.

The trooper's eyes scanned the beast, then travelled to the hide upon the ground. "Doing a bit of killing, I see," he remarked.

Ted commenced to laugh. "May's well get it off yer chest straight away, sergeant," he said, carelessly. "You're on the track of Gibson's big red bullock, ain't yer now?"

The trooper eyed him, a little uncertain. "Well, I have something of that kind to do," he replied, slowly; "but it's this brand business I'm seein' into more than anything. You don't mind? Duty's duty, you know; and I'd like to have a look round——"

"Among the dry stock, you mean?"

The other nodded. "That, too," he said, and glanced again at the skin spread out before him.

"I — I'll take you up and show yer our brand," Ted volunteered, anxious to get him away from the spot.

"Do you brand in initials or figures?" asked the trooper, in no hurry to move.

"'Nitals."

"What are they?"

"B.B."

"Um! Not a hard matter, I should think. You must excuse me, but I'm going into this matter thoroughly. There's been a lot of bother out here lately about branding, and——"

"Yes, of course; but what is it you're gettin' at?" interrupted Ted. "Let's come to the point; and if you have a warrant to search the place for the fake, inspect the stock, or anything of that sort, let's set to work and get it over."

"Yes. It's an ugly piece of business for a man of any fine feelings," went on the trooper, dismounting and moving towards the hide. "I fell across a couple of old chums the other day, and I was under the painful necessity of treating them like the rest. You mustn't mind, Mr.——?"

"Benson."

"Mr. Benson, I may be protecting you, even while I'm annoying you."

"Quite true, quite true. See, here's the skin; It's red. I'm told Phil Baxter's beast was branded — this is clean, as you can see." Ted turned over the hide as he spoke. "By the way, would you mind explainin' that little remark 'bout not bein' a hard matter? I don't want to be misunderstandin' anything."

The trooper ran his eyes carefully over the bullock-skins, then replied to the question. "Well, there are some letters in the alphabet difficult to

fake; B B is among them, but P B isn't. You see, Phil Baxter is very determined; and what I have to do, without casting suspicion on anyone, is to suspect everybody whose initial brand might fit his, and to find out the brands most likely to fake."

"I don't understand," said Ted.

The trooper took a book and pencil from his pocket.

"We'll say, for sake of argument, a Bill Brown has a brand, B.B., and Phil Baxter's is P.B.; then all Bill Brown has to do is to get a small U or pot-hook made, and with the aid of this flannel trick, brand it on to the side of the P, so, and he's got B.B., his own brand."

"By gosh, he's a smart 'un! — the smartest we've ever had on this job," thought Ted.

"Of course," continued the trooper, "this flannel business has got them all beat, so far; but I'm going to search the mystery to the bottom. You can't make me believe that branding through thick flannel is going to make the letter, or part of the letter, resemble a brand of months' or years' standing. What do you think about it, Mr. Benson?" The trooper had just fixed Ted with his keen, steady grey eyes, when a shadow fell across the skin they were holding; and the next instant brands and hide were forgotten in a hearty greeting.

"Bert! Great heavens alive! Who would dream of meeting you? When did you come out here? Why, I heard you were settled in Western Australia. Good Lord! what a surprise!" And Bert Benson and the trooper renewed their handshaking.

"You're not more surprised than I am, Jack," Benson told him. "I could scarcely believe my own eyes. Where did you drop from? When did you join? How long have you been in the force?"

Ted moved away, breathing a sigh of relief, while brief explanations were gone into by the two old chums; then Bert called him up and introduced him.

"My cousin, Ted Benson," he said. "We took up this place between us. You've often heard me speak of Jack Lawler, Ted? Well, this is him; but, great Scot! I never expected to see him in them buttons. We were kids together — went to school — grew up, and——"

"He saved my life. Did he tell you that?" put in the trooper, in his frank and pleasant way. "Cut out the piece, sucked the poison, and did everything as brave and clever as a doctor, when I was bitten by a brown snake, once. Then, when I caved in from fright, he carried me nearly four miles on his back, dropping me every five minutes and lambasting the devil out of me to keep me from going to sleep. Dear, brave old Bert! And to think I came looking for Baxter's red bullock, and faked brands, here on his selection." The trooper laughed, and slapped his old friend on the back again.

Ted went off and left them after a while.

“Look in at the house and ask Jennie to put the kettle on,” Bert called after him. “We'll be along directly.”

“Not married, Bert? Still the same free leg?”

A cloud seemed to cross the selector's brow for a second. He knew now that his next words would indeed be news to the young fellow. “Free! Not a bit of it; and I don't want to be. I've the best little wife on earth!”

“No! Newly wed, of course? But, my word, I'm glad! I hope you'll always think so, old man. No one I know, I s'pose?”

“Yes, you know her, Jack — Jennie Bryant, our old schoolmaster's daughter.” As he spoke he picked up a stick and flung it at a dog that was tearing and scraping at the head and windpipe of the red bullock.

The trooper's face became grave.

Bert knew his secret, but he could not tell he still remembered.

There was a brief silence.

“Come — come out of it, you brute!” the trooper cried, at length, and, walking round, he gave a kick to the dog. “Why, what the deuce is he after? He's not my property; he only followed me from a farm back there. Come out of that, you cuss! What's he after? What — what's this?” The trooper kicked the dark mass which the dog had dragged from the great throat at his feet, then he looked at the hide and finally back into Benson's face. No word was spoken. Bert's face became white and drawn; he stood convicted before his boyhood's and manhood's friend. Oh, that Ted had left the accursed brand where it was, he could have borne it better!

The trooper turned away and stared hard at the ground.

At length Bert, unable to bear it any longer, took a step towards him. “Go on! do your duty, trooper!” he said, with quiet resignation.

The officer pulled himself up with a jerk. For one brief space they looked into each other's eyes, then he took the work-roughened hand hanging limply by the big man's side.

“There's a duty that the highest law impels,” he said, slowly. “A friendship that can't be put aside. May she never learn your secret!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Three years later Jack Lawler visited that selection again, but this time as a farmer himself. He found his old friend a happy husband and father now — his one-time sweetheart the most devoted of wives and mothers.

The seasons had continued favourable, and Bert was fairly comfortable. Ted was still there, but there was sufficient for both.

“It was for her sake,” Bert told the ex-trooper, in a burst of shamefaced confidence, as they walked round the luscious paddocks together. “It was such a silly, awkward, great brute, and didn't understand her a bit. Bless her! She only wanted my affection and my confidence. Jack, are you

happy, old son?"

Jack laughed joyously. "As happy as you are, I'll venture to vow, especially now I know that all is well with you. And what's brought me over more than anything is the determination that you must meet the wife. You're both to drive out to dinner on Sunday, and if it's too cold for baby they can stop the night. You'll manage the billy and a bit of tucker in the morning, eh?"

## **The Lost Reef.**

### **William Spier (“Howard Doriemal”)**

Author of “Tarnkah Station,” “The Mystery of a Queensland Cave,” etc., etc.

On the cool night air was borne the distant cry of the curlew. The plaintive note roused in the mind of the man who sat gazing dreamily into the camp fire memories of years ago. Memories associated with certain events of his young manhood; memories, too, which painfully connected the past with the present. The past, with all its ambitions and promises; the present with its almost hopeless work, and incidentally the future with all its uncertainty.

The full light of the fire shone on his face, and the surrounding gloom was occasionally enlivened by the fitful flames which ever and anon burst out as they caught some of the more inflammable twigs and leaves attached to the wood just thrown on. The silence and solitude, only occasionally disturbed, by night birds flitting from tree to tree, or by the peculiar grunt of the native bears as they fed on the leaves of the gum-trees, would have been oppressive had the man been less intent upon the pictures which his mind was actively presenting to him. A solitary dingo howled dismally in the gloom behind him, and the howl was responded to by a pack in the distance.

Watkin Meares, brooding over the past, sat on late into the night, still gazing intently at the fire, until rain began to fall. Then he went into his tent, and after reading for some hours settled himself for sleep.

At an early hour in the morning, when Meares came from the tent, he was startled to see lying outside, apparently very ill, an old man. He at once recognised him as an old prospector, who had been wandering about for some months past. The poor old fellow was one of the many human wrecks met with on goldfields. Always hoping, but never realising, they end their days still confident in being able to strike something rich, and make the fortune which has so consistently eluded them.

A movement of the man showed that he was regaining consciousness, and he was soon able to answer a few questions put to him. It appeared that he had been prospecting about five miles away. About two days

previously he had felt very ill, and the previous afternoon, anxious to obtain assistance, he made an effort to get to Meares' camp, and only managed to reach it in an exhausted condition after midnight. Bush hospitality had many a time been extended to Meares in his wanderings, and he cheerfully responded to the call now made upon him. He realised that in all probability he would have this unfortunate fellow on his hands for weeks, but he willingly faced the inconvenience.

Two days passed, and the man appeared much worse. At times he became delirious, and talked incessantly of a rich reef he had discovered, and which had been stolen from him. A week had gone by, and one night Meares was reading by the side of the stretcher on which the sick man lay. Suddenly the silence was broken by a yell from the stranger, who jumped up, and with a bound disappeared out of the tent. His action was so unexpected that Meares sat for a few seconds motionless, then, recovering himself, he sprang after him. It soon became evident, however, that he could never overtake the fugitive, for the delirium had lent him superhuman strength and speed. Reluctantly Meares gave up the pursuit, and slowly retraced his steps to the camp, determining to make an early search for him in the morning. About noon next day he found him lying insensible about a mile and a half away. He had fallen down, and there he lay, with his arm encircling the outcrop of a quartz reef, almost as though he was embracing it. The presence of someone else seemed to have a peculiarly disturbing effect upon the insensible man, for as Meares approached him he made a restless movement. As he did so Meares caught sight of something glittering just below the poor fellow's arm. Upon closer inspection he was astonished to notice that the glitter proceeded from a piece of gold embedded in the quartz. With almost callous indifference he seized the old man to move him so that he might observe the extent of the out-crop. His attempt to do so produced an astonishing result. The old fellow no sooner felt himself being moved off the reef than he so far regained consciousness as to resist. With an almost animal-like cry he jumped up and threw himself on to Meares with savage fury.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that Meares was quite unprepared for it, and had to give way before it. He suddenly realised he had to do with a madman with all a madman's strength and cunning. The old man looked almost demoniacal in his fury. He had seized Meares by the throat, and with savage force endeavoured to choke him. "It's mine, it's mine, no one else shall have it," he hoarsely muttered. ... Then suddenly relinquishing his hold he turned round, and with folded arms stood gazing abstractedly at the outcrop. All signs of his madness had disappeared. His face bore no indication of the insane struggle of the past few minutes, and Meares gazed with astonishment at the transformation. The old man stood there utterly oblivious of the presence of anyone else.

He was under the influence of some deep emotion, the tears running down his furrowed cheeks, while an occasional sob shook him. "At last, at last," he muttered, "after all these years of waiting and searching." He buried his face in his hands, and stood for some moments motionless; then, turning round, he gazed at Meares in bewilderment, seeming unable to understand what he was doing there. Some sort of recollection of having been with Meares in his tent came to him in a jumbled, hazy way, and a smile of recognition passed over his face.

The old man was now as passively obedient as he had previously been violently resisting. He allowed Meares to lead him back to the tent, and, sinking wearily on to the stretcher, was soon sound asleep.

Meares waited some time for him, then retraced his steps to the reef, his mind in a turmoil of excitement as the thought of what that outcrop might mean to him. Curiously enough, he had not associated the old man with the reef, and it had never occurred to him that the man's resistance and violence were in any way connected with it.

He reached the spot, and leisurely examined the stone. It was undoubtedly marvellously rich at the top, but he was too experienced in such matters to come to any hasty decision as to the value of the reef below the surface. He was too well seasoned with disappointments to be led away by any wild anticipations at this early stage. Working vigorously he collected about eighty pounds of stone, with which he returned to the tent. The old man was still sleeping soundly. A rough assay which Meares there and then made of the contents of his bag gave 30oz to the ton. He trembled with excitement. "Thirty ounces to the ton — thirty ounces — to — the — ton!" his mind kept repeating.

The following day Meares again proceeded to the place, and for hours and hours worked continuously. As his work progressed he felt confident that the discovery would prove a phenomenal one. His mind dwelt upon all it would mean to him. Presently he started as he heard a voice call out, "Good day, mate. Struck something good there?"

For a moment he made no reply, but ceased working, and gazed in surprise at his questioner, who was on horseback, leading a packhorse. Unexpected as had been the man's appearance, it now flashed through his mind what another's knowledge of the discovery might mean to him. He knew how often prospectors had been defrauded of the reward of their discoveries by the many mining pirates who roamed about in the guise of genuine prospectors. As he stood silently gazing at the new arrival he trembled.

"Good day," he replied; and added, "I don't know yet what I've got here. I'm prospecting a bit."

The newcomer dismounted, and with a miner's freedom and curiosity approached a little heap of stone, and picking up a piece wet it with his tongue. Then, drawing from his pocket a small magnifying glass, he

proceeded to examine it more critically. Meares watched him with some anxiety, and noted the look of astonishment that passed over his face.

“Yes, mate, you've struck it this time,” he said as he stooped down and picked out another piece, which he subjected to the same examination as the first. “There's 50oz in that if there's a pennyweight.”

As he spoke Meares could not fail to notice the suppressed excitement under which the man was labouring. The appearance on the scene of this stranger was disquieting. Meares resolved to peg out his claim as soon as the man cleared away.

An hour passed before the stranger mounted his horse again, and rode off with the words, “Well, so long, mate. Hope you'll have good luck.”

Meares watched him as he disappeared over the hill, but with an uncomfortable feeling that he had not seen the last of him, and that mischief was brewing. One thing he was plainly conscious of, and that was that he must at once peg out the land he required, and get his application in to the gold warden.

When he returned to the tent he found the old man out of bed and examining a piece of the quartz. He turned round in some embarrassment as Meares entered, and placing the stone down returned to the stretcher, where he sat for some minutes watching Meares as he moved about the tent. He appeared so much better that Meares spoke to him about the reef. To his surprise the old man said, “I know all about it, for it is my reef; I found it.”

“Your reef!” Meares exclaimed. “Have you pegged it out?”

“No,” came the reluctant answer, and as he heard it Meares experienced a feeling of relief.”

He looked over to the old fellow, and noticed that he was under the influence of some deep emotion. His eyes sparkled, and his face twitched nervously. Then, after a little pause, he said: —

“I am an old man now, and the days of my early manhood sometimes seem a tremendous distance in the past, but as far as they are away, and much as I have crowded into my life, some of the events are distant enough even now. I married when I was about 26, and from the day of my marriage I longed to become rich, so that I might place my children in such a position that only wealth could secure. I won't weary you with details. I speculated in mining and lost everything. Years went on, and instead of becoming wealthy I remained miserably poor, but still hoped to make a fortune by discovering a rich reef. It was while keen upon this idea that I met a man named Collins, who was forming a party to go and search for a reef which he had found when lost in the bush, and was unable to locate again. He had some of the stone, which assayed richly. We went out, and for fully 12 months searched everywhere, but were unable to find it again. The party was disbanded, and Collins died, but up to the end always stuck to his statement about the reefs. The conviction

took possession of me that it would be my destiny to locate it. "Years passed," he continued wearily, as he passed his fingers thoughtfully through his hair, "and I still continued the search, ignoring in my blind folly the effect my fruitless work was having on my wife. Embittered and disappointed, she died, leaving me with a son and daughter. The son is now in South Africa, and the daughter, a Public school teacher, is stationed at Bathurst. What I failed to do for my wife and children when they were young I am struggling to do now for my girl. I want to remove her from all future poverty and dependence, and if I accomplish that I shall be quite content to join my wife. When I lay here a few nights ago I had a strange dream. I saw, as plainly as I see you now, old Collins digging and exposing the lost reef. As he stood there examining a piece of the stone, I also saw a man creeping up behind him with the evident intention of killing him. I gave a great cry to warn him, and rushed up to save him. Then everything disappeared, and when I came to myself, you were pulling me off the reef, and for the moment I thought you were the man from whose attack I wanted to save Collins."

He paused, and looked at Meares inquiringly. Meares had followed him with the closest attention, and it had dawned upon him with a force he could not ignore that if anyone could be entitled to a share in that reef, this old man was the one. He therefore told him the result of the assay, and also referred to the unexpected appearance of the stranger at the reef, and his remarks. The old man jumped up in a state of excitement, exclaiming: "What was he like? What was he like? Did he walk with a limp?" Meares now recalled what he had not taken particular notice of at the time, that the stranger did limp slightly. "Yes," he replied.

"Then," returned the old man, "it's old Springton, and he's on his way now to the warden to apply for the claim. He was one of our party with Collins. There's no greater pirate in all Australia than that man. He does no genuine prospecting if he can get what he wants by jumping. Good heavens!" he continued, as though speaking to himself, "am I yet to be done out of it?"

The necessity for immediate action was apparent, and Meares at once decided to start there and then for the township, which lay about forty miles away, to lodge his application with the warden. With his old horse, he could not expect to accomplish the journey in less than twelve hours, but if any of the creeks happened to be running a banker, as was very likely from the heavy rains that had recently fallen, he might be very much delayed.

Within an hour he was on his way. Some of the creeks were swollen, and although he managed to ford them, he knew that there was a difficult crossing at the river, and he questioned whether it would be wise to venture across; yet it was imperative that he should reach the township before the other man. He reached the crossing at daybreak, and was

dismayed to find the river running a banker. He stood looking at the broad expanse of water, upon the surface of which he could see a number of floating trees and logs, when suddenly his ears caught the sound of an approaching horse. He looked round, and there, silhouetted against the skyline, he saw the figure of a man on horseback. Even that hasty glance told him that it was the stranger who had visited the reef that afternoon, and he instinctively knew that he was on the same mission as himself, and it was now to be a keen race between them.

Ever prompt to act upon an impulse, Meares urged his horse forward, and plunged without hesitation into the boiling torrent. With persistent effort the animal struggled against the force of the current, which was bearing him steadily down-stream, and it was only when Meares threw himself off its back and swam with his hand firmly grasping one of the stirrup-leathers that the horse managed to make headway against the stream. Even then the beast's struggle was intense, and Meares himself had to make the most strenuous exertions to keep float. All thought of the reef and the object of his journey had disappeared now that he was face to face with a life-and-death struggle. At last he lost his grip of the stirrup. Suddenly he felt his feet touching the bottom, and he realised that they had reached the other side and were now out of danger. With a frantic effort he struggled up the bank, where his horse, panting and trembling, already stood.

Meares sank down on the bank and rested for a few minutes to recover from his exertions. A shrill cry of terror rang out, and, looking up, he saw Springton struggling in the water, his horse having evidently sunk. He was not many yards from the bank, and was being carried down with the current. Meares was too exhausted to plunge in to his rescue, but he saw that the stream was carrying him down to a fallen tree which projected over the bank. He ran down to this tree, and, getting astride of it, worked himself out upon the overhanging part, from which he could grasp Springton as he was carried by. The struggling man came closer and closer, and in response to the shouts of Meares made a desperate effort to work himself nearer the tree. Meares braced himself up for the strain, and, as Springton passed under, he leaned down and seized him. Had Springton remained passive he would have been saved, but with the terror and fear of a drowning man he grasped Meares's arm and commenced to struggle, with the result that his would-be rescuer was precipitated into the water. As Meares felt the water close over him, and found himself in the clasp of the drowning man, a thrill of awful fear passed through him, and he had to fight to free himself from that awful embrace. Suddenly he felt the grasp relax, and with an effort he shook himself free and rose to the surface. A few strokes brought him to the bank, up which he clambered. He could see nothing of Springton, and, fatigued and knocked up as he was, he walked some distance along the

bank to see if he could discover any trace of him. He failed to do so, however, and could only conclude that the poor fellow was drowned.

Meares hastened to his horse, and, mounting, pushed on for the township, which he reached in a couple of hours. He reported what had occurred to the police, and two troopers were despatched to the scene of the accident. He then went to the warden's office and lodged his application for the reef, but it was not until he had done this that he was relieved from all anxiety. He felt that he could now breathe freely; and, after making himself more comfortable by a change of clothes, he was able to take the rest he so much required.

He commenced his return journey the following day, and met the troopers returning with the body of Springton, which they had recovered about two miles below where the accident had occurred.

Within a month all the necessary formalities had been complied with, and the warden issued the lease for the ground to Meares, who gave the old man a half-interest in it. The reef proved to be richer than they had expected, and they sold out to a syndicate for £ 60,000.

Meares is now living in the south of France, and his partner, old Dan Parker, lives with his daughter in Tasmania.

## **The Awakening of Peggy.**

### **Peach-Blossom**

In the midst of the big scrub, many miles away from any township, there stood, nestling in the foliage of a great myrtle tree, and embraced by trailing passion-vines, a tiny cottage. It was approached by a road which wound round the side of a hill, and which was in many places overhung like a fairy bower with lawyer-vines and Lantana, while on the side of the path palms, ferns, and beautiful semi-tropical plants grew in the wildest profusion.

From the spot where the cottage stood, the country, as far as the eye could reach, spread out a lovely panorama. There were fields after fields of pale green cane and corn, interspersed with the darker green patches of virgin scrub. The great Dividing Range and the Macpherson Range formed an imposing background in the blue distance. Far below, the Tweed River wound along like a silver ribbon, or spread out into broad waters that flashed like mirrors in the sunlight. Across the narrowest part of the river a ferry plied, and an old ferryman wearily turned the windlass which urged the cumbersome craft along. "Ahoy! Ferry, ahoy!" borne upwards on the breeze, could be faintly heard at intervals in the cottage above.

From the door of the cottage a winsome-faced, blue-eyed girl emerged. Her face and bare arms were as brown as the radiant sun, the sea breezes, and the healthful existence could make them.

She did not appear on this occasion, however, to be perfectly happy, for her pretty brows were contracted, and her usually beaming eyes had a discontented look in them. She was petulantly swinging a sun-bonnet as she walked along into the depths of the neighbouring scrub. The lawyer vines caught her flimsy white dress and held her, but she angrily pulled away, heedless of the holes which their tiny hooks made in her dress.

She even brushed carelessly aside the scarlet blossoms of the hibiscus which tried to nod her a welcome, and waved her bonnet to scare away the cooing scrub pigeons and the orange-breasted regent birds that used to be her friends. The green lizards, basking in the sun, scurried off in fear, and hid themselves under fern-covered logs. The tiny wrens, the white-eyes, and the wonga pigeons, which sometimes came to chirp to

her, flew off into the deepest recesses without even a farewell greeting. The wise wild creatures of the bush knew that Peggy was in a bad humour, so they showed at once their wisdom by leaving her to recover alone.

Yes, Peggy was in a very bad humour — very cross and very discontented. In spite of all the loveliness around her, in spite of all the charming companions in fur, feather, or blossom, Peggy was feeling an ill-used little maiden.

“The bush is horrid! There's nothing but insects and trees, and lawyer vines which tear my frocks, and silly birds. I'm tired of it all!” So ran Peggy's unhappy thoughts, but here she sprang to one side as a green tree lizard sped swiftly past her feet in pursuit of a dragon-fly that had alighted on a leaf. “And nasty lizards! Hugh! Horrid things, horrid bush! I hate it all! Nobody to play with! I wish I could go to the big city to see Cousin Lucie.”

As Peggy uttered these words aloud, her expression changed, and she drew a book from under her arm. She opened it and looked at the inscription: “To my darling little namesake from Cousin Lucie.” A dimple crept out of one brown cheek, then another to keep the first one company. Peggy read the inscription again lovingly. Cousin Lucie was grown up, while Peggy was only approaching the borderland of teens; but this cousin in the great city, whom she had never seen since she was a wee baby, was Peggy's ideal.

She did not remember her, but from her father and mother had often heard of her, for they were very proud of Cousin Lucie, who wrote for the papers. To these quiet people that seemed something very wonderful. Peggy had read some of Lucie's writings, and admired them all the more that she could not understand them. Although there were years between them, they shared the same birthday, and every year brought Peggy a gift from the city. This year it had been a book of fairy tales, and Peggy had revelled in them, yet — sad to say — her discontent with her bush home was the outcome of the reading.

Beside the glories of the world of enchantment, the real world of everyday life seemed dull and monotonous to Peggy. The little round of duties and simple pleasures was growing strangely distasteful to her. Nothing seemed to happen. One day was just like another, and everyone was “horrid,” in the naughty little girl's phrase.

She opened the book and began to read. It was part of the description of the Fairy Queen's palace. “The roof was a dome of shining turquoise encrusted with precious stones, which sparkled with the most brilliant and many-coloured hues, and with their lustre lit up the hall.” Peggy shivered with delight. “I wish I could get there. Oh! wouldn't it be lovely to see the Fairy Queen on her throne?” And she looked round to see whether she could catch a glimpse of any fairy messenger to lead her,

like the girl in the story had been led, down to gaze on the wonders of Fairyland, and receive a gift from its tiny queen.

But only the trees waved in the breeze, the grass bent their tasselled heads, the ferns bowed and nodded their green fronds. The discontented expression gathered once more, and quite spoiled the pretty face.

“I wish father would take me down to the city to see the trams, and the ships, and the people, and the museum, and” — but here her list of the wonders of the city ended. “It's much better than here,” and little Peggy seemed almost inclined to cry.

“Peggy! Peggy!” Her mother was calling in a tone that somehow told Peggy she had news for her.

“All right, mother! I'm coming!” she cried, and ran swiftly towards the house. Her mother was smiling and holding out a letter.

“What do you think, Peggy? Father has just brought a letter from Cousin Lucie. She has been very ill, and is coming to spend a long holiday with us to get strong again.”

“Cousin Lucie coming!” Peggy shrieked with delight. “Oh! mother, I'm so glad! I'm so glad!”

The dimples were chasing one another across the little girl's face; her blue eyes were shining with joy. Her discontent had vanished, she was happy again; her cup of bliss seemed running over. To see Cousin Lucie was almost too good to be true. The days until her coming would not pass quickly enough for the eager child.

At last Cousin Lucie came, and although it was late at night when she arrived, little Peggy was allowed to stay up to welcome her.

Lucie Hill was a tall, fair girl, a “rare pale Lucie, a fair pale Lucie,” just as Peggy was a real “nut-brown mayde.”

Poor Lucie looked sadly weak and ill. City life, with its rush and fret and fever, had been too much for her. She had been beaten down, and had been driven from the field for the time. But Lucie was not of the stuff that remains beaten; she would but tarry till her strength came back to renew the fight again.

For the first few days Lucie did not attempt to leave the pretty cottage, but in spite of her weakness Peggy found her a delightful companion. She had brought with her pictures of the big city, and she could make word pictures so that Peggy saw it almost as if she were there — the crowded trams, the gay ferry-boats, the brilliant shops, the beautiful harbour, the eager, bustling crowds.

“Oh! how lovely it sounds!” cried the enraptured child. “I wish I lived in the big city, too.”

A shade passed over Lucie's face.

“Don't wish it, Peggy; you don't know what you are saying, dear.”

Peggy had not felt shy with her cousin from the first, for Lucie was one of the few privileged mortals who never lose the key of childhood, and

so can enter it again at will, to be the best of playmates.

“Don't I?” cried Peggy. “I do hate the bush! It is quiet and dull — hateful, I call it. I wish — I do wish father lived in the city. Wouldn't it be lovely to be there?”

But her cousin, to Peggy's surprise, did not agree with her, and said Peggy was far better off here in the bush.

“Lucie!” Peggy's tone was a little hesitating, for even a bush girl sometimes gets infected with unbelief. “Are there really fairies — true and honest, now? Has the fairy queen a hall with a dome of gold, encrusted with precious stones, and all the rest, like it tells us in the books you gave me?”

Lucie smiled slightly. “Are there really fairies, Peggie? Why, of course there are. There is a fairy lives somewhere here. I am going to search the bush to-morrow, and see if I can find her at home. I will not rest till I've explored the dim recesses, the secret retreat of this fairy, who, breathing upon the sick and the weary, makes them strong again.”

Next day they took their first walk. Lucie was anxious to see everything; Peggy was proud to be her guide.

As they walked along Lucie broke into exclamations of pleasure at the beauty of the scenery, the great variety of the vegetation.

Peggy wondered at her enthusiasm. She could not see anything to rhapsodise over. The scrub was commonplace to Peggy; she wondered what one who had come from the city could find in it to admire. But she was pleased with Lucie's pleasure, though surprised that such poor things could please her.

“The bush is horrid,” she said again, the red lips pouted. Her cousin did not reply, but drew her attention to some beautiful orange and black birds that flashed across the track.

“What are these?” she cried, eagerly.

“Regent birds,” returned Peggy. “There are heaps of them about; they are quite common.”

“Look at their brilliant colouring,” said Lucie. “Why, in the city they'd give pounds and pounds to have one of them.”

“Why don't they come and get them, then?” said practical little Peggy. “I am sure there are plenty. See those birds over there? They are satin birds.”

“Oh, what glossy plumage! How it flashes in the sunlight!” broke in her cousin, but Peggy hurried her on.

As they went further and further into the scrub, Lucie was entranced. Such palms and ferns she had never seen before.

“Why, Peggy!” she cried, “this is like fairyland. No, indeed; it is far better than any fairyland could be.” Peggy sniffed, but was politely silent.

A perfect wilderness of vegetation surrounded them. There were

burrawangs, bangalows, and mageen in the wealth of varied green, while on the trees, high up in the branches, were clusters of orchids, birds' nests, ferns, or mistletoe. Wild honeysuckle trailed over the smaller trees by the side of the track. Never had Lucie seen such luxuriance of glowing, throbbing life, such riot of colour.

"Peggy," she said at last, "I showed you the picture of our Botanic Gardens, and they are nothing compared to this — nothing."

Peggy's eyes opened, and she looked around, trying to comprehend what it was that her cousin found so marvellous.

Lucie stood still; she forgot her small companion. "This is the Australian bush," she thought, "the big scrub! How glorious! What a delightful land is this Australian land of ours, and how few have an idea of its beauty."

Peggy was silent, too, and as she saw the flush creep into Lucie's face, the light into her grey eyes, her own vision began to widen. She caught the contagion of her cousin's enthusiasm, and her little heart swelled with pride as she gazed around her.

"What colour!" said Lucie. "Look, Peggie, at all those wonderful shades of green, all harmonising, yet none the same. How can anyone prefer the city, with its dull grey tones, to the ever-changing bush?"

As they were making their way along, ever and anon being caught by the tiny claws of the lawyer vine, they heard a peculiar crying sound, like a little child in distress.

Lucie started. "Oh, Peggy! what is that?" she cried. Peggy laughed joyously. "Oh, that!" she cried, "that's only a catbird up in the big myrtle tree."

They made their way to the tree, and, sure enough, there were the catbirds making their peculiar sound. They saw numbers of cooing green flock pigeons and wonga pigeons feeding on the berries as they passed by.

The wonders of the scrub seemed inexhaustible. They heard the "pat, pat!" of the brush turkey as she strutted along a narrow leaf-sprinkled track, and Peggy made the woods ring again and again with her merry laughter as she saw the affright of her cousin when a timid little paddymelon jumped up almost from beneath their feet, and hopped rapidly away into the depths of the forest.

But Lucie's astonished admiration when she first saw a flame tree in the distance — one glow of burning scarlet and orange — awoke a new pride in Peggy. She was stimulated to think of fresh marvels to show the city-bred but appreciative cousin.

"Come with me," she said, "and I will show you a water-vine." She explained how if but one cut were made through the vine no water would flow, but if another incision were made, a yard above the first, a clear, cool drink could be obtained.

Peggy, though but a child, was wise in bush lore, for the bush had loved her, and had yielded up to her many a secret.

She pointed out the cedar trees, the tulip and the flgs, which envelop all other trees and crush them to death. She told Lucie how the top and the pith of the bangalow palms could be eaten, but to obtain them a big tree would have to be destroyed — and it was cruel to destroy the trees ruthlessly.

The more Lucie saw the more her wonder grew. She looked in astonishment on her little cousin, so strangely learned in woodcraft.

Just then the scrub opened up into a little green glade, bordered by the scarlet hibiscus, the wild holly, and the quaint cunjeboys.

“Oh, Peggy! Peggy!” she broke out. “Although you don't know it, you're a real princess living in a real fairyland.”

Peggy glanced archly up.

“A sleeping princess, Lucie, like the one in the story-book, and you're the prince come to waken me.”

Lucie kissed the little brown face. “You dear little Peggy! what a pretty little idea. I wouldn't mind being the prince to waken you. Perhaps I can waken you, too, and make you see the wonders and beauties that are around you. Far, far better to be here, Peggy, child, than in the big city you long to see.”

“Ah! but I want to see the big city,” she said.

Lucie sat down on the grass and drew the child into her arms.

“Listen, Peggy, and I'll tell you about the big city. The houses, the shops, the trams, the ferries, the beautiful harbour, the busy crowds of people are all there, just as I showed you in the pictures. But, Peggy, life is hard in the big city. It is all rush and flurry and worry from morning till night, if you have to work in the big city. It is a selfish life, little one. People hurry and rush past one another, and there is little care for anyone, but each for his own self. Oh, little Peggy! if you saw the stream of people flowing into the city in the early morning — the weary, white-faced girls, the hollow-eyed men, and the same crowd, more faded, more saddened, streaming homeward after toil — you would know how blessed you are in your happy, sheltered bush home.”

Peggy glanced up at her cousin's moved face. Her blue eyes grew thoughtful, but she did not speak.

“What would not the pale-faced little girls in the city, Peggy, give for a glimpse of this pretty spot? — the girls who see nothing day by day but long streets, and tall buildings, and trams.”

Peggy stroked her cousin's slender hand, and nodded her small head.

“You talked of a fairy, little one,” went on Lucie, yet though she addressed the child she spoke almost to herself. “A fairy lives here, a fairy called Health. You meet her every day; she touches and embraces you.”

Peggy smiled, yet she looked slightly puzzled.

“Yes,” continued Lucie, “she smiles upon you, this kind fairy, and your eyes grow bright, your cheek becomes rosy red, with the glow of the hibiscus over there. Ah! Peggy, this fairy has a dome of deepest blue. See that sky over the trees. Do you remember how it looked yesterday afternoon, when the sunset tinged that blue, and the clouds grew golden, then rose, then faded into tender grey? Think of the stars sparkling as no poor jewel could sparkle. Think of the green earth. Think of the flowers and trees, the birds and insects, and tell me, Peggy, has not the fairy Health a far lovelier home than any jewel-bedecked palace under the ground could be?”

Peggy's large eyes opened still wider, and again she nodded her sunny head.

“Think of the sea, Peggy, that we can catch a glimpse of from here. Look across at it now, and think — can you imagine anything more wonderful? Then the song of your birds, the manifold life of the bush — all for you, happy little Peggy — all for you. Love Nature, and Nature will love you in return, and show you all her treasures.”

The flush on Lucie's face was answered by the heightened colour of the ardent young face lifted to hers, as Lucie ceased speaking.

Peggy almost felt as if she grew in mind and body as she sat silently gazing at the scene before her. Her bodily vision seemed to become clearer as her mental vision broadened. She nestled closer to her cousin, and thought the long thoughts of childhood.

The sun set while they lingered, and they watched the glory of the heavens deepening into splendour, and fading into the brief shadows of the twilight. As they retraced their way the night came on, the fireflies were flitting before them like sparks from a blacksmith's anvil, and soon the moon rose to lighten the homeward track.

The trees looked eerie and shadowy in the misty light. It seemed indeed a world of fairy to the wondering, thoughtful eyes of the city girl.

Peggy's warm hand slipped into her cousin's. “Oh! Lucie,” she said, half shyly, “thank you for showing me all the beauty of my home. I'm sorry for the little girls in the big city who cannot come and see our bush, and who cannot meet the fairy Health to make them strong and well, to kiss the red of the hibiscus into their white cheeks. I'm glad I'm a bush girl, after all.”

It was not long afterwards that Lucie returned to the city, taking with her for a visit her little cousin.

Peggy saw Sydney, with all its wonderful sights. She rode on the trams, she went round the harbour in the gay ferry-boats. Lucie took her to all that was strange or beautiful in the city. Yet after the visit was over and the time came to say “good-bye,” though Peggy wept at leaving her beloved cousin, she was glad, so glad, to return to the tiny cottage, and

the big myrtle tree, and the wild honeysuckle, which nestled together in the bosom of the big scrub.

## **A Fragment.**

**R. A. G.**

Our birth, and life, and death  
Are but three stages;  
And after all have passed  
Souls claim their wages  
As good or ill we've lived,  
And then the payment!  
Like trees, our souls bear fruit  
When blossom fadeth.

## Clinker's Last Race.

### Vandorian

“You have quite made up your mind to go?”

“Quite. I've never missed the Spring Meeting since I came to years of discretion — indiscretion, perhaps, you call it.”

She made no reply. It was not her way to give the retort uncourteous.

“You'd better come to town with me. The change will do you good.”

“I'm not sure that it would. I don't care for races, and, after all, I am happier at home. The country is looking lovely this year.”

“As you like, Enid. But it seems to me you've always got two or three reasons for not doing anything I want you to do. Of course, I'm not going to press the point. How long is it since we agreed to go our separate ways?”

“About two years.”

Her voice was low, her head averted. But he saw the edge of a small ear turn a deeper pink.

“Two years — as strangers!”

“No — no — not strangers!”

“Acquaintances, then — friends, shall we say? Two years! I think we have been married almost three years.”

“You're away so much. There are so many race-meetings in Sydney and Melbourne. Time flies so quickly!”

She spoke with an air of apology, and not in any sense of reproach. Addressing the tip of her ear, as though it might act as an index to that averted face, he uttered the thought that was in his mind. “I don't find that time goes so quickly. It drags like a heavy chain. I often think I ought to get a good manager for the station and live in town. You could stay here if you liked — have your own friends about you, and be happy. We shouldn't have to bore each other to death!”

“I'm sorry that I bore you. I try to consider your tastes in every way.”

In his blundering efforts to bring about a reconciliation he had, as usual, said the wrong thing. He had the special disadvantage of being in love with her. And the curious feeling that he was like a man trying to fight a shadow with a bludgeon gave him a foolish sense of being clumsy and ridiculous.

“Of course, I don't mean that you — that I am tired of your society. You don't give me enough of it to — by heaven! when I come to think of it all, I swear you've treated me badly!” In a sudden temper he turned angrily away, walking across the garden with a savage sense of having widened the breach he had tried to heal.

The first sweet breath of spring was in the air. Round the outer edge of lawns, green after the soaking showers which had been as a gold-mine to the western plain country, was a great circle of flowering shrubs like a wreath that embraced the tender beauty of more delicate blossoms. A clump of wattle had been allowed to remain amongst the cultivated trees that shaded the western side of the station homestead. A mass of golden bloom, it made a gorgeous note of colour on the emerald of well-trimmed lawns. Under the shadow of the wattle sat Enid Tremayne. She pulled the brim of her hat further down over her eyes. The glare of quivering light from a distant roof of corrugated iron was hurtful — in more senses than one. That corrugated iron covered the stables. These were almost as big and much more important in the sight of their owner than the homestead. Her book fell to the ground. It was only a pretence to keep it in her lap. A dreamer, and having had as yet no spur of necessity to goad her into the treadmill of daily work, she lounged indolently enough in a low garden chair. And she brooded, as idle women of her type, sensitive and imaginative, will often brood over grievances which are for the most part only the distorted children of their daydreams. Her indolent fancy followed the slow voyage of some fleecy white clouds which sailed like small boats across the azure sky. They were like her own life. With morbid introspection the rich man's wife told herself that she, too, drifting unheeded from the unknown to the unknown, was of no more account in the scheme of creation than those faint shadows on the sea of blue.

Into the vague picture, painted darkly by those bad old masters, Idleness and Discontent, came a loud and cheerful voice.

“Well, Enid, how are you, my dear? No, don't bother about the gate. I'll put him at the fence. It's low enough to get over with his eyes shut!”

A big, masterful woman, Miss Tremayne put her ugly chestnut at the little fence that enclosed the garden.

“This horse is a fool! Unless a jump's nearly half the size of a house he falls over it. But I'll teach him to look after his heels yet. You don't consider him a beauty? It's not his looks, my dear; it's the good stock he's come from. Where's Jim?”

“In his favourite place — the stables.”

Miss Tremayne looked sharply at her young sister-in-law. “We're a horsey-doggy lot, and that's the truth. You might straighten us up if you'd try, Enid. But you sit apart, and look on — moon away the time over a book — while Jim — ”

“Have you had lunch, Hester?”

“Had it early, so that I could ride over in good time. Oh, I'm not going to interfere, but you'll excuse me if I say to your face what others say behind your back — you're a fool for your pains!”

“I suppose I must excuse it, if you say it. It doesn't make any difference — you'd say it all the same.”

There was a faint smile on Enid Tremayne's face as she met the old maid's keen glance. There was a stanch friendship between these two, curious enough, for the reason that Hester Tremayne, fifteen years older than her brother, was so like him in temperament. They had the same faults, counterbalanced by more common-sense on the sister's side. Yet the very traits of character which Enid judged so harshly in her husband she regarded as amusing eccentricities in her sister-in-law.

“I wish you'd go to the stables, too, Hester, and take that ugly horse of yours out of my sight. He spoils the perspective. His head is out of drawing, and his tail — I suppose it is a tail — is exactly like the end of a feather duster.”

“I can't alter his head, but I'll teach him manners before I've had him many weeks longer. Good-bye for the present, my dear!”

She made across the soft green lawns, careless of the havoc her horse's hoofs made on the edges of garden beds. Then, whistling to her dog, Miss Tremayne put the chestnut at an awkward double. Clearing it without the rap of a hoof, and mightily pleased with herself, she cantered into the stable-yard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Within an hour these two, brother and sister, were in hot dispute. They had loved each other always, and they had quarrelled with consistent inconsistency ever since the days when Jim Tremayne had grown too tall to submit to his sister's authority. Fingering her riding whip, Miss Tremayne looked as though she would have dearly loved to lay it across her brother's broad shoulders. He laughed at the light of battle in her grey eyes.

“That day's past, Hester. Oh, I daresay I deserve it!”

“You're no better than a child — a stupid, troublesome child, in the hands of men who make a catspaw of you! Your affairs are getting into such a hopeless muddle that they'll never come right again, if you don't mind what you are doing! You needn't scowl like that! Good seasons won't pull you through, unless you cut down expenses. How many horses did you buy last time you went to Sydney?”

“Who's been talking to you about my business? Mind your own affairs! Take a leaf out of Enid's book — she doesn't trouble her head about me.”

“Perhaps she does trouble — I'm not sure! We don't understand Enid. I

can't say she pretends to understand us! When a dove flutters into a stable-yard, it takes time to make her feel at home."

"I've always had such cursed luck in everything!"

"You fall into the hands of rogues, and believe they're honest men until they fleece you too openly. Oh, yes, you do! Then you raise a hornet's nest about your ears. Don't talk to me about your thirty-five years, Jim! You haven't got thirty-five months' worth of common-sense in that foolish head of yours."

So she raged, pacing wrathfully up and down the little den in which Mr. James Tremayne made some pretence of managing his affairs and balancing his accounts. He was a younger and much handsomer edition of the sporting sister. A big, fair-haired man, he stared moodily out of the window that commanded a view of the sunlit garden. His wife was still there. She sat in her low chair, leaning back with her hands idly clasped behind her back, her hat pulled down over her eyes, her white dress a light patch under the flickering shadows of the wattles.

"She hasn't forgiven me yet."

"That little affair with Mrs. Strellings? All moonshine, of course! A silly woman over-fond of admiration — anyone with common-sense could see it was only nonsense!"

"Enid can't see it."

"Because you won't take the trouble to explain it all. She listened to idle tales, and you're too obstinate to make the peace."

"I wish she'd come to the spring meeting, but she doesn't care about races."

"I'll speak to her about it," said Miss Tremayne, sharply. "Her proper-place is with you, and so I shall tell her."

"I wish to heaven you wouldn't interfere with me and my business! Why don't you look after your own affairs, Hester?" But he knew that his sister had looked after her own affairs. Miss Tremayne was a prosperous woman; fortunate in a mining speculation, she had invested wisely. The world was going very well with her.

"I've found time for my own business, as you know. Everything I touch nowadays seems to turn up trumps. It used not to be so! And everything I have will be yours some day, Jim! But you'll have to steady down if you want to save this place. How do I know? Never mind how; I know it!"

There were tears in her hard grey eyes. Her unwonted moment of tenderness touched her brother as her anger never did.

"I'll think about — many things — after the Spring Meeting. I'm going to put a pot of money on Tarboy."

"I wouldn't! His owner isn't — um — no, I wouldn't touch Tarboy, Jim."

"A sure thing, I tell you! I've had special opportunities of knowing Tarboy for the Derby — Clinker for —"

“I don't like your choice, Jim. It's not mine!”

They sat down to discuss the coming races. With pencil and notebook they studied the odds, the weights, the hundred and one chance for and against the various “sure things” which haunt the dreams of every racing man and betting woman.

Then they began to differ again, with minor explosions of the Tremayne temper.

“I tell you what it is, Jim, you never did know a rogue when you saw him, but now you don't even seem to know a horse from a jackass!”

After this slight token of her sisterly esteem, Miss Tremayne left the room, taking some trouble to give the door a really good bang.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tarboy had been an easy last for the Derby. Every stable-boy at Randwick knew that Mr. James Tremayne, of Enadon station, had been hard hit. Not because he had talked about his losses, but because the saddling paddock is full of voices that double or treble a man's gains, and quadruple his losses.

On Steeplechase day he waited, morose and silent, for the big event that was to mend his broken fortunes. Clinker was his last horse. With a jealous pang, Tremayne saw his wife, more animated than usual, one of the prettiest women on the lawn. Evidently she found a race-meeting sufficiently attractive. Faithful to her compact, she made no sign of interfering with her husband's pleasures. Yet once or twice he fancied that his wife was watching him. Her eyes were anxious. It was the money she cared about. Someone had been telling her, perhaps, that he was hard hit. Clinker would make things fairly straight.

But in the meantime there was suspense — the kind of suspense that is almost harder to bear than ruin. Tremayne began to drink more than was good for his legs. His brain was steady, his speech clear and incisive, but he staggered slightly as he walked. His senses were almost abnormal in their alert tension. He could see and hear with extraordinary ease. Field-glasses were almost forgotten as he watched the start. Remembering those unsteady legs of his, which had in some sudden freak taken to themselves a sidling movement, like the gait of a shying horse, Tremayne sat in a quiet corner of the grandstand. He wanted to keep away from his own people. Surrounded by strangers, he felt alone.

At last! They were off!

The hoarse voices of the “books” were silent. The babble of idle chatter ceased. Ten horses held 30,000 human beings in thrall. Up and over!

“Ah — a — ah!”

A flash of silk, a glimpse of flying hoofs, a thud, a black horse down; the ambulance crossing the flat.

What did it matter?

“Clinker leads! Clinker!”

“Silver Hoofs!” “Bright Eyes!”

Up and over!

“Ah — a — ah!”

Another fall — a dull echo from 30,000 throats.

“Clinker! Clinker!”

“By Gad! Down — no — up again!”

“Blue Peter leads — Storm King — no — Clinker!”

And now the pace began to tell. The field became a straggling tail, closing up on the straight, dragging out as they ascended the green hill.

Five horses in the steeplechase — then four!

Four, with the game bay still leading.

“There's only been one horse in this race from the start. I knew it all along. I stand to win a cool five hundred — come on, Clinker!”

The man next to Tremayne was prattling cheerfully. But he spoke to ears that heard not. With that hideously distinct sense of sight which had come to him since he had lost the proper control of his feet, Tremayne thought he saw the great bay horse stumble ever so slightly. And he thought he heard, being afflicted with that horrible exaggeration of hearing, the desperate whizz of the stinging blows that rained on the satin skin of gallant Clinker.

“The favourite wins! By the Lord Harry, Clinker, with three lengths to spare! Come on!”

The prattling tongue clacked merrily in Tremayne's ear.

Up and over — the last jump!

A crashing fall — a roar that echoed like the angry booming of a sullen sea — a rush to the fence that divided the lawn from the straight — a thousand voices in shrill clamour — a hundred questions with one answer.

Clinker had dropped dead within twenty yards of the winning post. Ambling up with the sudden importance of having, by strange chance, won the Steeplechase, came the ugly grey mare Silver Hoofs.

Tremayne tried to think, but his thoughts seemed to have gone the way of his legs. The only thing he could remember was the quaint death of one John Tremayne — a story that was over a hundred years old. He laughed as he recalled the incident.

“A fine swimmer, too, yet he died in a ditch! Fell on his face in four inches of water — man first, horse on top of him — a wild scamp — the horse is always on top when Tremayne — no, I don't believe it was more than three inches of dirty water! Good Lord! what a death!”

Muttering, he staggered down the grandstand. Sober enough to know that he was drunk, he made a desperate effort to get out at the back. His legs tried to take him to the lawn, and so to the saddling paddock, but he

fought them. If he could only get away where none would point the finger of scorn at his absurd gait — if he could only get five minutes alone!

With a sudden rush he made a dash for the lawn behind the stand. Crossing the road he saw a drag coming fast towards him.

“Horse playing up — driver's a fool! My God!”

He was under their heels. The mutinous legs he had tried to guide in the way of safety took him straight to the leader's heads, then collapsed.

\* \* \* \* \*

In that mysterious place reserved for “accidents” Jim Tremayne came slowly, and with much half-delirious babble, to his sober senses. He had a broken arm, an ugly gash across his forehead, an internal ache that was like a raw bruise.

“Don't frighten my wife; I'm all right. That's Enid riding Clinker. I'll swear she's going to win — going to win. Tarboy was pulled. Any fool could see he wasn't trying! There's old John Tremayne, dead — in a ditch — spoilt his hunting togs — what a mess I've made of it all! Don't let her come in, I say!”

But his wife was pushing her way through the crowd outside the door.

“I am Mrs. Tremayne. Let me get past! I must go to my husband. Please let me in!”

“I'm in such a beastly mess — smashed-up face — don't let her in. She's riding Clinker, too! Game old Clinker!”

In a moment she was in, her knees beside the stretcher, her beautiful dress marked with the blood that oozed from under the ghastly bandage. She had no words, but she took the damaged head and held it on her breast, crooning over it with fond endearment.

“It's Enid! She's the only straight goer on the field. I knew she'd win! Enid and good old Clinker!”

## **Clotho's Tangle.**

### **T. Carnett**

The verandah and upper lawn were crowded, a steady register of 95 degrees at 8 p.m. not being conducive to indoor festivity. The lower lawn was unoccupied, and the hammock curved alluringly between the orange and lemon trees. Conversation had gasped for a time, then had ceased, and nothing was heard but the hum of mosquitoes, the swish of fans, and the steady ripple and tinkle of the sprinkler. The friendly moonlight showed only the dainty coolness of white garments, mercifully toning down the haggard faces and weary, listless figures of those who had battled with the summer in the God-forsaken western town.

A limp figure in a dark corner of the verandah was all that remained of an irrepressible C.P.S. who had been unanimously ejected for attempting to versify the theme, "Go on the Land, Young Man."

The heat had sorely tried the tempers. Chaff was taken in earnest, jokes stirred up deadly thoughts; there was a steady undercurrent of irritation that nothing but lavish rain and cool breezes could drive away.

The women, notably those with least to do, whined and grumbled, while the men swore. A few kept their usual equilibrium, especially the doctor and the local school-marm, but then, as someone remarked, "a cool southerly was blowing for them all the time."

The romance was discussed by all the boarders — bets given and taken as to "when he'd do it"; no one betted on the result — that was a foregone conclusion. Such a suitable match — both in the early thirties, graduates of the same year, similar tastes, the philosophic calm of the one tempering the impetuosity of the other.

There was nothing hidden in their regard for each other. Frankly they sought each other's society, and as frankly showed themselves bored when others interrupted them.

A certain tension in the atmosphere the past few days told the onlookers that matters were approaching a crisis, and there was a decided expectancy in the attitudes when the doctor rose from the seat and said leisurely:

"Suppose we try the lower lawn for a change, Miss Stewart. It can't be any hotter, and at least we'll have a different class of mosquito."

The fans paused a moment to allow Helen's answer to be distinctly heard. "Certainly; the sprinkler must make it a little cooler."

They walked slowly down the path.

"Lucky devil!" remarked a rising legal luminary. "He'll get a good wife, and that is what more than most of us can hope for."

"At any rate, the wives are just as good as the specimens of husbands," was the acid remark of a lady who had sampled two.

Even limp Justice in the corner revived sufficiently to sit up and say: "Go on" — a well-aimed cushion changed it to — "and win, young man. Say, who'll have a drink? Let's get to the back lawn and give them a chance. We wuz all young wunst. Pills, bet you he smokes right through the charge."

"Shut up, you red-headed ass," was the reply of the outraged chemist.

Meanwhile, conversation between the two was jerky and intermittent.

"You take the hammock, Nell; I'll have the chair."

"No, thank you. I refuse to talk to a man who sits with his head in a lemon tree. Besides, you are lazier than I — I want the chair."

"The same remark applies to a woman with her head in a lemon tree. We'll both sit on chairs, and both be in the light. I want to watch you when I ask you — when I tell you — "

He broke off, and stooped to pick up her fan. Then they looked each other squarely in the face — his white and fixed, hers quivering with pain.

"I want to tell you first one chapter you don't know about. We've neither of us touched on the six years that elapsed from the time we left the 'Varsity until we met here. We've talked of events, of people, but not of ourselves."

Helen nodded.

"May I smoke? Thank you." He settled himself firmly in the chair, struck a match, and lighted his pipe, which almost immediately went out, but he still held it clenched between his teeth.

Twice, thrice he struck matches, and threw them away, then began jerkily:

"Suppose a man meets a girl and they fall in love, and become engaged, and supposing the girl is not sure of herself, and breaks it off, and they remain good friends; and supposing they become engaged again, and again the girl breaks it off; and supposing they become engaged for the third time, and for the third time the woman breaks it off, finally; and supposing there is no one else, but that she simply has no time for men, and will likely continue so till the end of the chapter; and supposing he meets another woman, and they become good friends, have a friendship that is seldom or never seen between man and woman, a friendship that results from a thorough and close understanding, that skilfully pilots round the rocks of opposition, and — "

“Ah! don't go on. Let me finish,” Helen interrupted, in a shaking voice.

“Supposing a woman meets a man in every way her opposite, and they fall in love, and become engaged; and supposing the woman's afraid to bind herself, and asks for release, and is refused; and this goes on for years, and the love is, if possible, stronger, and still the woman is afraid. And then the great break comes, and she gets her wish and finds out that now her freedom is distasteful to her, and that although there is no one else they can never return to the first stage; and then she meets another man, whose tastes in every way are more like hers, and they become good friends, and they make up their minds — ”

She stopped, and her hands clutched the arm of the chair as she watched the strong face opposite, the lines of the forehead, the steady grey eyes, and firm lips holding the unlighted pipe.

He dropped the pipe.

“I meant to-night to ask you to marry me, but I can't. You deserve all the love the best man could give you, and — my God! in spite of all, I love that woman yet.”

“And I meant to say ‘yes’ to you, to give you affection, to blot out all the past; but it is before me still, stronger than ever it has been. Heaven help me! I am a woman that can't forget.”

The sprinkler tinkled and rippled, the mosquitoes hummed. From the upper lawn came the voice of the now resuscitated C.P.S. chanting: “Go on the land, the land. Go, go on the land, young man; I say unto thee, go on the land;” and two bare human souls fought and struggled vainly with Destiny. The question is still debated at the Western Private Boarding Establishment as to whether she refused him or whether he didn't ask her.

## The First Train to Muncoodra.

### Ycleptos

“Do ye moind th' toime, Mrs. Bush,” said my neighbour, a little atomy of an Irishman, with a face for all the world like a chimpanzee, bright, beady black eyes, and a shock of greasy, straggling black curls that turned up in wayward abandon beneath the brim of his little pot hat, and clustered in oily, fantastic ringlets over his not-too-clean collar. “Do ye moind th' toime,” repeated he, “whin th' fust thrain come to Muncoodra?”

“No, Mr. O'Mara,” replied the lady addressed — a hard-faced, shrewd woman of portly dimensions, whose bejewelled neck, bosom, and fingers unmistakably proclaimed her the prosperous innkeeper she strove not to appear. “I was not there, you know, though I have often heard of it,” she hastened to add, seeing a mischievous twinkle in the beady black eyes of the Irishman.

“No more ye was. No more ye was,” chuckled Mr. O'Mara, with a sly wink at the lean, cadaverous-looking man on the seat opposite. “An' more's th' pity that th' young spalpeens shud have chosen sich a toime t' intrude thimselves on yer plans — th' varmints, kapin' their mother from all th' fun!”

“Mr. O'Mara!” rapped out the lady, trying to look dignified.

“Thru it is, Mrs. Bush, nor need ye blush to own it. For they was as foine a pair av twins, both ov 'em, as ever was, an' it's a foine shtrappin' pair o' lads they do be growin', an' ye had every raison to be a proud woman that day. An' it's moity few — ”

“But what about the first train coming to Muncoodra, Mr. O'Mara?” said the lean man, seeing the lady's embarrassment, and coming to her aid.

“Thru fur ye, Mr. Whilks, thru fur ye. Oh, it's th' man of tack ye be, tu be shure! Ye can't bate the lyers fur tack, sor,” said the little man, turning to me. “Whoi, Mr. Whilks here'll tak' his way thru the most intricate case that ivver set Kentucky lyers talkin', an' whin he's thru wid it he'll tak' his fill o' th' verdic', an' ye'll tak' what ye can get an' be thankful.”

The general laugh raised by this remark somewhat disconcerted the

lawyer, who nevertheless joined in it, to put as good a face as possible on his discomfiture.

By this time the attention of the assorted occupants of the crowded, stuffy compartment of the train slowly winding its way, with the wearisome, snail-like pace of most branch line trains, amongst the brown, drought-stricken hills, was directed to the little Irishman, who evidently desired a full audience before he would relate his story.

“Well,” said he, “th' fust toime th' thrain come to Muncoodra there was great ructions an' great shenanikin, I can tell ye. We was all of us, from moiles around, invoited t' inshpect th' 'oiron horse,' as they called it. An' they was much whonderin' phwat sort of a steed it cud be. They was to be a great gatherin' at the staation to mate th' baste, wid lashins o' grog an' ateables enough an' plenty.

“An' th' Gundamurra town band was engaged fur th' occaasion, an' nary a wan of th' bhoys had cast oies on a thrain befure. Muncoodra had no town band, an' a coach had been sint fur th' Gundamurra bhoys, who had been practising their schales and exercoises fur whakes an' whakes befure, an' blowing thimsilves hoarse, as was most approphpriate, until it was feared by airy wan of us they'd moightily scare the baste whin they did mate him.

“Well, whin the toime come, it was a foine sight to see the staation, wid th' flaags floyin' an' ivvery wan dhressed up in their go-to-meetin' best, and bowers and shtrings and festunes of greenery stretched acrost frum soide to soide. An' th' Gundamurra bhoys was there, wid their foine new uniforms — all exceptin' th' caps, which hadn't arroived — an' their big drum, festunated wid ribbons and wreaths, an' their brass blowers and thrumpets laughin' back at the sun an' makin' ye blink and wink as ye looked at 'em.

“But th' faces of th' bhoys was shinin' even broighter as niver was as a whistle sounded beyant from th' turn where the loine twisst in frum th' cuttin', an' wid chests and cheeks puffed out they put th' cornets and thrumpets an' blowers in front of their faces an' guv it lip wid ‘See, the Conquerin' Hero Comes.’ An' come he did, too, wid a vengeance, snortin' and puffin' towards us, brathin' sparks an' smoke and shakin' th' ground like a rale hero.

“Th' bhoys didn't half loike it, aither, an' many a wan lost his note wid turnin' arround to look at the dhreadful noise. But Mikey Ryan, th' bandmaster, kep' at 'em so strong wid his bit of a shtick goin' up an' down, ‘wan, two, three fure; wan, two, three fure,’ so fast an' so firm that it pulled 'em thegither a bit.

“Well, an' foine it was — fur a bit — while th' thrain was beyant, but moighty shakey an' quaverin' did it grow as the engine began t' come ferninst 'em. An' thin, be janus, 'twas an aisy conquerin' fur th' hero, fur th' bhoys, wid one shout o' terror, dhropped their blowers and brasses

— those that cud of thim; the wans that had their heads thru didn't wait fur that — an' wid a mad rush made fur the fince at th' soide, and some lepped it, an' some didn't, but jest thopped over into th' dhust an' schrambled to their feet wid their uniforms torn an' dhirty and their blowers bent straight and crooked. But they was all moighty handy wid their feet, and they skedaddled up th' shtreet loike as if Auld Nick himself was after thim, an' nary a shtop did they make till they had a whole block betune thim an' the staation.

“But not so Mikey Ryan, th' bandmaster. He was a throe son of auld Oireland, an' whin he saw the bhoys had deserted him an' he had no wan to conducth, phwat did he do but conducth himself an' march along ferninst th' engine as bhold as brass, batin' toime wid his stick, ‘wan, two, three, fure; wan, two, three fure.’ An' so, loike th' brave broth of an Oirish bhoy he was, he saaved th' situaation fur th' Gundamura Town Band, an' escorted himsilf — bein' the rale conquerin' hero of th' ocaasion — till he an' the thrain come to a sthandstill amidst the cheers of th' assimbled bysthanders, minny of whom was rollin' back in their sates wid laughin' at him.”

## The Second Flash.

### M. Forrest

The lightning seemed to split the sky from arch to horizon in one awful jagged tear, through which the impossible glory of heaven looked out.

For a moment the wide paddock was light as day, and they could see the surrounding wire fences, and the huddled shapes of the stud sheep in the far corner; the galvanised iron roofs of the station buildings, and the great black entire behind the sliprail, his head thrown back, as he snorted with terror. They could see the line of tea-trees beyond the swamp, and the ragged bark on the stems, the main road stretching between the gums towards the town; and they wondered if anyone from the door of the men's hut had seen them, as they stood hand in hand near the paling fence of the vegetable garden.

Then all was dark again, and the whole world blotted out. She drew near to him and shivered.

"I am afraid of the lightning, Tom," she said. "You had better let me go."

"Wait a minute, dear," he said. "It won't hurt you. One more flash, and then I promise you shall go home. I wish to God we could go home together," he added, passionately, gnawing his underlip and tugging at his moustache.

She could not see his face, but she slipped her band back into his as a cold wind began to rise among the trees by the creek, and blew her hair across her face. One drop of rain, sullen and large, fell on her upturned mouth, and he kissed it away.

"I will never see you any more," she said, resting her cheek on his crushed holland coat-sleeve. "I wonder if I shall forget when — I marry Jim."

"I wonder," he said, sharply, and she felt his shoulders straighten and stiffen.

She knew he was angry again.

"Don't be cross the last time we have together," she said. "Leave me something nice to think about, in case I should not forget."

He kissed her lightly, and laughed a little. "What would Jim say if he saw us now?" he said.

“I wish he could,” she answered, very low, “if that would make him give me up for good and all — but it's no use going over the old ground. If I wasn't bound, you are, so it would come to the same thing in the end; and she has refused to let you go ... Noblesse oblige. I don't feel very noble to-night!”

They heard the hammer of hoofs on the hard main road.

“There's the mailman, trying to get in before the storm,” she said. “I really must go now, Tom.”

“You promised to stay until after the next flash,” he said, holding her hands tightly.

As they stood side by side, she leaning her head against his cheek, and he with one hand caressing her heavy hair, the second flash came. Again the heavens were rent and God looked out. The ringbarked trees seemed outlined with silver. A flight of wild duck passed with harsh quackings and cries over the roof of the station house, and a mob of cattle in the branding yards bellowed hoarsely. For a moment they looked on a transfigured world, and then without a sound they fell together, the girl half across the body of the man.

There was a smell of singed garments in the air, and the entire galloped neighing across the paddock.

The thunder reverberated in the ranges, and down came the rain like a waterspout.

The second flash had come, and they had gone home — together.

## **The Five-Thirty from Sydney.**

### **N. Broughton**

It wanted but one moment to half-hour past 5 as Martin Forbes walked along the platform.

He moved briskly enough, and took his seat in the train with a proper show of energy that had become second nature to him, all the time conscious of a feeling of irritable impotence, because of the weary monotony of city life, as it appeared to him.

How he hated the city, the journey to it, and not less the homeward journey.

The very passengers, as they came along the platform in a constant stream, turning in at that door or this, as it suited their purpose or their tickets, chatting and laughing, too, most of them, as most of them were every afternoon, were all more or less of a grievance to him in certain of his moods.

Nothing to relieve the monotony of the fifteen minutes' cityward or return journey; never an instant's unconsciousness, he complained, from its attendant petty discomfort. Other passengers, with their apparent philosophy, he had no patience with.

To-day, as the "fast" passes suburb after suburb, and occasionally also a slow, with all the arrogance of a train of more than ordinary importance, he wonders casually how so-and-so, an argumentative friend, could contend that a study of faces in the train would serve to distract one's mind from irritating worries.

They were only men and women, uninteresting in whatever mood one studied them. That boy sitting opposite him now, for instance. Innumerable times they had been fellow passengers, and what cause of a second look at his thin — unnaturally thin — pale face?

This — that, instead of opening the new book of reputed interest that is on his knee, Martin Forbes leans back again and strives to conjure up a picture of this youngster's private life.

The youngster, who had all a man's dignity of bearing when he first took his seat, but who now seems one moment preoccupied to a degree, and the next in some danger of losing his self-control. Perhaps he is in difficulties, and sees no way out; and the girl-wife must at last be told of

the inevitable — a smaller cottage and less to live on.

Martin pictures it all as clearly as if the boy were his own cousin Rolf, and the wife, little Joan — the cheerful, plucky little wife of brave, happy-go-lucky young Rolf. Once again his dark eyes go back to a surreptitious contemplation of the pale, contracted brow, over which a panama is now drawn.

This time a pair of wide-open grey eyes meet the drooping dark ones.

Each looks steadily into the other, and then there is nothing for either to do but turn away simultaneously.

The older man unconsciously lifts his book, and opens it, but the train has sped on, and before very long he is otherwise occupied than in studying the character of a fletitious hero.

In utter contradiction to his ordinary work-day instincts, he, in his present mood, sees nothing indiscreet in a man of his standing deliberately dogging a stranger's footsteps, and in return for an unconventional offer of help receiving a spontaneous invitation to a ball that evening.

Why he felt so strangely drawn to this man he does not stop to consider when deciding that he should appear at his house, suitably attired, with as little delay as possible.

Later, as he is telling himself that never has he felt so completely in sympathy with a fellow-creature, his sympathies are for the moment diverted into another channel by the sudden opening of an outer door, the swish, swish of a woman's gown, a hand lightly — how lightly, he alone knows — touching his shoulder, and a voice whispering in his ears, "The first is yours. I managed to get away."

Her face, but not her gleaming eyes, is hidden beneath the hood of her long cloak. Does she, or does she not, as she hurries on without so much as a glance at the man beside Forbes, hear that man say in tones that tell of despair, "You'll repent of your good-natured offer, of course; but we must not let her escape a second time."

"Good Lord!"

Martin does not say it — he thinks it, and ponders over unspoken tragedies, skeletons in cupboards, and beautiful, gleaming eyes.

He waits, but not in absolute silence, though of that he is not conscious, nor is he aware that a pale, thin, boyish face flushes a little and quivers.

He has always considered himself a trustworthy man, and he is conscious a little later of being a determined one, as he sits under the glare of a gas-light and listens with what patience he can to such purely feminine excuses for restlessness as "I've lost my handkerchief; I'd better look for it myself." "It's positively stifling in here with the shutters closed."

There is little doubt that he does not see in a certain pair of eyes a gleam of mischief — mischief that is to come. He sits on stolidly for a

time, feeling horribly uncomfortable. Then he begins to fidget uneasily, and mutters: "Must I sit here much longer?"

"You'll be overcarried if you do," a thin-faced passenger gravely said.

"Um! eh! what! . . . Oh, thanks," and seizing his book and umbrella, Martin Forbes follows the youthful man out to the car-platform in readiness to step off as the train slows up. One glance at the boyish face shows him a pair of quivering lips, and who knows but that an impulse may have prompted him to take a turning other than his usual one, and so see a little more of this passenger with the thin, white face, had not a voice beside him said, "I would not go to sleep in full view of a possibly-admiring public, if I were you."

"Ah, Miss Rene. How do you do? Asleep? I was not asleep in the train, I assure you. I was thinking of the first dance."

"When I saw you from the other carriage and came through? Yes, and touched your arm and spoke to you. Oh, never mind what I said. Perhaps it was something about the ball to-night. At any rate, that boy opposite you was in an agony of repressed amusement. I noted that particularly. Yes, I managed to get away from the children's party earlier than I hoped to. I wonder you could sleep so soundly when that child was fidgetting about her handkerchief and the window, and sundry other things. Did you hear the elderly man beside you tell his friend in piteous tones not to allow her to escape? One would think he was speaking of a wild animal. Good-bye. No; do not come with me. Go home and dress, otherwise you may miss the first dance."

## **Red Mick and Benny.**

### **E. J. Braithwaite**

This is one of many stories about an old bridge I once knew. Through them all, like a silver thread, shines the “Queen o' Sheba” — God-sent, like the sun and moon, for the good of all.

At present we have to deal with one small atom of her kingdom, who is lying down by the river bank in the purple dusk of twilight, his little sunburnt face upturned to the blue vault watching how quickly the stars come out as the night deepens and darkens down there by the river, where the reeds are playing a soft musical monotone, and the bullrushes are quivering near his bare brown feet, that are almost as hard as horses' hoofs, and sometimes nearly as swift.

The night winds are playing tricks with his pants and his ragged shirt that are in the last stages of decay. His hat, an old battered felt that he picked up one day on the outskirts of the “camp,” lies near him, as does also a black gallon billycan redolent of wine — dirty, cheap wine that intoxicates and then maddens. He gives a little acrobatic twist to leeward to count how many frogs are croaking at once in Bathsheba's lily-pond, where the ducks swim all day and lay their eggs, to the annoyance of their mistress. “Two, three, four, five, six, seven, nine. Oh! it's worse than counting stars.” And Ben, sympathetically known as Benny, and extra sympathetically as “poor Benny” — but that is only when the wine has maddened — rolls back again, and in doing so collides with the empty can, the hollow sound of which strikes a chill of mortal fear to his little heart.

Benny Barnett's unworthy mother had sent him at the very first shade of dusk to fetch her half a gallon of wine. She had sent him so many times through the day that she did not wish Mrs. Riley across the river to see her send again. And now Barnett would be home, and not a drop of wine for his well-seasoned throat.

Well, stars would come out, frogs croak, and bandicoots call, and what were they for, if not for small boys to take an interest in! The “Queen o' Sheba” had told him down here one day by the river, when he helped her to carry water for her washing, that “God had sent all those things for our good.” Then why should he not love them all, and listen and count?

He scrambled to his feet, can in hand, and groped about for his hat, stepping nearer to the river. As he did so he felt the water surge softly round his ankles. Where was he? Had he slipped and rolled near the edge? Impossible! Great heavens! it was flood!

In one great tide it was rolling past him — noiseless and swift and deep. His little brown hands went down to his bare ankles; there was froth on them. Yes, it was flood, a big flood. Through the semi-darkness of the last pulsation of twilight he could dimly see the great body of water rolling by — not his first experience of a Finnis flood by many a one. It was not the sight of the flooded river that filled him with terror, but the thought of having to cross it. For a mile beyond, on the other side, lay Haley's wine shanty, and he must go, and return in haste, for had he not already wasted an hour counting stars and other vain things he had no right to think of? To dally by the way when there was wine to bring was a foolish thing to do; so, fixing the dilapidated hat on his head, he started a race with the flood, thinking he might reach the crossing-tree before the full force of the water hurled its strength against root and branch. For the bridge that is now old was then in course of erection, only two great iron girders over which the workmen spanning it from arch to arch went with careful step.

Not for all the wine in Haley's shanty would Benny venture on those awful girders. How often had he dreamt at night of clinging to them, while his little body hung suspended beneath, and above him glared the fearsome head and face of "Red Mick," the reigning terror of all the children in the "camp." How many times had they seen Mick scramble down from the scaffold as if it had been a haystack, throw down his mason's hod, and chase some terror-stricken child till its little legs gave way with fear. Mick was known to run a quarter of a mile for the flendish love of making a small boy or girl scream. It was also a well-known fact — amongst all the kiddies who were constantly comparing notes on this head — that "Red Mick," on catching anyone, took them to his tent, put them in a box from which there was no escape, and fed them on potato peelings. Report did not say whether the peelings were raw or boiled.

So Benny sped on, his mind full of dreams he had had, in all of which "Red Mick" figured grimly; whackings he had had, mostly for being late with wine; and memories of great floods that had even found an inroad to the tent, that usually stood high and dry on the banks. He at last reached the tree — a great, crooked old gum that grew almost in the bed of the river. The immense limbs stretched from bank to bank, springing out from either side of the trunk and resting bow-shaped over the water; the leaves at ordinary tide swept the sides, and the great limbs made an easy footbridge. But to-night the swaying branches were submerged — even to yards beyond — though the waters were still shallow.

Benny, with the billy still clasped in his hand, stepped in, half-way up to his knees, and, with a sudden little gasp of his breath, stopped as he began to feel the strength of the water lift him.

How horrible if he were to get into the current and be swept on, as he had seen a great bullock swept away in one flood! It had gone like a flash, and was swept out of sight, never to be heard of again. And what was he compared to a bullock? Like a twig compared to a tree.

Ugh! What a noise the river made under the arches! How it roared. Higher and higher it was spreading and frothing around his bare legs. And he stepped back, as the rain began softly to fall on his poorly-clad body.

Benny got on to higher ground, as the majesty of the stream rolled on with ever-increasing volume, swirling and roaring between the new stone arches of the unfinished bridge, and making an impassable barrier between himself and Haley's wine shanty that night.

Across the river he could see the lights shining from the "Queen o' Sheba's" windows; and, in spite of the rain, the door still stood open, with its ever-ready hospitality. What would he not give for one sight of the dear face — one word of advice from the wise, kind lips. He knew she would say, "You must go home, Benny, dear; you can never cross the river to-night."

But she was not near to say it, and he dared not go home with that empty can to face a drink-flushed mother and a brutal father.

Both had been at one time good members of society, but had become debased and unholy through drink. And at this time, bad wine, in all its maddening horror, was rampant amongst the navvies in the camp.

So, with the river rushing past him in its new-born fury, Benny stood on the bank, a pathetic little figure of indecision and childish misery. He would make no further attempt to cross. No — not even "Red Mick" could frighten him over. And with this decision arrived at he took a step homeward, with the can a-swing in his hand, when some awful apparition rose up before him.

It was only the other day that he had heard the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk." That was the first time he had heard of a giant — this must be one. From his knees downward his legs lost power of locomotion, and his tongue forebore to utter the smallest cry that a noisy boy could make.

A thick voice out of the darkness said:

"Ye little divil of a spalpeen, fat are ye doin' here in the rain — an' the river in flood — an' ye wid that woine can wid ye? Faix, it's woine they'll drink, till it bubbles out of their eyes an' ears!" At the same time a match was struck, showing up a great fiery-red head and beard, and a pair of eyes that looked like great fireballs in the matchlight.

The sight of that only too well-known red head and beard brought back activity to Benny's limbs. He would not have been half so terrified if it

had been the giant who used to say “Fee-fi-fo-fum.”

No; it was Red Mick!

With one ear-splitting scream that reached across to the very doors of the “Queen o’ Sheba,” Benny turned and fled up the rain-soaked embankment of the bridge, closely pursued by the ogre, who was calling to him in the wildest brogue.

Benny’s bootless feet sank into the red clay soil, and his faithful little hand still clung to the can that was, alas! lidless, as he was hatless.

“Will ye stop, will ye? Ah, faix, he’ll be over! Shure, the divvil’s in him. Ye murtherin’ little spalpeen, I’ll kill ye if ye don’t stop. It’s dhrouned he’ll be before me eyes, an’ me to blame. Will ye stop, ye little ommadahan? Arrah, shure, Benny, will ye stop!” the big navy cried, as coaxingly as his great rough voice would let him.

By this time they were both labouring hard and blown, for the embankment was steep and heavy. Fear, now, instead of weighting the boy’s limbs, seemed to lend him speed. Nearer and nearer he could hear the panting, quick-drawn breaths of the great red Irishman, who was almost bursting his lungs in his effort to save the terrified boy. But no word of coaxing or persuasion had the slightest effect. It was too late at the eleventh hour for this child tormentor to try to persuade one of his victims that he could really be kind or human. So on and on up that cruel, muddy bank panted boy and man, while under them swirled and raged the river in full flood.

At last, panting and breathless, Benny stood on the top, but only for an instant. Beneath him loomed the great bulk of the Irishman, almost within reach, within grasp.

“Be aisy now, Benny, an’ come home wid me. Fat are ye afeard of?”

Before Benny’s miniature mind loomed up a spotless little white tent he knew, though a kind Providence so far had kept him from seeing the interior, which for one thing he believed contained a strong box into which potato peelings were daily put with which to feed unfortunate little boys like himself.

“Arrah, now, Benny, it’s nearly dead I am; shure, I thought I’d never get ye. Come on home wid me.”

Once more a wild, unearthly yell came from the parapet of the unfinished bridge. Above the wild flood waters it echoed far and wide, and then, with one mad leap, the distracted child had sprung on to the big iron girder that spanned the new-made arches. At the same instant a cry of despair echoed from the lips of the man, who now saw too late what his love of tormenting the camp children had brought about.

Treading lightly as a cat, the child started to run across the bolt-studded girder, whilst far below the river foamed and rushed against the piers, whose masonry as yet had scarcely hardened.

Dumb and helpless, Mick stood on the newly-made railway line that in

a short time would be continued across the bridge, waiting to see the last of the tragedy which his own stupidity had brought about. The billy had fallen from Benny's hands, and Mick was distractedly waiting to see the boy follow. He was now half-way across. Only a miracle could save him from the flood that poured its boiling torrents beneath.

It came at last, but in a different way to that which Mick had anticipated.

With one tremendous whirling crash the whole structure gave before his eyes — the two great girders upended and heaved into the water, and, as near as he could see, the newly-built piers went with them. Through the inky darkness not a vestige of bridge could he see. Like a flash Benny had passed from the land of the living.

Mick put his hand up reverentially with the sign of the cross.

“May the saints rist his sowl — an' all the holy angels. Faith, he was the divil to run — so he was — an' the runnin's bin the death av him, so it has.”

And Mick went sadly forth to the camp of Macnamara to tell his sorrowful tale, and to acquaint the contractor with the disaster to his bridge.

\* \* \* \* \*

But that was not the end of Benny. Not by any means. Some boys have more lives than a cat.

When the morning broke, grey and murky, over a hundred men were gathered round to see what was left of the bridge, and the first thing that greeted their eyes was Benny, perched safely in the hollow of a broken arch, patiently awaiting deliverance, and bitterly lamenting the loss of his hat, which he mourned as “the only one he had to his name.”

But that and many other things were supplied him by the “Queen o' Sheba,” from whose side of the river he was rescued. From this time forth Benny was Bathsheba's sworn ally, her faithful henchman, ever ready at her beck and call to do her lightest bidding. Wet or dry, light or dark, he was ever at her service.

But all her wise counsel and gentle reasoning failed to lessen in him the fear of Red Mick, who more than ever, after Benny's adventure, became the terror of the kiddies at Macnamara's camp. Boys or girls, white or black, they had all been alike to Mick, before this night, food for his heartless amusement.

And many a story was handed from one to another of the hairbreadth escapes they had had at different times; of narrow escapes of capture and imprisonment. Still, none of them came up to the awful experience of Benny Barnett, when, as the children told with awe in the gloaming, Red Mick tipped up the great iron girders in trying to get at him!

## **A Baronet of Sloan Creek.**

### **Fred J. Broomfield**

Sloan Creek was a typical little bush township, with its one long stragling street, a gigantic dust-bin in summer, a slough of stygian horror in winter. This cheerful thoroughfare was fringed with the usual half-dozen shanties, some score or so of weatherboard cottages, the single respectable hotel, a bank, a lock-up with its one trooper's quarters, an "assembly" hall, a school-house, and a general store and post-office. Sloan Creek's visible population comprised a few besotted swagsmen and a pack of yelling, snapping, snarling curs. The township was asleep; for it was only 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and the great event of the day — the arrival and departure of Cobb's red-painted coach — lacked still an hour of happening. The drowsy hum of summer insect life hung in the air. A hiccoughed chorus droned forth from the open door of the "Cosmopolitan" — as the most imposing of the drinking-houses was named. The distant bumping of a springless dray, the clucking of a laying hen, the abrupt yelp of a spiritless dog startled from his slumbers, the ring of a chopper's axe, the whinny of a horse or the lowing of a cow were the only other sounds that punctuated with a staccato suddenness the universal quietude.

Sloan Creek was nested in a hollow of the hills. All round it rose tree-clad heights fledged to their bosky summits with towering eucalypts and close undergrowth. Nearer the township gaunt skeletons, the dry bones of a one-time vegetable life, reared their weird forms, and pointed grisly fingers at the sky. The stream which gave the place its name formed the arc of a circle's segments, of which the street was the chord. The water flowed sluggishly between its banks, a deep yellow current, leaving on each side a deposit of rich creamy mud of viscid consistency, for Sloan Creek was an alluvial field. The workings were all now deserted; and the shallow shafts, marked with their little heaps of cradle-tailings, were pockets of fern and bracken and marsh reeds. Higher up the creek, however, within sound but out of sight of the township, a few delvers for gold still wrought with sporadic gleams of fortune, and tinged the current of the stream with the chrome evidence of their intermittent exertions. One only among the diggers was a persistent worker. To him high-day or

holiday brought never a hint of idleness or revelry. He was, however, no anchorite, and no hater of his kind; albeit his reserve concerning his past was impregnable, and his silence about his own affairs was a proverb among the good folk whose business embraced that of five leagues of countryside dwellers in every direction.

Hugh Macdonald might have been any age between 40 and 50. His full-brown beard and moustache showed not a single grey hair. His head's hair of a darker brown was only slightly frosted where it grew above the temples. His features were clean-cut on a somewhat severe model, but his expression was kindly, almost benign. Tall and strongly knit, with an ample chest and broad, spreading shoulders, his every movement was characterised by conscious strength and an athletic grace. He was a man, every inch of him, and his dark grey eyes looked level with an undimmed honesty; they were mitigated, however, in their undeviating straightforwardness by the suggestion of a sense of Doric humour; for Hugh Macdonald was a Scot of the Scots, although his cultured voice betrayed nothing of his origin in the land o' cakes. If a man, his voice told also he had been born and bred a gentleman. His dress was the ordinary dress of a digger. A felt hat, of the style in former times known among bushmen as "Yankee," was carelessly slouched on his crisp-haired head. His shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled to the elbows, the neck of which was open at the throat, was made of rough blue frieze. His moleskin trousers, smeared with yellow clay and splashed by yellow water, were buckled around his waist by a leathern strap, and were tucked into the clay-daubed Wellington boots which completed his costume. He was resting now in a pause of his labour, with his hands on his digger's cradle, sun-tanned and perspiring in the hot sun's rays, listening to the remarks addressed to him by another man, who sat a little apart on the ground in the shade of a huge white umbrella lined with green. This second man was also named Hugh Macdonald, but he was dressed as a gentleman of a past period of fashion. His napless high hat was of Strand manufacture, but its style was of a bygone age. His faded frock-coat might have graced the form of a Regent-street dandy of some 30 years ago, and his frayed trousers the superfine legs of an ancient Mr. Mantalini; while his flowered waistcoat would have enraptured the heart of a Dickens or a Disraeli in the days of their sartorial magnificence, albeit his boots were those of a clod-hopper, and were built after the model immortalised by the great name of Prussia's puissant Blucher. There was something of the scholar about the bearing of this grotesquely-attired gentleman, though his gentility was of a seedy and snuffy character. Plentiful stains and grease-spots and marks of careless debauch were upon him. His face was old and bloated, wrinkled, and puffed. His lips hung pendulous; his cheeks were red and flabby; his nose was long and bulbous, and of a rich purple; his grey eyes were dim

and watery, almost hidden by their swollen lids; his broad high brow was corrugated as fire-wrinkled leather; and his large ears stood out from beneath his shapeless hat dropsically crimson. His hair was thick, and matted, and grey, his beard and heavy moustache were straggling and unkempt, his whole appearance was that of a man pitiably neglected, yet still there was about him an air as of better days, an aroma, as it were, of books, and the study, and of midnight oil — midnight oil, mayhap, too often latterly mingled with midnight potatoes and the atrocious fumes of unutterable tobacco. Even as he spoke to his stalwart namesake he emitted in punctuative pauses vile clouds of uncataloguable nicotian smoke.

If Macdonald the first was uncommunicable anent his past, and ever consistently silent about himself, Macdonald the second made ample amends. He had, he often said, nothing on earth to conceal. He was a gentleman and a scholar, the son of a Scotch baronet, the heir to a title and illimitable estates, to say nothing of a princely personality. Everybody knew how he had drifted to Sloan Creek in the earlier days, dragging at his chariot wheels a slatternly wife and a host of stairlike pledges of her love and constancy. Mrs. "Mac." was the female scandal of the township, and her raucous voice often competed in midnight madrigals with the frogs that croaked from the waterside rushes what time the lady referred to was (at her lord's urgent and earnest request) safely immured in the durance vile furnished by the township lock-up. Trooper O'Brien was ever an obliging man, and, being deaf as the proverbial post, little recked the pathetic plaint of the imprisoned fair. Besides, he took quite the pride of a mediaeval gaoler in the impregnability of his prison, and delighted in the extension of its hospitality to the erring wayfarer the while he dreamt of the incarceration of the desperate bushranger whom it was never fated he should capture and lay by the heels in his insignificant Newgate. Poor Mrs. "Mac." She was an illiterate virago and a shiftless drab, as well as an unbridled drunkard, it is true; but her heart beat fondly for her gifted "Hughie," and when she was not drinking stronger decoctions her religion, her politics, her economics, and all her social aspirations found powerful tannic expression in brewing for him strong billycans of strongest tea. The pathetic woman's whole aimless existence alternated spasmodically between tea and gin — but gin was oftener the god of her heart's idolatry. Peace to her ashes! The mortal remains of "Lady" Macdonald now lie mouldering in the quiet, tiny cemetery of the deserted alluvial field of Sloan Creek.

The baronetcy was a magnificent thing for the township, and the aureole thereof penetrated effulgently quite a few miles into the surrounding district. The baronet in futuro was an interesting personality to all and sundry. Sloan Creek was proud of him — would, in any case,

have been proud of him, even though he had never been a possible Sir Hugh, "Bart.," for the abbreviated form of the title was the township's distinctive reference. There was proprietorship in a some-day-to-be baronet of an essentially unique description. Come-by-chance diggers and casual bullock-drivers, the half-dozen publicans, the general store-keeper, who was also the postmaster, the trooper, the bank manager, the schoolmaster, the neighbouring farmers and sawmill hands besides their womenfolk and families, all called the dilapidated gentleman "Sir Hugh Macdonald" — thus post-obitally giving him his title of quasi-nobility. Nevertheless, Sloan Creek would still have honoured and esteemed highly their distinguished citizen, though heir to a baronetcy he had been none; for he could take his whisky like a man, and never flinch a hair's breadth; no single resident of all Sloan Creek had ever seen the gentleman the slightest bit "fou." But above and beyond all he was the chronicler of the district's happenings in the columns of the "Goldtown Advertiser," with which was incorporated (so ran the ambitious heading), "the Sloan Creek, Brimstone Gully, Biddledong Marsh, Coovap Swamp, and Mooranbangolong Times." "Sir" Hugh had the wonderful gift of the phrase, and was honoured accordingly by those to whom writing their signature to a cheque or a contract was a vast deal harder than a day's work with the pick and shovel, and by those also to whom keeping account books accurately offered no difficulty, but to whom composing a readable letter was a greater task than to Homer was the composition of the "Iliad."

Five years had passed since "Sir" Hugh had strayed with draggled-tailed wife and herd of half-wild progeny within the auriferous area of the alluvial field of Sloan Creek. The other Hugh Macdonald had dwelt in the diminutive Ophir's neighbourhood for only five months. He came none knew whence. He boasted no family, and he told no lies. His day's toil over, Macdonald the gold-searcher wandered down to the township, chatted pleasantly enough with whomsoever he met to chat with, took a hand at billiards with whomsoever chose to play, and was not above drinking a glass of toddy in a quiet, abstemious way. On "assembly" nights he would good-humouredly act as master of ceremonies, if importuned to do so; and he "never failed to give satisfaction to all," as Sloan Creek's phrase ran. "He danced like an angel," so the girls of the township averred who enjoyed the privilege of a waltz with the good-looking, well-mannered stranger; but he sought the favour of no sweetheart, and made no intimates. However, he soon attracted a Creekite to his company, and he became his persistent shadow — that is to say, whenever the shadow had any time to spare from his own pursuits and devices. The shadow was no less and no other than "Sir" Hugh Macdonald, "Bart.," who attached himself to his namesake with a pathetic fidelity. Similarity of name and a community of culture made

the association natural in some respects, but the men in themselves, in character, tastes, pursuits, and social behaviour, were wide as the poles asunder.

“Sir” Hugh Macdonald, “Bart.,” and Hugh Macdonald, digger, were, on this hot summer's afternoon, discussing the ever-present subject of the succession to the Scotch baronetcy; or, to be more precise, “Sir” Hugh was monologuing anent his “great expectations,” and the other Hugh was amusedly and interestedly listening.

“I am afraid,” said the “baronet,” pompously, “that I am getting a trifle too old to enjoy the rare delights of the chase; but still I can contemplate with luxurious anticipation the meditative pleasure, the holy and philosophic ecstasy, as it were, of casting a line in fair Dunruddock's pool. Dear old Izaak Walton, my friend, shall be my guide, teacher, and literary comforter when I return to bonnie Scotland, while you, in the torrid rays of an Austral sun, will still dabble in the waters of Sloan Creek, like a second Midas in the Lydian stream of mythic story, perspiring in the quest, Jason-like, if not for the golden fleece, at least to fleece some gold,” and the baronet presumptive gave a loud guffaw at the excellence of his own quippish conceit.

The other Macdonald smiled indulgently, and replied: “I think that Midas, according to the myth, deposited gold in the sands of fabled Pactolus when he went to bathe in that auriferous river, instead of finding any there. In fact, the river was not auriferous to the value of a cent's worth of ‘colours’ until the ass-eared old monarchial drinker of bull's blood went in for his morning dip. But Midas be hanged! Ixion must be my exemplar, and my old cradle can typify his wheel.”

With much more of learned discourse of a similar description intervals of rest in the stress of the digger's labour were filled by the alleged baronet, with huge satisfaction to himself, if not to his hearer. Poor lonesome “Sir” Hugh had a plentiful lack of subjects upon whom to inflict the pains and penalties of his rusting erudition, and his chance namesake was a positive godsend to him.

Meanwhile the township of Sloan Creek had awakened to a sense of its dignity and importance as a gold-mining centre. A bullock team was drawn up by the roadside flanking the general store. A dozen or so horsemen and boys, mounted on every varied condition of steed, from magnate's blood to scarecrow hack, came clattering up the street. Some dismounted abreast of the general store and hitched their nags to its verandah posts and to near-by fences; others rode into the hotel yard of the “Cosmopolitan,” in search of stabling and horse-feed. Two or three drays ploughed and pitched into the township's single street, navigating amid the shoals and rocks of ruts and stumps like Spanish caracks on a lee shore of West Indian reefs. The wastrels of the place gathered in little knots at the doors of the hostelries. Some of the womenfolk of the

township came out on their verandah-floors and looked expectantly up the road in the direction of twenty miles distant Goldtown. Children came, in straggling twos and threes, forth from the schoolhouse. Even the township's curs bestirred themselves. Quite suddenly, like a bolt "shot from the blue," the vivid vehicle of Cobb and Co. came swinging and rioting in, a flash of garish red coach and yellow dust, bit foam and horse-sweat and whip-lash, and wheels with spokes flaming as fire in the westering sunlight. The dusty driver tore from under the leathern apron strapped on the coach-roof Sloan Creek's undistinguished mailbag, and hurled it on to the verandah of the general store, following with his own long body and several parcels in his arms. Then he ploughed across the dusty rutted road into the bar of the "Cosmopolitan," an anticipated taste of beer accelerating his foot-steps. Thither went also the solitary passenger, a dust-grimed man in a city suit, his clean shave invisible through much deposit of road material. With a wash and a brush-up he would have looked exactly what he really was, namely, a smart lawyer's clerk from the metropolis, a fellow with the know-all air of Solomon and the perky features of Joseph Chamberlain. This traveller "shouted" for Cobb's driver with all the magnificence of manner proper to a Persian prince; and then, turning half round to the one lounge in the bar, demanded with an impudent swagger and in a cross-examining bellow whether there were any "party knocking round with the name of Hugh Macdonald."

"Yes," the man responded, "there was the 'Bar'net' — him that wrote things for the 'Goldtown Advertiser,' and them sort."

"That's the very cove!" said the legal sprig, clapping his thigh with a dirty right hand, and liberating a cloud of dust which rose as smoke sneezingly into the air. Then the young fellow finished his whisky-and-soda, and ordered a room as a millionaire would engage a special train. His manners were magnificent and efflorescent, but his soul was of generous calibre. He "shouted" for the bar-lounge, asked the young lady who served to "join him, miss," treated Cobb's driver a second time despite that worthy's independent expostulation, and treated himself. When the driver brought in the legal young twig's portmanteau, the bar-lounge again rejoiced, and the smart Solon from the city gave them a toast: —

"Here's the health of Sir Hugh Macdonald, Bart.!" Yes, he called the gentleman "Bart.," just like a Sloan Creekite born and bred — and, by all that was wonderful, there was the very man, accompanied by Hugh Macdonald, the other. The "baronet's" entry was impressive and imperial. His appearance was like that of the King at the opening of his trusty and well-beloved Parliament.

"Gentlemen!" began "Sir" Hugh, in his second-best oratorical voice, "Gentlemen, language makes me a pauper in my thanks for this high

distinction at your hands. Gentlemen, I feel as though I had been cut off with a verbal shilling, and my gratitude for your kindness, which calls loudly for a golden responsiveness, has at its dispensation only the base copper of a common courtesy.”

The legal spriglet took off his dusty bowler and bowed to the ground. An Australian of city birth and breeding, he cast about him mentally for terms wherewith to address a member of the British aristocracy, or, at least, a baronet of James the First's creation, no less; and stumbled on the following, picked up somewhere from an obsolete fashionable letter-writer of great-grand-motherly antiquity:

“Sir Hugh Macdonald, Bart., your most humble obedient servant to command, William Makepeace Thackeray Grounsell, managing clerk of the firm of Messrs. Smith, Brown, Robinson, Jones, and Smith, Attorneys, Solicitors, and Proctors of the Supreme Court of New South Wales;” and then, with a hasty concession of exaggerated politeness to the rank of the man whom he addressed, and another sweeping, Osric-like bow, he added, with stentorian rhetorical flourish: “Sir Hugh Macdonald, Bart., Dei Gratia!”

This was too much for the other Macdonald, who escaped into the billiard-room, coping with a vehement desire to roll on the floor and get rid of his repressed feelings. “Sir” Hugh, however, sustained the situation with a bearing of serene dignity. Truly, his fame was no figment. Nevertheless, it was in the power of know-all Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray Grounsell, “managing clerk of the firm of Messrs. Smith, Brown, Robinson, Jones, and Smith, Attorneys, Solicitors, and Proctors of the Supreme Court of New South Wales,” to disturb to its foundations the superb self-possession of even so great a man as “Sir” Hugh Macdonald, “Bart.” The old baronet in far-away Scotland was at last actually dead and indisputably buried; and the Sloan Creek correspondent of the “Goldtown Advertiser” was sought out by Mr. Grounsell's principals as the rightful heir to the title, estates, and bequeathed property. The poor Bart's” brain appeared to be in a whirl, now that the event so long talked about had been really and truly brought to pass. He gasped and tottered forward, to be caught in the strong arms of the other Macdonald just as he came out of the billiard-room, whither he had retired some time before. A few potent imbibitions soon, however, put the new “baronet” on his pins, and a messenger was hurried off to the Maison Macdonald, a none too lordly slab hut at the other end of the township, to convey the joyful tidings to her ladyship and the scions of the noble house. Sad to relate, “Lady” Macdonald celebrated her accession to that title in the small but secure lock-up of Sloan Creek. “Sir” Hugh was, however, magnificent. He took absolute control of the “Cosmopolitan,” and treated the entire township to whatsoever it fancied in the way of cool refreshment. Trooper O'Brien tarnished his reputation

and soiled his uniform in the dust which lay thick under the long table in the hotel's commercial-room. The bank manager forgot every arithmetical operation save that of addition. The general store-keeper became a general consumer of liquor, and sorted his drinks with greater despatch than he did his letters in his reversionary capacity of postmaster. The school teacher on that one unique occasion was no example for his pupils.

The whole company became hilariously merry, and the fun waxed fast and furious. Two men were, among the jovial throng, commendably prudent and abstemious: to wit, the landlord, with his cunning grey-green eye on the main chance, and Macdonald the other, with his eye on his deliriously exhilarated namesake. A time came at length when everybody became maudlin after his kind, and some became cantankerous. A very few became unmanageably and murderously quarrelsome. Mr. Grounsell, insignificant city shaveling though he was, carried himself like a whisky-cask which had been previously seasoned by amontiladosherry. He grew neither maudlin nor cantankerous, but became outrageously obsequious to "Sir" Hugh, flamboyantly complimentary and attentive to the lady who served the drinks, and bitterly sarcastic on the rest of the company. His sarcasm ran, however, along lines followed by nobody but the bank manager and the school teacher, and by the latter vaguely. The nastiest-tempered man in the room was a sullen fellow named Sampson a huge, hulking giant, desperately poor, desperately lazy, and always desperately thirsty. Nobody liked him, and he hated everybody. "Sir" Hugh was his generous-handed host, but he hated "Sir" Hugh that night more than he hated anybody on earth, including even his half-starved drudge of a wife or the dog that he fed on boot-kicks. Sampson hated "Sir" Hugh for this new good fortune that had befallen him. Now, Sloan Creek was a quiet place, a law-abiding, good-humoured, hail-fellow-well-met, peace-on-earth sort of township. The trooper's berth was a sinecure, although he was never done dreaming of outrage and bushranging, murder, and sudden death. The vision of sudden death was in that room, however — and the one representative of the strong arm of the law, Trooper O'Brien, was slumbering peacefully in the dust under the long table. Grounsell said something to Sampson about his red hair, or his scowling face, the insulting sarcasm of which was broad and hot enough for even that dense-witted ruffian to understand; and in a minute he had whipped out a long sheath-knife and made a slash at the lawyer's branchlet. Sheath-knives were common enough in Sloan Creek, though few troubled to carry them about to a convivial evening. Their use was, however, usually confined to cutting string, or tobacco, or whip-sticks. Never were they used by Sloan Creekites on the carcass of a man and a brother. The legal sprig from Sydney slipped nimbly aside, and the savage blow spent itself in the

resistless gloom of much tobacco smoke. But the bully in Sampson was on top. He raged and swore and stormed. His face grew red, he spluttered and foamed at the mouth; his giant chest heaved again with unrestrained fury. The "baronet," clothed in the invisible divinity of inherited titular distinction, approached the brute with tipsy gravity, mollifying intent, and an outstretched expostulatory arm. It was a second edition of good King Canute and the incoming tide. Sampson's hairy arm went up like a flash of lightning, and like a second flash it as swiftly descended. "Sir" Hugh fell back — but not stabbed to the heart. Quick as Sampson was, the other Macdonald was quicker. He gripped the hairy wrist in a clamp as of steel, and made the giant writhe again. Sampson dropped the sheath-knife as though it were a piece of searing iron fresh from the forger's fire. The other Macdonald marched the fellow off and locked him up for the night in the "Cosmopolitan's" stable, in order to give duty-neglecting Trooper O'Brien a chance to sober up. When he returned in search of the "baronet," he found that distinguished ornament of King James the First's creation in a meditative mood.

"You saved my life," he said quite simply, never once referring to a mythological deity.

"Let us both go home," said the other Macdonald, just as simply. And they went out into the clear starlight, and walked together down the one street of the township.

"You saved my life," again remarked the "baronet."

"Now we are quits," said the other Macdonald. "Ah! I see you don't remember — and has time so changed me? Why, Davie, we are only about the same age!"

"Great God!" sharply cried the "baronet." "Little Hughie! little Hughie! My own boyhood's chum, my foster-brother, my fellow-pupil, the companion of a hundred fights and frolics. The lad whom my father taught. Why, man, I dreamed you were dead years ago; although I once saved you from a watery grave in Dunruddock's Pool."

"Is that why you changed your name and took up a claim to the title?" said the other.

"Tut, man! It was done at first more in fun than in earnest. But it grew earnest enough as time went on, and I thought you dead. At last I began to believe I was Hugh Macdonald, and not David Drummond, son of the old Aberdeen professor of classics. Anyhow, it would have served your father right if I had gone home and claimed the title and estates, after the way in which he treated you. But I do not believe I should ever have carried it through, after all! Who knows? And now you are alive — well, everything is all right. But Alice — is she——"

"Yes, she is dead!" and the other Macdonald sighed with a great weariness.

"And now you will go?" asked "Sir" Hugh.

“Yes,” said he very simply, as a mere matter of course.

“Ah! well,” said “Sir” Hugh, “it is all finished. My silly reign is ended!”

“Not so,” responded the other. “Stay here, keep your own counsel, and still be a baronet of Sloan Creek.”

## A Daughter of Her Country.

### Isabel Grant

“Daddy, we're Americans, you en Mummy, en me, ain't we?”

“Yes, Maidie, true-blue Americans.”

“ 'Cause we live in Australia now, it won't make us into Australians, will it, Daddy?”

There was a look of such deep anxiety on the beautiful little face that Stanners hid his amusement, and replied gravely, “I guess not, Maidie, I guess not. Once an American always an American. You're American-born, little daughter, and nothing can alter that fact. If I'd taken you over with me when I accepted the managership of the Bundamurra Export Company — but I couldn't, you know, because Mummy was ill, and you were such a tiny baby — you'd still be an American.”

“That's a blessing. I'd be drefful sorry ef I couldn't stay an American,” said the child, as, with a sigh of deep content, she settled herself more comfortably on her father's knee.

It was now nearly two months since Maidie and her mother had arrived in Bundamurra in tropical Queensland, but Stanners was still as interested in his little daughter as a child in a new toy. Everything about her was a revelation to him; he never grew tired of investigating the working of her childish mind, which, indeed, was of no common order; though he was careful not to let her see his curiosity, for she was sensitive, he had found to a degree. Each day discovered to him some quaint or winsome trait, and daily his love and tender wonder grew.

At length Maidie twisted round and gazed up into his face with the sweet, wise look that it startles us sometimes to see in a child's eyes.

“Daddy,” she said slowly, “I've been thinking. I was a baby when you left us — where did the weeny teeny girl go to what growed up to be me? Is she losted, Daddy? Or is God just keeping her somewhere?”

Stanners clasped the child closer to him, feeling with a pang that in those six years so irretrievably gone he had indeed lost the sweetest years of his daughter's life, and he grudged the coming years too, that would so quickly rob him of the remainder of her childhood. He did not speak, and the little brain was soon on a new problem.

“Daddy, why did you come over to Australia?”

“Some people might think,” Stanners gave a whimsical smile over the child's head, “that it was because they offered me this position at a bigger screw than I was getting at home, but what do you think about it, Maidie? You puzzle it out for yourself. Do you think I came to make money?”

“Of course not,” cried the child indignantly, “you could get heaps of money in America. Mummy says you're real smart.” She paused and looked earnestly at him. “I guess you came over here 'cause you were sorry they didn't know how to do things properly in Bundamurra, en so you came to teach them.”

Stanners broke into an involuntary laugh, which he checked at the grieved surprise on the small face.

“You've struck it, Maidie! Quite right, O.K., my dear; I wanted to show them what a genuine American hustle was like — ” his lips set in a grim line — “and James P. Stanners is the man to show them, I reckon.”

Bundamurra's business men could have endorsed this statement, and would have done it perhaps with some bitterness. “Hard as nails” was but a mild way of expressing the opinion they held of “the Boss.” Maidie's father and Bundamurra's manager were two widely different men.

The little one was satisfied. She lay back for a long time happily, and thought with pride what an altogether wonderful father she had found in this new land, but at last a fresh thought came to disturb her serenity.

Maidie went to the Girls' Grammer School, which this week, like the city itself, was passing through a time of mild excitement at the prospect of a visit from the Governor of the State. The State School pupils were to join the public procession to greet his Excellency; the Grammer School scholars, as befitted their dignity, were to be visited by the vice-regal party — the distinction is emblematic of the way in which the two schools are held in democratic Australia.

The National Anthem was being assiduously practised by the pupils of all the schools, and it was the singing of the anthem that formed the subject of Maidie's cogitation as she sat silently on her father's knee. Ought she, an American girl, to join with the Australians in singing “God Save the King?” She determined to submit the question to her father, and, as is the way of children at times, she set about doing it in a round-about fashion.

“God Save the King” is the Britishers' Anthem, isn't it, Daddy?” Her voice broke the reverie into which Stanners had fallen.

“Right, Maidie.”

“En the ‘Tar 'Pangled Banner’ is ours, isn't it?” Now and then Maidie's tongue got twisted over the intricacies of speech.

“Correct again; but where did you learn about anthems, pet?”

“Captain White 'splained all about them to me coming over on the steamer; en he told me when I heard the Britishers sing ‘God Save the

King' I must sing 'Tar 'Pangled Banner.' Had I ought to, Daddy?"

Stanners gave a short laugh; he could not help it, in spite of Maidie's evident displeasure. He did not dream that anything lay behind the child's question, and the quaint conceit amused him.

"Why, certainly, you little Yank," he said as soon as he could get his face straight, "keep up your end of the stick, my dear! The 'Star Spangled Banner' every time that you hear 'God Save the King,' of course. Hold the 'Stars and Stripes' waving on top of the 'Union Jack' that's the business, I guess, of every true American."

"I can sing the 'Tar 'Pangled Banner' en 'Hail Columbia,' en heaps of American songs. Captain White taught me, and he just reckons I lick creation."

The last words came with irresistibly comical, yet unconscious, imitation of the bluff tones of the Yankee skipper. Stanners's laugh again rang out.

The child looked at him uncertainly.

"Never mind, Maidie; never mind, my girl. Dad didn't mean to laugh at you. Let's hear you sing the 'Star Spangled Banner.' "

She slid off his knee, put her heels together with military precision, her bits of hands stiffly by her sides, and stood an adorable little soldier — in the position of "attention." At the first note Stanners looked at her in sheer delighted surprise. The voice rose clear and true, pure and sweet as the song of a bird. Though childish in tone, it was full and rounded — strangely powerful for such a tiny singer. The words were sometimes curiously mangled, but the tune was note-perfect. It was plain she had a good ear, as well as a good voice.

Pleased with her father's absorbed interest, Maidie sang on, one patriotic melody following another, as if, like Wordsworth's Highland Lass, "her song could have no ending," but at last the thin, peevish voice of her mother — an invalid, who sad to relate, did not fully understand the workings of her own babe's mind — broke the spell.

"Maidie, come in; you haven't prepared your lessons for to-morrow. Come in, this very instant."

A quick change, pathetic to see, passed over the mobile face as the child obeyed without a word.

Mrs. Stanners came languidly on to the verandah.

"I wonder you encourage her in that nonsense," she said, as she sank into the chair he drew up for her. "Don't make her worse than she is already."

"Worse!" Stanners drew a quick breath, but checked the reply rising to his lips. He must have patience with poor Julia. When she had recovered from the effects of her journey, when she had become accustomed to her new home, she would be a different woman. Not even to himself did he dare to confess that the delicate, gentle girl he had left had developed

into the self-centred hypochondriac. But the child made up for everything — he would be patient with her mother for Maidie's sake.

“I say, Julia,” he said after a pause, “how in the world did you manage to turn our baby into such a rabid little patriot, such a red-hot Yankee?”

“Don't blame me,” she replied in a tired voice, “it was all the doing of the captain and officers of the *Alcestis*. There were very few passengers, you know, and Maidie was the only child on board. I was sick most of the way, and so was that idiot of a girl I brought with me. I am sure when I found they were making such a pet of the child I was thankful to get her taken off my hands. But they went too far; they stuffed her full of anti-British ideas, told her she would need to show these Australian Britishers that America was the biggest nation on earth, and goodness knows what rubbish besides. They taught her every American air they knew, and used to have her up on the table singing them till they fairly turned the child's brain on the subject of the Britishers. She's fit to say or do anything. I wonder she hasn't shown it to you sooner, but I expect she has been too occupied with her new surroundings to say much yet. I'm sick to death of it, I can tell you, and I hope you'll put your foot down on it.”

Stanners did not speak for a moment, and she continued fretfully: —

“I tell you what, Jim, I'm half afraid to have Maidie in the drawing-room when any of my visitors call, for she is really half-crazed on this point, and I'm in constant dread what she might say. She is just the child to enjoy making a martyr of herself for the pure love of the thing, and she would not think twice about coming out with some of the dreadful anti-British sentiments those men taught her. I guess if she did the ladies might resent it. How do you think they'd take it, Jim? You wouldn't like the situation yourself.”

But the husband was not disturbed.

“They'd only laugh,” he said soothingly. “Don't fret, Ju,” he said, “the Britisher all the world over is so cocksure that his country is ‘number one’ among the nations that he is only tickled at opposition. But I say, Ju, where did the kiddy get the voice from? I never heard anything like it in one so young! Why! I reckon it must have carried half-way down the street.”

Those who knew the face of James P. Stanners in its keen, hard, business aspect only would scarcely have recognised it now in the fatherly pride that transformed it. He chuckled to himself at the child's aggressive patriotism, but he said no more about it to his wife; it would only irritate her.

As for the question about the National Anthem, he dismissed it from his mind, and did not guess that his laughing endorsement of Captain White's ironical order had given the needed spur to a resolution that only wanted the seal of his approval to become law for little Maidie. Her course was now clear, her resolution fixed. Daddy thought just like

Captain White; so it behoved Maidie to show that she was prepared to obey. The other girls at the school might sing "God Save the King" to greet the Governor, but she, as sole representative of the land of the "Stars and Stripes" — "God's country," as Captain White's phrase went — must uplift her voice in the "Star Spangled Banner" and so keep the "Stars and Stripes" flying on top.

When she went to school next morning she did not speak of her intention to her young companions. She still felt nearly a stranger among them, and there was, besides, a certain delicate, innate reserve in the young American that prevented her making a confidant, but her mind was made up.

The teachers, she thought, being Australians and so British, and naturally prejudiced against Americans, might punish her — and Maidie was a timid child, full of awe of the powers that be — but she admitted no idea of wavering. The blood of far-off Puritan ancestors was in her veins; there was not a coward drop in all her slender little body. To older minds the matter might seem trivial, ridiculous; a child's purer vision sees no difference between small and great. Right is right; wrong is wrong. Black and white have no merging, no affinity; for children there is no half-way house of grey.

"You quite understand, girls, I hope." The head mistress was giving her final directions — his Excellency was expected every moment. "As the vice-regal party enter the room you will rise to your feet. When they reach the platform Miss West will play the first few bars of 'God Save the King,' then strike the chord. Now remember," Miss Sutherland spoke impressively, "at the sound of the chord you must all start together; nothing gives a worse effect than a ragged beginning, so be very careful, girls; every voice start on the first note."

The desks, rising one above the other, were filled with white-robed maidens, dainty as a flock of snowy sea birds; their tropic-pale faces touched with a faint tinge of excitement, their eyes bright with expectation. Maidie was there, very fair and sweet, in the front row, but what an anxious heart was beating beneath the new embroidered white frock! Miss Sutherland looked very stately and imposing in a handsome dark silk, and the young American, to whose childish mind she was an incarnation of British power, kept her eyes fixed on her with a species of fascinated awe.

The sound of wheels was heard, and the air seemed to grow tense as Miss Sutherland moved to the door with a silken rustle. Steps came along the tiled hall, a group of men appeared in the doorway, the girls rose to their feet, Miss West struck the first note of the prelude, when clear and high on the hushed air there rose: —

"Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light

What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming.”

Poor over-strung Maidie, in her one-ideal absorption, forgot Miss Sutherland's precise instructions, and, believing the first note of music to be the signal for the anthem to commence, she launched with one great breath of desperation upon the “Star Spangled Banner.”

The vice-regal party halted, a paralysis fell on the music teacher, her hands dropped limply off the keys, the head mistress, stunned by the unfortunate contretemps, stood for a moment aghast, while those two lines poured out a flood of perfect melody. Then the strange stillness arrested the spell-bound singer, her voice faltered, broke, and trailed away into a sobbing childish quaver.

“The chord! The chord! at once.”

The insistent whisper of the head mistress galvanised Miss West into life. She struck frantically at the chord, and the girls in a panic swooped upon the note. “God Save the King” rang through the room with an energy, a fire, a verve, these walls had never before heard. One could almost fancy that the simple school girls had felt, and answered, a subtle national challenge, so defiantly, yet exultantly, did the music rise and swell.

The Governor, a tall, soldierly, impassive man, stood in courteous attention, showing neither surprise nor amusement.

The city gentlemen who had come with the vice-regal party, as they joined in the Anthem looked at each other with a queer expression in their eyes. They all knew whose daughter was the daring little singer, and as Stanners, president of the Chamber of Commerce, caught those glances it half seemed to him that there was something of veiled antagonism in them. He felt a sudden sense of being alien, aloof, from these men, whom he had met daily for six years in the ordinary, familiar course of business. But there was no sign of this on his face, nor of the vexation that he felt towards Maidie for this awkward interruption to the harmony of the vice-regal visit. His face was set in its usual saturnine lines, his grey eyes were as expressionless as ever, but his small daughter's instinct was not at fault when one fleeting glance in his direction told her that he was angry with her, and her heart sank with apprehension.

At the close of the anthem his Excellency spoke briefly. Sir George was not an orator, but there was a curious quality in his voice, something magnetic in his quiet personality that drew the young faces to his in a stilled attention.

The usual introductions, speeches, and formal ceremonies were gone through, and the Governor turned to go. As he did so his eyes fell on Maidie's beautiful troubled face. He smiled slightly, and glanced at Miss Sutherland.

Poor Maidie! she wished the floor would open and swallow her up as she caught the exchange of glances. Her heart began to beat in heavy throbs; if her father deserted her she was indeed lost, for she placed no limit to the power of these "Britishers." Oh! for some place to hide in; some tender, sheltering arms to run into. Daddy, her own daddy, had forsaken her!

The head mistress understood the Governor's glance. It would be as well, she thought, to make an explanation.

With an apologetic smile she said: "Maidie Stanners is a new little scholar, your Excellency. She has just come from America, and I expect the poor child did not realise that she was singing her own National Anthem instead of ours. Had she waited like the others for the chord, her little slip would have passed unnoticed." The low distinct voice was audible over the room.

Stanners' face cleared, for he had during these last few moments been collecting uneasily the conversation he had held with Maidie on the subject of anthems, and he feared he was himself to blame for the foolish position of affairs.

Sir George walked up to the desks. He placed a firm hand under Maidie's soft chin and lifted it up.

"So that's how it happened, my wee American!"

The eyes of the man and the child met. The brown eyes, steady, observant, and kindly; the childish blue eyes, timid, and yet intrepid, too. There was something behind that gaze, thought the Governor, whose training had taught him to read faces.

"That was how it happened, eh?" There was a question now, a command in the words.

The child's eyes wandered to the stern, handsome countenance of the head mistress, that seemed to say, "Yes! yes! That was how it happened, of course. Say 'Yes,' Maidie, at once;" then to her father, who was evidently waiting for the same answer; to the inquisitive, though not unfriendly faces of the other gentlemen; and finally returned slowly to her questioner. The lovely face whitened to the quivering lips, but the indomitable spirit, the heritage of her New England blood, shone in the blue eyes.

"No, I can't say that, 'cause" — the sweet voice shook — "'cause it wouldn't be the truth. I knew we had ought to sing 'God Save the King,' but I'm not a Britisher" — the golden head was lifted a little — "I'm an American, so I must sing the 'Tar 'Pangled Banner' and keep the 'Tars and Tripes' a' flying on top of the 'Union Jack', Captain White told me;" but here Maidie's courage gave way, and she broke into a flood of tears.

The grave brown eyes grew soft as a woman's as his Excellency lifted the small, sobbing figure in his arms, and, heedless of the curious

onlookers, said gently: —

“Tell me all about it, my brave little American,” and Maidie, looking up into the understanding eyes, told him all the story — the momentous problem of duty that had vexed her young mind.

“Children,” said his Excellency at length, putting the child to the floor, but still keeping one kind arm round her. “My dear girls. Maidie has given you all a lesson. Yes, and to us older folks, too! This little child has nobly dared to take the difficult path of truth, when the easiest, the pleasantest, the expected path was one of falsehood. She has made a mistake, as even grown-up people can do, my dear girls, when they act from mistaken ideas of duty, but Maidie is so young, and has come so lately from her distant American home, that we need not be surprised at what she did, especially as she only followed what she thought was real advice given in earnest — not a bit of sailor's fun. Maidie will see this herself by-and-bye, and when she is older she will understand, too, what is meant by international courtesy. The Americans and the British are, after all is said and done, of one blood — and blood is thicker than water, isn't it, girls? The ‘crimson tie of kinship’ that we talk a great deal of out here is between us. The ‘Stars and Stripes’ and the ‘Union Jack’ can fly together without quarrelling which is on top. But,” he paused and looked steadily, earnestly, at the thoughtful faces before him, “my dear girls, will you let me say to you one thing? — love truth, follow it, and keep it as your most cherished possession. And now I must bring my little sermon to a close.”

A smile lighted up the seriousness of his kind face.

“You all appreciate, I know, what a brave thing Maidie Stanners has done; she is, you see, no unworthy daughter of the land that produced George Washington.”

Then to the admiring and half-shy delight of the school-girls he bent down and raised Maidie's hands to his lips with old-fashioned courtesy.

“Good-bye, little Maidie; I congratulate America, I congratulate your parents on owning such a daughter, and perhaps — who knows? — if your voice fulfils its promise, Australia may one day be congratulated on sending out another world's singer in its adopted daughter, Maidie Stanners.”

That evening as Maidie nestled in her father's arms she whispered:

“You aren't angry with me, are you, Daddy?”

“Angry!” Stanners' voice broke. He drew the little figure closer to him, and there was no need for words.

## **Stockings — The Story of a Mare.**

### **A. K. Morrison**

From the moment that she was knocked down to him in the Scrubby Flat pound-yard, for the sum of £2 12s 6d, Mr. Peter Jeffs had doubts as to the wisdom of his purchase. Certainly, the mare was in low condition, and ought to improve, but at the same time it was undeniable that there was great room for improvement. Her rough, staring coat was a dark liver chestnut, with great white stockings that came up well over her knees, and a large blaze that straggled over her Roman nose and half the side of her face. But, in spite of the thick, ungainly shoulders and great ragged hips, the legs beneath were clean and sinewy, and there was a hidden something that peeped forth now and then from the mild brown eyes, to give the lie to the rest of her personal appearance. Mr. Jeffs slipped an old greenhide halter over the mare's head, whistled to his heeler, and, climbing on to his old hack, started off on his seven-mile ride home, the new purchase jogging docilely behind.

For the next four months Stockings — for this was the name the ugly chestnut acquired with her new master — enjoyed a rather varied and changeful existence. She was turned out at first in a small paddock adjoining the homestead, in company with a stunted yearling pony and half a dozen head of poddy calves, but through she contrived every day to get through her allowance of “cockie's chaff,” the condition that Mr. Jeffs fondly hoped to see adorning her gaunt frame seemed as far off as ever. In the meanwhile all attempts at making her useful were doomed to failure, for she proved worse than a bad hack, inclined to buck, while her career in harness only lasted just as long as it took her to kick Mr. Jeffs's best sulky into fragments of various sizes and shapes. Even the turf was tried, but, alas! there, too, Stockings failed ignominiously, for she ran unplaced in the Scrubby Flat Handicap, of fifteen shillings (the second horse to receive half a crown from the stake), though she had the services of Mr. Jeffs' eldest in the saddle. This was the last straw on the patient camel's back, and the mare was returned to the company of the poddies, where in all probability she would have remained to this day if fate, in the person of Jimmy, the lad driver of the Rocky Dam mail, had not deposited a buyer at Mr. Jeffs' feet.

“This bloke,” said Jimmy, whose words were mostly few and to the point, “was wire inspectin' for old Clark, and got the sack for gettin' on the beer. He wants a crock to go home on. Think you can fix him up? You mostly have one or two for sale, so that's why I laid him on.” A look passed between the speaker and Mr. Jeffs as the latter replied: “Think so; he ought to be able to pick something to suit him out of my lot.”

The stranger, who had hung his head rather sheepishly while Jimmy was describing his needs, now descended from the coach, dragging out after him an old and much-battered hunting saddle, with a small swag tied clumsily in front. He might, perhaps, have been 25, slightly below the middle height, but so extraordinarily thin that one was surprised at not hearing his bones creak as he walked. The driver received his fare, and the coach moved on, the two lean horses having apparently come to the conclusion that it would be less painful to put their much-wrung shoulders into the collars again than to stand any more flogging, a matter which usually took them some little time to decide.

Mr. Jeffs turned to the stranger.

“Better come and have a drink of tea,” said he, cheerfully, “and then we'll have a look through the horses. Bill” — this to his son and heir, who was standing with his mouth open, staring at the stranger as though he were a new variety of his species — “run them horses up, not forgettin' the chestnut mare and the pony in the calf paddock.”

But when they stood in the stockyard the stranger proved harder to please than Mr. Jeffs had hoped.

“Them would never do,” he said of the two first shown him.

“They're a sight too wild for me. I can't ride much, you know. But what about the chestnut mare?” pointing to Stockings, who, like the Arab steed in the poem, “was standing meekly by.” “She seems quiet, and” — plaintively — “my missus that's dead had a great fancy for a chestnut. What'll you take for her, now?”

Mr. Jeffs considered for a moment.

“Well,” he said, “I was askin' twelve quid, but seein' as you're stuck” (he would have despoiled an angel of its tail feathers had he found it entangled in one of his barbed wire fences) “I'll say a tenner, and we'll call it a deal.”

It was a deal. Ten minutes later the stranger had climbed heavily on the ugly chestnut's back, and was riding through the rails with a receipt in his pocket in place of ten golden sovereigns. But he had hardly gone a hundred yards when he wheeled the mare round and shouted: “What do you call her?”

“Stockin's,” roared Mr. Jeffs, “'count of her laigs.” This appeared to satisfy the stranger, for he rode on without comment.

“Well, of all the fools I ever seen,” said Mr. Jeffs to his better half, who had watched the proceedings from afar, and now came up to view the

spoils of battle, "he beats the lot. He give me a tenner for the chestnut mare without as much as looking in her mouth or trying to beat me down a sixpence, an' now on the top of it all he stops and asks me what I call her. I suppose he thinks she'll come when he calls her. Regular balmy, that's what he is."

"Don't be too sure of that, Pete," answered his spouse. "That chap wasn't quite what he seemed. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he had got the better of the deal now."

Mr. Jeffs turned away angrily, muttering something uncomplimentary to wives in general and his own in particular; but had he been able to see some couple of miles down the dusty road he might perhaps have been led to view the matter in a new light. The stranger had dismounted, and was lying on his back on the grass by the roadside, rolling in convulsions of laughter, while the mare stood by, eyeing her master with mild surprise. When he had sufficiently recovered himself he stood up, kissed the mare on the point of her pink nose, then, gathering up his reins, he swung himself into the saddle with all the ease of a practised horseman, and with a cheery "Come on, old girl!" started off at a steady trot down the road.

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Even on an off day a city racecourse is as pleasant a place as can be found to spend a few spare hours and a little spare cash. But Mr. Jeffs was not thinking of these advantages as he paid his modest shilling and boldly invaded the flat. He had heard that they carried on racing better in the metropolis than at Scrubby Flat, and though he doubted he had come to see.

He climbed on to one of the steeple fences opposite the grandstand, and seated himself comfortably just as the bell was ringing for the first hurdie race, and the field — a string of glossy thoroughbreds and gally-clad riders — filed out on to the course. His right-hand neighbour, a rather genteel-looking personage, was speaking to a friend in the tightly-packed crowd below.

"They're all 'ere, Biff," he said, viewing the competitors with a critical eye. "No, Ellis's mare ain't out yet. I'd 'a' backed 'er, but I couldn't get better than fours. She ought to be a 'undred to one chance, the outsider of the lot, comin' down from the country without a performance; but they always rush anything Ellis rides. Look, there she is!"

Mr. Jeffs' eyes involuntarily followed the direction in which the speaker pointed, and were at once rivetted on a sight which held him rigid with amazement, for not twenty yards away, trotting leisurely down the straight, was Stockings, the mare that he had sold not six months ago in his own stockyard for ten pounds, with the man to whom he had sold

her sitting firmly on her back. Mr. Jeffs kicked the solid timber beneath him to make sure he was not asleep, and looked again; but there was no mistake, though now the mare's coat shone like polished copper over the swelling muscles. Her rider was unchanged, except, perhaps, that he looked even leaner than before, but his racing kit fitted him to a nicety, and he sat his mount in a manner that showed this was not his maiden ride over the battens. Mr. Jeffs took thought unto himself, and though he did not visibly increase in height, he churned over the events of the past in his mind, and saw the chance of a coup-de-main. He alone of all that vast crowd knew that the mare was worthless. "If she couldn't win at Scrubby Flat, it's not to be expected that she'll win here," reasoned he, "and though that chap can ride a bit better than I thought, I'll bet a bit he can't give my Bill much start. An' a jumpin' race, too! Why, Bill couldn't get the old crock over a middle rail. I'll have a bit out of these Sydney blokes, cunnin' as they think they are."

Then the man on his right spoke again.

"No, I won't let her run against me. Hamerchure or no, 'e's the best man we've got over the sticks, an' anything he rides is good enough for me to back. I've got a fiver 'ere that I scored on Flyaway las' Saturday, an' I'm going to do the lot in on 'er. Can I still get fours, Bill?"

"No, you can't," replied his friend. "They're rushin' 'er like free drinks. It'll be take six to four in 'alf a shake."

Mr. Jeffs had made up his mind. Here was the chance he had been waiting for. He turned to his neighbour and said in a loud whisper: "I'll lay you twenty quid to a fiver if that's all you want."

The genteel one and his friend turned and surveyed this daring layer of odds with interest. Evidently the survey did not altogether please them, for the former answered with some little asperity: "Don't get too funny, old rooster; it ain't good for the 'ealth."

"Funny, eh?" said Mr. Jeffs sourly, and producing a roll of notes. "I s'pose my money's as good as yours." There was no denying this, and it appeared to put a new complexion on the matter.

"Good enough! Keep yer 'air on," said the would-be backer of the mare. "If you mean biz, I'm 'avin' it. Oo'll 'old the stuff? Bill will, won't you, Bill?"

"No, Bill won't," said the cautious Mr. Jeffs. "You don't know me, an' I don't know you. Let each 'ang to his own." Saying this, he selected two crisp new ten-pound notes and carefully replaced the remainder where they had come from, while his opponent displayed five sovereigns in a somewhat dirty palm.

"All hands is witness to this," said Mr. Jeffs solemnly. This was an unnecessary question. Wagers of this kind were about as common as earthquakes on the flat, and people were crowding round to see what was going on. Whisperers, three card trick men, and the artists with the straps

lost their followings for the moment.

“Seven pound seven and sixpence I made over the deal, an' a fiver as good as in my pocket. I didn't do so bad after all out of the old mare. I wonder what the missus'll think,” soliloquised Mr. Jeffs, as he stood up on the fence the better to watch the coming race, though he kept the corner of an eye on the sporting gentlemen beside him. The mare had by this time finished her preliminary trot and canter, and was swallowed up amongst the other horses facing the starter. The whole course was humming like one vast beehive. Then there was a cry from all sides of “They're off!” and the next moment the as yet unbroken line was charging the first hurdle. Another and another, and they were up with the one opposite the fence on which Mr. Jeffs was standing. The field was more strung out now as the various horses got into their places, and he noticed with inward satisfaction that Stockings occupied a back position, and was on the extreme outside, though the way she cleared the obstacle which brought down one of the leaders sent a cold shiver down his back. Could he have been wrong? Could he have been mistaken as to the mare's capabilities? No, he put such fancies away from him as absurd. But the rest of the race was like a bad dream to him. He heard shouts of “Grasshopper's down!” “What a fall!” “Firecracker's beat!” “The Gull's bringing them along!” He had lost sight of the mare, but something told him she was still on her feet somewhere in that cloud of dust.

Then silence reigned for an instant as the horses swept, almost in Indian file, round the last turn, only to be broken by shouts from paddock, leger, and flat together, “The mare's coming through!” “The mare wins!” “The mare on her lonesome!” “The mare walks in!” He could see plainly enough now. Every whip in the field was busy save that in the hand of the rider in lilac and green on the despised Stockings, three clear lengths in front of everything. As he watched he saw her fly the last jump like a swallow, and, gradually increasing her lead, run in the easiest of winners, her beaten and dispirited opponents toiling hopelessly in the rear. Mr. Jeffs turned to the man beside him, handed over the notes in silence, and, deaf to all offers of liquid refreshments, dropped from his perch and walked slowly off the course. He had had enough racing for that day. As he passed out of the gate the clerk of the course was leading in the winner, amidst tremendous cheering. “By gum! the old woman was right, after all,” said Mr. Peter Jeffs.

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When Mr. John Ellis, the noted gentleman rider, had weighed in, had a bath, and resumed the garb of civilisation, he invited a few of his intimate friends to a nice little champagne lunch in one corner of the big room beneath the stand. The frock-coated men and fashionably-dressed

ladies congratulated their host and incidentally themselves as they gathered round the little table. And then —

“Oh! Mr. Ellis,” said one lady, “isn't there some romance attached to your mare? I heard the Thompsons talking about it last night at the theatre.”

“Well, not much of a romance,” said Mr. Ellis, looking up from his task of dismembering a turkey, “but I had her up at Tarbaroo schooling her, and she got out of the horse paddock at night. The station hands and I searched for her for weeks, but at last I had to give it up as a bad job. Then I got word from the mail-driver that she had found her way into the local pound, and had been bought by an old fossil who had no idea what he had got hold of. I posted up and got the mare for ten pounds” — here Mr. Ellis smiled with apparently no reason — “and I sent the mailman as much more. I think you know the rest. But she's just about as good as they're made, even if she does try to hide her light under a bushel. Now, ladies and gentlemen, what do you say? Shall we drink her health?”

## For Her Sake.

### Lancewood

The moonlight gleamed through the sleeping leaves of the luxurious vines which closed in the verandah, throwing a chequer of light and shade on wall and floor. With a faint puff of wind they danced over the white form in the squatter's deep chair.

"That is always the way," said a petulant voice. "You people who protest so much about what you will do always fail one at a pinch."

"Really, Miss Hamilton——" began Robert Harvey.

"Oh! I know what you are going to say. It's no use repeating it," she interrupted.

He moved to the verandah railings, and stood looking over the garden, from which the mingling scents of flowers perfumed the still air.

The silence was becoming oppressive, but the man, apparently stolidly indifferent to the girl near him, never moved from his place.

A soft rustle of her dress, and she laid a hand on his arm.

"He will get into such a mess if you report him again. Dad will be awfully angry, and it means such a lot to Jack now. He wants to get on."

Harvey looked down into the pleading face, with its wistful, tender eyes upraised to his.

"Give him another chance. Just this once!" she said softly.

"For your sake I will," he replied. Then his hand closed over hers. "Lucy," he said hoarsely, "you know I'd do more than that for you, even if it cost me my position. You know——"

"Would you?" she laughed lightly. "So you always say."

"And perhaps I shall convince you some day."

A cheery whistle sounded at the garden gate.

"There's Jack!" she cried. "I must go and tell him. Good-night!" And she ran lightly down the steps.

Harvey stood listening to their gay voices. "It's always 'Jack' now," he muttered moodily. "I was sure of her until he came, but she's not the same girl now. But I'll lend him a hand if she wishes it, though she is miles too good for such a harebrained young scamp."

So Harvey, to please the wilful girl he worshipped, overlooked and accepted himself the blame for the faults of Jack Vincent, her cousin,

turning aside his uncle's anger when some more than usually foolish blunder had been perpetrated in his work on the station.

And she, intent only on Jack's promotion, never noticed the growing reserve of the elder man to whom she was indebted.

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The heavy-laden clouds broke for a moment, showing a gleam of watery sunlight and green sky, then closed in more thickly than before. The river, foam-flecked and muddy, was rising rapidly. Already the water curled and eddied round the trees on the bank, whose white trunks stood out from their rain-drenched surroundings.

A large mob of cattle came splashing through the mud to the water's edge, bellowing continually. When they reached the bank, with one accord they stopped.

Mr. Hamilton watched them for some time from the homestead verandah. "What cattle are those at the crossing, Harvey?" he asked.

"Vincent was to bring a mob from the Twelve-Mile, but surely he'd have had sense enough to wait until the rain was over."

"What's that, father?" asked Lucy, catching the last words.

"That young ass Jack's got cattle at the river, and can't cross them. He's on an island now, which'll be under water in a few hours. Harvey, you had better go down. Take Thorn from the stables."

Harvey swung himself into the saddle and rode the big chestnut out into the drenching rain, to see the girl standing anxiously looking first at the crossing, then back at him.

"It'll be all right!" he called out.

"Take care!" she answered, waving her hand, and he wondered what was really in her mind.

The cattle were "ringing." Round and round they rushed, and, above the steady roar of the pouring rain, the thunder of many hundred feet on the soaking earth almost deadened the sound of the clashing and cracking of horns. Some were down in the mud, and being trampled on by others, in their mad haste to get away, while the stockmen stood looking helplessly on, or tried to break the "ring."

Harvey watched for a while, then rode into the water. Stepping warily, Thorn answered the urging heel, as slowly the cold water crept up his sides to the knee-pads. In another moment he was swimming, striking out against the current, which ran so swiftly and silently. Deeper and deeper he sank, fighting valiantly, but borne downstream in spite of every effort.

Harvey slipped from the saddle, and swam beside the horse, until at last, swept into an eddy round a tree from which he was barely able to free himself, his feet touched bottom, and he struggled out, gasping for

breath.

"Hullo, Harvey!" shouted Vincent. "What's the row?" The cattle stood for a moment with the stockmen round them, all looking at the newcomer.

"Row enough! You're in a pretty mess."

"Oh! we'll get over directly," Vincent said airily.

"Maybe," said the other shortly. "Look out!"

The mob, tired of facing the water, and anxious to get back to their beat, quickly broke past the men, and galloped heavily through the mud, with everyone in pursuit.

Again and again the men wheeled the cattle, at last bringing them back to the crossing, but they showed as much reluctance as before towards entering the water.

"Let 'em steady a bit," shouted Harvey, and men and horses willingly obeyed, for the sticky mud was trying their strength.

The river was over its banks, and was rapidly rising and spreading over the low island where the mob stood. A quarter of a mile behind them raced another current, swifter and more turbulent than that which lay before them, and, beyond that, miles of country which also would soon be under water.

"It's no use going back," said Harvey, as Vincent rode up to him.

"No, we must cross somehow. They told me not to come, but I never reckoned on the river being so high." The light-hearted young fellow for once looked so downcast that Harvey could not help saying:

"Oh! we'll cross somehow, but it's a crusty mob. They're watching from the house," he added, looking across at the homestead on the hill.

An indefinable flash crossed the boy's face as he saw his cousin's figure, and Harvey turned gruffly away.

"Now then!" he shouted, "bring up the tail, and force them in!"

But they were not to be forced, and again began to ring, thundering round with clashing chorus, every animal apparently intent on getting into the middle of a dense mass, where, their heads forced up over the backs of their companions, they were so tightly packed as to be unable to move.

Driving his spurs into his horse, Harvey raced straight at the seething mob, forcing his way through the outskirts to break the ring. But it formed again behind him, and he withdrew to make a fresh attack.

"Follow me closely," he said to Jack. "But your mare's about done," he added, glancing at her heaving sides. "It's the only way through." And once more he forged straight into the mob, which, now wearied, gave way before him and opened out.

For a moment they stood. Then, as the whips cracked behind them, the leaders slowly walked into the water. Deeper and deeper they waded, and soon some of the little calves were swimming beside their mothers, as

slowly the cattle advanced, churning the muddy water into foam.

“Thank goodness!” muttered Harvey.

But too soon!

The whole mob was in. The leaders were swimming, but as they approached midstream, where the current swept down with resistless force, they turned suddenly and tried to force their way back. Mingling with the main body, however, they were borne out back into the stream, in turn following each other round, until the mob was “ringing” once more.

Bad as it was on land, it was infinitely worse out there. Round and round the whole mob, forming a solid mass, was being swept down.

Helplessly Harvey watched the frightened animals. A moan from a crippled cow in the mud made him look away for a moment, but a smothered exclamation from a man near recalled him to the trouble ahead.

Vincent was out in the water, forcing his already tired mare after the cattle.

“Come back!” shouted Harvey.

He never turned, but guided the mare past some bushes. Then she struck out. In silence the others watched him. He swam out, quickly overtaking the cattle, and trying to break the ring; but horse and man were forced into the circling mob, and the former was failing. Too late he saw his folly, and tried to fight his way out. Lower and lower sank the mare's head, and he slipped from her back. But it was no use — she could not get clear.

“Dive clear of them!” yelled one man. He did not hear, and fought stubbornly against the current.

“He'll never come out,” said one of the drovers.

“About done, I reckon,” agreed another. “And, heaven help him! we can give no assistance.”

For the second time that day a gleam of sunshine streamed across the watery waste, and Harvey once more caught sight of the white figure on the verandah on the hill opposite.

“For her sake,” he muttered, and drove Thorn forward.

Responding gamely to every call, the old horse struck out, his lean head and shoulders well out of the water. Closer and closer to the mob he swam, and there, fighting for their lives, he saw Jack and his mare, unable to extricate themselves from the crush of terrified cattle.

“Strike out this way! Leave the horse!” cried Harvey.

With a desperate effort the lad tried to obey, but, exhausted as he was, the feeble support of the mare was all that had kept him up, and it was only by turning Thorn sharply downstream that Harvey succeeded in grasping him as he sank.

The drowning man clutched at the horse's mane, and Thorn, answering

the bit, tried to fight his way across the stream in the wake of the mob, which had at last struck out for the opposite bank. The double load was proving too much for the old horse, so Harvey slipped off and swam beside him. Still they were being swept down.

“Stick to him!” gasped Harvey. “He’ll pull you out. I can manage alone.”

Scarcely had he spoken when a log, shooting past on the turbid stream, struck him, and he knew no more.

\* \* \* \* \*

When at last Harvey opened his eyes they met those of Lucy Hamilton, as she bent over him.

He struggled to rise, muttering incoherently, “For your sake, you know——”

“Yes, I know,” she answered softly, “you saved Jack, and — and — ” she hesitated, slipping her hand into his — “you must now take care of yourself — for my sake.”

## Handmarks.

### Ironbark

The old woman is dead now, and, besides, it is so long since I heard the story that no harm can accrue through its appearance in print; also, it may serve to enlighten many who have looked at the hand-marks on the ledge above the opening, and vaguely speculated as to how that black hole in the rock came by its gruesome appellation.

Prowling through the bush with my gun one summer holiday, I found myself with a big thirst. I had been out from soon after sunrise until noon without coming across any water that I cared to drink. Suddenly I heard the ring of an axe amongst the trees on my right. Two minutes later I stood beside a tall, wiry man in a sleeveless flannel shirt, moleskin trousers, blucher boots, and slouch hat. He leaned on his axe, and listened to my doleful request for water.

“Rough on you when you can't get a drink, ain't it?” he suggested, sympathetically. “But you haven't far to go; there's the old house at the bridge, along there; or you can get one at the ‘crick,’ just up here at Dead Man's Cave — only mind the snakes.”

“Dead Man's Cave!” I echoed.

“Yes; it's just up here. Ain't you never seen it? Come along.”

Crossing a sandy track that ran through the bush parallel with the river, we came to the foot of a spur running out from the main range, over which the red road passes, and here, in the angle formed by two bluffs, a clear, shimmering stream gurgled out from a square black recess that seemingly ran back into the bowels of the earth. Coming from the pitch darkness, the tiny creek jumped down in laughing bounds over little pebbly cascades, and went sparkling off through the underbrush, which grew like a dark wall about us. To the right of the hole an overhanging rock formed a sort of ante-chamber, the sandy floor showing numerous tracks of native cats, punctuated here and there with the funnel-shaped insect-traps of the ant-lion.

“Queer-looking shop, ain't it?” said my new friend, when I had drunk. “See them hand-marks?”

Just beneath the jutting ledge, and leaning towards the square aperture, were a number of marks upon the rock, as though a hand had been placed

against the wall, and then dusted with powdered ashes. To the right and left the marks ran, growing more numerous and confused as they neared the entrance to the inner cave.

“Bet you can't wash 'em off,” he said, as I stepped forward to examine them closely.

I splashed some water over them and rubbed them with my hand, then stood back and looked. As the wet dried off, the marks came gradually into view again, and finally stood out as distinctly as ever.

“Funny, ain't it?” he asked, looking admiringly at them, with a patronising air of proprietorship in the concern.

“Dead Man's Cave — nice name! Where's your dead man?” I said.

The bushman bent himself backward and emitted a loud guffaw. “Why, there ain't been no dead man here for a matter of — let's see — well, not since I was a kid,” he said.

“Tell me the story,” I said.

“Oh!” he replied, “go down to the house by the bridge, and ask the old woman there; she knows all about it. He was her brother. You tell her you're a friend o' Jim Buckley's — that's me — and then kind of w-o-r-m it out. See?”

\* \* \* \* \*

The old lady was sitting on a bank by the roadside under a spreading white cedar. Her house was a mere ruin of two or three patched-up rooms.

Under pretence of a request for another drink, I casually mentioned my acquaintance with Mr. Jim Buckley. At the sound of his name she opened her heart to me at once. Words were too faint to express her feelings towards him. Though bound to her by no other tie save his infinite goodness of heart, he, by the strength of his arm and the keenness of his axe, kept her supplied — winter and summer alike — with firewood. He it was who saw that her water-tanks were full; he it was who spent a whole week in heavy rain making the place habitable. Never did he pass her door, going or coming from the city — Buckley was a wood-carter, and lived out Kingsgrove way — but he called in to bid her a cheerful “Good-day, mother!” and to leave her some little presents; now a few eggs from his own hens, or a trifle of stuff from town. She loved that lathy individual, I could see.

Presently I took occasion to remark that Jim was felling timber down near Dead Man's Cave. Once upon the subject she spoke freely.

“Things were very different then,” she said. “Dear me! dear me! in them days all the traffic to the southern district passed over this road. Forty years ago it was nothing but teams, teams all day long, backwards and forwards past our door. Them was busy times!

“My brother Fred — him that's gone — and I lived here. We kept a little store, and besides that I had my cows and bit of poultry, so what with the eggs and milk and other things we used to do pretty well. Fred never worked much, but somehow he always had plenty of money, though I didn't know how he got it at the time, and when I asked about it he used to look wild. Once or twice he threatened to hit me if I spoke about it again, so I got to be afraid to say anything. Father had been a ‘Government man.’ and people used to say that Fred had ‘the black drop’; perhaps that was why nobody mixed up with him. Most of the time he was away over in the Three Valleys somewhere, and if not there he was poking about in the bush near Dead Man's Cave, but it wasn't called by that name then — very few knew of it at all.

“I was a slip of a girl at the time, and the teamsters used to stop as they passed our place, some for packages my brother left them, others just to chat with me; and by-and-bye scarcely a dray went south but the drivers looked in to ask if Fred had left a parcel for them. I often wondered what these parcels were, but the men never told me, and I was afraid to ask either them or Fred what was in them. They were pretty heavy, too.

“One of the teamsters was a big, six-foot man, with a great fair beard. His name was Sam Wilson, and he had the finest team of bullocks on the road. Sam was one of the few that never asked for a parcel from Fred, but he always called in as he went by, and after a time I came to be glad to see him. My brother didn't like him at all — used to call him ‘policeman’ behind his back, and, though there was no quarrel between them, yet they never did more than nod to each other when they met. As time went on Sam and I got to be great friends, and one afternoon while I was out at the back feeding my fowls, who should come riding down the side of the hill but Sam Wilson, dressed up in his Sunday clothes, new saddle and bridle and all, looking as fine a man as any in the country. He tied his horse up, jumped over the fence, and came down to me. ‘Why, Sam,’ I said, ‘you do look grand. Is it a wedding you're going to?’

“ ‘That's what I've come to find out, Mary,’ he says, getting red in the face and looking on the ground.

“ ‘What is that to do with me?’ I asked, feeling all of a tremble. ‘You've no call to ask me where you can go!’

“ ‘Mary,’ he says, looking at me very soft, and taking my hand; ‘Mary, I've been doing very well the last few years, and I'm doing better every day. I've got a bit of a farm out at George's River, with a cottage on it — all paid for, Mary — and only wanting somebody to look after it, and look after me.’

“Then he put his arm around me — dear, dear! what a strong arm it was! ‘Mary,’ he says, ‘I love you, and I've come to know if you'll marry me.’

“Goodness knows I loved him,” said the old lady, softly, “and when I

told him I would be his wife he kissed me and went on like a little he was so glad — till at last I said: ‘Well, Sam, you haven't got me yet. You must ask Fred about it first.’

“Fred!” says he, jumping up. “Where's Fred? I'll go and speak to him now.’

“ ‘No, not now, Sam,’ I said, feeling a bit nervous-like, for I knew the two were not friendly. ‘Wait for a day or two, there's a dear.’

“ ‘No, fear, Mary,’ he answered; ‘no day or two for me. Just tell me where to find Fred, and I'll go at once.’

“It was no use trying to persuade him in a thing like that. I tried all I could to keep him back, but he would go. ‘He wasn't going to wait for his wife an hour longer than he could help,’ he said, so I told him my brother was down in the bush at the foot of the hill, and off he went, while I sat by the well there to wait for him.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“It was a good hour before he broke through the scrub into the open again, and as soon as I saw him I knew there was something wrong, for he walked slowly, with his head down and his hands clenched.

“ ‘What's the matter, Sam, dear?’ I asked. “Didn't you find Fred?”

“ ‘Oh! I found him all right, my girl,’ he replied, putting his arm round me and kissing me. ‘Let's sit down here, and I'll tell you all about it. I went straight into the bush where you told me,’ he went on, when we had seated ourselves on a log, ‘and hunted about for a good while, expecting either to see him or hear his axe, thinking, of course, that he was out for timber, but didn't come across him, so on my way back I kept close to the rocks. Just as I came to the little creek that crosses the track on the other side of the fence I saw a big black snake crawl out of the water and go slowly away into the scrub along the bank, and, picking up a stick, I went for it.

“ ‘Every now and then the snake stopped, and I would creep along up to it; but whenever I got near enough to strike it would hear me and clear out again. At last, as it came to the end of the scrub, it made a run to get amongst the rocks, and when I ran out after it there was Fred just going into a cave with a keg in his arms, and half a dozen more on the ground. He turned on me like a tiger, and called me all the sneaks and spies he could think of. If he'd had a gun I believe he would have shot me. Of course, I got wild, too, when he rounded on me, and told him I didn't come there to catch him working for a private still — that I didn't care if he ran a dozen stills — I was looking for him to ask about you, Mary. Well, he wouldn't listen to a word I said, and went on till it was all I could do to keep my hands off him. He told me his sister wasn't going to have anything to do with a “policeman,” and ordered me never to come

near the house again. Now, Mary, what do you know about this business?’

“I told him all I knew about the parcels for the teamsters, and then he got up and kissed me again, and told me that he would marry me whenever I was ready; he would come and see me as often as he could, and that if my brother made a fuss he had a card in his hand now that would stop him. Then he mounted his horse and rode back over the hill.

“He often came to see me, but I managed that the two men never met, for when Fred came home that day he went on about Sam something awful — swore he'd be the death of him, and all things like that. One night my man Sam and I were sitting before a big fire in the kitchen talking things over. It was a dreadful night outside; the rain was coming down in torrents, the wind tore round the house, making everything rattle and shake as if the place was coming down, and the trees all slashing their branches together till you could scarcely hear yourself speak. We had scarcely sat down when there was a great hammering at the door, and as I got up to open it my brother came in, wet through, with his hair hanging down his face and the water dripping off him as though he had fallen in the river.

“At first he didn't see my Sam, but stood there swishing his hat by the rim to shake the rain off, growling to himself about something. Presently he looked up and caught sight of Sam sitting quietly by the fire with his pipe in his mouth, as though there was nothing in the world to trouble about. ‘Hullo!’ he shouted, taking a step across, ‘what are you doing here, you —— trap? Didn't I tell you not to come here again? Get out of this, and the sooner the better.’

“Sam just spread his legs apart, blew out a cloud of smoke, and said quietly: ‘I told you before I'm no trap, Fred. Your business is no concern of mine, but I'm going to marry Mary here, and so I've come to see her. Why can't you be friendly and decent, same as any other man?’

“ ‘Marry my sister! My word, you won't!’ cried Fred. ‘She doesn't go and tie herself to any — policeman, if I know it. Go on — clear out!’

“ ‘As to that,’ Sam said, ‘I am going to marry Mary, and I believe that this house is as much hers as yours; so if you want me to leave you've got to put me out.’

“At this my brother went on like a madman. He daren't lay a finger on Sam, but he turned on me and abused me till Sam sang out: ‘Here, I say, you stop that. Don't you call her them names, if she is your sister.’

“ ‘Won't I? I'll do more than that!’ shouted Fred, and clenching his fist he struck me on the breast, knocking me against the fireplace.

“I put my hand on Sam's arm, and begged him not to hurt my brother, although he was such a brute. Poor, dear Sam! Oh, poor, dear Sam! He placed his arm round me, and was going to say something, when Fred suddenly sprang in and tried to throw him, but in a second he was on his

back with Sam's hand on his throat. Then I threw my arms round Sam, and cried to him to stop it, and let Fred up. So he drew me to him, and kissed me turning his back on Fred. Then Fred sprang up, with his axe in his hands. It had been leaning by the fireplace. I tried to push Sam out of the way, but I was too late — too late — my darling! — my darling!”

\* \* \* \* \*

The poor old creature shuddered, and hid her face in her apron, and when she tried to continue her story I gently dissuaded her, and, leaving her a small present, went off to find Buckley.

“What have the hand-marks to do with that awful yarn?” I asked, as Jim stopped working and greeted me.

“Oh! they tracked her brother to the cave, and he was found dead with a big wound in his leg, caused, they think, by the swinging back of the axe. He made them marks in his death struggles, they say.”

And there they are to this day.

## Lilac and Moonbeams.

### Mary Leith

“But, Grandfather——”

“It's not a bit of use, Marjorie. I think” — grimly — “you should know me by this. No” — hastily — “tears won't do me any good. A nice guardian I would consider myself to the sacred trust imposed upon me, first by your father on his death-bed, later by your mother, if I entertained the young man's absurd proposition for a moment. Marriage, indeed! Eh? you know your own mind? Ha, ha! That remark borders on the tragic. Does the thistledown know its destination when it floats overhead, caught by every wandering breeze? Does the summer day, rising clear and cloudless, know its mood when clouds gather low on the horizon? No, child — for a few years yet I must be the guiding breeze to the downy atom, the storm portend for the cloudless sky. Your mind! Bah! the mind of a butterfly poising in hesitation over the roses in spring.”

“But, Grandfather, grandmother — your Marjorie — was no older than I.”

“What, now? Your grandmother no older than you? No older, no older?” Ah! the lilac nodding in the moonlight, and the fluttering curtains framing the bonny red roses.

“But” — pulling himself together with a start — “that was a very different matter. I was ten years older than she. I had my own sheep station, though, true, that was not through energy of my own. There was no mawkish sentiment about me, I can tell you. I simply saw in your grandmother the woman who would make me a good sensible wife, and I married her, that's all.”

A choked voice from the foot of the table was heard remarking nervously that “something of this sort had happened to Ted.”

“Tut, tut! Why, only a year ago you had a mane of untidy hair hanging about your shoulders, getting caught in my buttons, and mopping up the gravy at meal times. As for that young man — well, simply this: I refuse to discuss the situation.”

With proud little head carried haughtily to conceal tears of mortification, Marjorie stepped through the door opening on to the lawn.

How can he be so cruel? she thought miserably — he who is usually the soul of kindness. Poor grandma! Perhaps it is as well she didn't live long. How dreary it must have been to live with Grandpa before he got nice and mellowed with age. Fancy marrying a girl of 19 because she would make him a “good sensible wife.”

“Marjorie! Marjorie!”

A voice irritable with the effort of sustaining a hostile attitude taken up for controversial purposes recalled her. With cheeks aflame and a heart full of resentment, Marjorie re-entered, wilfully blind to the flagrant transparency of the old man's simulated antagonism.

“Yes, Grandfather?”

“Did you find the ‘Amateur Gardener,’ as I desired? I want to see what it says about lifting tulips.”

“No, Grandfather.”

“Then, my child,” with mild exasperation, “go and look for it. It is in the study somewhere, and with it is that treatise I am writing on seed potatoes as exponents of the Darwinian theory. Look intelligently, for goodness' sake, child, and don't waste your time calculating the niceties of the drop from the study window as a means of escape from life as judged by your present tragic acceptance of the term.”

Marjorie looked “intelligently.” She turned out every nook and corner of the study (replacing everything she displaced, oh! most rare of women!), every cupboard and shelf overhauled, and still no “Amateur Gardener,” nor yet a treatise on seed potatoes. It was monotonous work, and Marjorie was fretful and inclined to tears.

Dragging open a drawer in an old bureau, she turned over the contents carelessly.

Her own name traced in faded ink arrested her attention. A bundle of letters lay uppermost, folded square, all yellow with age, and emitting a faint odour of bygone perfume.

Marjorie's understanding sub-consciously took in the written words traced in old-fashioned penmanship, the sight of her own name rendering her temporarily oblivious to the impropriety of her action.

“Oh, Marjorie, Marjorie, my little love! Do you remember that evening? The moonlight traced the shadows of the lilac blossoms on the carpet, and their perfume filled the room. You were sitting at the piano, darling, and you sang an old-world refrain. As you sat there, with the moonbeams resting lovingly on your bonny brown hair, my heart failed me, for very love, Marjorie mine. Your angel face seemed part of the angel world, the white frock you wore, the lace kerchief knotted at your breast, the red, red rose in your hair, all part of a dream picture. And, coming through the garden door, I saw you thus. Ah, me! Marjorie, that gown you wore, I have it still. When, too, I am called upon to offer up my soul that gown will be enclosed in the wooden casket which bears my

shell — that gown and a tiny lock of silken hair. He would——”

Marjorie read no more. When she realised the awfulness of her action she grew white to the lips with self-loathing.

“How could I do such a thing?” she sobbed contritely, as she dragged the “Amateur Gardener” and the paper on Darwin's theory out of the drawer. “I never realised. It was such a lovely letter, I did not seem able to stop ... Poor old Grandfather: no ‘mawkish sentiment’ about you, poor old darling, with your scars hidden, and your seared heart jealously guarded. ... I must tell him I did it. I'll go right away now, before my courage reaches vanishing-point.”

Just then an idea occurred to Marjorie, and she sat down suddenly in her Grandfather's armchair.

Her face flushed and paled by turn. “Dare I, dare I?” she thought. “No; I could never carry it through — I'd break down, I'm sure.”

Then, resolutely, “Yes, I must, for Ted's sake. Grandpa can at worst only kill me.”

And she stole guiltily upstairs to where was kept an old brass-clamped trunk.

Grandfather was walking across the lawn, all bathed in pale moonlight. He leaned heavily on his stick, and his thoughts were far away.

“Forty years to-day, Marjorie mine, since I brought you a white-robed angel woman to your home — the home you grew to love so well. Ah! Marjorie, how could you leave it and me so desolate and forlorn?”

He climbed nearly up the grassy slope, the weight of memory heavy upon him. Crossing the verandah, he entered the room. As he did so a faint cry escaped him. The moonbeams threw a silvery shimmer through the swaying curtain, and traced the nodding lilac blooms in fantastic wreaths on the carpet. The quiet room was bathed in a moonlight almost unearthly.

At the piano sat a figure robed in muslin gown, quaintly, primly, stiffly fashioned. How waxen her white shoulders looked, rising from the draping of a lace kerchief, mellow with age, and knotted at her breast. How glossy the dark-brown hair, coiled low in the old-world style, with a red, red rose resting in the coils. How tremulous with nervous apprehension the fresh young voice, crooning softly, plaintively, an old-world refrain.

“Marjorie! Marjorie!”

The old man started forward, the light of bygone days shining in his eyes.

“Marjorie——”

\* \* \* \* \*

But Marjorie had risen, and with warm flesh and blood arms was

clinging to him.

“I love him, Grandfather, even as she loved you in the days you wrote about. Oh! Grandfather, out of the happiness that was yours give us our share.”

The old man sank into a chair, and passed his hand over his dim eyes.

“You are right, child,” he said, “and I am wrong. It would have marred her happiness on this, the anniversary of our dawning joys, had she thought there beat one heart less glad than ours. Yes, yes, you are right! Go, Marjorie, and gather me a spray of the lilac framed in moonbeams. ... Now pin it in my coat. She gathered such another spray, and fastened it with loving fingers. Just thirty-nine years to-day — but ah! she did it unbidden.”

## **The Sacrifice: A Dingo's Story.**

### **Albert Dorrington**

It was Jim Haskett who trapped me and my brother, Nia-nia. Nia-nia was killed with a stirrup-iron. A dingo doesn't go into mourning over his dead brother, but long afterwards, when they broke my heart with a stock-whip, I used to dream of the nights spent playing in the kangaroo-grass with my mother.

I was too sly and sullen to make a good cattle-dog. Jim would never trust me alone with a mob of ewes. I was always watched, and shepherded by a half-bred collie. If I bit a sheep too hard I was flogged, and if I loafed in the shade when the dust blinded and choked, the whips found me out; and the squatters hated me.

"Shoot him!" said a big Monaro man to Jim one day. "He'll spoil your good dogs, and make loafers of them. There's only one idea in his wicked head."

"What's that?" asked Jim, quietly.

"Kidney fat," growled the man of sheep; "and there's a bullet for him first time he crosses my land."

"Thank you," said Jim, politely. "I've promised to give him a chance, and" — Jim grinned at me — "I want him for a bit of special work."

"Special work for a dingo!" snapped the Monaro man. "Ye'd better see a special commissioner for rats!"

There wasn't much loose wool about that Monaro man. He'd have given his boots to have had a shot at me.

Jim was a Queensland drover. He would bring store mobs from the Gulf and deliver them to another drover anywhere between Cloncurry and the Maranoa. Punching big mobs from the north would be easy work if the wild things would let a drover travel in peace.

First, the blacks send up smoke-signals, telling each other of the mighty herd of beef travelling south. And when the warrigals start to spear your flanks, the wounded steers may work up a ten-hour stampede. The wild dogs swarm through the gullies fluting all night, fretting the cattle and keeping them awake.

Sometimes a swamp alligator or a rock python livens up things. A bull leader, nosing for a drink among wet boulders, may find himself looking

at the big flat head of Australia's king snake. The rest is delirium tremens — for the bull. But nothing that yelps or crawls will turn a drover bald sooner than the beef-killing warrigal.

I have heard swagmen's dogs speak of drunken cattle camps. I have run with the best and worst men on the Queensland stock-routes, and I never saw a drover drunk at his work. He couldn't do it. The cattle and dogs know a drunken drover, especially the dogs. I never saw Jim the worse for liquor. He was young, and full of work; he knew that one sober head was worth a paddockful of muddled cattle-busters.

He taught me not to hustle the dogs at meal-times; although, when it came to a fight, I found my shoulders as stiff and strong as the others. Tiger, a Barwon sheepdog, gave me trouble. There were five of them, and they showed me no quarter even after our work was done. They bided their time, and I knew they would kill me if Jim fell sick. Crossing a river one morning, they closed around me savagely. A dingo doesn't like water, but when the long stockwhips are speaking behind he takes it with his tongue out. Jim's cattle dogs were cunning water-fighters. They knew that the river was the best place to handle me. The whole five were heavy, hard-living dogs, capable of pulling down a bullock. They took me by the throat and paw, and rolled me in deep water. They danced on me, while the cattle broke for the scrub in all directions. Then, through the booming water that choked and blinded, I heard Jim's voice and the pistolling of his whips.

“Yah, you curs! Hooshta!” Bang went the whip, splitting the water like a gunshot, and as it curled, wet and dripping, from the stream, I saw my enemy Tiger swimming away with a blood-gash across his face.

No more fight that week. Tiger waited his chance to end my career. He followed me one night into the ranges, his throat-hair bristling with rage as the terrible loneliness enveloped us. He hung on my flanks sullenly, like one choosing his time and ground before coming to death grips.

Something in the ranges was calling me. It may have been the smoke and scent of a blacks' camp or the fluting of my brothers across the pine-clad spur.

A dingo knows the difference between a black and a white man's camp. The cunning myalls burn everything before leaving, lest an enemy pick up something belonging to them and work a hoodoo.

Their brush gunyahs told me they were not buccaneers or station blacks. Their bodies were daubed with red and white boomerang stripes. They were cattle-spearers, untamed warrigals from the Jardine country.

The myalls were sprawling in the grass watching the mob of cattle on the flat. A smell of fishbones hung around; scraps of half-cooked barramundi were thrown here and there. I was homesick, not hungry, and after all a blackfellow was nearer to me than a white.

The smell of fish was more than Tiger could stand. He sneaked in

closer, and——

A pack of half-tamed dingoes had watched our coming. They are always with the blacks when cattle-killing is on hand. Tiger swung round like a wolf in a trap. A dozen hulking, big-shouldered dogs were upon him in a flash, filling the night air with horrible snarling yelps. The blacks were up, too, and I heard the dull thump, thump, of waddies as they drove the dingoes from Tiger's body.

These half-tamed dingoes are bolder than the wild packs. Their hatred of the white men's dogs is like a madness in them; they fought and hurled themselves at the blacks, striving to get near the stiff-haired Tiger, until a gigantic young warrior seized the cattle dog by the tail and throat and bore him to the camp.

The blacks love a good dog, and when the shadows of the gunyahs closed on Tiger I knew they would keep him for ever.

The cattle camp never saw him again. Years later an old dingo told me that he saw him in the Gulf, running with the warrigals, showing them the cattle routes where travelling stock could be easily speared.

Well, after Jim had landed the last big mob near the New South Wales border, he found, after his receipts were fixed up, that he had earned and saved over £300.

I remember how he whistled that morning as he flung me a bit of clean beef on the grass.

"Time I thought about getting married, eh?" he said, pleasantly. "Too much dog and cattle and tobacco isn't good for a man." Then he took out a bundle of letters and sat down to read them again and again, until the sun lay deep in the west.

He held up the photograph of a young girl and kissed it twice. Then he looked hard at me.

"All this comes of being too much alone," he said loudly. "I can't ask her to be a drover's wife. She knows the business too well. A man's life runs out on the plains between mobs without end. And ... because I love her better than anything, better than my work, the stars, mountains and tablelands, river and sea, I'll be something better. But" — he looked round eagerly — "I'll have to play 'possum to get her from the old man. Of all the men I know, he's the hardest and worst to manage."

That's how the drover talks when no one but the dogs are around. I didn't want Jim to get married. Once he settled down to farming he would hand me over to big Sandy M'Iver, the rager of the Queensland cattle-tracks. I didn't want to work for a rager. I was not anxious, either, to settle down with Jim. I would have to make friends with his cat, and sit like a white man's dog in the front garden.

Jim started east suddenly. There was a peculiar light in his eyes. His head went up, and he began to sing. He left the cattle-routes far behind and struck into farming country, where the wheat grew high as the fence,

and the milk cows wandered around the settlers' homesteads. He paused suddenly one afternoon at the end of a small sheep farm, and whistled to me.

I approached sullenly, watching him hand and foot, knowing that something peculiar was going to happen.

He looked me between the eyes steadily, and I flinched and whimpered as though he were flogging me.

“Come here, you little savage,” he whispered. “Did I ever hit you for nothing?”

I licked his hand wildly.

“That's all right,” he said hoarsely. “Now” — he pinched my ear and held up a finger — “I want you to run inside this fence and find the prize Shropshire ewes in the home-paddock over there. See?” He pinched my ear again.

I waited, stiff-eared, for the final word to go. I wanted to howl, but his strong hand was near my throat.

“Inside the homestead paddock,” he repeated sharply. “Kill a couple and come back.”

I sprang out. He held up his fingers.

“A couple — no more,” he said. “I'm watching you — devil. No more than two. You'll find the break in the wire.”

Killing sheep wasn't new to me, but I was puzzled to know why Jim should set me to work. In training me, his voice and whips were always against sheep-killing; and now he was undoing his work. What did it mean? I was certain that it was his sweetheart's father who owned the sheep.

It was quite dark now. Inside the fence the grass swished against my shoulders. In the distance was the homestead, flanked by a row of young silky oaks. Across a cultivated hillside, nestling in a well-grassed hollow, was the paddock where the prize Shropshire ewes were kept. I had often heard Jim speak of old Bob Clinton's prize sheep.

I slouched over the ploughed land, keeping well in a deep furrow that led like a track to the Shropshires. Then a taste of sheep came like a scalding breath into my throat. I crawled under a patch of torn netting into the paddock with a bloodstorm swirling before my eyes.

“Two!” I choked, “only two!” There were twenty big Shropshires inside the fence. One of them looked at me with his silly grey face and baa'd. The bleating voice filled me with rage.

“One!” I snapped. “Two!” How easy it was, flinging down those foolish woolly monsters and worrying them to death. Geese would have fought harder for life; even the hard-pressed kangaroos will make a last stand.

“Only two!” I repeated, as the sheep-blood spurted into my eyes, and the grey fleeces turned scarlet. Everything was scarlet to me — the trees

and grass and the half-risen moon seemed to peep like a frightened face through the scurrying clouds.

A sharp whistle caught my ears, followed by the barking of a farm dog. I thought of Jim's whip as I went under the wire.

He was waiting for me with a white, savage face and flashing eyes. "Two, I said; not seven!" he cried. His stockwhip cut me like a knife; it thundered and cracked about my ribs until I rolled, sick and faint, in the dust.

I did not hide myself as cattle dogs do. I looked at him with ears flattened, and my teeth points showing.

"You devil!" he whispered. "Why didn't you stop at two?"

I followed him sulkily to his camp in the bush. In the early morning he dressed carefully and rode towards Bob Clinton's farm. I followed stealthily, hiding in the scrub whenever he looked back.

I did not like the look of things. Why had he asked me to kill Bob Clinton's ewes? I was almost beside him in the long grass as he pulled up at the homestead gate.

Then I saw a wild-eyed man coming towards him from the sheep paddock. His face was livid with anger, his eyes wandered over the hill; he shook his fist at the sky.

"Good morning!" shouted Jim amiably. "Lovely weather, Mr. Clinton." Bob Clinton looked as though he had swallowed a thunderbolt.

"Lovely ruination!" he snarled. "Have ye seen a dingo this morning?" he demanded. "I'd give my right hand to be even with the skulking hell-brute that came here last night."

Jim looked sympathetic while the old man stormed about the Shropshires I had killed the night before.

"I've just come in from the Gulf," said Jim, apologetically. "I hope Bessie is well?"

The old man was silent. His angry eyes wandered over Jim and across the paddock almost to where I was crouching.

The house curtains moved stealthily. I saw a woman's face peeping between them. Her eyes grew white as she saw Jim standing near the old man. Then Jim looked up, and the young blood leaped like a flag to his cheeks. The curtains fell back gently.

"Eh?" rasped the old man. "What did ye say, lad?"

"Nothing," answered Jim, placidly. "I've had my share of trouble with dingoes. They shepherded me day and night from the Roper to the Towers. Good-bye," he said, springing into the saddle. "I'll put in a day looking for your dingo — they're not so hard to find at times."

"Ye'll find the dingo more than your match, my lad," snapped the old man. "The country is full of young men who swear to bring home a dingo."

Jim cantered through the gate, and again I saw the woman's face at the

window. He turned in the saddle, and they looked at each other as though endless dry tracks of country had separated them for years. Love sat like a great drought in their eyes. I thought of the lonely cattle drives and the bundle of letters he used to hide in his tent.

I sneaked ahead of Jim, and when he arrived at the camp I was stretched in the sun about twenty yards from the tent, with my nose to the ranges. He did not boil the billy that night, but paced feverishly up and down, up and down.

“It's mean to turn dog on the cattle pup,” I heard him say; “but the old man won't let me see Bessie unless there's a sacrifice. If I could show him a pup's scalp he'd light his pipe and talk things over. And what's a dingo pup, anyway?”

Next morning he suddenly called me. His revolver was hanging inside the tent. I had seen him shoot wild dogs before, and my hair bristled with suspicion and fear.

“Come here,” he said gently, “you poor little fool.”

I had always answered his call, but now I ran to the edge of the scrub, whining uneasily. Then I saw him fling the bridle over the camp-horse, and as I turned he stooped for his old rifle and cartridges. I started for the ranges at a swinging gallop.

Day was breaking; the bush was brindling with the strange fires of the sun. He rode straight in my tracks, and I knew there was small hope of outstripping his camp-horse in open country.

It occurred to me that Jim was playing a deep game, and that I was to be the scapegoat. My scalp was to be the price of Bob Clinton's goodwill. I wanted to see Jim happy. I would have killed a hundred sheep to see Bessie in her new wedding dress standing beside Jim. Still, if my scalp was to be the price of it all, I thought I'd give him a run for his money, just to steady him a bit.

He gained on me as we scampered towards the hills. I wondered why he didn't shoot, instead of trying to get close to me.

A sudden lift in the wind turned my thoughts in another direction. As we drew nearer the clump of brigalow on our left, I picked up the scent of a fresh dingo-pad running dead across the range. Jim must have heard my voice; he must have understood that something strange was in the wind. He turned in the saddle, shading his eyes; then I heard him slow down and creep after me, rifle in hand.

He was too keen a dog-trapper to make mistakes. He followed me cleverly, without throwing himself in the way of the wind. A line of sand-hills appeared in the north.

The fresh dingo-pad was in a straight line with them. Jim nodded and looked at me. I made a flank movement across the sand-hills. Jim nursed his rifle, and waited behind some boulders.

Running slowly along the ridge, I halted suddenly, my heart thumping,

my ears stiff as shear-blades. A couple of dingo-pups peeped at me over the sand hummock — it takes a lot of sand to hide a dingo's ears at times.

Then .... I saw a head and a pair of flaming eyes watching me. It was old Mrs. Dingo. I shall never forget her face and her crafty movements, as she half-crouched from the burrow. She made a little mumbling noise, and the pups ran to her and sat on their haunches watching me.

“Good-day,” I said, brightly, “I'm looking for water. Two nice pups, ma'am,” I ventured, admiringly.

She snarled and lifted her forepaw like an old wolf. I saw she didn't believe me.

“Liar!” she whined. “You have been running with men and horses lately. I can see where the station dogs have mauled your right shoulder. Who killed the sheep the other night?”

There was no guesswork about Mrs. Dingo. She crept nearer and nearer, and, with a yell, she sprang at my throat.

Fighting cattle-dogs had made me skilful in the matter of dodging an angry mother. I gave her my big right shoulder, and she rolled back, biting the air. Then I ran, and she followed snarling at my heels. The pups floundered after her. I felt her teeth on my flanks as we raced downhill. She was a vixen. Down we ran, biting and snapping at each other. I saw a jet of fire leap from a boulder suddenly, then came the heart-shaking clap of Jim's rifle. Mrs. Dingo pitched over me and lay still, a bullet through her chest. The pups swerved uncertainly for a moment, and galloped back. A couple of shots dropped them on the crest of the hill.

“Ah!” said Jim, looking at me, “you brought the old lady up to the music. in good style.”

I felt safe when I saw the three scalps hanging from his saddle, and I followed leisurely as he rode towards Bessie's homestead.

I don't know what happened when he showed the scalps to old Clinton. Peeping through the high grass an hour later, I saw Jim smoking beside the old man on the homestead verandah. Then, towards evening, the voices of Bessie and Jim came from the garden.

“How did you manage dad?” she asked, softly.

Jim laughed. “I played my pet dingo against a few sheep, and he killed four too many.”

“Jim, you are mean!” she whispered.

“Something had to be sacrificed, dear,” he said; “and my little dingo played the game, and brought three yellow rufflans to my gun that might have slaughtered dozens of your Shropshires later on. The end has justified the means, hasn't it, dear?”

I couldn't hear Bessie's answer, but I know that the loneliness of their lives had departed when he kissed her in the shadows.

I passed a very bad night. Towards dawn a great loneliness came upon

me. Glancing towards the hills, I caught a breath from the inland lagoons. I saw the tiny swamp quail, the white shield drakes, and the pigmy geese rising from the wet blue-grass. I heard the cry of the warrigals, and it was more than I could stand.

When Jim whistled for me next morning. I was running towards the inside tracks where my people were calling.

## **The Battle for the Pilchards: Being a True Record.**

### **Charles Thackeray**

Arripis Salar was his name, but he did not know it. He had heard himself called a buck when he had been sporting in the waves that curled and broke along Maroubra Beach, and had laughed until his gill-covers nearly split at the antics of the beach fishermen, who made semaphore-like gestures before firing pieces of lead into the sea with little sharp-pointed curved contrivances on them to hook his sides.

The fact that scientific men had given him a Latin patronymic did not trouble him one whit. He knew he was born at sea from floating ova, nursed in the curve of a wave, the son of poor but honest sea-salmon parents; but that was six years ago, and he had nearly forgotten the incidents of his fry-hood.

This year he had joined in with the rest of the family for the annual pilgrimage along the coast of New South Wales, after the shoals of pilchards and herrings. He had no fear of death, for when he was born he was made at once aware that he had many enemies, swifter, stronger, and more rapacious than himself.

As a prettily-marked young salmon with golden spots on his sides, he had not usurped the name of his betters in other waters; but fishermen, whether he willed it or not, had styled him a salmon trout, and he had sported thus misnamed among the sand-crabs, worms, and whiting fry until the interfering sharp-toothed tailers and the unerring instinct of his race for travel had driven him northward after the pilchards.

Arripis Salar had flourished. The sea and all that was in it was his. He knew no chains or bondage, and had never been dragged from the rollers by beach fishermen, like many of his friends. True, he recalled one narrow escape. The hook on a jagger's line had caught his back once, just below the dorsal fin, but he had put all his five years' vigour and his great speed into the combat, and emerged from it victorious, with a hook and a piece of gut sticking in his anatomy. In a little while the hook had fallen out, and the hole it left soon healed, and his symmetrical proportions were undisturbed.

Scouting about his usual haunts in company with many of his relatives just outside the temperate zone that favoured so many of his enemies,

Arripis learned that a finny newcomer had made an unwelcome appearance along the coast. It was the winter of 1905, when the tidings were carried by whisk of tail and quiver of operculum to the salmon shoals, and great curiosity was manifested amongst the sea salmon regarding the character of the strangers, and whether they came in peace or war. They were not kept long in suspense. Like four-foot meteors the silver and drab barracoutas shot northward into the grounds held from time immemorial by the salmon, harrying the pilchards and outraging the precedents of at least a generation by biting at everything floating that came in their track.

The schnapper fishermen of Twofold Bay and Eden were the first to complain. The barracoutas had as little regard for the creatures above the water as they had for those below. Finding little pieces of bait adhering to the lines sent down with a message of destruction to the schnapper, they promptly brought their sharp teeth into play and saved the lives of many schnapper by severing the lines. The salmon had never been guilty of such a nefarious proceeding — such a one as only the immoral leather-jackets in their waters had hitherto boasted of.

While awaiting reliable news regarding the strangers, Arripis Salar found he was getting hungry. His food did not seem so plentiful as of yore, and he had no option but to blame the barracoutas. Bewildered at first by the headlong rush of the snaky bodies past him, he hesitated to open his mouth for fear a barracouta might close its cruel bird-of-prey jaws upon his tender tongue. Gathering his wits at last, he noted that the long bodies of the swift fish were unarmed, and that they could not turn as deftly as himself. He called a council of war, and the gathering was one of many millions.

It was held in a bay south of the great headland of Point Perpendicular, and the plan of campaign was communicated along the wave line to the assembled hosts. The sharks and porpoises were in attendance, and it was difficult work to telepath the news while they were foraging for feeble salmon, but finally the tale was told, and the salmon, with Arripis Salar at the head, turned southward and seaward. They travelled in a wedge-shaped formation; not like the barracouta, who were so intent on hunting that they broke into comparatively small shoals, and rushed close inshore on occasions.

There were more than a few spectators of the meeting of the finny hosts. Overhead the cormorants, shags, gulls, penguins, seahawks, and a couple of regal robber eagles hovered, chattering and screaming as they watched the unusual fish movements below. Ever and anon there was a rush of wings and a sudden plunge, as portions of the bodies of salmon floated to the surface after the swift assault of a kingfish or shark into the centre of the slowly-moving shoal. The pell-mell scatter of the scared salmon from the vicinity of these foul murders made the water boil, and

often a hapless one, missing his way, would leap out of the water and fall back, unready to avoid the next sortie of the preying hordes that always attended their gregarious evolutions. A great sea-battle was imminent, and the birds, as well as the predaceous fish, that tailed up the salmon shoals knew it.

At last a large shoal of barracouta was encountered, its constituents carrying on the same disdainful tactics that had characterised their movements ever since they had shifted from their depleted feeding-grounds in Bass Strait.

Relying on his bulk, Arripis did not pause. He rushed straight at a yard and a half of barracouta, and closed its gill on one side by the fury of his charge. The 'couta sank some twenty feet before a giant kingfish bit it in two. Arripis bit and butted in blind impetuosity, and nearly every salmon in the shoal was soon in the fight. Many managed to bite the long bodies of 'couta locked in a jaw-to-jaw death struggle with other salmon, and many smitten ones on both sides floated helplessly on the surface with ruptured air-bladders. Here and there were to be seen injured salmon floundering round and round in ever-shortening circle, with one eye torn out by the sharp teeth of their adversaries. Many were bleeding from great jagged wounds in their sides, and, floating to the top, afforded the winged spectators a few seconds' banquet.

"This," said a great shark, as he lazily swallowed pieces of fish that came down to him, "reminds me of the feast we had twenty years ago, when the 'couta came up the coast to feed on our grounds. Let 'em all come, say I."

"Last time the salmon won," rejoined a great ray. "Only a few 'couta got up as far as Port Jackson."

The fight continued for hours, and a freshening southerly did not put an end to it, although the increased wave action made many of the charging fish miss their objective. The sea was tinged with blood for acres, and the feathered hosts overhead filled the air with their discordant noises as they fought and plunged for the feast to which they had not been bidden. Many of them had known whale-feasts when the killers had done their deadly work in Twofold Bay, but this was better than whale-meat, and the undertakers of the air were happy. Still the shoals of the barracouta kept pouring from the south, and the salmon school, thinned by the ravages of their enemies, found it hard to battle while they swam against the southerly surface drift. Exhausted by their struggle against the current almost as much as by the fighting, they rested, drifting northward, and several shoals of 'couta seized the opportunity to slip past them close to the shore. The food supply was what they were after chiefly, but they feared no fight. Gradually the salmon were forced further northward, with their enemies at their tails.

For days the battle was continued. None of the combatants went very

deep. They knew their limitations, and the areas peopled by the bream family and the giants of the sea were debarred them. Reinforcements from the south rushed into the fray with headlong precipitancy against the salmon. One fighting shoal of barracouta, which had been tearing the lines and nets of the fishermen at the entrance to Twofold Bay, proved a formidable phalanx.

Advancing at the rate of about ten miles an hour, it encountered a wing of the big salmon shoal, and chopped it as if it were so much sargasso weed. Bleeding, quivering fragments of salmon strewed the sea in their wake, or sank into the maws of the fishes below. Massive electric rays, who hated exertion, found food falling before their surprised eyes, and, keeping their batteries well charged to repel attacks by the sawfish, thankfully enveloped the food so freely given them, frightening away the scratching gurnards that were rooting out crabs and other crustaceae at the bottom, oblivious of the battle above them. One section of the fighting multitude got close inshore, and some of the barracouta in their mad haste leaped on to the broken shore with ripped sides, to fall victims to the octopi, eels, and crabs in the pools as evening approached.

Each night the battle ceased, but the first glimmering of dawn saw it renewed. For a long time the issue hung in the balance.

Then the salmon gave way. Arripis Salar and his friends were steadily beaten back.

The splendid green-backed fish retreated, tired and bleeding, and drifted with the current and wind further and further northward, where the pilchard shoals were thinner and the food harder hunting. The only place where the barracouta did not dare to follow them was close to the sandy beaches, where the cresting billows did not suit them. Along each wave the salmon could be seen for miles as the waves curled and broke, but the 'couta skipped the sandy bays, travelling faster across the mouths or keeping close to the rocky shores. So the newcomers stole the feeding grounds of the salmon and won their way north, for the battle was theirs.

Jaded and sick with the pain of many wounds, Arripis Salar would fain have closed his eyes, had they possessed lids, and died of sadness of heart on that hopeless journey. Hungrily he searched the old feeding grounds for stray pilchards, and, finding a shoal of mackerel off Port Hacking, he regained strength during a week's stay in the vicinity of Wide Bay. But his heart was not in his wanderings. It was rather with his dead friends on the back track, and he grew careless and indiscriminating in his feeding. Reaching Bondi Bay at last, he swam carelessly up to a headless prawn. He knew at once that the thing had a steel centre; for that in his dumb despair he cared nothing, although such a thing had marked him before. There was nothing now that held him by the heart to the old familiar bays. Directly his jaws closed on the bait he felt the prick of the needle-pointed barb, and it awoke all his fighting

instincts. Carelessness and recklessness and despair vanished for the nonce, and he fought as he had never fought before.

But a skilful hand held the line, and despite his struggles he was guided into shallow foamy water where the aeration was intense and his gaping gills absorbed more than his breathing apparatus could deal with. His last fight was almost over, but he churned the waters in his pain, for valour in him died after hope.

“I've got you, my beauty,” said a man, who ran swiftly down the beach slope, and lifted the game fish clear of the backwash. “You've given me a royal fight and a cut I'll remember for a few weeks.”

And those were the last words Arripis heard, for as the cold west wind beat upon his pulsating gills they dried, and a strange dreamy peace came over him.

“Got anything, mate?” asked a stranger, walking along the beach to his captor.

“Only a ten pound buck,” replied the sportsman.

But neither of them knew that Arripis Salar had committed suicide, or why.

# The River.

**E. C. Morrice**

In the springtime, when the wattles  
All their golden glory strewed,  
When the north wind, sweet and faithless,  
With his kiss their blossoms wooed,  
Then the river, clear and tranquil,  
Flowed with silver rippling tide  
Past the town, and ever downward,  
Till it joined the ocean wide.

Here the joy of life ran riot  
By the river's mazy ways,  
Youth and age and happy childhood  
Revelled in those vernal days;  
Wedding-bells pealed o'er the water  
Music gay and sounds of glee  
Came across that sparkling river  
In those days of jubilee.

When the night stole o'er the ranges,  
Blotting out the sunset gleam,  
Myriad lights from happy households  
Glittered in the placid stream;  
And when all was steeped in slumber  
And the Cross shone out on high,  
Then the river to the sheoaks  
Sang a tender lullaby.

From the arid west the summer  
Came, and all the gardens sweet,  
All the fruitful fields and pastures  
Shrivelled in the scorching heat;  
Plaintively the river murmured,  
Shrunken from its lordly flow,  
Hazy were the skies at noontide,

Red at eve, with flery glow.  
Then up from the sea the south wind  
    Swept, with clouds and floods of rain;  
O'er its banks the waters rising  
    Overflowed the sodden plain;  
And upon the town the river,  
    Roaring through the midnight gloom,  
Bearing death and sure destruction,  
    Came with unrelenting doom.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now no longer by the river  
    Smiles the gay and busy town;  
Where it stood are swamps and marshes  
    Overgrown with rushes brown.  
Here the joybells ring no longer,  
    But the plaintive plover's cry,  
And the sad and eerie curlew  
    Walls beneath the lonely sky.

But at midnight if you listen  
    By the river cold and bright  
You may hear the dirges chanted  
    Softly, sadly, through the night.  
You may hear a sound of mourning  
    Through the reeds and rushes sere,  
And a slow and solemn tolling  
    In the river marshes drear.

## The Lighted Windows.

**Samuel A. Mills**

In a little back parlour of a little public-house a man sat at a small table with a newspaper and a glass before him. The walls of the room were dirty, but relieved at intervals with paper pictures pasted upon them; the floor was covered with a cheap linoleum from which the pattern had long disappeared, and in a number of places the linoleum was worn through, revealing a dirty hardwood floor, or else patches of grey-black dust. The man sat in a corner, with a gas jet flaring above his head. A pair of steel pince-nez were upon his nose, and the light, shining full upon his face, showed up his features with remarkable distinctness. He was middle-aged, square built, and of medium height, with short black hair, short black stubbly moustache and beard, thick lips, and small greedy black eyes. He wore a white cabbage-tree hat, a black tweed coat buttoned close, white ducks, and soiled cheap tanned boots.

A slim man of 30 came into the room, shut the door, and said "Good day, Macksky." The newcomer had a small sallow face, a waxed moustache, a greenish suit, a light black cane, black patent leather boots, and white spats.

"Lor'," said Macksky, as he eyed the visitor all over, "you look just as if you had come out of a bandbox."

"Well, I've just come out of a cab," said the gentleman with the waxed moustache. "This is the second time I've been in Sydney, and it don't do for a young professional gentleman like me to walk about the city when he wants to learn the hang of it, and to admire the scenery. Besides, walking spoils the look of me patent leathers, and then the girls won't look at me."

"I haven't called you in here, Dice, to talk about love's young dream," said Mr. Macksky with a nerveful manner. "Wot I've called you in here for is to sit down and listen to me while I talk business." Thus admonished, the somewhat foppish young gentleman sat down at the table and drank his glass of beer in three successive stages.

"You're a smart and a taking young fellow, Dice," said Mr. Macksky with considerable warmth and amiability, "and I've got a little job in hand that I think you can carry out perfectly. Now, I suppose you know

what Omar, the clever man of Persia, said about life and its opportunities —

“Gather the roses while you may —  
Old time is swiftly flying.”

Mr. Wordice changed his hand with which he twirled his wax end, and smiled upon his mentor. “Why don't you say straight out you've got a plant, and you don't want me to let the grass grow under my feet?” remarked Mr. Wordice, with an air of professional pride and alacrity. “I believe in Australian poets, not Persians; and I like to see rich men in the position of Lord Ullin — left lamenting.”

“Exactly, my lad, exactly,” said Mr. Macksky, rubbing his right palm vigorously and enjoyably in his left; “the plant, my lad, is at the seaside, and the nice old party to whom you will pay your attentions is very well up in the money world. I have drawn out a little plan of his house and grounds.”

With that, Mr. Macksky, like a good business man, suiting the action to the word, produced from the inner breast pocket of his coat a piece of paper somewhat copiously marked with rough lines and wordings. “Now, you watch that, while I talk.” Mr. Wordice instantly put his stick upon the floor, smoothed the paper out carefully on the table, gazed steadily upon it, and listened respectfully to the discourse of his elder.

“The place is a white four-storied house at Manly, with a slate roof, two small pointed towers, a white flagstaff in the garden, and a white fence in front of the lot. The moment you are off the wharf turn to the left and go along the asphalt path under the pine trees. There will be nobody about in the evening, except the lovers sitting on the seats, and they'll be too interested in one another to notice you. When you find yourself getting near a low stone building with a lot of windows in it, and with sheds and palisading jutting out into the water, that'll be the baths. Stop about eighty yards this side of 'em, look up to the right, and you'll see a lamp-post. Go up the little asphalt track towards the lamp till you get on the footpath of the street. Keep along for about a hundred yards, then you'll come to where the iron fence turns to the left a few feet and stops short. You'll see two signboards there, one standing by itself, the other nailed to a tea-tree. Leave these two signboards on your right, follow the track that runs round the shores of the bay, and you'll come to it. There's barbed wire running along on top of the fence — look out for it. Round that way a bit there's a little lodge with nobody living in it. Don't go past it, because if you do you'll reach the fowlyard, and it won't do to go in that way, because you might wake cockolorum. But have a look at it, because just beyond it there's a bit of a paddock with thick scrub and lantana. You might have to run out that way, and if you do you

can easily climb the fence, because it's ordinary two-rail and palings — no barbed wire. It's easy to get over that fence from either side, and if you do a bolt that way you'll be straight away among trees, bushes, and rocks. And you can go straight down the rocks into the water if you want to — rather too sudden in places — but there are good nooks to hide in. You'll need to wear boots, not shoes, because if you have to get hot-foot out of the house it's so rough and rocky all about there that you'll have a hundred to one chance of spraining your ankle. But I don't think there's the least chance that you'll have to cut and run. At the seaside everybody becomes free and easy. There's a lot of abandon and freedom. People get careless, and as likely as not you'll find some window open or unfastened. People sleep heavy there, too. The sea air and the sea bathing gives them good appetite and good digestion, and both those things make people forget their cares and troubles. I see by the paper that there'll be a southerly blowing to-morrow night. That'll cool the air, so everybody in that house will sleep like tops to-morrow night, and another thing in your favour is that the old parties have a good supply of wine, and treat the servants very cordially. There's one more thing in your favour: the southerly will make a row among the trees and cause a pretty good noise with the waves breaking on the shore; those sounds will deaden all other sounds. Do you understand me, Dice — is it so?"

"I have followed every word of it on this plan," said the younger man, quietly.

The elder man continued: "Once you've got the stuff, come straight down from the house towards the water. You'll see a big church right opposite across the bay. You're bound to see some lights in it, because it's most conspicuous from where that house is, being right opposite, and high up on the hill. I spoke to you about the lodge. Well, in a line between that lodge and the church you'll see a track leading off the main track that runs round the shore. That little track leads down to the water. You can't miss it, because it starts just in front of a seat. Stone steps lead all the way down to a hole that's been hollowed out in the rocks and built in a bit, to make a bath. I'll be fishing in a boat just off that bath, and burning a little lamp in the bow. Give a low whistle. I'll bring the boat right into the bath, pick you off the rocks, and once you're aboard we'll paddle her back to Sydney. Is it so, Dice?"

"Good!" said the young burglar. "But you've said nothing about the boodle, what it is, or where it is."

"I'm coming to that," said the elder man, as he slowly puffed his pipe. "But I want you first to be clear on it, that although you're a limber chap you've got to be careful about finding those steps. If you go a bit to the left the fence that's there might stop you or it mightn't, and if you should fall it's a forty-foot drop on to solid rock; that means ta-ta. And take care that you don't get to the right of the steps, for if you do — well, you

know what happens to birds' eggs when they fall out of the trees. Well, you'll fall just as straight, just as hard, and you'll break just as badly there. Is it so, Dice?"

"I'll see to those steps before I'll do the trick, Mr. Mack.," said the younger man, looking up and twirling his moustache. "If anybody falls there, it's the man I rabbit as he's following me — understand?"

For answer the amiable Mr. Macksky smiled unctuously upon his pupil.

"The police down there are a pretty sleepy lot," continued Mr. Macksky. "They think of nothing else but trying to catch the publicans selling drink on a Sunday, and they don't know enough to do it. Or else they moon about the beach. You needn't worry about them. Well, on the side of the house near those signboards I told you of, the ground rises inside of the fence in the form of a high bank. There are plenty of trees and shrubs inside — big pine trees. There are also a few fruit trees, peaches and that. Don't take the peaches — leave 'em for the small boys on a dark night."

"You're a verbose old fraud," remarked Mr. Wordice. "Why don't you come to the point?"

"Remember all the geography I'm teaching you," said Mr. Macksky with much dignity, "and you'll not only get the silver, but you'll get away with it."

"Well, I'm on top of the bank," said Mr. Wordice. "How am I to get inside the house, and how am I to get to the little plant?"

"The silver," said Mr. Macksky, "is all kept in a cupboard leading off the dining-room. The dining-room is the front room on the eastern side. As I told you before, the chances are you'll find a window open. If they're all shut you'll have to effect a little gentle persuasion. Is it so, Dice?"

"Right!" ejaculated his companion. "When I come down those steps I'll whistle 'Love's Young Dream.' "

"Whistle it soft and low, Dice," remarked Mr. Macksky with a deep inward chuckle, "whistle it soft and low, and yours ever will come to you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, when Mr. Reginald Wordice in a preliminary reconnoitre reached the top of the steps described by the excellent and painstaking Mr. Macksky, he was confronted by a spectacle that, criminal as he was, made him very uneasy. It was not the steepness of the stone steps that disconcerted him, nor was he in any way disheartened by the fortress he had to capture. On the contrary, he had been most favourably impressed, having found everything faithfully there as described by his industrious

and admirable mentor. But the sight that upset him was afforded by the great church. It was far larger than any other building visible on the landscape. It was the commanding figure, the great centrepiece that looked down guardian-like upon the hundreds of houses, the smaller buildings upon its right and left. From its centre rose a square tower, and from the top of the tower a flagstaff pointed to the sky — “to heaven,” the voice of suppressed religion whispered within Mr. Wordice. He had heard many stories from his mother and his father of the far-reaching power and invincibility of the Church. He knew no sects, but all religions were massed in his mind as “the Church.” Wordice flattered himself that he was an atheist, but the germ of religion transmitted to him by inheritance now began working inside him, causing him discontent and misgiving. His imagination began to play. He found himself staring at the hundred windows of the great edifice and fancying that the windows were eyes all watching him, taking note of him, waiting for his next move. When a chorister walked out of the building, Wordice almost expected him to produce a telescope and point it directly at him. Certainly, if a clergyman were sitting at one of those windows looking over the landscape with a field-glass or a telescope, the first thing he might light on would be Wordice himself, since he was directly opposite. But to the credit of Mr. Wordice it must be said that he was too sincere a criminal to be very long bothered by these fears. He shook them off, went down the hill, and, entering a hotel, ordered dinner. He asked if he might have his coffee on the balcony. The landlady agreed with a smile, and said she would bring it up to him. He rose from the table, and, going up the stairs leading to the balcony, arrived at the little drawing-room, took hold of a comfortable chair, wheeled it upon the balcony, placed it in a convenient position, and then with accustomed coolness placed his feet upon the balcony railing before him, and leaning back in the chair dozingly surveyed the sea. Then, oppressed by the heaviness of the air, which was coming in fast in the form of a wet north-easter, he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was just on half-past 10, his hat had fallen off and rolled some feet away, and his right arm, which had fallen to the floor, was quite numb. He soon set these little things right, however, and went out.

It has often been commented upon by philosophers that the unforeseen, the accidental, and the insignificant play the most important parts in the development of the drama of human life. We can lay our plans, we can take every possible precaution for their successful execution, but we can never eliminate the element of chance, the million and one causes that may arise in the world without, to thwart or defeat our most carefully deliberated schemes. Our senses and our capacities being limited, we can never too surely rely upon the exactness and completeness of our own observations. Thus Mr. Macksy, who had taken the most careful note of

all the surroundings of the big house, had taken no note whatever of the tremendous din made in the trees around by the locusts that swarmed on every trunk and limb. He had gone into the back entrance and later into the front entrance, on the pretence of asking questions as to whether or not the house was for sale. The real object of his visit was to ascertain whether there was a dog on the premises. Finding none, he had come away in great jubilation, and therein was the shortness of his wisdom; for although no dog was there, he would have perceived, had he looked attentively, that there was a large cat snoozing on the verandah in the sunshine. The dishonest assistant of a fashionable jeweller had given him exact information about the value of the silver, but the same assistant had never even suggested that a youth who had fallen soundly asleep at 11 p.m. may be awakened by a noise half an hour later, and, feeling hungry, may forthwith arise and go down to the dining-room and thrust his head into the very cupboard where the silver is kept unprotected. Nor would these forces have ever become active in the fields of this story had not Mr. Wordice, strange as the assertion may seem, possessed quite a number of mental and moral defects, the smallest of which was contrariness. Thus, when he discovered two windows open in the dining-room, he did not take the one nearer the ground, but chose the one that was two or three inches higher. This, however, would have been of no consequence whatever had it not caused Mr. Wordice to alight somewhat heavily on the one creaking board in the floor of the dining-room. This in turn would have signified nothing, had not the open window let in an hour earlier the family cat, and two hours earlier a "yellow mundy" locust. The creaking of the board agitated the locust in the corner to which it had crawled. It squeaked. The cat awoke, bounded over to it, and began pawing and playing with it. Every time it tried to fly from the floor the cat struck it down. It began to "sing" at its top, and the locusts on the trees without caught up the refrain and sang in clear sonorous chorus. The boy, awakened by the noise, came downstairs looking for food. He put his head into the cupboard, surprising Mr. Wordice, who without hesitation smashed the boy down with a terrible blow on the head from a heavy silver mug. Then he rushed across the room, slipped out of the window, and made his escape. Reaching the esplanade he saw there was no steamer at the wharf; he went straight on past the wharf to the place where the rowing fleet is moored. Wading into the water, he got hold of a boat, cut the rope of its moorings, and, with the help of the rudder, which he found lying in the bottom of the boat, he began paddling out from shore. He intended to paddle over to the spot where Macksky was fishing. But suddenly the rudder fell from his nerveless grasp; he shrank down, appalled by the lights that shone from a hundred windows. One moment the windows were ablaze, the next they were in utter darkness. Very soon they shone again, then once again they were

shrouded in the blackness of the night. And this kept recurring and recurring at regular intervals, until the man, with the fear of the murderer shaking him like a palsy, saw in it the action of the supernatural, the effect of something done by the Church — the Church. They were doing this, these black-robed men of the Church, who kept vigil and prayed through the night. They had heard the blood of the murdered man crying from the earth, as God had heard the blood of Abel crying after the first great crime. By supernatural agency the windows seemed to light up, to darken; to relight, and re-darken; and this he knew would go on till the hue and cry were raised. The telephones would be set in motion, the police would begin scouring the harbour, and here he was alone in a boat, trying to paddle his way with the help only of a rudder. They would know him at once by these signs; and once they had him, what then? The thought never came to his brain in its full reality, but, actuating his muscles, caused him to fling himself overboard. The water was deep, and, being unable to swim, he soon choked and sank.

Early next morning they found his body. Nobody identified him, not even the youth whom he had struck down, and who had recovered of his own accord after laying stunned for ten or twelve minutes.

The jury returned a verdict of “found drowned.” Nobody suspected for a moment that he was a comparative stranger in Sydney, and that his death was brought about by the effect made upon the windows by the revolving light of the lighthouse at South Head.

## **The Race — Little Jim's Story.**

### **Albert Dorrington**

My pride was hurt when Dick Marsden entered me for the Ladies' Bracelet at Bong Bong. Having a just regard for my pedigree, I hated country races. There was a feeling in me at times that I could overtake the white flash that runs down a lightning-rod. I objected to be classed with a crowd of hacks, feeling certain that most of them ran in carts during the week, while the others knew more about chasing kangaroos than flat-racing.

My owner, Dick Marsden, knew that the best English and Australian racing blood ran in my veins; the strains of St. Gatien, Dutch Oven, and Lady Betty put me to rights when it came to a dead finish.

The race at Bong Bong was a tenth-rate bush circus, a matter of ten sovereigns, with an added sweepstake of a pound. I was badly ridden, jockeyed, nagged, and spurred. I won, very much against my will, with an iron-fisted jockey sawing my mouth, and half strangling me.

At twenty-four Dick Marsden had married Phyllis Chalmers, a Victorian girl. He was cashier in a Melbourne warehouse, until hard times came; and in the crash that followed the boom he found himself without a billet, and with only a little money in the bank. Bush-fires and drought ruined her father, and Dick, silly, big-hearted Dick, had backed bills for his smart friends and got left.

Immediately after his dismissal Dick cast about for an opening; but unemployed cashiers were as plentiful in those days as overdrafts and empty houses.

Fagged and weary, he would return home after scouring the city for employment. Billets were harder to obtain than 40oz. nuggets or an agent-generalship. Finally, one wet miserable day, Dick told Phyllis that I was their only asset, but when he spoke about selling me she cried so bitterly that he postponed the event a little while longer.

As a two-year-old I was the property of old Captain Marsden, Dick's uncle, who owned a station at Gunoon Downs. The captain always said that he would hand me over to his nephew the moment he could afford to look after a first-class horse. Dick's salary was £300 a year then, but Captain Marsden didn't think it was enough to maintain a wife and a

five-hundred-guinea race-horse.

Captain Marsden died suddenly, leaving his affairs in a dreadful state. A big-fisted bailiff walked into Gunoon Downs station, and held the floor until things were straightened out. He came into my stable one morning, and looked at me over the partition.

“Ah! my beauty,” he said huskily, “you're the flyer known as Little Jim, eh? We'll turn you into cash by-and-bye.”

I waited with my ears back, hoping he would come a bit closer. I had never lifted a full-grown bailiff through the stable door, but it's quite easy, even when your shoes are off.

When Dick heard of Captain Marsden's death he ran up to Gunoon and interviewed the bailiff about me. Dick always regarded me as his property, but the bailiff thought otherwise, and defied him to open the stable door. Dick didn't argue with the bailiff; he simply unlocked the stable the following night, and away we went — Dick and I.

He'd tell you about it himself if you asked him. And after Captain Marsden's affairs were wound up, it was found that his creditors came out of it well enough to allow Dick's claim to hold good.

I was sorry for Dick and Phyllis and Baby. As a three-year-old I never liked babies, but when the financial crash came Phyllis brought the red-fisted little mite into the stable, and cried on a heap of straw at my head. Dick was away in Melbourne.

I was used to hearing Phyllis laugh and cry, but when she sobbed with Baby resting against my neck it made me feel queer.

I know what ruin is, black ruin that strips a house bare and leaves an unsatisfied wolf where Love should sit. I heard it in Phyllis's crying, and I stood still, not daring to flinch, while Baby twisted its fingers in my mane.

One cold morning Dick returned from Melbourne, bringing with him a small, bright-eyed little man named Dare. They came to my stable and saddled me, and without a word led me to the grass track at the rear of the house. Dare's horse was standing near the paddock gate, a big, “classy” bay, with a muscle-packed neck, and thighs and quarters heaving with bone and strength. It “cheeked” its bit half savagely as I approached; it had a coat of silk, and the head of a racing machine.

“So . . . this is Little Jim,” said Dare, passing his hand with a flexing motion towards my fetlock. I quivered at his touch; it seemed as though he was counting my sinews and veins.

“Ye-es,” he continued, slowly. “Bit small.” Then he drew back and eyed me steadily. “Better try him over a couple of furlongs with Dreadnought. One can never tell,” he said, testily.

Dare mounted Dreadnought. Dick took charge of me, and in a jiffy we were off. It was only a flutter, but Dreadnought seemed to eat the ground as he hammered along. I didn't feel like racing that morning, but when

Dick spoke to me I flashed alongside the big bay, hauling at the bit savagely for my head.

“Whoa! whoa!” laughed Dick; “you little glutton! Whoa!”

Dare swung round and again looked over me. “Not so dusty,” he snapped. “If he was taken in hand for a while he might.” He looked meaningly at Dick.

Dick shook his head uncertainly. But Dare examined me again, hoof, eye, and mouth. “Hang it!” he said, staring at me, “he's the dead image of little Paris. Look at his shoulders and neck! Great Scot! he might sneak the Cup if we looked after him.”

“No, no! It's too big — out of his class,” answered Dick sharply. “Think of him meeting Burrumbeet and The Jap, Maranoa, and The Czar. He's too small, and I wouldn't ask the little beggar to do it.” Dick patted me affectionately. “You don't know what he's been to me; he saved my life and honour one night in the ranges, when the troopers were at my heels.”

“You didn't borrow him, eh?” laughed Dare.

“No one had a better right to him than I,” answered Dick hotly. “He belonged to Uncle Harry at Gunoon Downs, and after he died he was claimed by a thieving bailiff named Howitt. Little Jim used to follow me about the yard like a sheepdog. I rode off with him one night while the estate was under auction. The bailiff Howitt sent the troopers after me. I was taken to the lockup at Yarraba, but Jim slipped away into the ranges with his saddle and bridle on. The Yarraba lockup couldn't hold me that night; I climbed out and found him in the hills among the brumbies. You know the rest, Dare; I got away, and the affair dropped.”

Dick patted my neck affectionately. “I don't think I'll enter him for the Cup, Dare; let us try a smaller race.”

“Bah!” Dare swung round almost savagely. “I thought you were Dick Big Heart. What's upset you?”

Then after a little while he put his hand on Dick's shoulder kindly. “My boy, your father was my friend once. Men call me the Hound. But I've made enough money and to spare, and I'll see you through if it comes to a pinch.”

I was taken back to the stable. Dreadnought — I learned that he was the winner of a dozen big events — was placed in the adjoining stall.

“Plenty of work ahead,” he said to me; “Derby, Caulfield, and Cup. Whips and colours, spurs and bit. Heigho! what a grand life!”

“I'm only a beginner,” I answered modestly. “Besides, I don't like race-courses.”

“H'm!” Dreadnought glanced at me peevishly. “You a beginner! Go and tell that to the boy who brings the chaff.”

That night Dare clapped a belltopper over Dreadnought's mouth to keep him from biting me. About a week later I was entered for the Cup.

Then Dare began to prepare me for the event. Under his clever hand I felt myself grow limber and flexible as indiarubber. They walked and swam me in the sea water at the back of the house, where the gulls hovered in swarms across the bay. My muscles were flexed with hard and soft brushes, my food weighed and given to me at certain hours, until I yearned to break bit and bridle whenever my head was pulled.

One hot day I was taken to Flemington, and stabled alongside some of the big Melbourne cracks. I used to meet them on the tan in the early morning. Big, princely fellows they were, with flashing eyes and wicked heels. I could not but admire the two first favourites, The Jap and Burrumbeet, who were closely attended and “clocked” whenever they exercised or went for a morning gallop. Heigho! no one took the trouble to throw a watch on me!

My box was at the end of the row. Dreadnought and Bill were my stable companions. Bill was Dick's faithful bulldog. He was fond of me, and he used to lie in the straw, his small eyes half closed, his tiny ears pricked at the slightest sound. Dare said that a bulldog was an excellent companion for a Cup horse.

The Jap soon leaped to position of first favourite. He was fancied on account of the way he smothered the field at Caulfield. Then came Burrumbeet, The Czar, and Maranoa, The Dingo and Alligator. I was hardly mentioned in the betting. And Dick — it made me tremble to think of it — sold everything belonging to him to prepare me for the race.

Phyllis, Baby, and Dick rented a three-roomed cottage near the course. Phyllis would often bring Baby into my box, while Dick smoked and yarned at the door with Dare. These silly young people hadn't a penny in the world now; everything was sold and mortgaged except Baby and me.

“What's the good worrying about the race until it's lost?” said Dick to Phyllis. “We'll shake the field up or bust,” he laughed.

“But Jim is such a little horse,” sobbed Phyllis. “I saw him this morning cantering beside that terrible man-eater The Jap, and, oh; Dick, he looked no bigger than a pony on the track.”

Dick came into the box and slapped my shoulder briskly. “Jim, Jim, you pulled me out of the fire once. I can't ask you to do it again. The Jap and Burrumbeet will break us, I fear, and then——” He stopped, and covered his face.

Phyllis came in and put Baby against my shoulder, and it said: “Boo-oo-oo, Gee-gee!”

I kept to my work cheerfully, and one morning I heard Dare say that the papers were reporting every bit of my work. Within a week my price was 10 to 1; later it shortened to 8's, to 7's.

I had heard of men bearing the pinch of hunger before making a final bid for fortune. I knew that every penny spent in training me meant an

extra pinch for Phyllis and Baby. And yet I could not blame Dick for putting his last hope in me. It hurt him a little to see dainty Phyllis going out in shabby clothes. She was like a little grey mouse when she moved among the well-dressed ladies and owners' wives.

One midnight, when Dick had gone to bed, I heard a scraping on the roof of the stable. Then the iron began to squeak, as though a crowbar was tearing it open. The moon was shining. I saw the faces of two men looking down at me. Dreadnought became restive, and trembled violently.

"That's him!" said one of the men, pointing to me suddenly. "He's very quiet. Make him swallow the ball, Joe. Don't mark or hurt him in any way."

A moment later Joe — he was an evil-eyed stable boy — slipped down, holding something in his hand. "Steady! whoa!" he whispered. "Whoa. Jim!" I felt that Dreadnought was shaking with fear in the next stall.

"I'll settle your claim to the Cup, my beauty," said Joe in my ear. He caught me by the mouth and forced back my head. For a moment I felt that he was strangling me. ... Dick, Dick! I thought. He will never know what has happened.

"Hist!" whispered the man on the roof sharply. In a flash I saw Bill the dog leap from the straw to Joe's knee, and in a second was swinging from his throat.

"Help! murder! help!" Dog and man rolled on the stable floor beneath my feet, clawing and tearing at each other. The dog made no sound, voiced no appeal, but the man with the poison ball in his fist rolled and screamed for help.

Dare came, lightning in his eye, a dogwhip in his right hand, and flung wide the stable door. Then a jockey boy flashed a big lantern on the scene. Dare choked off the dog, and picked up Joe. "So," he said, shaking him fiercely, "what's your little game?" Dare stooped and picked up the poison ball from the floor. Then he looked at the trembling man, and his face grew livid. "You unprincipled dog! Have you no spirit for clean sport? Out, you dog, out!"

Dare smote with his heavy whip again and again. The would-be poisoner staggered to the door with the lash marks on his neck and arms. "Go," said Dare, "quickly!" The man ran, cursing his luck and the dog that had trapped him.

"You'd better sleep in the stable," said Dare to Dick. "There's a gang of spielers hanging about ready to do Little Jim an injury. They think he is likely to interfere with their books, I suppose. I'd like to see the little fellow ruin the whole gang. All the same, we'll have to watch him night and day until the race is over."

The night before the Cup was like a furnace; the heat clung to the

stables like a hot blanket. Then came a violent change. A sudden deluge of rain roared on the roof, and made Dick sit up and cover his face. "All over now," he choked. "The ground will be like a glue-pot to-morrow. The mud will tire him; he's so small and light."

Dare peeped into the stable with a glum face. He strolled out after midnight to look at the course, and returned silent and depressed. Phyllis and Baby were quite cheerful, especially Baby. It clung to my neck, saying: "Boo-oo, boo! gee-gee!"

"That's what the crowd will say to me after the race," groaned Dick. And the rain thundered on the roof, and ran in swimming belts of mud across the flat. Afar off I heard the mighty Jap coughing in his box. The voice of a sleepless jockey boy broke upon the night.

"Wait till the numbers are up. I'll show you how to ride!" Then I fell asleep. When I awoke a cool breeze was blowing across the tracks. A grey sky and wet grass greeted me as I crossed the flat for my final morning gallop. Later in the day I heard the voice of a multitude roaring around me. All over the hill and flat they spread, men, women, and children, laughing and panting, in close-packed hundreds. The paddock and enclosures were alive with colours and prettily-dressed women.

Phyllis and Baby came to have a last look at me before I entered the saddling paddock. Her dress was poor, her face pinched and worn.

"Six to four The Jap," roared a voice. "Eight to four Burrumbeet!"

"Good-bye, Jim," said Phyllis to me. "Good-bye, dear!"

I stamped my foot angrily. "It's Baby he wants," whispered Dick. "We'll have to humour him."

For one moment Phyllis allowed Baby to lie against my shoulder. "Boo, boo! gee-gee!" it said in my ear.

After that I don't remember much what happened. My jockey, a well-knit little fellow, walked me on to the course.

"Little Jim!" shouted someone. "Here he is! Number eight on the card!"

The clamour of a great multitude buzzed in my ears. Hundreds of glasses were upon me as I cantered half-lazily past the stand.

"Isn't he a tot?" said his Excellency, leaning over. "Almost a pony. Ah! here's The Jap. What a magnificent horse!"

The favourite swung past me, his jockey tugging at his big head. I watched them for a moment as we ambled to the post.

"The Jap will fight out the last furlong," I said to myself, "until my heart breaks; but it is going to break or win."

My head flashed up and down. I felt the blood of my sires surging through my veins.

A bell rang, while a great silence fell upon the crowd. One by one the Cup starters lined up to the post. I had a place on the outside. Old racers like Burrumbeet and Maranoa kept their eyes on the flag, and as it fell

the field moved away without a mishap.

“They're off!” It was roared from hill to flat. The great race had begun.

Now, I thought, if the boy has grit we'll have a look in for the sake of a little woman and a baby.

“Steady! Jim,” said the boy, in a low, comforting voice. “Steady, you little glutton!”

I liked his voice and his sure hold on my mouth. If he felt that I could whip the stars in their flight he was a boy of sense and discrimination. He crouched forward until I could hardly feel him in the saddle. He seemed to hang his weight on air-pegs. There was no flash riding, no bumping to throw me out of my stride.

“Bless you, my boy,” I said. “What a golden jockey!”

There were thirteen first-class horses in front of me, trained to the hour, well ridden, and biding their time; and they shovelled the mud along my line of sight like a gang of navvies.

“Get out of my way!” shrieked Burrumbeet's jockey. “I can't get through!”

“Catch hold of my tail,” shouted The Jap's rider, “and I'll give you a tow.”

“Steady, Jim!” sang out my jockey. “The fight hasn't started yet.” Through a mud-mist in front I beheld The Jap and Maranoa striding along like machines.

“Easy! Whoa, Jim! Easy, you little devil!” choked the boy. “Great Scot! it's our race if nothing happens.”

A loud murmur surged like the sound of ocean surf across the hill and flat.

“Maranoa and The Jap!” The shout went skyward like a half-frantic appeal to the Fates. The big field was behind us now. My heart was beginning to sing, and, hey! the whips were out!

“Home!” snapped the boy. “Now for it, Jim!”

“Maranoa! Maranoa! come back to me!” I breathed. The whip stung, but not so sharp as the thought of defeat. The long quiet straight leaped ahead; the judge's box loomed like a small sepulchre at the end. It seemed to reel towards us.

“The Jap”

“Burrumbeet!”

“Maranoa!”

The sky seemed to close upon the maddening voices. Then a hoarse triumphant roar boomed down the hillside.

The Jap rolled in his stride like a dying colossus, and I ate the ground inch on inch until I breathed the air in front of his big head. Then through the sting of spur and whip came the human roar.

“Burrumbeet! Burrumbeet!”

A great silence fell upon the multitude, that was broken by a clear,

ringing challenge.

“Little Jim!”

“Yah!” shouted my jockey, “I should think so!”

I forgot everything else, except Phyllis, as I walked from the paddock. Dick found her sitting in the garden, holding baby to her heart.

“Well,” said Dick, huskily, “what do you think of it, dear?”

“I heard the men crying it in the road,” she half whispered. “Oh, Dick, Dick! it's like a dream,” she sobbed.

Dare came up and shook hands with Dick and Phyllis. Then he put Baby on my back and walked me up and down the yard.

“If you'd like to sell Little Jim,” he said, winking at Dick, “I'll make you a good offer.”

Dick stroked his chin and grinned behind his hand.

“What do you consider a fair offer?” he asked, mischievously.

“Dick!” cried Phyllis, “how dare you talk of such a thing! I'd sooner sell——” She stopped and blushed furiously.

“Baby?” asked Dick, quietly.

“Almost,” answered Phyllis.

We are pretty comfortable now. Phyllis doesn't wear cotton dresses, and Dick tells everyone that I galloped the wolf from the door.

## The Red Kangaroo.

### Ethel Castilla

The spring sunshine was lighting up the Maroondah schoolroom. It was a cheerful room in a cross-curtained out-building, separated from the homestead by a lawn. The Maroondah gardens skirted a Queensland river, and from the schoolroom could be seen great, green-haired willows, dipping into the shining water, and making a delicious background for snowy fruit trees, and orange-groves, and glorious masses of roses, crimson, white, and golden. Beyond the river ran level green plains to the horizon. The sunbeams danced in at the open schoolroom windows, and the soldier birds sang "Sweet! "Sweet!" up the musical scale, making it difficult for the occupants of the room to take a keen interest in "Little Arthur's History of England."

In a cushioned armchair sat an exceedingly pretty girl of 20. Her dark-blue cotton gown exactly matched the tint of her laughing eyes, and her curling hair made an aureole of gold about her head. Her cheeks had the colouring of rosy shells. A red-haired boy of eight, sturdy, tanned, and inconceivably freckled sat on a low chair on her right. On her left nestled against her a pretty rosy girl of seven, whose red curls and greenish-grey eyes were the only points she had in common with her brother. The governess held a copy of Lady Callcott's "Little Arthur's History of England" in one beautiful, white hand. The boy was droning out from another copy of that celebrated work.

"Although the poor — Britons were al-most na-ked, and had — very — bad — swords, and very weak spars and bows, and arrers — and small shields, made of bas-ket work — covered — with — leather — they were — so — brave — that — they fought a great — many — battles — against — the kangaroos."

"Jim!" cries the teacher, laughing.

"Well, Crystal, I really can't 'tend. I'm thinking of the drive all the time. And we do fight the kangaroos, anyway."

"There were none in ancient Britain, Jim."

"Crikey! What a slow time the boys must have had there!"

And Jim went on stumbling over Lady Callcott's historical facts.

Crystal Wilton was the eldest daughter of a widowed squatter, who had

failed and died, leaving four girls on the world's charity. John Forsythe, the owner of Maroondah had taken Crystal as a governess, chiefly because he got what he called "edication" for his children, cheap. Old Forsythe was as economical as he was wealthy and illiterate. The homestead had no mistress. John Forsythe had lost two wives. The first had left two sons. Jim and Margaret, usually called Midget, were the children of the second marriage. The house was managed by Mrs. Daggert, a grim, middle-aged housekeeper. John Forsythe was a clever man, who had made Maroondah one of the show sheep stations of the district, but he was entirely unconscious that both his sons were the slaves of the blue-eyed governess.

Jim had not been long occupied in slow and painful tracking of the ancient Britons, when there was a loud rap at the schoolroom door.

"Come in," said Crystal. And a tall young man carrying a gun strode into the room, with a fine black-and-tan collie at his heels.

"Drive's on in ten minutes," he cried, in a ringing voice. "Look sharp, Rufus and Midget."

The children scampered out upon the lawn.

"I have your gun ready, Crystal," said Jack Forsythe, gently, coming up to the girl's chair, "and Mat is saddling Bayard."

Crystal smiled sweetly at this handsome son of Anak. Jack Forsythe was undeniably good-looking, though a costume consisting of a loose holland coat, a soft shirt, secured at the waist by a cartridge belt, shabby tweed trousers and old leggings, was not calculated to enhance his beauty. He had fine dark eyes, a good nose, and a particularly handsome moustache. This ornament hid a rather coarse and sensual mouth, but Crystal shared in the common opinion of Jack Forsythe, that he was a fine young Queenslander, and twice the man his bookish elder brother Theyre appeared likely to become. Jack was only 23, but he had developed quickly in the forcing Queensland climate, and was reputed the best shot and scrub rider on the Downs. Old Forsythe grumbled equally at all his children, but he had been heard to own that he "liked a lad with a spark of the devil in 'im, and Jack 'ad more 'n one."

Crystal went over to the schoolroom piano and sat down, beginning to play a dreamy waltz.

"I don't know that I want to go. It's cruel work shooting kangaroos. Poor beasties."

"It's too bad," said the young man, impatiently. "I got up this kangaroo drive for you. And you promised to ride with me." He paused, and added jealously, "I believe you want to stay behind with Theyre."

A quiet voice at the door interrupted him. "The old man is asking for you, Jack; the Mountfords are come," and Theyre Forsythe came into the schoolroom.

Jack frowned, whistled to his dog, and went reluctantly away.

“The Lily” was Jack's nickname for his elder brother. Jack had a hearty contempt for the products of Rugby and Oxford, and had firmly refused to enter either of those seats of learning. Theyre had gone to both, and had taken a B.A. degree at Oxford. He was slighter and shorter than Jack, and his smooth-shaven face, with its delicately-cut features, was less tanned than his brother's. He had been born and bred on Maroondah, and was not deficient in manly accomplishments, though he could not compete with Jack either as a shot or a rider. He looked well in his brown riding suit, made by a London tailor.

“Aren't you ready for the slaughter, Crystal?” he asked lightly.

“I'm not coming,” answered the girl, turning round on her music-stool.

“Why, you were keen on this drive yesterday.”

“Yesterday isn't to-day.”

“Well, I was only going because you were. I thought it would please you.” The young man bent over the capricious creature and spoke with feeling. “Am I never to please you, Crystal?”

“If you got me a red kangaroo skin,” said the girl, slowly, as though the wish was the result of long thought, though it was but the caprice of the moment, “I would like it. I have wanted one for a rug for my room for an age. Di Mountford has a beauty.”

Now, a red kangaroo is a rare beast, and Crystal knew it.

“Come to the drive and ride with me, and I swear I'll shoot one for you,” said Theyre with sudden energy.

“Done!” cried the girl gaily. And she tripped across the lawn and into the house, while Theyre made his way to the stables.

A few minutes later they joined the hunting party outside the garden gate. There were a score of horsemen at the gate, each wearing a cartridge belt and carrying a gun, and a couple of led horses were laden with cartridges. Away to the west was a line of white-trunked gum trees, girdled with scrub. Towards this a string of horsemen, armed with stockwhips, were galloping over the plains. John Forsythe, a short, thick-set, bandy-legged man, with a large head and a red, rugged face, half buried in a grey beard, was standing by his strong brown horse, Adept. He did not notice Crystal or Theyre, though the girl was conspicuous on the showiest horse in the Maroondah stables, Bayard, a bright chestnut, with a white star on his forehead. Theyre was the one well-dressed man of the party, as Crystal observed, as she rode up to the Mountfords' buggy to exchange gushing confidences with Gawne Mountford's two rosy-cheeked, dashing daughters. He looked well on his bay thoroughbred, which he had named Pegasus, greatly to the puzzlement of Mat, the groom. That worthy wondered “Why Mr. Theyre put a mare's name on a 'oss.” Peg the horse remained in the stables, and out of them, until he was gathered to his fathers.

Theyre and Crystal cantered away from the rest until they reached a

little creek, shaded by a fragrant tangle of musk-trees and golden wattles. They followed its windings, letting their horses walk. The college-bred man, "with loads of learned lumber in his head," was many fathoms deep in love with this untravelled girl. For her sake he was ready to comply with his father's wishes and stay upon the Downs.

"Crystal," he said, after a long silence, "I've been trying for the last week to get the old man to stock Kareen."

Now, Kareen was the cattle station adjoining Maroondah, left to her elder son by the first Mrs. Forsythe.

"And he won't?" asked Crystal, sympathetically.

"Not he! He argued in his own obstinate way that it won't pay. I think he likes to keep me dependent on him, when I want to strike out on my own. I was at Kareen yesterday. It has such a nice cosy little homestead. We could be so happy there."

"Indeed!" said Crystal, laughing. "You seem sure that I want to go there."

"I am sure of nothing," said the young man, flushing angrily.

"Don't let us quarrel on this heavenly day," cried Crystal, and she cantered away towards the scrub, where the party were dismounting.

The horses were tied in a line to a wire fence when Crystal reached it. She slipped from Bayard, tied him up, and took her gun from the buggy to join the shooters, who had taken their stations behind trees, with their guns at their shoulders. Behind the scrub resounded loud shouts of "Ooay! Ooay!" and the sharp cracking of stockwhips. There was a pause, and then a mob of soft-eyed, brownish-grey kangaroos came hopping out of the underwood, and seemed to dance round the shooters. Guns went off in all directions, and the pretty creatures fell. The slaughter continued till the belt yielded no more game, when the sportsmen disappeared into the bush to get the big skins and tails, which were fastened on the led horses.

"We take Kooray Paddock next," shouted John Forsythe, in his harsh voice.

The cavalcade set out again, followed by the Maroondah buggy, wherein sat Mrs. Daggert and the children, and that which held Di and Nell Mountford. Crystal kept close to the Mountfords' trap, and appeared deeply interested in Di Mountford's shooting. She was too clever to make herself conspicuous with either of John Forsythe's sons. The second drive proved even more successful than the first. After a third and fourth had been accomplished, a halt was made for lunch on the banks of a reedy lagoon, shaded by ironbarks girt by silvery brigalows and wallaby bush. The sun blazed in the clear blue heavens, and deep noonday stillness reigned. The lagoon lay in a grassy flat, well adapted for a dinner-table. The Maroondah hands lit a fire near the water, and set quart-pots and billies to boil in the glowing embers. The three girls put a tablecloth in

the shade of a clump of bragalows, and Theyre spread rugs and buggy cushions round it. Mrs. Daggert took hampers bursting with good things from the buggy. She produced plump cold roast fowls, cheeses round and golden as a summer moon, pyramids of tempting sandwiches, and mounds of crisp brown cakes. Then she began to slice ham with a great carving-knife, while Crystal mixed salad dressing and broke lettuces. The girl's next task was to supply everyone round the rural table with huge cups of tea. Only Crystal could be relied upon to remember that John Forsythe liked lemon and sugar, and Theyre both sugar and milk, that Mrs. Daggert took her tea sugarless and strong, while Jack's must be weak and sugared.

“Who's made top score?” asked Jack, boisterously, looking round the party. “I got nine. How many did you shoot, Crystal?”

“Five,” answered the girl, absently.

“Best lady's score. How many, Theyre?”

“Ten,” said his brother, reluctantly, “and not one red one,” he added, turning to Crystal.

“Oh! never mind,” said the girl.

“I've bagged fifteen,” remarked John Forsythe. “You youngsters can't compete with the old man.”

Lunch was soon over, and the men began to stroll about with lighted pipes. Theyre did not smoke, and he lingered near Crystal, who was packing a hamper.

“I'm going for that red kangaroo, Crystal,” he said presently.

“Don't trouble about it,” she said. She looked distractingly pretty in her riding habit of pale grey cloth and her panama hat, with a white gossamer veil, floating like a cloud about her golden hair. “Don't go!”

He thought she doubted his skill, and was nettled. “I shall bring it home,” he said firmly. “So long!” And, vaulting upon his horse, he cantered away, waving his hat gaily. He took Pegasus over a great tree-trunk and disappeared into the scrub.

Theyre made for a paddock holding a great V-shaped disused kangaroo-yard. During the last drive he thought he had seen a red “old man” kangaroo lurking in the bushes by the sapling fence. The yard was about five miles from the homestead, and was overgrown with wallaby bush and baby eucalypts. It had not been used for ten years, when there had been a great kangaroo-hunt, and many hundred kangaroos had been driven into it and despatched with iron bars. As Theyre reached it, the largest red kangaroo he had ever seen hopped out of the bushes. He fired, but the creature had seen him and disappeared. He dashed into the scrub after it, but failed to find it. He came back to the yard, having lost his hat, cursing his luck that he should have seen the prize he desired for one maddening minute and then have lost it. He lingered about the kangaroo-yard, without any result, and then rode aimlessly from one belt of scrub

to another until he was tired. He hobbled Pegasus and lay down beneath a grove of scrub oaks, whose needle-like foliage piled in masses on the ground made a pleasant pillow. He fell asleep and dreamed that Crystal was laughing at him because he had come home without a red kangaroo.

The plains were flushed by the light of the setting sun when he awoke. He mounted Pegasus to go home. On his way he again passed the kangaroo-yard, and cast a longing glance into it. Once more he caught a glimpse of what seemed the identical red kangaroo, half hidden by a clump of wallaby bushes. Theyre fired and wounded him. The beast did not fall at once, but limped slowly into the inner pen of the yard and crouched among the scrub. The young man leaped from his horse. Dropping his gun, he seized a rusty iron bar that lay at his feet, and ran up to the dying beast to put him out of his misery.

The kangaroo was not dying. He reared himself to his full height and faced Theyre, towering over him. In a flash the brute had rushed upon the young man and jerked the bar from his hand. Theyre staggered, and the kangaroo, holding him with its fore-paws, tore his clothes to ribbons with his cruel hind-paws. Again and again Theyre tried to clutch the iron bar, that lay just beyond his reach. "Cooee! Cooee!" he cried, but his strength was fast going, and he was answered only by the harsh "qua-a-ah!" of the carrion crows and the mocking laughter of the jackasses. The beast tore his flesh, until he was sick and faint from pain. He closed his eyes and ceased to struggle at last, and wondered weakly if the carrion crows would pick out his eyes after he was dead — or before.

The thud of a horse's hoofs roused him. There was a crashing of boughs as a horseman made his way through the scrub, and in the fading light he recognised Dr. Allworth on his big grey mare. The grey-haired, gaunt bush doctor, whom everyone liked, rose to the emergency with characteristic nerve. In a few moments the kangaroo had received his death-blow from a hand that could be as gentle as a woman's.

The doctor knelt down and examined the young man's wounds. His face was grave as he bound them up with bandages improvised from his handkerchief, and gave his patient whisky and water from his flask.

"And now, how are we to get home?" he said. "Your horse has gone, I see. I must get you on Bess." And the doctor raised him gently in a pair of strong arms.

"The kangaroo?" said Theyre, faintly.

"The brute's dead."

"I — want — the — skin."

"Can't wait for it," objected the doctor.

"I must — have it! Hang it all! — I'm — not dying."

Very reluctantly the doctor skinned the beast and flung the skin over Bess's saddle. Then Theyre suffered himself to be lifted to the mare's back.

It was a toilsome journey to the homestead. Theyre lent forward on the horse's neck, like an old man, and the doctor had to support his patient, as well as guide his mare, and look to his own footing.

As they moved painfully along, the house-party gathered at the Maroondah dinner-table.

"Where's Theyre?" asked his father.

No one knew. He had not been missed till the close of the day, and everyone supposed he had gone home.

"Do you know anything about him, Miss Wilton?" asked Mrs. Daggert, looking sharply at Crystal, as she sat behind the tea equipage. Old Forsythe loved the customs of his youth, and insisted on tea at every meal.

Crystal turned as white as the table-cloth, and would have fallen to the floor had she not been caught by the parlour-maid. "What is it, Letty?" cried Mrs. Daggert.

"I just told Miss Wilton Mr. Theyre's horse has come home without him, ma'am," answered the girl, whimpering.

Mrs. Daggert and Letty carried Crystal to her room, and the others trooped out of the house. They gathered round riderless Pegasus and exhausted themselves in aimless conjectures. Old Forsythe was already organising a search party, when Jim announced the arrival of Dr. Allworth and Theyre at the garden gate.

The doctor and Jack took Theyre to his room and laid him on his bed. He was deadly pale, and lay in a stupor with closed eyes. Old Forsythe followed. Dr. Allworth dressed his patient's wounds, and explained the accident in a few curt sentences to his father.

Suddenly Crystal appeared in the room, looking as pale as the patient. The trampling of feet had roused her. She flung herself with a bitter cry beside Theyre's bed, as she saw his bloodstained shirt and still face. She thought he was dying, and that she had sent him to his death.

"Theyre! Theyre! speak to me," she cried, in a tone that enlightened John Forsythe.

Jack was standing with his father, a little away from the bed, in the recess of the bay window of the big, airy room. He turned away his face and groaned.

"He'll get her now," he murmured, and his face worked.

More light broke upon the master of Maroondah. "You — you want 'er, too!" he muttered. "By — " And he was mute with rage and astonishment. He turned to his old friend Dr. Allworth, and carried him away to the dining-room. Jack followed, and Crystal was left alone with Theyre. She lifted her tear-stained face and looked at him with a pity fast melting into love.

"Theyre!" she whispered.

The young man opened his eyes and smiled faintly. "The — red

— kangaroo-skin — is — there,” he faltered. “I — brought — it.”

Her tears rained on his poor bandaged right arm. “Theyre, stay with me! I cannot bear it! I do love you, Theyre. You must live for me!”

He smiled again. “I — will — live — now.”

After dinner Forsythe drew Dr. Allworth out on the verandah, and confided his troubles to him. “To think of Theyre throwin' 'imself away on 'er,” cried the injured father, “when 'e might 'ave 'ad a lady o' quality with a fortin, too! After all the good money I've spent on his she'll bring 'im nothin' but a family tree. An' they both want 'er.”

“She's an uncommonly pretty piece of feminine ware, Forsythe, and as bright as they make 'em.”

The old man pondered. “I s'pose I've bin a blitherin' idgit, Allworth, 'avin' the gel in the 'ouse.”

“You have, Forsythe,” the doctor answered, with the frankness of old friendship.

“An' I never suspected it, Allworth, never! It come upon me like — like thunder! What do you think of that?”

The doctor laughed. “I think you'll have an uncommonly clever daughter-in-law.”

Dr. Allworth stayed for three days at Maroondah, and had many similar conferences with John Forsythe. Theyre was invalided for three weeks, and spent most of his time in a lounging chair on the verandah. Crystal and the children were his constant companions. His father usually avoided him, but one fine afternoon old Forsythe came out on the verandah and found his son alone. The old man came up to him and asked him somewhat absently how he did. Then old Forsythe stood silent for some minutes, looking down upon his son with beetling brows.

“Look 'ere. Theyre,” he said at last, “if yu're bent on this marryin' business, do it. I'll not 'inder you. Indeed, I've bin thinkin' it over, and I find it'll pay to stock Kareen.” He paused. “The gel's a good gel and pretty enough. I've nothin' agin her. I think she's a bit artful. Never lettin' me see you an' Jack was both soft on 'er — look she don't play you no tricks.” He paused again. “Be a fool if you like.”

And with this paternal blessing old Forsythe strode into the homestead.

## **Told by Three.**

### **E. B. Hodge**

They say I'm bad. Perhaps I am. Certainly, these latter days leave no record to be proud of. Aimless, careless, devilish passing of time. Yet it was not always so. My thoughts fly backwards. The years fall from me, and memory revives for a moment vanished sweetness, dead hopes, and past ambitions. I am again the lover fond and accepted, diffident yet confident, proud, though humble. I hear tenderly-uttered words of love, feel kisses on my lips, and soft tendrils of hair beneath my hand. I perceive the silent if unspoken opposition of her parents to my suit.

It was mine then to prove to them, later on, all I could accomplish. I worked hard to remove this obstacle, and no toil was too hard with this end in view. With her at its finish work meant joy; labour was sweet, and toil life. They were good days, those hopeful working ones, holding out promise of greater good. Their brightness served to intensify the darkness that followed.

The visits that my courting comprised were the strips of silver lining in the grey clouds of my toil. I snatched them as I could from the work that was to be the means of crowning my life. ... One evening, after a long and hard day's work, I rode into Marrah to see her. I was physically tired and worn out, yet every incident of that night stands out with vivid clearness — the details of the sweeping muslin dress, the curves of her tall, graceful figure, the glory of her brown hair, and the earnest, steadfast gleam of her grey eyes.

How foolish then to think the steadfastness and earnestness were for me!

Even before she spoke I was conscious of a change in her. I was not long left in doubt. After some circumlocution she directly attacked the subject agitating her mind.

“Leonard,” he said, “I think we've made a mistake!”

With her words came a premonition of evil. I would not question her.

“Leonard, we must part!”

I kept silent.

“It's for your welfare — for your good. I am too thoughtless for one so capable and energetic as — you — ”

She terminated the sentence without words. I refused to help by speech.  
“I am not fitted for drudgery. I might become a discontented wife — ”  
She hesitated, as though defying me to deny her imputation.  
“A discontented, overworked wife makes a miserable husband.”  
I still maintained my dumb attitude.  
“Am I not right?” she demanded, softly.  
Her insistence brooked no further delay. I took her hands in mine.  
“Explain yourself,” I said, slowly.  
She rose and stood before me.  
“Am I the sort of woman built by nature to bake bread and cut up sheep — ”  
I looked at her slender white hands. On a finger of one glittered the ring I had toiled to place there.  
“I do not want a cook or a servant,” I interrupted her to say.  
“It's not a man's desires but his circumstances that enable him to keep his wife other than as a working housekeeper.”  
She spoke with a quiet determination that told me her words were the outcome of a thought-out decision. I knew at once the prudent counsel of parents had prevailed against her love. I scorned to plead my cause against such.  
“You are right,” I replied slowly. “I cannot gainsay such an opinion. At your own wish all is ended between us. Good-bye, Mavis, good-bye!”  
A moment later the house was closed for ever on a man who fifteen minutes previously entered it with the joy and confidence of an accepted lover. ... The intervening years that lay between that day and this are smirched and darkened by the hideous incidents that occur in the life of a man who, hopeless of achieving any good, probes the lowest depths of life in search of oblivion and respite from the gnawing sense of failure that is ever at him.

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## **The Maid.**

They think me soured. Possibly I am. For a woman young as I cynicism is certainly an unattractive trait. None know it better than I, and the knowledge is bitter, even though at times I set to the world a smiling face. I have tried to regain my faith in my fellows and failed. I understand now that it is only the exceptional man who lives and works for others. The average one works selfishly for the self that from birth to death rules him. Women are taught to look on men as superior to all the paltry weaknesses that assail their own sex, and yet men pay to, and gain the love of a woman merely to satisfy the petty vanity of their nature. This much I have proved beyond uncertainty. There are times when

doubt will come whispering to me — then, coolly and calmly, I go over that night we last met. I cannot bear sight of that muslin dress that became me so well, and I wore it that night to look my best, because he was coming. Even as he entered the room I knew the labour of dressing accomplished nothing. It was not in him to feel interested in the attire of the woman he professed to love. Directly he stepped on the verandah I saw the dark, sullen look on his face, as though duty, not pleasure, brought him to me. .... The ease with which he acquiesced in my remarks concerning the breaking-off of our engagement makes my blood boil, even after this length of time. Possibly he came to me with that intention. Perhaps — but why should I here in loneliness give a thought to the man who in going to the bad has but returned to the ways that his heart loves best. ... .. Years have gone since then, years darkened by sorrow. First, my father — one of the few men who lived uprightly for the sake of good alone — was taken from me. Then my mother — 'tis because of her going that the blinds are close drawn, and the heaps of black-edged envelopes — bearing inscriptions more varied than their size, shape, and depth of conventional mourning edge — lie on the table near me, ready to be opened. I am left well off, as the world has it, yet gratitude has no place in my life. .... I am too weary even to weep those tears I kept back years ago, that their ravages should not distress those near and dear to me. I have become that most hateful thing in my own sight — a spiritless, selfish, listless, and discontented woman, knowing full well I have my life in my own hands to mould it as I will. I cannot delude myself into belief that my freedom is other than distasteful to me, or that I shall give to the world the best in me. So to the dreary end I go on.

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## **The Selector's Wife.**

(Written before Mavis Laing's visit to the selection.)

They think I'm lonely. They don't know. They do not look beyond my rough dwelling. They do not understand the company baby is for me, nor can they comprehend the joy that is ours — baby's and mine — when our dear one comes home at the finish of his hard day's work. They only see me living monotonously day by day, tidying our humble house, scrubbing, washing, cooking meals, and clearing them away with tedious regularity. They watch George toiling and sweating under stress of storm and heat, and rain and cold. The blessing of our love that sweetens life, enriches penury, and lightens labour, is invisible to them. So they cannot know that he goes forth cheered each day by baby's smile and my farewell, nor that he leaves us strengthened and ready for our little round of everyday duties by his cheery good-bye and the turn of his head to nod

a second adieu when he reaches the paddocks, ere the uncleared land hides him from our view. We both look forward to the day when the hardest part of our work will be done, when there will be change for me, and ease for him, and baby will share in both.

The object that gave rise to these thoughts lies unheeded in my mind. It is a letter from Mavis Laing, enclosed in a black-bordered envelope. She is coming to us "for a holiday," she says, "because you are the only sincere woman I know. You and George and the baby are often in my thoughts, and I cannot help wondering if you two older ones have changed your simple views of life. I hope not, for I need a little diversion, and if you will have me I shall get it." I am sorry for Mavis. George laughs at me when I say so, and calls her a "born old maid." Certainly for a woman comparatively young she is cold and cynical, and her remarks on the other sex are somewhat jarring. I'm afraid when she sees our poor little house she will look down on it, for she inherited her father's property, and he died a wealthy man. She will smile her irritating smile of superior wisdom when she learns how George took up and befriended that poor miserable creature Leonard Delroy. I imagine her saying: "My dear George, you pick up a drunken loafer, nurse him to health, give him work, and make much of him, and expect a permanent reformation. Well, I hope you are not disappointed." George will laugh uneasily, having hard work not to be rude to her. ....

\* \* \* \* \*

(Written a few days after commencement of the visit.)

Surprises will happen, and this is the greatest surprise of all. Mavis and Delroy, it seems, met years ago. Neither appears pleased to meet again. I suppose she has heard something concerning the wild life he led, and she lets him see that she knows it. He shrinks shamefacedly from her, and she treats him with a lofty scorn that seems so fitting a manner to go with her tall figure and long, sweeping black skirts. I think it extremely ill-natured of her. If she rides her high horse again, I'll speak plainly to her and tell her if Fortune has helped her and Fate vanquished him, it is the more reason she, as a woman, should be more tolerant of his weakness, and remember, if he is only a selector's labourer now, he is still a gentleman by education, training, and culture. ....

\* \* \* \* \*

(Written at the termination of the visit.)

I spoke to Mavis. I wonder if things would have turned out as they had had I not done so.

"My dear Julia," she said coolly, "you and your George know as much

as baby there of the selfishness that lies at the apparent virtues of most men.”

“You may talk as you like,” I cried warmly, “but politeness demands that you treat a man beneath our roof with civility. He is a hard-working fellow, and anxious to retrieve his past.”

“It is rather a good paying game, that hard-working sort of thing, but so far as I am concerned he has played it for all it is worth.”

“Mavis,” I replied suddenly, “what is there between you and him?”

My words conveyed more than I intended. I had not the remotest suspicion of the truth until she turned to me with flashing eyes and flushed cheek.

“Nothing!” she cried. “Has he told you anything? 'Twould be like him to do so.”

“I never dreamed for one moment he had anything to tell. Now I shall certainly ask him — ” I tried to speak airily.

“You shall not mention my name to him.”

“I always knew there lurked a woman's influence in his life, but never till now did I suspect a man's in yours — ”

“How dare — ” she interrupted.

“Do not speak so,” I interrupted softly. “If you once cared (I emphasised the past tense) for him and yet not enough to share poverty and hardship with him — ”

“It was not I, but he, who deemed the struggle too great a sacrifice. After leading me to believe that for my sake he worked, I found out he worked but to become rich for money's sake.”

With that enigmatical attempt at explanation, she walked away to the little room I apportioned her, to which I could not as hostess intrude on her privacy. ... Nothing directly came of our talk, but the next evening we five — baby, Mavis, Len Delroy, George, and myself — were on the verandah. It was a lovely evening at Christmas. The moon threw its light over the near and distant bush land. The season was the best for years, consequently our surroundings were beautiful to the sight, sweet-smelling to our nostrils, and pleasant for our thoughts to linger on. Mavis was unusually silent, just opening her lips to utter some caustic remark. Len Delroy was taciturn. George was drowsy, so, but for baby, who was just learning to talk and make herself a pet with everybody, we should have been a dull company indeed. I mentioned the moonlight just now. I must do so again to make you understand that “it was clearly as light as day.”

Presently Mavis rose, and, dragging her long black muslin skirts behind her, she walked leisurely among the roughly-made flower-beds in front of us. A moment later Leonard Delroy, with a smothered cry, was after her. The next, we were all in a state of commotion. I caught baby up in my arms, and held her tightly. Mavis's trailing flounces had disturbed

a snake. Len, watching her, saw the reptile rear its head, and was just in time to save her from its fangs. In time to save her — but, in doing so, received the hurt himself. Catching it in his right hand, the thing twisted back and embedded its venom in his forefinger. Quick as a lightning flash George had the creature disabled at his feet, and almost simultaneous with its death Len stood before us minus a finger, looking white and ill, with the blood soaking through the handkerchief rolled round his hand ..... There was Mavis, white-faced and humbled, clinging to him, weeping and tearful as any lovelorn maiden in her teens. And he humble and lowly listening to her loving protestations as one unworthy of a word from her.

Such a demonstrative pair of lovers never did I see, each taking more than his or her share of blame of what I never could make out .....

“Julia,” sobbed Mavis an hour later, when, with baby asleep, we two women, nervous and anxious, were passing the midnight hour, until the return of the two men from the twenty-mile drive to the town whence George had driven Leonard to ensure medical aid, “if he should die now I shall go mad.”

All her unattractive independence was gone. She looked old and haggard in the lamplight, yet, somehow, she was the Mavis of long ago.

“Have patience,” I murmured comfortingly, “you have nothing to fear. They will return before midday.”

It was late in the afternoon when they did come. Both men were lively and apparently none the worse for the worry and excitement. Len had evidently confided his love story in George.

\* \* \* \* \*

A month after her marriage, Mavis purchased a mortgaged station — Melabrino — for half its real value, and nothing would do but George should go in as co-partner with Leonard Delroy, her terms enabling him to do so, being so liberal that the succession of good years that followed cleared George of his financial indebtedness to her, and so increased the wealth of the Delroys that Delroy himself feels less a dependent on his wife's money. Not that it mattered much, for a happier couple never lived.

## Every Bullet Has Its Billet.

### Lancelot Booth

In the early sixties there was no man more popular in the Lachlan district than Dr. Robinson. He was a fine specimen of manhood, handsome of face, stalwart of figure. He stood six feet in his stockings, and was proportionately built, but with hands small and shapely. He wore a long cutaway coat, with a waistcoat buttoned up to the throat. This waistcoat was single-breasted, and carried a row of bright steel buttons, so that at a distance he might have been taken for a trooper, especially as he invariably wore riding breeches and high Wellington boots. This costume more than once nearly cost him his life.

The life of a country doctor in Australia is an arduous and a trying one, even nowadays; but at the date of this story it was much more so. Railways there were none to speak of; long rides had to be undertaken at all hours, day and night, and the roads and bush tracks were terrorised over by lawless men, who were too often screened by sympathisers. The genial doctor, however, was never molested.

One night, about ten o'clock, in the year 1863, Dr. Robinson was in his library, and on the point of retiring. He had had a busy day, and had not long returned from visiting a patient ten miles from the town of Forbes, where he resided. He was congratulating himself that he would have a good night's rest, when there came a loud knocking at his front door, followed by a vigorous pull at the bell.

"Humph! Just my luck," he muttered. "Another false alarm on the part of Mrs. Nooburn. Hang it! why can't women keep their dates properly?" His household having retired, he answered the door himself.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he recognised Jim Stubbs, a stock rider from Hopover station, "what's the matter at the station, Jim?"

"Well, sir," said the man, touching his hat, "there's been a bit of an accident. Jack Banks has been and gone and shot himself."

Bidding the man enter and follow him into his room, the doctor said: "Shot himself, eh? Well, I suppose he is not dead, or you would not have come for me. What made him do that? Drinking?"

"Oh, no, sir. He didn't go for to shoot himself o' purpose. He and a couple o' shearers were out kangarooing, and — and — well, I don't

know exactly how it happened, sir.”

“Whereabouts is he shot?”

“Somewhere about here, sir,” replied Jim, passing his hand round an area of his person from the inside of his left thigh, and indefinitely over the groin. “The boss packed me off for you, sir.”

“I can't understand how any man could shoot himself with a gun in that part of his body. What time did this accident happen?”

“About 3 o'clock, sir.”

“And — the station is ten miles away from here — you never thought of coming for me till this time of night,” exclaimed the doctor, looking with suspicion upon the man's story.

“Well, sir, we didn't think it were very serious.”

“You have no right to think. Did the bullet make an exit?”

“Make a — beg pardon, sir——”

“Did it come out?”

“No, sir.”

“Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Riddleton thought that a bullet in a man's groin was not a serious matter, and that he put off sending for me till this time of night?”

The man muttered something to the effect that the “boss” wasn't told. The doctor decided to go at once, for the squatter was one of his best patrons, and a good friend.

“Your horse, of course, is fresh enough?” said he, as he left the room without waiting for a reply, and went to call his ever-wakeful groom to saddle “J.P.,” a horse he always used for night journeys. Then, after apprising his wife of his sudden call, the doctor returned.

“The moon, in her last quarter, has not long risen; and from appearances at present we are likely to have heavy rain. A drop of good whisky won't hurt you, I suppose?” said the doctor, with a searching glance at the man, as he poured out a glass. Jim Stubbs supposed it would not after his ride, and would gladly have helped himself to another, but the doctor quietly removed the bottle, and told him to go to his horse, for “J.P.” was being brought round. Putting a small case of instruments into one of his capacious pockets (at the same time depositing a small though deadly instrument in an inner breast pocket), he left the house, sprang into the saddle, and started off at a brisk trot, followed by Jim Stubbs. The groom looked after them for a moment, and muttering: “I do reckon the doctor's made o' iron; he don't never seem to sleep, neither,” he made his way back to the harness-room to continue his slumbers from their last broken point.

For a mile or so the doctor rode at a rapid trot, so rapid, indeed, that Jim, well mounted as he was, was obliged to put his horse to a canter to keep up with him. Soon, however, the country became rougher, and the pace had to be reduced. Great masses of black clouds came rolling up

from the south east, and obscured the little light the moon gave forth. The night became black as Erebus. Big drops, scouts of the coming storm, began to fall, and very soon were succeeded by torrents of rain. None but a man like the doctor or his companion could have travelled on such a night in the black shadows of the bush at much beyond a walking pace. Like sailors accustomed to peer far into the night over the interminable sea for the faint glimmer of a tiny light, they could distinguish objects that would have been invisible to a city-bred man. Moreover, their horses, practically left to themselves, instinctively avoided every obstacle.

They had covered about eight miles — the storm had passed away to the north — when they came to a spot where the road forked. The doctor rode on straight ahead, but Jim halted and called after him: “This road, doctor.”

The doctor pulled up and shouted back: “This is the road to the station.”

“That's so,” replied the man; “but he — he's not at the station.”

Dr. Robinson walked his horse back to where the road branched off. His anger was apparent from his tone.

“You told me the man was at the station. I abominate a lie. Why can't you speak the truth? Where is this wounded man?”

“He's at the Billy Can pub., sir. If I'd ha' told you he wasn't at the station, mebbe you wouldn't ha' come,” replied the man, abashed.

“And that is a good five miles from here, and a wretched road, too,” exclaimed the doctor. “It would serve you right if I turned back.”

“Don't do that, doctor. You'll be paid all right, sir.”

“Confound you, I wasn't thinking of that,” retorted the doctor, angrily, as he took the new road. Having come so far, he concluded that he might as well “see it out.”

The Billy Can Hotel was a roadside publichouse, where the coach changed horses three times a week. The proprietor, Robert Manson — “Ratty Bob,” he was known to the country round — did not bear an over-good reputation, and was strongly suspected by the police of being an active sympathiser with the outlaws who scoured the bush. The doctor was a fearless man, however, and could use that little weapon he carried in his breast pocket with deadly effect if called upon to act on the defensive. He also reasoned that his services were evidently required by whom he knew not, and that therefore his person would be unmolested. He pushed ahead regardless of the broken nature of the country, till he came to the brow of a steep hill, at the foot of which the light from the windows of the Billy Can twinkled. He was a good forty yards in front of Jim, when a man stepped out of the bush, and the doctor saw the feeble rays of the moon glint along the barrel of a gun levelled point-blank at him. He pulled up his horse and quickly put his hand into his breast

pocket, when Jim dashed up and shouted: "It's all right! It's the doctor." Instantly the threatening weapon was lowered. The doctor smiled — he began to see the reason for his midnight visit — and with a "Humph!" he rode on.

"Gosh!" said the stranger to Jim, as he drew up, "I took him for a trooper."

Jim nodded, and rode on after the doctor.

Arrived at the Billy Can, the doctor and Jim rode into the small stockyard, at one end and side of which were some stables and outbuildings. Giving his horse to Jim, who promised to rub him down and look after him, the doctor advanced towards the house. He noticed three or four men of rough aspect, and all unknown to him in the darkness, at different parts of the premises, each carrying a gun. "The kangaroo-shooters," said the doctor to himself with an incredulous smile. "They seem unwilling to relinquish their weapons."

Here a man stepped forward and said: "Your patient is in here, sir," indicating a small room used for stowing away old harness, odds and ends, and lumber. On a stretcher in this place lay extended a brown-bearded man of a little over 30 years of age.

"You've been long enough coming, doctor," said this man.

"Twelve miles on a night like this, and over such country, in an hour and ten minutes is not such bad work," replied the doctor, looking at his watch. "Hold the lantern here and let me see the wound." This was addressed to the man who had directed him to the room.

The wounded man was divested of his riding breeches. The doctor produced his instrument case, and began probing for the bullet. He found that the bullet had struck the inside of the thigh, having evidently been deflected, and, missing the bone and important arteries in a miraculous manner, had lodged just beneath the true skin at the back of the thigh. Turning the patient over, he made a couple of incisions, and presently drew forth the leaden messenger. A single glance told him at once that the bullet had come from a police carbine. There was also a slight dent in it. "You've had a narrow escape. How did you manage to shoot yourself?" queried the doctor, with a peculiar smile.

"Who said I'd shot myself? D'ye think I'm a blooming kid?"

"The bullet must have struck something before entering your body, to take the direction it did."

"Yes; it hit a buckle on the saddle."

"Then you may thank the buckle that sent it down instead of up."

"Give me the bullet, doctor." This was done, and the man took his pocket-knife and cut a notch in the lead. Meanwhile the doctor plugged up the hole, stitched, and did all that was necessary to make his patient comfortable.

"Are they all on the look-out, Jack?"

“All right; there's no fear. Their horses knocked up twenty miles back, and this heavy rain has been all in our favour.”

“The wound is not so serious, as it happens; you will be able to get about in a few days. Meantime, you had better have a good rest, or inflammation and other symptoms might set in, when I would not answer for the consequences.” Thus the doctor.

A great laugh from the patient greeted this advice. “Rest! A few days! Me! Not much! I rode forty miles with that bullet in my leg. Hang me if I can't ride twice that distance now it's out.” Here he held up the piece of lead between his finger and thumb. “See here, doctor, I'll send this bullet back to him that sent it. You'll know it again! So the next time you look for it, you'll pick it out of a trooper's skull.

The doctor left the room, and went to see how his horse J.P. fared. One of the men was leaning over the half-door gazing at it. “That's a bit of good horseflesh, sir. Will you part with him?”

“He is not for sale,” said the doctor, curtly.

“I wouldn't ask your leave if I wanted him, but that would be too mean,” muttered the man, as the doctor left and entered the house. Satisfied with a glass of the Billy Can's best whisky (and Ratty Bob kept a good article for certain customers) and a biscuit, the doctor removed his wet overcoat, and, intending after an hour or so's rest to make a start for home, he flung himself upon a sofa, and, in contradiction of his groom's opinion, fell into a sound slumber.

It was breaking day when he awoke. The landlord had thrown an opossum rug over him. He rose hastily, and his first thought was of his horse. He hurried to the stable. J.P. whinnied a note of greeting as he left off feeding. Jim had looked after him. The strange men and their horses were nowhere to be seen. The patient, too, was gone. An inquiry from the landlord elicited the information that they had all left “hours ago,” but, added Ratty Bob, “You'll be paid all right, doctor,” which incensed the latter, who was singularly (or seemed to be) indifferent to whether fees were paid or not. After partaking of a light breakfast, he mounted J.P., and returned to Forbes.

A month later the doctor received by post a bank draft for fifty guineas, accompanied by a handsome gold watch, on which were engraved his own initials, with the date of his attendance on his unknown patient. The watch was brand new, and had been purchased in Forbes. He kept it, but, having his suspicions as to the methods adopted to furnish the bank draft, he distributed the proceeds in charity.

Some six months after this Dr. Robinson decided upon removing his practice to Wagga' Wagga, and conveyed his furniture and effects there. This latter was no light undertaking, as there were no railways, and all his goods had to be carried by teams, etc., of which he employed several. Among the men engaged in the job was one Dick Dapton — he begged

the doctor to let him accompany him to Wagga. It was suspected that this man had given certain information about the outlaws to the police. This had come to the knowledge of the gang, who swore vengeance against him. The man was in fear for his life.

The doctor and his baggage had got about half-way on their journey, and were in rough country, when a man rode out of the bush, carrying a gun, and demanded of the man in charge of the leading waggon:

“Whose goods are these?”

“Dr. Robinson's, of Forbes,” replied the man.

The doctor, who was at the rear, perceiving the stranger, galloped up.

“It's all right, doctor,” said the horseman, with a smile, as he put spurs to his horse and disappeared in the bush. In that brief moment he had recognised his patient of the “Billy Can.”

Then the doctor heard: “Hist! hist! doctor,” and a white face appeared from underneath a tarpaulin. “Don't you know who that was?” It was Dick Dapton who spoke.

“No.”

“That was Ben Hall. It 'ud ha' been all up wi' me if he 'ad spotted me.”

The worthy doctor never had to perform the unpleasant task of picking the bullet from the skull of a trooper, for Ben Hall was himself riddled by over thirty bullets shortly afterwards.

## Little Paul.

Arthur A. D. Bayldon

Little Paul was in the rear of the hut blowing away at his hardest on the battered old trumpet his Uncle Bob had given him, to the consternation of some weedy hens that had fled into the crannies of the firewood stack, panic-stricken at such an uproar, when he heard his mother shouting for him to come and get his bumps read. He instantly stopped blowing, with a wild intention of following the hens baulked by an irresistible stomach-yearning at the unfamiliar smell of boiling cabbage coming from the kitchen, when his fate was settled by Clara swooping on to him and depositing him in the parlour ere he had time to kick for freedom. At the sight of a stranger his head ducked into his left elbow, lifted instinctively for protection, and he stood on view — a little chap with bare brown legs, in a crimean shirt and patched-up knickers drawn tightly up by a single brace, clutching his beloved trumpet, his black eyes scrutinising the long-haired, blue-eyed man dressed in dusty black pants and a faded long-tailed coat, seated in his father's armchair talking to his mother.

“Eight year old. Just the age, missis. And I'll” — and the stranger's voice gave a jumping snort through some throat impediment — “bet yer what yer like I'll” — another snort — “tell yer what's he good for.”

“I wish ter goodness yer would, Professor, becos he gives me no end of trouble foolin' about the place and waggin' it from schol. An' he's that vent'resum I'm real scared as he'll be drouded. On'y yisterd'y his fether strapped him fur waggin.' It's on'y the bit of cabbige I managed to get from the Chows as is keepin' him — but he sharn't have any if he's not a good lad, an' I paid a bob fur it, fur things is that dear as it beats me what'll come of us. This 'ere drou is a fair terror. An' so yer think our Clara'll make a good nuss?” and fat Mrs. Logan lent forward and took Clara's phrenological chart from the table.

Paul pricked his ears at these last words, and squinted across at his 16-year-old sister to see if she had altered at all. He felt relieved that her fat red face and stout, shapeless figure bore no signs of her recent ordeal.

“I marked her seven in order and benevolence. She must” — and his eyes closed as his voice arose snorting over — “cul-tivate contin-uity. Good Lord!”

The last exclamation, uttered with emotion, was accompanied by an expression of great astonishment in the Professor's countenance, who had just caught side for the first time of Paul's face, lifted cautiously into view. The sudden turning of all eyes into Paul's direction so disconcerted him that he stared blankly at them.

"Paul!" exclaimed Mrs. Logan, startled at the Professor's now eager gaze at Paul, and bewildered that she beheld nothing to explain the man's extraordinary behaviour, but betrayed by force of habit into a sharp rebuke of her son.

There was a loud yell as the Professor pounced on Paul, and, running his hairy fingers over his cranium, kept jerking out:

"Tune 9 — time 9 — ideality 7; wonderful! Keep quiet, carn't yer? Veneration 8 — memory 9 — here, missis, I'll bet yer what yer like this 'ere lad's got genus."

"Got what?" exclaimed Mrs Logan, alarmed.

"Genus! I tell yer, genus! Great Scott! what a head!" and his fingers ran caressingly over Paul's short-cropped headpiece.

Trembling with anxiety, and a desire to know the worst; Mrs. Logan gazed helplessly at the Professor, whilst the soft-hearted Clara felt such an inclination to cry that she hurried into the kitchen.

"It it dang'rus, sir?" asked Mrs. Logan, feebly, confounding in her agitation the Professor's vocation with the doctor's.

Paul, who had meanwhile been passing through remarkable body contortions in the vain endeavour to escape the manipulating fingers, was invaded by such a paroxysm at this question, associated in his mind by past experience of what he suffered when he had the measles, that the Professor, hitherto indifferent to his attacking feet and fists, fell back with respect for a pair of lusty jaws assaulting his leg, leaving his assailant coiled up like a hedgehog and raising a plaint of remonstrances against having his bumps read amid howls at his having "got genus."

Checking with a hasty movement of his hand Mrs. Logan's commencement of a tirade of grievances against the district, the Professor whipped out a flute from his breast pocket, and with deliberate coolness began breathing out in soothing notes the memory-laden air of "Home, Sweet Home." With a far-away expression in his upturned eyes he filled the little parlour with the soft, pathetic melody. Mrs. Logan's apron kept moving absently to her eyes as they filled, for happy scenes of her childhood and courtship days in England's green lanes, fragrant with wild flowers, flitted through her memory. The assemblage of huts alongside the sun-glaring road sloping to the apology for a little town, the mines working night and day, with the treeless, sandy waste stretching monotonously around them all, for a few minutes quite faded from her life. Her dreaming mind, however, was all at once awakened by an inrush of astonishment as her wandering eyes happened to fall on

Paul, who had uncoiled, and was straining his little figure eagerly as though he were drinking in the music at every pore, his swarthy features transfixed, his eyes gazing with a devouring passion at the sweet sound-dispensing flute. She turned an inquiring glance towards Clara, now listening at the doorway, without getting any response, and then towards the Professor, who was evidently waiting for it, since he winked prodigiously, discoursed a final flourish, and gazed as her triumphantly.

“There, missis! are yer satisfied. Why, bless yer,” — and, catching hold of Paul, who seemed too dazed to offer any resistance, and tapping his forehead about the outer eyebrow with a sort of rapture, he exclaimed — “he's a musical genus, that's what he is. Look, missis, this is tune — see how big it is; and this is time. They're abnormal. The lad's a real genus, the first I've come across, and I've travelled the country for thirty years.” And he gazed down at the little chap, who was picking the ends of his fingers, with the pride one imagines a naturalist must feel when he examines the specimen of a new species of insect he has accidentally found. His excitement was such that his speech impediment for a time had been overcome.

Mrs. Logan's sudden relief from anxiety, produced by an indefinite impression regarding the meaning of “genus,” might have precipitated her into scolding little Paul for being somehow responsible for having it, had not the Professor broken out into an incoherent account of the poverty and sickness and unhappy marriages of men of “genus” in general, and of the fame and wealth and glorious lives of some exceptions in particular, all the while fingering Paul's abnormal organs with reverential fondness.

“Dear, dear!” — when the Professor at last paused for breath — ejaculated Mrs. Logan, too overcome by his energetic manner and display of knowledge to connect them with any applicability to Paul.

“An' yer think he takes after his Uncle Bob, then, as plays in the band? He doesn't get it from me, Professor, as our side wasn't brought up with no fiddle-faddle ways. Though my sister Sarah,” she added reflectively, “has Annie learnin' the planer, but her old man can afford it. Anyways,” she continued with conviction, “the lad's fair mad after trumpits and such things. A body cannot get a bit of peace fur him. His fether gets fair knocked up on night-shifts, getting no sleep from the row, and strappin's no good.”

“Strapping, missis!” broke in the Professor in a high-pitched tone of angry amazement. “Killing a heaven-born genus in embro! Now, listen to me,” he went on hastily, seeing by Mrs. Logan's rearing in her chair that she was taking offence, “this lad wants learning music. Don't yer bother your head, as I'll” — (snort) — “learn him for nothing. Only yer mustn't strap him any more. He'll be a good boy for me, and when he plays ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ I'll” — (snort) — “give him this 'ere flute.”

“It's very good, Professor, I'm sure! His fether'll be home soon,” and Mrs. Logan flurriedly turned to Paul. “What do yer say to the Professor for his kindness, eh?”

Paul glanced up at the Professor's face with an expression dawning in his eyes, evidently understood by the other, for he waved his hand deprecatingly at Mrs. Logan.

“Say ‘thank yer, sir,’ yer rude boy. Yer've no manners than a pig!”

And so it was finally arranged that during his stay in the district, which might be some months, the Professor should cultivate little Paul's musical “genus,” and in return for which kindness Mrs. Logan, who could not bear to be beholden to a stranger, should attend to his washing and what not, as he looked “fair lost, poor man, for want of a woman to his bit of duds.”

As might be expected, the Professor's visit that morning turned out of mighty importance to the growth of little Paul's mind. A strong desire in his nature ever since he could remember to imitate every agreeable sound he heard had become almost overpowering after a visit with his Uncle Bob to the town one Saturday night to hear the band playing in the main street. Bob, who was cornet-player, thereafter became in Paul's eyes a sort of divinity among his heroes. There was Pat Murphy, who had once fought for the middle-weight championship, and was only just beaten after as tremendous a slogging as had been witnessed in the ring for years, the referee in every local fight, a mate of his dad's and working in the same copper mine; there was Ted Hardy, who had taught him to swim in the mill-dam, a swaggy wisp of a chap with horribly squinting eyes, and a voice like the rumble of a traction engine, that could paralyse every lad in the district, even “balmy Sam” — an 18-year-old idiot — who would do any risky thing if he were dared to it, quaked whenever he chanced to cross Ted's path. But the Professor not only soon outstripped these two heroes, but reached a pinnacle in Paul's mind above even his divinity. Probably the Professor's unflagging enthusiasm in everything connected with the little chap's “genus,” together with the bestowal of an indulgence at every visit in the shape of some sweetmeats or longed-for toy, both won his allegiance and captured his affections. Then the Professor had travelled so much, with an observing eye and a retentive memory; had actually known Red Angus, the bushranger; seen the Commonwealth procession, though he condemned the waste of money over it; and heard hundreds of musicians playing together. This was all very interesting, despite his snorts at the most enthralling parts of his stories, and the intrusion of phrenology when least expected. Little Paul soon got accustomed to these mannerisms, however, and such comments as “she's too big in self-esteem; he didn't like me tell-ing him he was wanting in caution; I cleared, for he was defici-ent in conscientiousness and veneration,” came as a matter of course.

As was natural, the little fellow must reciprocate with odds and ends of information he had picked up about the mines; that such and such a number “oughter to be seen ter by the 'spector, who was a fair cow — By gum! Jackets is hustin'!” or drag the Professor to the mill-dam to show off, perhaps barking his knees and elbows in his anxiety to accomplish some impossible feat. The Professor learned what to do when he had sandy blight, and the particulars of the worst dust-storm dad had ever seen, and such-like desirable items. The impressions Paul had received of this world were not over-varied and inspiring. The assemblage of miners' huts, most of them without enclosures, surrounded by a herbless waste, constituted his most immediate and strongest. About half a mile to the right of the huts, pouring out sulphurous smoke that, veering with the wind, half-suffocated the inhabitants around, the big copper mine lifted its ugly scaffolding towards the flaming, brassy-blue sky from the centre of its huge breastworks of slag. To the left, on the top of the sloping hill, about a mile away, another mine projected into sight from a huddle of huts and small cottages, connected with some outlying excavations by a bridge spanning the road, along which trucks kept moving to and fro, discernible as black dots. In front stretched the level desolate country, with columns of dust gyrating in the sky here and there like reddish and pale smoke, into a vapourish haze of sombre timber in the distance. Behind was the little town, hidden in a dip. No trees, no flowers, not even grass anywhere to relieve the eyes, aching with the pitiless sun-glare. The only water procurable for household purposes was pumped from a tank four miles away, and distributed amongst the inhabitants in carts — a tawny, warm, silky water, of which you could drink and drink and drink, and still be thirsty. It was quite a treat to wander to the brackish mill-dam, dismal as it was, for a glimpse of its preciousness. Day after day the same exhausting heat; the same bright, naked, wearying sky; the same shadowless, distressing spread of brickish-red desert; and, alas! the same depressing sight of pale, haggard men, uncouthly garbed, listlessly wending to and fro betwixt the huts and the copper mine at the sound of the steam horn. When longed-for night at last shut off the blinding glare the whole district was plunged into stifling darkness. At intervals a flery torrent of molten slag pouring down one side of the copper mine's breastwork would shed a brilliant illumination for a few moments, and then fade into a dull, ruddy glow. Every now and again the steam horn would sound discordantly, as though the mine were a monster demanding its victims. Then tiny lights, like stars, singly and in clusters, begin to appear, travelling mysteriously to and fro. Did you approach them they would develop into miners carrying their crib with oil lamps fastened to their caps. Then the hours toil nervelessly on, the district breathing heavily under the choking sulphurous smoke, till dawn, like glittering steel, ushers in another destroying day of drought.

You may be sure there was much ado among the youngsters about the huts at Paul's acquisition of the rudiments of music. The Professor was delighted in the boy's progress, and spread his fame as a "genus" in his bump-reading dissertations at the huts he canvassed. He was now in great demand by anxious parents curious to know what their "Tom or Sal was good fur." In fact, the Professor was doing a roaring trade when Fortune suddenly set her face dead against him.

An epidemic of petty burglaries had all at once broken out in the district. There was hardly a night but some articles of clothing or bits of jewellery did not vanish from its owner's hut. Eatables began to follow suit, causing dismay to hungry households. These depredations continued for some weeks, bewildering everyone, till a report that a bottle of mustard pickles had departed from old Mother Hayes's kitchen table in broad daylight threw the whole community into hysteria. This startling occurrence became the standard theme of conversation in the mines, in the pubs, and especially at mealtimes in the huts. Who was the burglar? Suspicions were levelled now at one person, now at another — newcomers to the district. Of course, the burglar was a stranger, no doubt of that. The Sydney travellers hurriedly booked their customers' orders and fled, alarmed at the vindictive glances from every side. The tide of suspicion set permanently towards the unfortunate Professor, however, when old Mother Hayes supplemented her last report with the information that "that there blamed prosser chap was worritin' her innards out about the kids when t' bottle was tuk." The change of attitude of the whole district was as swift as it was disastrous towards him. Doors were banged to at his approach, angry faces glared at him from windows, scrutinising eyes followed him everywhere. He was shunned like a leper. His business connection was severed at one stroke. Fierce murmurs began to arise at the police for not arresting him. His bump-reading was only a blind. Why should he come to their part? They'd no money, and didn't believe in "fortin'-tillin'." Then someone spread the terrible report that he was an escaped criminal. The whole place actually seethed with fury at the news. Several miners spoke vaguely of "slaggin' " him if they caught him out of a night. The poor Professor was thrust unceremoniously into an almost dangerous position. Meanwhile the burglaries continued merrily.

The Professor, however, faced it all unflinchingly. He tramped from hut to hut, condemning the inmates when they slammed the door in his face for having flat heads, for having no "moral develop-ments," and endeavouring to collect the little balances to his credit — but 'twas of no avail. At last he hopelessly desisted, and determined to depart by the excursion train advertised for the next month.

Little Paul, however, remained faithful to his teacher. He blubbered when the Professor, wiping a tear from his big blue eye, told him his

father had forbidden him the hut. With a great thrill he felt the little chap's arms around his neck, and overlooked that thundering oath connected with something about "dirty leein' divils," rapped out viciously.

It was on a Saturday night following this blubbering fit that Paul had his mettle tested. His father was on night-shift, and his mother and Clara were in town shopping, and he had been left in his cot as usual. He was too miserable, however, to sleep, and the heat augmented his discomfort. Why shouldn't he play on his flute? No one would know. He crept from his cot, and was groping about the room, when he happened to glance through the window. The scattered huts were enveloped in silence and gloom, with a faint light only here and there shining from a window, for they were nearly always deserted on a Saturday night. Paul caught his breath with surprise as a flash of light from the window of Jim Jensen's hut at that moment arrested his glance, and disappeared. Jim was an old bachelor, a reputed miser, and was on night-shift with his dad. Again the light flashed and vanished. In another moment Paul had unfastened the window and crept through, his mind big with one thought: "They're in Jim's hut."

As he dropped lightly to his feet, he felt a faint shiver at the darkness. Nothing short of his passionate affection for the Professor, whose big blue eyes seemed somehow to be looking pathetically at him, would have set him creeping towards Jim's hut in a darkness that appeared dancing with uncanny things. Twice he stopped with a deadly chill striking at his hair roots, and peered for some place of safety, and then approached cautiously to within a few yards of the hut. All at once he discerned a dark form issue from the window and hasten away, and he silently sped after it, his teeth clenched, one thought absorbing him. On reaching the road the figure halted as though listening, and then strode on towards the copper mine. With a flash of inspiration Paul made a bee-line for a recent clay-pan opposite the smouldering slag embankment, into which he crept, his head peeping from behind a small hillock alongside the road. The man came striding on, obviously careless now he was away from the huts. At the sudden illumination of the molten slag, splashing and streaming down the embankment, he slackened his pace to avoid the searching glare, and passed when the crackling surface of the slag threw only a deep crimson shadow. But Paul's keen eyes had detected his face. He arose silently and shadowed Bill Foggerty, the gaol-bird, who had recently returned to the district.

Before many weeks the Professor was not only reinstated in his former glory as the greatest bump-reader in Australia, was not only congratulated and repeatedly informed by those who had been most suspicious of him that "they'd allus said he'd nought to do wiv it," but this Christmas he and little Paul, by special invitation, will play at a

concert to be given in aid of the local hospital the memory-laden air of  
“Home, Sweet Home,” in duet, arranged by himself.

## **The Man That Came Back.**

### **Bert Mudge**

Another day was closing in upon the thousands that toiled in a thousand claims.

To the past was being added another record of disappointment, and tomorrow these thousands would take up their burden again, strengthened and urged on by that eternal hope which ever dangles golden dreams before the miner.

The Westralian gold rush startled the world contemporaneously with the bank crisis in the East of "ninety-two," and hundreds of bank clerks, actuated by necessity, flocked to the western State, to become merged into the population of the mining fields — few to return prosperous, some to anchor on a subsistence, but the many to mark the grim path of the pioneer with death or failure.

On this evening in the shaft of a claim near Cue, Harry Thaw, ex-bank clerk, and now, through to circumstance of his own choosing, mining prospector, bent with whitened face over a broken piece of quartz.

It was lined with dull yellow veins that found a counterpart in the jagged rock in the side of the shaft.

As realisation came, he leant back against the sloppy earth with a dazed look on his bronzed face. His pick lay idle in his nerveless hand.

After nearly five years' toil and struggle that had seen him penniless and facing starvation, a fortune lay at his feet.

His first feeling was one of intense fatigue and bewilderment.

The energy that had stubbornly swung his pick day after day and year after year gave way to an overwhelming lassitude. He was lost for the moment in vacant doubt.

Sudden fortune affects men strangely. I knew a man, a farm labourer, who drew the first horse in a big sweep, a prize of £5000. When the news was conveyed to him by excited informants he was busy ploughing. After they told him he was silent for a few moments; then said, coolly, "Oh, well, I must get on with the ploughing. Get up, boys!" Was it nerve? Not a bit of it. He simply could not realise what it meant. Afterwards when his friends had slowly drilled into him actuality, he went on a wild spree, the typification, unfortunately, in many country

towns of supreme joy.

Thaw, although he had not admitted it to himself, had long since given up all hope.

Seeing the many failures and the few successes amongst the thousands who, like himself, flocked to the fascinating West, the many that sank or drifted, his dreams had given place to a desperate content with food and life.

And those hopes and dreams of the past!

His mind recalled the "Other Side," and it was a bitter memory.

Five years ago he had left the East pledged to May Morris. She was just a nice girl — one of the many thousands to be met in Australia, not divinely beautiful, but pretty and dainty; not wondrously talented, but sensible and attractive. She was natural and jolly, honest and clean — the type so many thousands of us dream of seeing seated by our own fireside. That is all, but the one girl in the whole land to Thaw.

It was to be a separation of a few months — a few months when he should have returned prosperous, and their dreams of prosperity were not greedy.

A few months — and the months had grown to years, and fortune had become a fleeting vision.

Even his hard-earned savings had slowly disappeared in the struggle for existence, and the time came when he could not return home, for the little won went in keeping life together.

And he wanted to "go back."

Bad luck is seldom spasmodic. Coward like, it hits the man that is down.

Two years after he left May's father died, and her bright world changed to a dull grey.

From a happy home she had to face the world practically alone. Her few relatives were not able to help her, and with the scanty store left by her father as a reserve, she eked out a bare living teaching music in that little New England town.

And Thaw, held apart by the want of mere passage-money, and perhaps a touch of pride, echoed the lonely note, unintentionally perceptible in her letters, with a heavy heart.

He had at last to write and tell her his own desperate position, and ask her to consider she was not bound to him, for the future seemed hopeless.

The girl wrote a brave little answer, tossing, as brave women do, his fears aside, and full of the golden future that must surely come.

But the years passed in miserable loneliness, broken only by the weekly letter, the one streak of sunshine in his desolate life.

It was a cruel fight in that Western land of sand and fever, of death and failure, and nowhere is failure more pitiful than where fortunes are at times snatched from a hostile soil.

It was melancholy work sitting by the ragged tent as the fading sun smouldered dully across the dusty plain, and the baked earth gasped in the welcome shade of the coming night.

His pipe would go out and his head droop as he pictured his brave, little girl on her dreary path when all might have been so different.

The unutterable silence of the night weighed in about him, crushing his very soul with Nature's grim mercilessness.

And now. ... the blood surged to his head as he saw how life had changed, and he could have screamed in his mighty joy. The sodden mining shaft was a palace; the desert land was full of running waters and shady springs.

A day's feverish work proved the find was not a "pocket," but a solid vein, and as the news spread rapidly over the camp Thaw was soon given good offers for his claim.

He was ready and eager to sell. He wanted to "go back" — to go back as quickly as possible to where love waited.

When the sale had been completed his first impulse was to telegraph the news of their great fortune to May. Then a whimsical desire to see her and be the bearer of good tidings mastered him. It was a natural wish, and he would be home as soon as a letter could reach her.

As Thaw started on his journey to the coast and the excitement of it all passed away he felt strangely unwell.

He strove desperately to throw aside the sickness he felt coming upon him, but a few hours after his arrival at Perth he was a delirious patient in the public hospital fighting for life in the grip of typhoid.

And a clerk in the post-office at Cue put aside a letter that came for Thaw from the East a few days later with a smile as he muttered: — "I guess Thaw is proving to that young party by this that there is something better than letters" — and — such things do sometimes happen in these country post-offices — that letter was swept aside, slipped in behind some pigeon-holes, and is probably lying there to-day.

Six weeks later Thaw, emaciated and white, crawled out of the hospital, heedless of the doctor's protests, and shipped for home.

On the voyage the past became gradually adjusted, and he wondered dully why there were no letters from May. But the visions of their coming union brought the long-dormant blood bounding through his worn frame, and he was filled with a mad anticipation. And that powerful tonic, assisted by the sea air, soon chased away the remnants of his disease.

Despite the long train journey from Adelaide — for he could not think of taking the slow trip round by boat — there was little sign of the invalid in the bronzed and bearded figure that stepped off the train at Molac early one autumn morning.

He took mighty gulps of the keen mountain air as he watched the

sunrise slowly breaking over the little township with a full, happy heart.

As his eye caught the green fringe of rugged hills behind the distant tree tops, the rolling paddocks marked with the brown patches where the early frost had bitten hungrily at the green grass, the trim hedges and the quiet town where a few chimneys lazily threw out long curling columns of smoke, he thought of the endless barren plains he had left with a thankful shudder that the past was gone.

Throwing his bag into the one waiting cab, he walked briskly up to the hotel.

May was boarding at a private house, and it was too early yet to go to her, although he chafed at the delay with a grim smile as he thought of the delay of the past years which had threatened to be perpetual.

The morning air was biting enough for him to welcome the cosy fire that he found in the little sitting-room, and, with a feeling of having at last reached home, he asked the landlady to give him his breakfast there. With the selfishness of happiness he wished to be alone.

Although he had been twelve months in the little town, he saw that she did not recognise the dapper bank clerk in the stalwart man before her. Four years of hard manual labour had filled out the little form, hardened the muscles, and worked a great change in his appearance.

Not caring to be bothered with the torrent of inquisitive questions he knew the revelation of his identity would produce, he kept silent.

But the landlady was stout, garrulous, and affable, and chatted merrily as she prepared the table. She was in a state of excitement, and he was soon to learn the cause.

“Dear me,” she said, bustling in and out of the room, and in her haste multiplying her task considerably. “I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels. We are very busy to-day. Great doings.”

“Eh,” responded Thaw, politely, and without interest.

“Yes. You see there is going to be a wedding in the town, and they are going to have the breakfast here, or rather luncheon, but they call it breakfast, don't they?”

“Oh, a wedding.” Thaw felt curious, for was he not even now dreaming of a wedding, and at no distant date? Why, he thought with a smile, they would probably have their little breakfast at the hotel also.

“Yes,” she repeated volubly, “and, do you know, it is quite romantic. The girl is one of the nicest and best little souls in the town. Not that there are not plenty of nice girls here,” she added loyally, “but this is quite different. You see, she has lived here for years, and a long while ago — nearly five years ago — was engaged to a young fellow in the bank here.”

Her listener started, and the blood beneath the sea bronze slowly receded, leaving his face an ashen grey. A dull fear gripped his heart as he sat gazing into the fire, silent and motionless.

But the woman was too interested in her story to notice this, and went on, uninterrupted by the other.

“He went away to West Australia to seek his fortune; but, poor chap, did not seem to have any luck. He was a nice fellow, what I remember of him, and she was awfully fond of him. A couple of years ago her father died. He was postmaster here, and she had to keep herself. Poor little girl, it was a hard battle. She was teaching two of my little ones music, and coming here so often I got very fond of her. She was always trying to be bright and hopeful, and talking of when her Harry should come back.

“But he never seemed to do any good, and I remember her telling me he had written to her saying she was free if she liked. Fancy a man writing like that to a girl that worshipped him. But, there, you can never tell what a man will do, and I suppose he was down on his luck and all that. But if I had been him I'd have got home somehow, if I'd had to swim; for a girl can't go on like that for ever, and even if he had been broke she'd been happier having him here, and a man can generally get hold of something to do. I don't see much in this Western Australia, anyway!”

Thaw's head sank a little lower, a little heavier, and the shadow of regret crept slowly into his eyes.

The old lady had bustled out to get something for the table, but soon returned, and eagerly resumed her story, glad of a new audience.

“Anyhow, about twelve months ago she met Tom Mason. He is a good fellow, who has a fine place out here a few miles that his father bought for him. He seemed to fall in love with May — yes, that's her name, May Morris — as soon as he met her, I think. Of course, I used to hear all about it, and made no bones about telling her what a fine fellow he was, for I'm so fond of her that I wanted to see her happily married, and — God bless her — she is lady enough to be a pride to any man. Not that there is any need to tell Mr. Mason that.

“But she was very loyal to the other fellow, the old boy in the West, and had he come back Tom would not have had much show as far as I could see” — Thaw smothered a deep sigh by a hasty movement in his chair, and fidgetted with a pipe that was never lit — “but as the months rolled past, what with seeing Tom every day and all that sort of thing she began to get very fond of him. No doubt, and I don't blame her, the thought of a home of her own and a good husband was very tempting. And they can say what they like, but when a girl is fighting along by herself, and is lonely and miserable, love, when the man is a thousand miles away and has not the sense to come back, ain't much to go on!”

“Well, at last she began to waver — Tom was very persistent — and wrote to the one that was away. Of course, I did not see the letter — she was too loyal for that — but from what she told me after, for she used to come here a lot and talk to me, having no mother or father, poor dear, I

don't think she broke it off altogether, but sort of told him she was weary of waiting, and left him a chance to answer and come back. But that was months ago, and no answer came — not even a line — and I think that was mean of him, for she waited long enough!”

“But it was all for the best, for she is fond of Tom, I'm sure — fonder than she ever was of the other, perhaps — and it was so long ago. I think it was more a feeling of loyalty and keeping her word, for girls are like that sometimes, although they should think of their hearts only,” she added, philosophically. “Anyhow, it's all settled now, and they are to be married to-day, and there is not a soul in Molac that is not for wishing them good luck.”

Somewhat out of breath, the old lady turned to her neglected table as she finished speaking, and there was silence for a moment in the a silence in which a man's hopes were shattered and a strong heart broken.

Then Thaw gave a short husky cough as he said, “But it is a bit rough on the other fellow, isn't it? Suppose the letter went astray or he was sick, or anything. It's a rough country over there, they tell me.”

“Of course,” she answered carelessly, “that might happen. But what is the good of bothering? She is going to be married to a good man that she loves. And, anyhow, the other did not come back.”

“Yes; but suppose,” he continued, with curious persistency she thought, “he came back, rich and true. Supposing he were here now.”

“Well, of course, that is not likely,” she replied with a short laugh, as she adjusted the cutlery carefully, “and if he did and was a true man he would say nothing! Do nothing! What's the use? It's better to suffer than spoil another's life. It's too late now.”

Thaw rose from his chair with a gruff laugh, and said, as he moved towards the table, “Oh, well, these love stories are very interesting, but I reckon breakfast is more to the point, eh?”

“Yes, sir. Dearie, me! Here I am chatting away and you there waiting for your breakfast. What am I thinking of?”

“It's all right! By the way, I won't want a room, as I'm going on by the midday train.”

“Very well, sir. Nothing more you want?”

“Nothing more, thanks. Nothing more!”

## **A Book of Verses.**

### **Alice Grant Rosman**

When Richard Branch told his wife that he would be obliged to spend the summer at one of their northern stations instead of accompanying her to town as usual, she found herself incapable of expressing surprise. For a long time she had known that they were approaching a crisis, and this announcement had so startling an air of finality that it could not pass without definite explanation.

She remembered that of late Richard had worked with a feverish energy, and that she had found him practising little futile economies as though he knew the necessity for retrenchment, and hoped that his own care might meet the situation. She had waited for a suggestion of retrenchment in the household, but none came; and so, with a silence stubborn as his own, she, too, had economised in ways which would make things lighter for him when the crisis came.

Now she felt that she was to know something definite of the trouble. Her heart rose to the knowledge courageously, with relieved expectation of certainty instead of suspense.

For once, however, her husband was singularly blind to the needs of the moment. In reply to Hester's helpful "Why?" he would only say that the Ten-Mile property had been going down lately, and needed his personal attention. Therefore he had decided to spend the summer there.

"Then, if it is really necessary for you to go to Ten-Mile, Richard," she said, "of course I shall change my plans and accompany you. It will certainly be far more economical than going to the Bay."

She had the satisfaction of seeing his eyelids flutter in momentary surprise, but when he answered her it was with the habitual half-humorous courtesy that characterised their intercourse.

"Indeed, you must do nothing of the kind," he said. "A summer at Ten-Mile would bore you to death, and the heat would be very bad for you, I am sure. As for economy, I don't know that that was mentioned."

"No," said Hester, facing him desperately, "that's just it. It is not mentioned, but, of course, I know it must be at the bottom of this necessity. Why not admit it?"

He smiled. "If it comes to that," he said, "economy is at the bottom of

most things in this world; and, of course, it is economy of a kind for me to look after my property rather than allow it to go to wrack and ruin in the hands of a stranger.”

Hester gasped. She had to admit that the evasion was peculiarly praiseworthy, and she had never known Richard advance beyond the bounds of obvious platitudes before. She found herself wondering if he was at all conscious of the avenues of thought to which that remark of his might lead. Yet the evasion, as an evasion, irritated her to argument, and she pointed out to Richard that he would be uncomfortable without a woman to look after him, that she would enjoy the experience, and, finally, that she really wished to accompany him to Ten-Mile. But for once Richard was so versatile in excuses as to make argument useless. Hester soon recognised it and gave in; but the conversation, and its sequel in Richard's departure, left behind, besides the old suspense, an inexplicable soreness in Hester's heart. She was hurt that he had not confided in her, yet she recognised the consideration of his silence. He was shielding her, and unreasonably she resented it.

Their marriage, three years before, had been purely one of convenience — a dangerous precedent, yet, in this instance, undeniably successful. Hester was 25, alone in the world, brought up to wealth, and suited for the life of social triumph that she coveted before all else; he was alone, too, but with the means to satisfy all her desires and himself yearning for someone to entertain for him and make a home of his beautiful empty house. From the beginning they were quite frank with each other. Neither was in the least sentimental, neither very young, and that was a safeguard against possible regrets by-and-bye. Thus, after three years they were both outwardly satisfied while little more intimate than at the time of their marriage.

In their very difference from other people they made a possibility of the position. Each had a pride that taught them to recognise and avoid the dangers of the situation, the worst being a too frequent companionship, that ruin of much married happiness in ordinary cases. Both were workers of the strenuous sort, Hester as much socially as Richard with brain and pen; and therein lay their greatest safeguard against each other. The very difficulties of the situation appealed to Hester's fighting spirit, and she rose to the occasion valiantly, with something of that brilliance of resource which made her virtual leader of her world.

Before he had recovered from the surprise of it all, Richard suddenly awakened to the fact that, out of its uninhabited gloom, his home had risen to be a veritable storehouse of beautiful things, and that his wife was the best-dressed woman and the most popular hostess in town.

Nor was he for a moment relegated to the background. True, he saw comparatively little of Hester, but she always had her brightest smile for him. After a little, he came to feel that he had a part in all her social

triumphs.

Always beautiful, always charmingly elusive, no wonder she dazzled him so that he came in his slow way to love her tenderly. No wonder, either, that she — since he did not speak his love for fear of hurting or disturbing her — believed that each fresh kindness on his part was but the result of an obligation like her own.

So the third summer came, and Richard departed to Ten-Mile. Hester commenced her preparations for the summer flitting to the Bay, but somehow this year the prospect was less alluring than usual, and she felt rather bored at the thought of it. It was the first time Richard had gone away for any length of time since their marriage, and she laughed at herself when it occurred to her that it was his absence that was making her so very unsettled.

Before everything else, however, that old suspense of portending trouble weighed upon her. She began to feel a personal responsibility for it that made the thought of the gay summer at the Bay intolerable. In sudden revolt against the rush and gaiety of her life, she longed for quiet and the uneventful days her youth had chafed at. She was suddenly tired, and she wanted to be alone.

It happened that the summer had come earlier than usual, and already the long, hot days made any thought of activity unbearable. Hester, passing through the darkened, silent house and shady garden, had an inspiration — she would spend a long, peaceful summer here. With a delightful feeling of quixotism she dismissed the servants as usual, keeping only the gardener and his wife for her personal needs. Then she opened the trunks, all neatly packed for the summer holidays, and threw the contents far and wide over her room in a glad confusion.

Once she had the house to herself, she began to feel a new childish interest in it, as though only now she was beginning to recognise her ownership. The first day she made a detour of all the rooms, finding in their linen summer garb something simple and refreshing after the solemn grandeur of ordinary times. She tried every chair, and lounged in the library, peered under the covered pictures and into the book-shelves, as though she had never entered the room before. Then, with a sudden impulse, she passed on to her husband's study.

This room at least she did not know. It had pleased her at the time of her marriage to insist that it should be Richard's stronghold against all invaders, even herself, and she had always carefully avoided it. Now, as she opened the door and peered into the dim recesses, she felt like a discoverer entering on an unknown country. She pushed up the window, threw the shutters wide, and saw without a space of lawn and garden in the shadow of the late afternoon.

Quite near the house there were tall trees with hammocks swung between them. Through the framework of the interlaced boughs she

could see shifting sun and shadow, and cool vistas of buffalo-grass and blooming flowers. She drank in the beauty of it all with a contented smile, then turned, half-sighing, back into the room. She was thinking of him who sat day by day at that very window, preoccupied, unseeing, prosaic to the end. She commenced her travels round the study then, and went with a delighted sense of her own frivolity from chair to table, from table to writing-desk, from desk to picture, in the true ardour of discovery.

By-and-bye to Richard's book-shelves she came, smiling a little with amused expectation. Richard's literary tastes were very obvious to Hester, and she, who was something of an epicure on the subject, had always fastidiously avoided it, levelling her conversations to his requirements in her intercourse with him. Now, as her eye ranged over the long rows of scientific volumes, she felt for the first time a throb of admiration for one who could find interest and amusement here.

The next moment she caught sight of a familiar cover, and stooped with an exclamation. Down on a lower shelf she found a copy of Omar, a Keats, Lamb, Alexander Smith, and half a dozen others — almost a duplicate of her own little shelf of favourites upstairs. Hester dropped on to the floor and examined them eagerly.

“Keats!” she exclaimed, “and frivolous Omar! What a sacrifice to the conventions, Richard. And all uncut, of course!”

She pulled out the Omar and carried it to the window, pausing on the way for a paper-knife, because she was so sure that it would be uncut. But when she came into the broader light she noticed that the edges of the book were worn, as though with much handling, and that the binding was slack, so that it fell apart of its own accord. Involuntarily Hester began to read. It was Fitzgerald's Omar, second edition, and presently she found herself giving a smile for the unknown owner of it, whose tactics coincided so evidently with her own.

For here and there were lines lightly scored under, marked for comparison with other editions, a hundred and one signs that gave a fleeting glimpse of the characteristics of the possessor. In one place Hester found a pencilled line or two of criticism, written in a small, eminently conventional handwriting. She laughed, and with a gay impulse seized a pencil from the table and wrote: “Et ego in Arcadia vixi.” The marked quatrain was one over which she had had many an argument in the days when there had been leisure for such things, and again she fell to wondering who he might be — this eminently desirable person who regarded his Omar with a devotion equal to her own.

She put the book down on the window-sill, gazing half-absently at the neat inscription that stood in such startling contrast to her own characteristic writing underneath. Presently the shaping of the letters seemed to take on a certain individuality which puzzled her, as though

she had seen them before, but could not quite remember in what circumstances. Then all at once the remembrance flashed upon her. The writing was Richard's, and it was part of her unfamiliarity with him that she had not recognised it at once.

That was an afternoon of revelations to Hester Branch, revelations and the readjustment of all her thoughts of the man she had married and had so little known.

An hour passed. Outside in the garden the shadows grew and deepened, and a little wind blew up. It set the hammocks swinging lazily, and, blowing in through the study window, ruffled the hair of the woman sitting there. But she did not notice.

With bright eyes and cheeks flushed girlishly, she gazed into the distance, smiling sometimes, at others frowning a little in a puzzled way, but always with that new light of expectancy in her face, as though there had suddenly been opened to her illimitable possibilities of pleasant things.

All her life Hester had loved books and art and music, the finer appurtenances of existence, and this love had brought her unscathed through certain crises and given her a delicate humour that preserved her youth and kept her utterly unspoiled. It hurt her vanity now to remember that her instincts had so failed her with regard to Richard, and yet the situation appealed irresistibly to her sense of the unusual. It was so pathetically absurd that they two should thus have hidden so carefully from each other that which in reality would have been proved a strong bond of fellowship between them.

For they had hidden it. Hester remembered now, with a flush, how many times she had checked quotation or epigram on her lips in her conversation with Richard, believing he would neither understand nor appreciate it. And he — how very superficial he must have thought her! She laughed at the ease with which she had been able to deceive him so completely. Even at this moment it was the artistic side of the situation that appealed to her first of all. Then, still absently, she arose and closed the window and went out of the room, with a little odd smile of determination in her eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next day Hester received her first letter from Richard since his departure, and with a laugh of anticipation she carried it into his study to answer it. She expended all her art upon the composition of that reply, and penned three and a half pages of light gossip with a practised hand. Then she added:

“How very dull you must find it at that outlandish place, and of course you have nothing to read up there. Couldn't I send you something. — one

or two new novels or magazines, for instance, or some of your old favourites from the study. Let me know what you would like and I will see to it.”

She signed the letter, sealed it, and sent it away, and then set herself, as patiently as she could, to wait for a reply. But the days of a week went by before that came. For Richard had promised to write her a weekly letter, and, fearful of boring her by a more frequent correspondence, he held to his promise rigidly. Exactly in a week the letter came, and its first words reassured her. It was another point of difference between them that, whereas Hester made elaborate preamble, and artfully threw in the most important part of her letter at the end, Richard went straight to the subject that most nearly touched him, and so fell headlong into her trap.

“It is so good of you to think about the books,” he wrote in his ceremonious way, “and if you are quite sure it will not trouble you I should be very glad of one or two. With novels and magazines I am amply supplied, but there are two books in my study that I intended to bring away with me, and forgot in the hurry of departure. I don't think you will have any difficulty in finding them. One is Mills's ‘Political Economy,’ the other a small volume of poetry called ‘The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,’ which you will find on the lowest shelf of the bookcase, about the third from the right-hand side. If by any chance you are unable to get them, promise me you will not bother, as it was part of my usual stupidity that I forgot them when I came away.”

“Was it?” said Hester, pausing at this point, and laughing softly. For once she had reason to be grateful for his stupidity, since it had assuredly given her this revelation of him. That he had so guilelessly met the occasion, and asked for his Omar, did not surprise Hester in the least. That was the eternal fitness of things. But his description of where it could be found was too superb. “I wonder what you would think, my friend,” she said to herself, “if you knew where that little book of poetry called ‘The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam’ had been lodging for the last week.”

Next day Hester sent the books to Richard, and two days later she wrote him three more pages of light gossip. At the end she carelessly added a postscript, that eternal friend of woman. “By the way,” she said, “I hope the books reached you safely and in good condition. I packed them carefully, because I know how horrid it is to have one's books destroyed. I see that your Omar is the same edition as mine, and am rejoiced to find a fellow-sinner. I confess to an obstinate affection for the second edition that nothing has been able to change, and I have been much censured for bad taste in consequence. Hereafter I shall be doubly obstinate, remembering that I have someone to uphold me.”

In due time this letter came to Richard at Ten-Mile, and that one little personal reference at the end of it played sad havoc with his well-

balanced mind, and made the week of waiting before he might reply to it interminable. He wrote twelve incoherent pages to Hester, then tore them up in favour of a more ordered epistle, over which, nevertheless, his joy was writ large.

Hester read both joy and letter with a smile for the success of her ruse. For she thought that Richard's joy and her own that echoed it were born of the discovery of a fellow-bookworm. Hester was very clever, but love needs spectacles.

That was the beginning of a correspondence that lasted through the summer, and grew in volume as the days went by. At first Richard held to his weekly letters valiantly, and Hester spent all her brilliant wiles to draw him from his righteous way. But when at last he threw discretion to the wind, and wrote two letters in a week, she kept him waiting ten days before she answered him. That was too much for Richard. Again he fell headlong into the trap prepared for him, and in his immediate reply showed how anxious, how perturbed he had been, how he had looked vainly day after day for her letter. And that was exactly what Hester wanted to know.

After that the correspondence grew to be a daily one, and far too interesting to both of them to be relinquished. Their talk was in personal ways, and always of books — that safe, new vantage ground they had discovered. All manner of strange delightful by-ways of literature they explored together, comparing, discussing, arguing with the ardour that was theirs. And, strange to say, it was always the man who was leader on these excursions — he whom, scarcely a month ago, Hester had believed ignorant of the very outskirts of that wondrous country through which he had suddenly become her guide.

It was significant that it was Hester upon whom these daily letters had the most disquieting effect. Richard was a modest person, thankful for small mercies, and it was enough for him that Hester, in her goodness, spared a few minutes every day to write to him. To take advantage of that goodness to inflict his unwelcome love upon her would have seemed to him unpardonably unfair. But she, with her woman's want of logic, and having much leisure to think of these things, came to long for that personal note which in the beginning she had so carefully excluded from their correspondence. The excitement and intrigue of the first letters had passed by, and she and Richard were growing day by day to know each other, but her nature, awakened to interest, unconsciously pleaded for more.

So the summer passed away, and gradually town became alive again. There was the old glad rush of footsteps along city streets, the old swirl of cool autumn winds about the garden, where all day the leaves fell silently to earth. And still no word of Richard's coming.

At length Hester grew impatient.

“Down here in town it is already autumn,” she wrote suggestively, “early as summer came this year. Almost everybody is back in town at last, and out in the garden, beyond your study window, the trees are shifting colour every day. Richard, when are you coming home? Surely that wilderness cannot claim you any longer, and your world requires you here. Let Ten-Mile go to rack and ruin, if it must, but don't bury yourself alive any longer. Let me hear that you will soon come home.”

Richard did write soon — at once — but his letter told other news, the confirmation of an old suspicion of hers that lately she had put behind her.

“Dear,” he said (for distance had made him brave), “I am afraid I cannot come home for some time yet. Do you remember asking me one day if economy was at the bottom of my coming here? I didn't tell you then, because I hoped against hope that the need would pass. But it has not. For years I have lost heavily on this property, until I am somewhat seriously involved. But since I have been on the spot I have become hopeful, and believe that with great care the difficulty may be tided over. But it will take time, and I must superintend things myself, which means staying at Ten-Mile till the end of the year, at least. I cannot tell you how sorry I am, because it distresses me to leave you alone; but I know that you are too resourceful to be lonely, and during the season you will have plenty to occupy and amuse you. Enjoy yourself as usual, and write to me when you have leisure; and please do not worry yourself with the thought that I am buried alive. Up here we have the season's changes, too, and the sunlight on the young grass is wonderful. I am out of doors all day in the crisp autumnal air — a healthy, active life. So you see there is really nothing to complain about.”

So he was not coming home. Hester told herself unreasonably that she had known as much all along — that he did not want to come — economy was all an excuse. And so he thought that he was going to stay up there and work and slave while she gave parties and entertained her friends. Nice way people would talk, indeed: say they had quarrelled and separated, and all manner of unpleasant things. Really, Richard was too absurd. She had a vision of the new grass bathed in sunlight that was wonderful, of the long rides and outdoor life, and wished she had a part in them. But Richard had not mentioned that, and, of course, she would be in the way. Men were such selfish beings. Well, there was no help for it, she supposed.

She set the reinstated maids to turn the house back to its old splendour, and while they were doing that she wandered from room to room in an aimless way that did not speak well for her resource. Then it occurred to her that she would attend to Richard's study herself, for the pleasant hours she had spent there in the summer. So she had the room brushed thoroughly, and set to work, lingering over it with an impulse she did not

understand. Finally, when it was all in order, she bethought herself of the book-shelves, and set about taking the books down one by one, dusting and rearranging them. She had scarcely commenced upon the second shelf when she knocked a slender parcel standing between two books, and before she could save it it fell to the ground. Hastily jumping down to see that no damage was done, she found that the wrappings had fallen off, disclosing the back of a photograph and some withered flowers.

For quite two minutes Hester stood staring straight in front of her, consternation, fear, and a sudden knowledge of herself in her eyes. Then she stooped resolutely and picked up the photograph.

Her own face looked back at her from a picture taken six months ago, but that was not all. Under it someone had written: "My beloved" — and this time she knew the writing very well.

\* \* \* \* \*

Late that night Hester turned to her desk from the open study window and a vision of scented Northern dawns. Drawing pen and paper to her, she wrote:

A book of verses underneath a bough,  
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread, and thou  
Beside me singing in the wilderness,  
Ah! wilderness were Paradise enow.

This she put in an envelope and sent to her husband.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days later she was on her way to Ten-Mile.

## My Sister — A Story for a Wintry Night.

### Chicot

At the door of Life, by the gate of Breath,  
There are worse things waiting for men than Death.

We may well call a spade a spade; it was a madhouse, a Bedlam, and I was going there to see my sister. The word “asylum” has a hideous sound in my ears. I wouldn't mind “Dottyville,” but that is sacred to Phil May.

This was last year, and it was my first visit to such a mental museum. To see my sister.

Charles Lamb's sister was a lunatic, and stabbed her mother with a dinner knife in a fit of homicidal frenzy. And Elia devoted his life to taking care of her. When she knew her dark hour was coming on, brother and sister used to walk off tearfully hand in hand to the “asylum.”

Surely it is better to be laughing mad than crying mad, though that is better than dumb mad.

On my way to see her, a year ago, I remember I got thinking of little things that had happened long, long ago. We were known in County Cork as the “Mad M's.” Little, far-off things came back to me. I was cheerful, but pensive.

I remember how “blueful” Mitty used to get here in Australia. “Mitty” was her baby name. The heat stifled her, and the grass was never green. She was here some years, and I've often heard her say she had never seen real grass in New South Wales. “Very far gone,” you will think.

She went home five years ago. Hadn't been herself for many months. “Coming events cast their shadows before” — it must have been so. When I kissed her “good-bye” on board the boat, she put her arm round my neck and whispered —

“Ah! Jim, if they shut me up, you'll make them put me where I can see a green tree.”

It was the last time I saw her before they did shut her up. I made the arrangement from this side of the world. Memory now harked back a quarter of a century to when she used to take care, or try to take care, of me.

When I was young, like a fool, I took opium: and she found it out. Possibly I told her. After the first year I was beginning to look pretty

seedy on it. One day she asked me to go for a walk with her to the “gravel-pit,” and she took me out to take me in with a vengeance.

The “gravel-pit” was a huge crater-like depression on the top of a rise in one of our fields. It had a circular fence round it, and was planted with young larch-firs. How is it that larches always seem young — all those, at any rate, that I remember having seen? Here there were woodcocks in the winter, and bullfinches — literally flocks of them — in the spring; and in summer, wild strawberries all up the steep sides. No one, until he has tasted wild strawberries and cream, can understand the reverend doctor's pronouncement: “Doubtless, God might have made a better berry than the strawberry, but, doubtless, God never did.”

There was a scene in the gravel-pit, all right. She cried, not offensively. She knew I was “killing myself with morphia.”

I was cynical. Didn't think I was a particularly valuable citizen.

“Oh, it's we want you, Jim!”

And for the only time in my life I experienced that romantic commonplace — a female creature “flinging” her arms round my neck. It was very embarrassing.

I stroked her down, and thought it was all right, but she began to whisper something. She “had some muriate of morphia.”

I jumped. “Where the devil did you get it?”

“I stole it from you.”

We might be a mad family, but we never condescended to tell lies. (By jingoes, for the first time it occurs to me that probably this is a striking proof of our madness.)

“Oh!” I was a good deal relieved. The fact was that the last ounce of morphia had gone so quickly that I was almost frightened; thought I must have been taking it in a waking sleep.

She went on whispering. The kernel of it was that if I didn't give it up, “I could do anything I tried,” she said — a flattering faith, surely — she would swallow all she had.

“It's beastly, nasty,” I hinted.

“I know. I tasted it.”

“Good heavens! How much did you take?”

“Oh! I didn't swallow it, silly!”

I saw the storm was blowing over, so I temporised.

“You'll have to give me five weeks to taper off,” I suggested.

“Oh! I'm so glad. You'll do it, honour bright?”

I don't think I hesitated perceptibly before I pledged myself, “Honour bright!”

Perhaps the story should rest at that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Did I give it up? you want to know.

No, I didn't. But I said I did. Luckily, I was looking bad enough for it to be true.

There or four days later, fortunately, I left home, and never went back again, before I came out to Australia.

\* \* \* \* \*

I got to the madhouse.

She was brought in to see me, and her face lighted up at once — dropped some mask of dulness and decay.

“Oh, Jim! you've come for me! Oh! you're good!”

They let me take her away. The doctor told me she would be all right for some time. No hope of a permanent cure. As we shook hands I asked: “How about her health generally?”

“Sound as a bell. Might live to ninety,” he answered curtly.

Mitty and I lived quietly and happily together for nearly a year. She got quite young again. We had a big cottage, some sixteen miles from Killarney. No one knew us. It was one of the loveliest spots on earth, surely. I began to think the doctor a pessimistic old bird. We used to talk sometimes about her experience in the asylum, but not much; it seemed to excite her. When that happened she always made me promise, “You'll never, never let me go back there, Jim, dear?”

I patted her hand and said: “Never, Mitty.”

Then she would smile and whisper: “Morphia!”

I hadn't taken any for seventeen years, and it was the only thing in heaven or earth, or under it, that I was really afraid of. But I nodded.

Then, as the autumn was coming round again, I saw the dulness and abstraction growing in her eyes which the doctor had told me to watch for.

She knew it, too, though we never spoke of it in any way. Only at last, every night when she kissed me, I heard a whisper like a breath, very low: “Another day! One more day!”

I pretended not to hear, took no notice; but she knew I understood, because if I hadn't I should have asked.

By heaven! I hear that now sometimes, and it wakes me in the night.

I believe she thought that my saying nothing was a tacit promise of the “one day more,” and that I would tell her when the time came. A tradition of never condescending to tell lies is a valuable asset in any family. Perhaps she really wasn't competent to think rationally at all.

I did it one night after tea. Morphia, of course, was altogether too crude. But there is a pleasing laboratory experiment. You take a kitten by the scruff of his neck — lift him up. He mews. You spurt four or five minims of a certain drug into the back of his throat; and at the same time

let him drop to the floor. He's dead before he touches it.

She was lying on the sofa asleep, with her mouth half open.

I put ten minims in a hypodermic, and shot it into the back of her throat. That was all.

After a few minutes, I kissed her, and went out for a walk. The hypodermic syringe and a half-ounce bottle, that had travelled twice round the world with me, lie as far out in Bantry Bay as I could throw them.

The servant found her about ten o'clock. There was no inquest nonsense.

“A cynical brute!” you think. “A heartless, mocking devil!”

Man! man! Put your head in a bag. Know this truth, a truth too deep for tears, that before some mysterious terrors the devils also believe and tremble. Perhaps if I splash in the Fountain of Laughter, it is that I may not drown in the Fountain of Tears.

I buried her in the greenest spot I could think of in all Ireland — outside the walls of an old monastery garden, that only a lonely road divided from the graveyard. We had played out our childhood in the garden, and were born in the old house that it surrounded, once a bishop's palace. Under the big elms and horse-chestnut trees there is half an acre of bluebells in the spring.

There, in the sleepy hollow of the hills, may her rest be deep. She was one of earth's gentlest, saddest souls, always; too finely fibred to bear the stress and strain and dulness of it all.

## **Nurse Olive.**

### **George Martin**

From the period of the decay of its pristine glory the small, moribund mining town of Dee Gully for many years experienced nothing capable of stirring its sluggish pulse until one memorable day, when payable gold was again found within its precincts. This moving event suddenly vitalised the older inhabitant's dormant memories of the ancient times that had brought the place into being — which times, indeed, soon seemed to be living themselves over again in the hourly spectacle of newcomers, and the strange, harrying movement of the lately sleepy streets.

Among the first of the fresh arrivals had been Mrs. Ann Ironside and her son David, the latter a miner, and support of his widowed mother. The pair occupied a cottage just beyond the town, and at the point when this story commences were seated one evening in early winter in its plainly-furnished but strikingly clean and orderly little sitting-room; in truth, modest as the place was, it smiled and glittered from end to end with the almost aggressive look of its spotless cleanliness.

Mrs. Ironside, seen as she sat knitting at the table by the light of a lamp, was a small, thin, wizened woman, with white hair and furrowed skin — a certain antiquity in her appearance not lessened by her horn-rimmed spectacles, and the faded, much out-of-date but carefully preserved black satin dress which it was her custom to display when the work of the day was over.

David, her son, afforded a notable physical contrast. His working clothes discarded, he sprawled a full 6 feet of lithe, muscular manhood before a log fire, which burned red and gold in a dazzling white hearth, and his strong face bore the freshness of comparative youth. He did not, however, seem at his ease — he turned too many thoughtful looks at his mother, accompanied by restless shifting of his long limbs. In this his mood did not concur with the fixed attitude and calm placidity of Mrs. Ironside, who, keeping her work to the lamp, tended it with steady intentness, her mouth partly open, her eyes rarely lifted.

“Why don't you go into the kitchen and have your smoke?” she said quietly. “You usually want to after your tea.”

"I will presently, mother," answered David a little hastily, as one glad at the ending of a silence. Then he said directly, "Er — what do you think of Olive's new move? Did anyone tell you?"

His mother raised her head, and stared at him with astonishment. "New move! — new move!" she testily repeated. "No; what has she done? Given you up, and taken another sweetheart — or what?"

"No — oh, no," answered David, smiling. "Nothing so serious as that. She's gone over to Meston's Hall, that's all."

Mrs. Ironside hastily pushed her spectacles above her eyes. "Good gracious, Dave," she said querulously. "I wish you'd be a little more explicit. What do you mean by 'gone over to Meston's Hall?'"

"Just to sing, mother," said Dave, more at his ease now that his subject was launched — "to sing every night. It was her mother's idea. Olive was willing, and Meston (who is a shrewd fellow) was satisfied. It will be a good thing for them, you know, now that the father is dead, because Meston will pay well, and Mrs. Wills is quite unprovided for."

Mrs. Ironside had looked at her son with a rigidity of figure that stirred no more than the coal-black eyes under her knitted brows or the small, close mouth drawn down at the corners. Presently she sighed deeply, as one who has slowly comprehended a new and unexpected aspect of a once familiar matter.

"Then, if that's so," she said with deliberate emphasis, an angry flush rising to her cheeks, "you can consider your engagement with Olive Wills at an end! For she shall be no daughter of mine."

Dave laughed with dubious jocularly. "Oh, that's nonsense, mother," he said, with good-humoured persuasiveness. "It won't make any difference to Olive — not the slightest. You know what a good girl she is. She'll be awfully popular too. She'll sing songs that will keep the men good and do them good; she'll touch their hearts. And why shouldn't she turn her voice to good account — you can't say it isn't honest?"

"It may be honest," fired up his mother, "but it will be the girl's ruin. Aye! You may look as black at me as you please, if you dare to, but I say it will be her ruin! Won't she be mixing with them theatrical folk Meston has? Will ye deny me that?"

David laughed aloud. "Why, of course she will, mother. But what of it. They're decent people. And, believe me, Olive can take care of herself. She has a way, too, of bringing people she associates with to respect her, no matter who they are."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed his mother sharply, "a girl can't do it. What next will you be telling me! I say that any young woman with good looks will meet her ruin at a place like Meston's — a low singing-hall tacked on to a public-house! Are you a fool that you can't see it?"

David shook his head and smiled assuredly as he crossed his legs and looked into the fire. "No, mother," he said firmly. "You're wrong

— wrong as far as Olive is concerned, at any rate. And I shall marry her when the time comes, depend upon it — although I won't hurry matters, for Olive wants to save a little money for her mother.”

Mrs. Ironside now dropped her work on the table and rose impatiently. “And will you sit there,” she said vehemently, her eyes flashing, “and defy me — your mother? Will you be a disobedient son and bring a curse on you? Is all my teaching — aye! and your dead father's — to go for nought? Will you bring shame and disgrace on our ancient ways — the beliefs in which I have lived, and — please God — will die?”

“Look here, mother,” coaxingly expostulated Dave, eyeing her kindly, “this is a matter of which I am a better judge than you. You are prejudiced and——”

“Do you dare to say so?” she cried, bridling before him. “Prejudiced! Will you tell me I have lived so long in the world to know at last less than my own son? Who can see where your happiness lies better than I? Is it nothing that I have tended you all these years, and raised you to the man you are? Do——”

“That's all right, mother,” interrupted Dave a little irritably. “I'm not arguing——”

“But you are!” exclaimed his mother, her form trembling and face flaming with wrath. “You are defying me — your mother! Is it because I am old, and dependent on you? Then I will go out and work — aye, I will! I do not fear work, for there is still strength——”

Dave could stay no longer. A frown and troubled look on his face, he rose hastily from his chair, took his pipe from the mantelpiece, and unceremoniously left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

About a month later Dave, according to his nightly wont, was hanging about outside Meston's hall waiting for Olive Wills. The place looked invitingly warm and bright, the light from its low windows falling in regular splashes on the dark ground outside, while intermittent peals of applause brought envious looks to the faces of a few penniless nomads who, congregated together, formed a small but unselect exterior audience of their own.

Dave had not long to wait, and Olive and her escort were soon walking leisurely in the direction of her home. The night was cold and calm, and the moon was bathing in soft silver a rigid sea of yellow gravel heaps, flecked by the darker touches of huts, sheds, and poppet-legs — for Dee Gully had not belied its new promise, and was once more largely on good gold.

“Dave,” said Olive, giving his arm a warning squeeze, “do you know I'm going to be very angry with you? No? Well, I am. You've been

having trouble with your mother about me for weeks, and haven't told me. Now, why not — why haven't you?"

"Who told you?" blurted Dave.

"Ah! Who, indeed," said Olive, collectedly. "Well, Dr. Bardsley, who has been attending your mother, has been lately called in by mine — I am thankful to say for nothing serious, Now, your mother — I suppose because she can't open her heart to you — has done so to him; and he, poor man, thinking, perhaps, to do you and me a service, has repeated her story to your future mother-in-law. Now, David, why ever didn't you tell me yourself? The idea of you and your mother living on estranged terms on my account — you bad boy!"

"What would have been the good?" answered Dave, promptly. "I have always given in to the old lady as much as I could, but in this instance it was impossible; her ideas were beyond all reason. I didn't see what good I could do by telling you; I should merely have upset you."

"Then let me tell you, sir," said Olive in her best manner, "that nothing is so bad for a woman that it won't be worse by being withheld from her. Will you remember that?"

Could David have seen her face, he would have perceived that she was struggling with suppressed laughter, and she said, "Your worthy mother thought that Meston's would bring me to perdition, I understand?"

"Olive," said David hotly, "don't think anything of it. You know she comes of a race of Puritans, and has the most extraordinary ideas. One of them is implicit obedience of children to parents — which, I believe (laughing), is never to cease this side of the grave."

"And why," asked Olive, demurely, looking at the ground, "didn't you give me up when she told you to?"

"Don't chaff," said David.

"Shall I tell you something funny your mother told Dr. Bardsley?" asked Olive, bubbling with mirth. "I can't help laughing," she said, warningly. "You mustn't be angry with me!"

"That's all right," said David, smiling. "Go on."

"Well," resumed Olive, seething with suppressed merriment, "it appears that your mother throughout her life has earnestly prayed for the downfall of that venerable institution, the Popedom of Rome, to which she has made no secret of her hostility; and her fixed belief now is that this, having at last come to ears of high authority, the rheumatism from which she suffers is, by occult means, a malign rejoinder!"

With one accord, the two broke into peals of laughter, which reverberated among the mullock heaps and sand dunes across which they were now picking their way.

"Well," said David, presently, when he had regained composure, "now that we have opened the subject, I don't mind telling you, Olive, that for the past month things between the old lady and me haven't been

pleasant — a sort of armed truce. Of course, at heart, she's as good as gold — when she can have her own way. But she won't give in, although she's thoroughly unhappy. Sometimes I hear her crying to herself in her room, and that gives me a bad turn — but I can't help it. I'm going to be as firm as she is. I would give way if it were a case for giving way.”

“Dear,” said Olive gently, “there is a way out of the difficulty. You ought to have told me how matters were before, as I said, and I could have arranged so that no trouble between you and your mother would arise. However, I have settled everything. Dr. Bardsley has helped me, and my mother agrees. I am going to leave Meston's — ”

An impatient exclamation was uttered by David.

“And going as nurse to the hospital at Eagle Range. It's only a few miles from here — we can meet often — and although the pay won't be equal to Meston's, still it will be good, because — ”

“But, Olive!” broke in Dave, in remonstrance.

“Because,” went on Olive with quiet resolution, “what with the old diggings there, and the revival here, the girls are all getting homes of their own, and nurses are not easily got. Now, David,” she concluded persuasively, “you can't possibly have any objection to this. I really can't see where any objection can arise. How nice for you and your mother to be on pleasant terms once more!”

But David was not pleased. It is true the compromise so adroitly effected solved the difficulty with the mother, while preserving to reach their standpoint; still, he would have preferred continuance of the problem rather than solution at any sacrifice on the part of Olive.

“I don't like the idea, Olive,” he said, demurringly. “It will be a hard life for you. You will be separated a good deal from your home, and you and your mother will suffer on my account. I would rather you had left things as they were, for I shall feel far more uncomfortable now than I did.”

“Nonsense, Dave,” said Olive cheerily. “It won't last very long; I only want to leave mother a small sum when you and I — you know. And you can't possibly feel as uncomfortable as I should if I were prolonging unhappiness in your home.”

Dave perceived that argument was useless — a resourceful brain and willing heart had cast the die. There was only one thing that a man could do under the circumstances, and Dave did it — they were quite alone. He took Olive in his arms and kissed her, and vowed there wasn't a hospital in the country that should keep her long. For answer, she made him distractingly jealous by saying she believed the place was really very comfortable, and that there were several young, good-looking, and unmarried doctors, who were — so it was said, but, of course, she didn't know — particularly nice, and most considerate in their dealings with the nurses!

\* \* \* \* \*

The close of the following summer saw Eagle Range emerge from a three-months' ravaging grip of scarlet fever, that had been scourge-like in its widespread results. The place was an old-time camp that had developed into permanence, but did not afford prospects of sudden acquisition of wealth equal to those held out by its richer rival, Dee Gully, which had, too, robbed it of a goodly proportion of its population, in which had been numbered, by the way, David Ironside and his redoubtable mother. Through the epidemic — now happily overcome — Nurse Wills had come unscathed. The girl — for she was but barely out of her teens — had worked with a will and a cheery, indomitable patience and self-abnegation that had lifted her to a sort of heroineship in the institution. Only a few months before her winning personality, combined with faculty she had of infusing her natural insight and keen human sympathy into her songs, had so found its way to the hearts of the male element of Dee Gully that it was threatened with reform of even its worst characters; indeed, there was something like a revolution at Meston's when her bright, fresh young face was no more seen on its somewhat tawdry platform. But Dee Gully's loss had proved a very solid gain to Eagle Range, where Olive's following, if less heroic, was born of emotions set deep down in the hearts of scores of both men and women whom she had helped back to health and to their cottage homes dotted on its hillsides.

And then, after a month's entire immunity from the fever, it was left to Mrs. Ironside — while on a visit to old friends in Eagle Range — to become infected with its last vagrant breath, and be brought to the ministering hands of Nurse Wills — to receive from her, through many anxious watches at dawn, day, and dark, ceaseless — in truth, affectionate — care until convalescence. It was a case that once closely touched peril, and that authority frankly accredited a victory mainly won by the strong-hearted, enthusiastic young personality that had had it in unwearied keeping.

The air was close and sultry, and the windows of the hospital ward were wide open. A blood-red sun was perceptibly sliding down the back of the purpling ranges, and broad, level shafts of light were lying in serrated rows down the long room. Olive, snatching a few minutes' rest, was seated by the bed of Mrs. Ironside, a scrap of sewing in her fingers. She had been listening with perfectly assumed docility and genuine enjoyment to her patient's talk.

“But you must leave the place now, my dear,” went on the old lady. “You've done enough for it; for your own mother, and for those you've nursed; besides, you're looking ill, or run-down, yourself. ... Ah! I wish

David was more like you! A good son — a good son — but so obstinate and anxious to have his own way in everything! I've always been too yielding with him; but you must assert yourself a little with him, my dear — he wants it, and it'll do him good.

“As to this illness of mine,” she added, shaking her head darkly — well. I know who's sent that!”

And Nurse Olive, having with a sense of humour but little command over her risible faculties, suddenly hurried away.

\* \* \* \* \*

The day had closed at last — a Sunday, three weeks later, destined to remain long in memory of Eagle Range and Dee Gully. The air had been as still as if Nature were holding her breath, while the sun had laid soft mantles of gold, and blue, and now grey upon the wooded ranges. All the day people had come from afar, on foot and horse, to join in a long band that had crept silently from the hospital to a broad, level, white-dotted gully, high-banked by whispering trees; and as they had silently come, had silently gone, melted in long distances and in the indigo haze of the evening. A marvellous opal sky had crowned the falling sun, and faded, too; and now, out of a deep orange west, a star, set like a lamp, blinked at the slender arc of a new moon. It has been one of those days of gentle beauty which, at another time, the folk of the country-side would have lingered, in cottage garden and verandah, to see the last of; but it had passed unregarded and unregretted.

In Mrs. Ironside's cot. Dave sat in the darkening sitting-room by the empty fireplace, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. By his side knelt his mother. Her old eyes were red with past tears, whose ducts were all spent and dry, and tragic in the intensity of their appealing, unavailing look at him.

“Dave,” she said, in quivering tones, “what am I to say to ye — won't ye speak? Do ye think I don't know I've done it all — even to giving her her death-stroke? Ah! They told me I had, and she knew it; and she took it with a smile — always a smile — till she could smile no more .... Will ye hate the very sight of me, Dave, now?”

A trembling hand, ready to caress, hanging indecisively over his head, dropped to her side, and she moved a little farther off from him.

“If ye want me to go away, Dave,” she said piteously, “I — I'll go; ye can do with me as — ye will.”

Her white head fell in abject dejection .... Dave remained still for a moment; then he loosened an arm, and placed it round her .....

And away in the gloom of the quiet, white-specked gully, the cool evening breeze was singing a vesper hymn that stirred the petals of a big mound of flowers that rested above the sleeping form of Nurse Olive.

## **In Dark Waters.**

### **J. G. Youll**

The whistle had gone, the day shift had knocked off, and the cage was bringing the men from the black depths of the colliery as fast as wheels could turn.

The men were in good humour with themselves, for their agitation had been successful in extracting from the management a promise that a portion of the colliery, long considered unsafe, should be sealed up. So their spirits rose as the good news spread, till they joked like a lot of schoolboys.

The most light-hearted of the crowd was Hugh Laing, a fine, strapping young fellow, who had passed all his theoretical examinations, and was just finishing the three years it was necessary for him to serve below before he could get his manager's certificate. He was working in the affected area, and had never felt comfortable. His anxiety arose not so much from the thought of his own danger as from the knowledge that it was worrying his mother. She was a widow, whose energies and affections centred in her only son, so it was not to be wondered at that the son placed her welfare before his own.

But he had another cause for satisfaction that day, for he had just heard that Sam Thompson was again working in the mine, and as he contemplated the prospect of wiping off an old score his face lit up with a grim smile that boded ill for Thompson.

He entered the little cottage with a buoyant step, and greeted his mother with more than his usual fervour, before telling her his two items of news.

"I'm real glad to hear about the closing, lad," she said, "and in regard to Sam Thompson, I'll only ask you to promise one thing."

She stopped, and Hugh, knowing what was expected of him, asked: "What is that, mother?"

She waited a moment, and then said impressively: "Never forget that he, too, has a mother depending on him."

Some time elapsed before Hugh answered. He was looking back and thinking of the way Sam Thompson had lied in order to separate him from the girl he loved. As he thought of the success that had attended

those efforts, and of his own failure to undo the damage, his mouth set tight, and his eyes shone with a look there was no mistaking.

His mother wisely let him fight his battle alone.

“There are other things I'll remember as well as that, mother,” was all the reply he made. But the mother knew her son, and was satisfied.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Hugh lay awake that night listening to the moaning of the breakers, he little guessed that they were at that moment breaking down the last barriers that separated them from the workings beneath. He little guessed that the moments as they flew were ticking off the closing scenes in the drama of many a life. For no one knew that the morrow was to usher in one of the greatest calamities that ever interrupted the ordered flow of Australian national life.

\* \* \* \* \*

The calamity occurred just as the men were having dinner. The comparative quiet was broken by a low rumbling that gradually swelled and swelled till it seemed to fill the pit. Hugh and his mate, an old miner named Morgan, looked at each other, and no words were necessary to give utterance to the fear that blanched their faces. Both knew that the sea had broken in, and nothing could stop its inrush till the whole mine was flooded up to sea-level. They dropped their picks and ran like mad for the main road.

Before they reached the road, a fierce blast of wind swept through the workings. With a weird shriek it proclaimed itself the harbinger of the coming flood, sent forward to announce the triumph of chaos over the puny works of man. The intensity of the blast told the men that one flood that followed was coming with appalling swiftness, so they raced along like demons, recognising that their only chance of safety lay in their ability to get beyond the lowlying parts before the flood came upon them.

During that wild race with the waters Hugh's mind was busy. He saw plainly that if the flood caught them that side of the hollow their only hope was to reach one of the headings above sea-level, and take their chance of cutting their way out. The noise of the flood was growing louder and louder each moment, and it rolled and echoed through the mine like the booming of a thousand breakers.

What a rush it was! They stumbled and fell, but still struggled on in the darkness, with never a groan. Many a man stopped to help a fallen comrade, though all the time the flood roared louder and louder, like some monster gloating over its prey. It only lasted a moment or two, but

the memory of it remained with Hugh for ever.

When the waters overtook them many of the men were in the hollow. Poor wretches! They are gone for ever "till the sea gives up its dead." Hugh and some others were just on the edge of the depression. Few survived the first shock of the torrent, and these few could do little more, for some moments, than cling tenaciously to their supports. After a time the current abated some-what, and it was possible to struggle against it.

Old Morgan's voice was heard above the babel of the waters. "Boys!" he yelled. A few "ayes" answered him. "Let's make for Jimmy Duncan's bord. The top end of that is above sea-level, and we might cut our way out into the old B—— workings."

The uselessness of staying where they were was apparent to all, and so without more ado the pitiful remnant set out. Then a providential thought struck Hugh. If he could only get a message to the pit top they might stand a chance. He remembered that there was a telephone just along a cross-road that might not have been reached yet, and he started out in that direction. He soon reached it, and rang. The "burr" of the current in his ear told him that it was still "live," and with his head nigh bursting with excitement he stood and waited for the answering call. He knew his time was short. He knew the water was rapidly filling the lowlying areas, and as soon as they were full it must rise on his side, till the main yes, and even this cross-road where he stood, was flooded to the roof. The water was at his knees now, and gently rising. He knew it would be chest high in the main road, and before he could reach Duncan's bord it would probably be up to the roof, and then——! Would there be an answer?

He thought of his mother, and a hard lump came into his throat. God help and pity his mother, and all other mothers who had sons below that fateful day! He wondered how Thompson had fared, and he felt a flendish desire to laugh as he thought of him coming back to the old mine just to die.

What could be wrong in the office? He was just about to ring again when he heard the click of the receiver being removed, and then his heart gave a mighty thump as he recognised the manager's "Hullo!" at the other end. In a few brief words he gave his message, and then, knowing by the horrified cry of the manager that it was understood, he just waited to repeat the name of the spot they were going to try to make, and dashed off.

When he reached the main road the water was up to his armpits, and running strongly. It was all he could do to keep his feet. He thanked heaven that miners wore heavy boots, for without them his case would have been hopeless.

No words can describe the terror of that walk through the darkness. Dragging himself along by the skips, or anything else he could lay hands

on, he came nearer and nearer the haven he sought. Sometimes he could hardly breathe, the water was so high, and the roof so low. Sometimes he lost precious seconds through some obstruction holding him fast. Sometimes he thought he was off the track, and then the horror of it all nearly drove him mad. Sometimes the last piteous wall of some drowning comrade reached his ear, and had it not been that his own case was nearly as bad, those cries would have frozen the blood in his veins. Before he reached the bord the water was at his neck, but he got safely through, and as he struggled up the rising ground it fell away from him until he felt safe, for the water was now no higher than his waist.

He gave a shout to see if the others had arrived safely, and the answering cheer assured him that it was so. But high above the cheer rose a cry there could be no mistaking. It was the despairing scream of a doomed man that came from the watery hell he had just left, and the voice was that of Sam Thompson.

Hugh only hesitated a second before he plunged back into the water. Although he knew he was taking a great risk, and although he knew Thompson would see him drown before his eyes without raising a finger to assist him, he could not forget his mother's words: "Don't forget he has a mother depending on him."

He plunged on, till he guessed that he was near the spot from which the cry came.

"Where are you, Sam?" he asked. A choking sob came from somewhere on his left hand. He felt blindly till he caught hold of Sam's shirt. The water was up to his neck now, and over Sam's mouth, but he never flinched. Taking a deep breath, he dived into the water, and felt down the other's body till he found the trouble.

A loaded skip had canted over and pinned him to the wall. With feverish haste Hugh strove to unfasten the couplings that connected to its fellows, and every time he rose for breath the water was appreciably higher. At last he succeeded, and not a moment too soon, for as he pulled the insensible Thompson out of the trap he found that his strength was just about gone. How he struggled out he never knew, but he learned afterwards that he had been found just on the edge of the advancing waters with the limp body of the other on top of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The history of that long, weary waiting in the darkness, with dumb fear gnawing at their hearts, and grim famine always before their eyes, has never been told. Colliers are built in an heroic mould, but they are modest withal, and seldom given to talking. How they revived Thompson, and nursed him back to life with the last remnants of their food and drink, how they cheered each other to deeds of self-sacrifice

such as only heroes do, how they swore Hugh was the gamest lad that ever gladdened a mother's heart; how Thompson, hearing the tale of his rescue, told the whole story of his infamy towards Hugh, and how Hugh, thinking that no place for anger, shook hands with him on the spot — all this is the groundwork of a great story; but it has yet to be told.

And then there is the tale of the gallant rescuers and of the triumphant fight they made against foul air, noxious gases, crumbling walls, tottering roofs, and the other fell dangers that beset their lot. How they entered the old workings of the B—— mine, and, taking their lives in their hands, searched round till they found the spot they sought, never heeding the fact that every moment an explosion might hurl them into eternity.

How they worked for days with never a glimmer of hope, till men fell from exhaustion and lack of air, but their places were filled from the ever-ready crowd of waiting volunteers, who were eager to brave the greatest dangers for the sake of their imprisoned comrades.

It was a perilous time, but the difficulties were all overcome, and the prisoners were snatched from the rising waters after seven days of entombment.

\* \* \* \* \*

Great was the relief of the crowd at the pit top as the word was passed along that at last they were rescued, and many the tears of joy shed as women embraced those whom they had given up for dead.

Hugh Laing looks back on his experiences with mingled feelings, because he owes his life's happiness to the disaster. Had there been no accident, he might never have demonstrated the possession of those faculties that put him on the first rung of the ladder of fame; and he might never have been reconciled to his sweetheart, for that joyous event was the result of Thompson's efforts, and it is only right to state that the whole of Sam's subsequent career was a complete vindication of the power of a wholesome application of the Golden Rule.

## **The Housekeeper.**

**M. Forrest**

### **Chapter I**

Frank Fort had had endless trouble with servants. His red-headed chum, Percival O'Dowd, said half in joke that he ought to try a housekeeper. O'Dowd thought it preferable to entertaining the notion of a wife. He said he would do it himself, but possessing only a selection which wouldn't carry a sheep to the acre and weighted by a substantial overdraft, he found it necessary to be his own housekeeper, cook, and housemaid, and he always spent from Saturday to Monday at Fort's station, which paid and was not in debt; consequently there was something worth eating to be had for Sunday dinner when there was no domestic upheaval on the tapis and a cook to cook it. O'Dowd, at home, lived mostly upon dried apples (which he always forgot to soak before cooking), and anything he could find about the place. It was quite a godsend to him when a passing traveller ate on the premises a watermelon he had stolen from a neighbouring cockie's, for later a melon vine clambered about the supports of the house on the spot where O'Dowd had been accustomed to throw his washing water, and it bore a few fine melons. Then the goats from the pub. strolled over and ate most of the vine and trampled the rest. O'Dowd had meant to mend the fence round the house, but had gone to the township races instead. He was not in the best of spirits when he offered the advice about a housekeeper to Fort. He had lost money at the races. He always did. This time it was the bulk of a draft his mother had sent him from Ireland to keep Christmas on, and now the hot arid months before the New Year stretched out uninvitingly before him. He had meant to have a case of whisky and, perhaps, a housewarming on the strength of that money. He had intended to buy a new suit and renew his calls at Coolibar ridges, where brown-eyed Rosie Glanvers had just arrived home from boarding-school in Melbourne. But there! The races were responsible. What did they want to hold races just at this time for? "Sure, they ought to have more sinse!"

Frank Fort, or "F.," as the district called him, laughed, and returned to the subject of the housekeeper.

“The devil always comes shaped like a horse to an Irishman, Percival,” he said, and smoked thoughtfully. “I think I will get a housekeeper, though, someone over 40, eh? That wouldn't scandalise the community, would it?”

“Begobs! Say something over 50, and be on the safe side,” said Percival. Fair and forty, man. Forty's not old enough! She'd be coaxing you to make her Mrs. Fort in no time!”

“My good fellow. you know I do not look at anything over 20,” answered Fort, looking sideways at Percival, who winced ever so little as he burnt his fingers with the match he held to the bowl of his pipe.

“My love is like a red, red rose!” sang Fort, and then stretched himself luxuriously in his hammock. “Hit there yourself, O'Dowd?”

“Of course! I'm just the cut for a married man. I've such a fine property behind me. I could feed a wife on the fat of my neighbour's flocks. I certainly couldn't on my own! So it's a wife instead of a housekeeper you're thinking on, old man?”

“Not I! I was only joking. Seriously, O'Dowd, a man is a fool in my opinion to marry before he is 40, at any rate — if then! I am 30, and I want ten more years to kick up my heels in.”

“So it isn't Miss Rosie?” O'Dowd was looking out into the wide sun-dried garden, with its rows of trellised grape-vines.

“It isn't anybody!” Fort yawned comfortably, enjoying the certainty of his own heart-wholeness. “Like a good chap, write out an advertisement for me for a housekeeper, middle-aged, unprepossessing appearance, etc., no encumbrances, not fond of Irishmen. Be sure to put that, Percy, or I'll have her falling captive to your bow and spear straight away.”

Percival drew out his notebook and scribbled down an advertisement, which answered the purpose more or less.

“‘Wanted, housekeeper for station, middle-aged lady, without encumbrance.’ Does that mean children or husband? ‘Apply, stating salary required, etc.’ Now, Fort, how does that suit? I'm afraid you'd be after getting no replies if I put that in about the unprepossessing appearance. Most women are beauties to some men, and all are to themselves, bless 'em! Besides, if she came on those terms she would all the time be asking you if you thought brains weren't preferable to beauty any day, and I'm quite sure you don't think so.”

“Nor does any man, though they sometimes pretend they do. A pair of red lips against weighty grey brain matter! Ugh! What do we want women for except to look pretty at the heads of our tables and to wear the jewels we hang on them?”

“You're very young yet, Frank, very young,” said O'Dowd, shaking his head. “What about your housekeeper-to-be, now?”

“Oh, I grant you that class. The women who have to work and grow ugly in the doing! Poor devils! Yes, I grant you their use. Washerwomen

and the like! And lady helps, etc. But I was thinking of the women we play with.”

“In short, the women with the higher destiny of amusing man?”

“Oh! don't get satirical, old chap. Have a whisky?”

O'Dowd drew the syphon to him. “It's too d — d hot for argument,” he said apologetically.

By the next mail the advertisement for a housekeeper went down to the daily press in the city.

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She was a success from the start.

O'Dowd, the pessimist, shook his red head. “She doesn't look her age,” he said. She had given herself out to be 45, and her hair was grey all over her large shapely head. She had delicate lines about her mouth and a little furrow across her forehead. Percival allowed all that, which Fort made the most of, but her eyes were bright brown as Rosie Glanvers' own, only with the difference which we see between the young bird's, just peeping out of its downy nest, and the faithful collie's, who has watched long bitter nights, and yet not a collie exactly, for a collie's eyes have had all the wolf-dog domesticated out of them. The old wolf was still lingering in Mrs. Armitage's eyes, O'Dowd said.

“You must have been looking pretty closely into them,” said Frank shortly, and Percival laughed in his whimsical fashion, and asked after the yellow rose, with a cunning smile, for Fort was trying to rear Cloth-of-Gold roses in his garden, a thing which the district had never accomplished yet. Some people said it was the fault of the soil, some said the want of the rain, some that the sun was too hot for the greater part of the year. But Mrs. Armitage, who seemed to know everything, maintained that the roses loved the dry weather, and she put on her blue sunbonnet and cared for the cuttings herself. Everything in the house went like clockwork now. The German woman who cooked decided to stay, since there was a “frau” to look after things. She never could get the “Herr” to understand, and the housemaid said that she was a “real lady.” She won the heart of the Scotch gardener by discovering herself as a countrywoman of his own, whose forefathers had let out crofts to his forefathers. “It's a gran' old lowland family she cooms of,” he confided to the Boss, and Fort thought none the less of her for that. “The district will talk,” muttered O'Dowd on the day she arrived. He never said it again. It was obvious that Fort was annoyed, and there was no further occasion to comment on what followed instantly.

The district talked itself blue, but after they met Mrs. Armitage they invited her to their houses, and when she firmly and so sweetly excused herself they talked themselves red and pitied “F.” A tit-bit of scandal is

such a blessing in the bush, where people have so much time to walk round it and examine it from all sides. Country air agrees with it when it might become stifled by other interests in the town, and it grows all the time.

O'Dowd still spent his Sundays at the station. The cooking was excellent and he began to despise his dried apples and odds and ends of hastily-fried abominations, and to envy Fort. But, still, though he envied, he did not approve, and watched, figuratively speaking, from afar off. Mrs. Armitage had beautiful hands, and she taught Fort to play cribbage, though he had never cared for cards.

"A nice game for two," muttered O'Dowd in his moustache, and wished that he had not advised Fort to get a housekeeper. "I never imagined one like her," he added darkly to himself, which meant that he did not believe in housekeepers with beautiful hands. I think there was a good deal of dog-in-the-manger about Mr. Percival O'Dowd in these days. The rose cuttings progressed wonderfully. Little green sprouts came out about the slim stalks, and one day on riding up to the station Percival was met by Fort with the news that there was a bud on one of the Cloth-of-Gold trees. They were "trees" now, they had so waxed and grown great in the land under the care of the beautiful hands. "It is quite a little triumph," said Fort garrulously. "Rose Glanvers has been trying to grow them ever since she came from school, and every slip she got died first go. Mrs. Armitage has extraordinary luck with flowers."

But, later on, Mrs. Armitage refused to wear her laurels.

"It is Mr. Fort, every bit as much as my care, that has pulled the roses through," she said, smiling that charmingly aloof smile of hers. "He is such a clever gardener!"

"And you are a very clever woman," whispered O'Dowd to his serviette. Aloud he said: "Ah! Mrs. Armitage, when you smile on the flowers what would they be after doing but looking up?" She eyed him curiously for a moment. "Always an Irisman, Mr. O'Dowd," she said, and passed him the butter.

"She's got my measure, all right," said Percival to himself.

Then O'Dowd took to riding over to Coolibar ridges, and having long talks with Rosie. And somehow Rosie always brought the conversation round to "F." and "F.'s" housekeeper.

"She must be a most interesting woman," she said one day. "But she is so hard to meet. Mother wrote and said she was sorry she was not strong enough to call, and would she drop convention and come here, but she never came."

"Why don't you go over?" asked O'Dowd, wrinkling his freckled forehead under his red hair. "It would be a kindness, and I'm the man for your escort any day."

A little devil leaped in his heart. He did not want Fort to marry

anybody, not only for Fort's own sake, for it might be as well for him to marry later on. Frank Fort, though his friend, was not the man he wished to give Rosie to. He must finish his wild oat sowing and settle down before Percival would like to see him take this little white heart to reign at the station. He had not much faith in Frank's loyalty to one woman. Nevertheless, Frank was his friend. He did not want to see Frank entangled with a woman with "wolf eyes," especially one who was ten years at least his senior. Percival did not believe that Mrs. Armitage was 45, but she was certainly older than Frank, and she was — oh! dash her! — she was a woman in a thousand to wind herself round a man's heart, in making herself necessary to him in a hundred ways. He would try a contrast of Rosie's freshness against the maturer beauties of "F.'s" housekeeper.

Rosie rode over to call on Mrs. Armitage, and, on being pressed by Fort, she stayed the night. Mrs. Armitage played hostess instead of cribbage that evening. Percival watched, and was satisfied. Rosie was taken out by Frank to see the new flower on the rosebush in the moonlit garden. They were a long time admiring the flower. Mrs. Armitage won O'Dowd's respect. She sat so still in her high-backed chair; the soft lace about her throat rose lightly to her even breathing, and she smiled and smiled bewilderingly. The Irish-man felt the hot blood rising in his cheeks. He was a skunk to try to spoil this fine woman's little game, and after all. .... But she looked up. He decided that he did not like her eyes. He pictured Rosie as a little white lamb astray in the forest, with a sleek wild creature following her up from tree to tree, never showing itself in the light, but stealing gradually nearer — nearer. .... Mrs. Armitage yawned apologetically.

"Do you care about cards?" she said, leaning over and drawing the cribbage-board to her.

"She is going to teach me to play cribbage," thought O'Dowd, and his pulses quickened ever so slightly.

By-and-bye the two moonlight strollers came in from the garden. Rosie was flushed. She put her hand on Mrs. Armitage's arm when she said "Goodnight," and called her "dear." O'Dowd frowned. Fort thought it very nice of her. He beamed affectionately on his housekeeper.

"I am going to ride home with Miss Glanvers early in the morning," he said to Mrs. Armitage when she returned from showing Rosie to her room.

"Tells her what he is going to do now!" said Percival to the little devil he kept on watch.

"She is a nice child," said Mrs. Armitage. The lamplight fell on her silver hair and fine head.

"She makes me think of a picture of a French marquise in the reign of Terror," said Fort later, when the men were smoking on the verandah.

“Who? Rose Glanvers?” asked O’Dowd, wickedly. Fort smoked.

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When Fort returned from his ride to Coolibar the following evening it was growing dark. Mrs. Armitage was sitting in a rocking-chair on the verandah in a black dinner gown, the neck and arms filled in with fine black net, which revealed the firm beauty of her shoulders. In passing through the garden Frank had picked a full-blown rose from the sacred tree, and, as he swung up the steps, he held it aloft, shouting boyishly: “Here! Prize to the victor! Te salutant, Caesar!” and he dropped on one knee, his spurs clanking on the verandah boards as he knelt before Mrs. Armitage.

She laughed softly, leaning forward to take the rose.

O’Dowd, watching from the hammock where swung his long legs, noted how her hand hovered a moment over Fort’s fair head.

“She’d be stroking his curls if I wasn’t here,” he thought, and then said: “Don’t lose sight of the audience, F.”

Fort jumped up and turned a laughing face to him. “I knew you were there, you old thief! Well, watch the end of the play! There, do you remember Francis Barraud’s picture in this year’s Salon book — ‘A la sante de Madame la Marquise’ — and the brutes crowding round the marquise, who sits with her proud frightened eyes on the rabble, and the dead body of her husband or lover — I do not know the story, I’m just imagining — on the floor behind her? Now, isn’t she the moral of the marquise?” He held the yellow rose against Mrs. Armitage’s hair, without actually touching its soft masses.

O’Dowd raised his eyebrows till they encroached on his wide low forehead and almost touched his shock of red hair.

“Oh — yes — s,” he said slowly, choosing his words, “but I don’t remember that there was any rose in the picture; besides, Mrs. Armitage does not look in the least afraid of the rabble — I presume you are the rabble, Fort, and I am the dead husband — or lover? I am sure I should like to be.”

Fort tossed the rose into the housekeeper’s lap.

“I don’t know if O’Dowd means to compliment us or not, Mrs. Armitage,” he said lightly. “You know he’s only a mad Irishman! Well, I suppose I must be off to have a wash before the dinner bell rings!” And he went whistling up the hall to the bathroom.

Far away on the township road they could see the lights of some teamsters’ camp fires glimmering in the oncoming dark. In the garden there was a stirring of tiny hidden things that moved among the vines and grass. It was still summer’s night, and the bark of a dog at one of the station huts sounded near at hand. Mrs. Armitage rose with a rustling of

silken underskirts. O'Dowd had never seen her so fine. "Keeps that for his final subjugation, I suppose," he grunted to his familiar. To her he said: —

"Fort is nothing but a boy in spite of his thirty years!" She nodded, looking past him dreamily.

"It's a pity we ever have to grow up," she said, then turned to him and smiled, slowly. He had never imagined that her eyes could grow so soft.

"Do you think he will marry the girl?" she said.

For all the forty years he had spent in growing accustomed to the unexpected, O'Dowd was startled. He had never anticipated such frankness from her. Well, he would be equally frank. He took a step towards her. The dusk had blotted out the finger prints of the passing years from her forehead; he only saw her dark eyes shining through the gloaming.

"He will — if you will let him!" he said boldly.

After dinner the men smoked, to keep away the mosquitoes, in the corner of the verandah, and Mrs. Armitage went to the piano. She played fairly well, though she owned to being out of practice. Once she glided into some Scotch airs, and Fort called out, "Do you ever sing?"

For answer she struck the opening chord of "When the Kye Come Hame."

The light from the hanging kerosene lamp flooded her head and shoulders, and shone on the yellow rose pinned among her hair.

"Twixt the gloaming and the murk, when the kye come hame."

Her voice was a little thin and worn on the high notes, but inexpressibly sweet and plaintive. It stole out into the garden, which was lit up now by the shining lances of the advance guard of the full moon, peeping red over the tree tops. It died away among the willows that fringed the creek. A black gin, passing along the station street, paused to listen; the men could see her standing a deeper shadow among the shadows outside the garden fence.

When the song came to an end, Fort thumped applause.

"Now something Irish for Percy," he said, and she nodded, smiling over her shoulder at Frank. O'Dowd could see that her eyes were wet. She ran her fingers along the keys and began, "I Saw from the Beach."

O'Dowd leaned forward. Presently his pipe went out.

"Give me back, give me back the wild freshness of morning."

Aye! The wild freshness of morning! O'Dowd's red head went into his long freckled hands. Fort listened with a complacent smile. "The freshness of morning!" How she wailed her heart out for the unattainable! And Fort sat and smirked.

Percival was a lad again among the peat — a laughing, rollicking, daredevil Paddy! He forgot the years of struggle with drought and misfortune — forgot that he had ceased to have any ambitions, and at a

little over 40 had settled down to a hopeless outlook without a struggle. He remembered the blue-eyed colleen he had kissed and promised to go back to, and whom he had forgotten long ago. Ah — the freshness of the morning! This woman understood! She wanted the freshness of the morning to be given back to her again — and why? He looked across at his host's placid face because of this man before him, whose destiny it surely was to eventually settle down and marry Rosie Glanversi Poor little Rosie! Poor Mrs. Armitage! For a minute he forgave her the wild things that looked out of her world-wise eyes for the sake of the longing in her sweet voice. He wanted to kick himself — but, most of all, to kick Frank! Then the music ceased abruptly. Mrs. Armitage rose and shut down the piano, and lowered the wick of the lamp. Fort noticed this with pleasure. He liked thought for little economies in women. It showed that they cared for men's interests. In a certain class of women one looked for extravagance. One did not expect to have to countenance it in one's housekeeper.

O'Dowd sat up and pushed forward a chair.

Mrs. Armitage shook her head. She seemed tired.

“No. I am not coming out,” she said. “Good night, Mr. O'Dowd. “Good night, Mr. Fort. Are you going out with the musterers in the morning?”

“Yes,” said Fort, shaking the ashes out of his pipe over the edge of the verandah. “Will you stay, old man,” turning to O'Dowd, “and lend a hand?”

O'Dowd said that he would, and added, with half a sigh, that he guessed that the selection could look after itself for a bit longer.

## Chapter II

A faint rose-and-saffron dawn was stealing over the ridges when the musterers left the head station on the following morning. Shearing time was approaching, and the men would be busy from daylight to dark, and after bringing the sheep in from the pockets of the run. Soon the station would be surrounded by clouds of dust, and noisy with the yapping of the sheep-dogs and the whistling and shouting of the men as they encouraged the sheep to hustle into the yards adjoining the shed, and thence to the tender mercies of the penners-up and on to the shearing floor itself into the hands of Tommy, the novice, who was always wanting tar, and Billy, the ringer, who could do his hundred a day with practised ease, and who prided himself with being able to pink without snicking the sheep.

The early summer morning air was fresh and sweet with the scent of pale flowering things in scrub and scattered timber. The little lizards looked out from the crevices in the hardwood of the wool-loading stage, and some gaudy-winged parrots came down to drink at the creek, and

rose with a whirr of wings, as the musterers splashed through the shallow crossing.

The sheepdogs ran laughing, red tongues glistening, and the men chatted and joked loudly, as they rode behind the Boss and O'Dowd along the swamp oak flats. Fort was whistling cheerily the tune of "When the Kye Come Hame," and O'Dowd was thinking deeply, with frowning brows. Suddenly he quickened his horse's pace to keep step with Fort's mare, and said,

"She's a fine woman, F., but not for you!"

"What the devil do you mean?" Fort was half amused, half annoyed. O'Dowd leaned forward in the pommel of his saddle to escape an overhanging bough, and answered.

"I mean your housekeeper, of course — one of the 'poor creatures who have to work, and grow ugly in the doing.' She's taking a long time about growing ugly, me bhoy!"

"I'd like to know what you're driving at!" was all that Fort said.

"Look here, F., I could have no ulterior object in what I am saying; rather it might play into my hands, if I had ever thought about taking a wife, for you to marry the housekeeper."

"Damn you, sir!"

"Don't get your hair off, old man, so early in the day! For I'm going to have my say, anyhow! It's all very well, but you and Mrs. Armitage have the house to yourself, and what with cribbage and yellow roses and French marquises — not that she's a bit like the girl in the picture to any man in his senses — and going on your knees and all that, you'll be in the deuce of a hole before long, and, as I have helped you out of other scrapes. I don't see why I shouldn't be allowed to speak the confoundedly interfering word in season to you — or any other young fool!" he added sotto voce.

Fort turned in his saddle, his eyes ablaze.

"You might think of the woman; your tongue is too easy about women!" he said fiercely.

"Yes, but no woman has ever been the worse for knowing me. Fort, can you be after saying the same?"

"Mrs. Armitage might have been my mother!" said Fort sullenly, digging his spurs into the mare. She started and bounded aside, and he tightened the rein.

"Not in the course of nature. She's not a day over 40 — that's my belief — and wears well for that. Many a man has married a woman ten years his senior."

"Well, what of that? You know I don't mean to marry anyone yet awhile."

"But you are more than half in love with your housekeeper all the same."

“What bally rot!”

There was silence between the two men, broken only by the jingle of bits and the creak of saddle leather, and then the overseer and two of the stockmen caught them up and began discussing a broken fence along the route, which a careless boundary rider had overlooked. But all the day Fort's forehead wore an unaccustomed frown, and when O'Dowd turned his horse's head toward the track which led to his selection, which forked from the home road to the station, Fort did not press him, as was his wont, to return with him for another night.

For all that, Percival's words had sunk deep, and the seed was sown on no barren ground.

A few weeks later Percival was in the township, trying to make arrangements about another loan from the bank, and to lay in some stores. He was seriously thinking of chucking the selection, and arranging about a caretaker, while he took a job of droving. A restlessness had been in his blood ever since that night when he had sat on the verandah at the station and listened to a woman's sweet voice yearning over the lost freshness of life's morning. Since Rosie Glanvers had come up a finished young lady from boarding-school, with her brown eyes and her dimples, it had been a sort of creed with O'Dowd that had he been in a position to do so he would have asked Rosie to be Mrs. O'Dowd, but the utter impossibility of keeping even himself in comfort had sensibly debarred him from such a reckless step; and, more than that, the certainty that Rosie's heart was given to Fort had lately been borne in upon him. F.'s most trivial doings were of more interest to her than any feats Percival O'Dowd might possibly perform, and the quick wit of the Irishman was not likely to be mistaken in that direction. But now he asked himself, if he had inherited the impossible thousand a year, which he sometimes dreamed about, would he have laid it at Rosie's feet, even if she had had the bad taste to look favourably upon his red hair and freckles?

He could not say. He only knew that he was ill at ease, and that the wander-lust was in his blood.

As he loitered in the bar of the hotel, one of the men from Fort's came in. O'Dowd shouted, as was his custom, for all faces that he knew, and they passed the time of day.

“Heard about the Boss?” asked the man, winking above his glass. He knew perfectly well that O'Dowd had not been calling at the station lately, and much had been the speculation thereby occasioned in the men's hut. The most acceptable notion was that O'Dowd had been caught making love to the housekeeper, and that Fort had kicked him out. We like our stories spicy in Arcadia.

“No,” said O'Dowd shortly. “How's shearing going on?”

But the man was not to be put off.

“Boss is goin' to be married,” he said. “Blanky fool!” the whisky beginning to take effect on a head never very strong.

O'Dowd tossed a shilling on to the bar counter and strolled to the door. So his words had been futile!

“Housekeeper's leavin’,” said the man, following him to the door. “Boss is goin' to marry Miss Glanvers?”

O'Dowd walked out into the street wondering. So it had turned out better than he had expected. He was immensely relieved, and marvelled a little at himself that he didn't feel more envious of Fort's good luck. But he had been accustoming himself to the idea so long. Poor devils like himself must grow accustomed to such things — to seeing their friends walk off with the plums, while the Dead Sea fruit remained their portion. Good luck to Frank! Dear old chap! Things would smoothen out now, and he must give them a decent wedding present out of that lately-arranged overdraft! Then he wondered when Mrs. Armitage was leaving the station.

### Chapter III.

“Wasn't it kind of Mrs. Armitage? Instead of coming to the wedding, as he wanted her to, she said she must stay and fix the house up with flowers and things, and have everything ready for us when we got home,” said Rosie, looking down and blushing prettily.

“When does she leave?” asked O'Dowd laconically.

“We expect to pass her on the road,” said Rosie. “She wants to catch the morning's coach from the township. I hope I shall have a chance to thank her for all she did for Frank.” Rosie looked round for her new-made husband, as though afraid of losing him even for a moment.

Then the guests gathered round her to say good-bye, and wish her all the usual stereotyped things, wishes so often uttered, so seldom fulfilled. O'Dowd stood aside and speculated on many things, principally as to whether if he halted at the Half-way House this afternoon on his way home he should find Mrs. Armitage there. He didn't fancy that the bride and bridegroom would pass her on the road. There were two roads — the higher and the lower — leading to Fort's station. He surmised that Mrs. Armitage would have found out without much trouble from Frank as to which route he intended taking on the morrow, and would have decided that the black boy, who was to drive her to the township, should bring the buckboard the other way.

And so it turned out. Rosie forgot all about her before she reached her new home, and if Frank kept anxious eyes on the winding track she never noticed it. Thus does love make blind the brightest eyes.

When O'Dowd reined his horse at the sliprail before the slab-built Halfway House, he saw the station buckboard in the yard. He gave his

horse to the knockabout, a disreputable-looking person, who only wore one brace to his patched moleskins, and who was reputed to be brother of a man of title at home, but who now scarcely remembered his own name, so long had he been in the mud, and stepped with a jingle of spurs on to the low galvanised iron-roofed verandah. The fat hostess came smiling to the door.

“It's rale good to see you, Mr. O'Dowd,” she said. “I s'pose as ye hev been to the wedding?”

O'Dowd said he had, and gave her all the details she craved, and then slid past her portliness into the coffee-room. Seated on the uncomfortable shiny horsehair sofa was the woman he wanted to see. She wore a black travelling hat and a light fawn dustcoat, and she had a large white motor veil tied under firm chin. She was one of the few women past their first youth who can wear hats in lieu of bonnets without becoming hard of feature and stern of expression in the process. Her white ungloved hands lay idle in her lap. O'Dowd noticed how her wedding-ring slipped back as she held out her hand to him. He also was not blind to the hate in her stormy eyes, quickly veiled by down-drooping lashes. He noticed that her eyelashes were quite black. He did not believe that she was even 40, in spite of her silver hair.

“Isn't it hot to-day?” she said lightly. He liked her for not showing an ostentatious interest in the wedding.

“Yes,” he said, and, the landlady bustling in, he ordered some sodawater.

“Don't mind drinking whisky before me,” Mrs. Armitage said, smiling, “If you want to.”

That was the beauty of this woman. She liked men to be at their ease, but women who were too adaptable — the old carping spirit! He told himself that he was an evil-minded beggar!

But he refrained from the whisky. When the landlady, with much gasping and hard breathing, had unwired and opened the bottle for him, and had spilt some on the best green tablecloth, much to her chagrin, and departed to attend to the wants of a swagman who was thumping on the bar counter, O'Dowd leaned back in his chair and took a long look at Mrs. Armitage. It was nice to see a woman who was always unruffled, whatever happened, even on the marriage day of the man she had meant to marry herself.

“You always look cool, anyway,” he said.

“I have travelled a great deal,” she said, with just a flicker in her eyes which made him think of wild forest creatures.

Percival rubbed his long hand thoughtfully over his red head.

“Aren't you tired of knocking about?” he asked, and then cursed himself for his mal apropos remark. He wondered what the station would look like without her, and how the yellow roses were getting on.

"I don't know," she said. "The charm of life — as, no doubt, you have found out long ago — is its variety!"

"One thinks that for awhile, but later one gets older and stiffer in the joints, I suppose, and it seems then that one stands by and envies one's friends their wives and homes, and the same dear old jog trot, where one always knows just exactly what is going to happen next!"

"Do we ever know that?" she said softly. "Life is all one big surprise, until death comes, to most of us, as the greatest surprise of all."

"And sometimes as the greatest good." He looked out of the window on to the burning yellow-grassed plain, stretching out to miles of grey mirage, dancing like lakes of silver along the sky line.

And then, "So you are off by to-morrow's coach?"

"Yes." She looked out of the window now, away in the direction of Fort's station.

"Will you ever be coming this way again?" he asked lamely. There was something at the back of his mind, insistent but elusive, which he knew that he had come here to say, and he could not place it, or frame it in words, and yet he knew if he went away without saying it he would go desolate.

She smiled her strange smile and shook her head. "I am on the wallaby again," she said. "Looking for work!"

"What a shame!" He reddened as he said it, knowing that but for him — perhaps she knew it, too. She looked at him steadily, and the old mystery of the untamed thing looked out of her eyes. The determined smell of boiled cabbage and salt beef came in to them from the back regions, where the fat lady was presiding. Presently the girl would come in to lay the cloth for their early tea.

O'Dowd, in a sudden flash of illumination, which made him reel, found what it was that he wanted to say.

"If you would me," he said, "I would chuck horseracing and settle down; by Heaven I would! I'd work; wouldn't I just work for you!"

He rose and stood over her, trembling with the strangeness of his discovery and the boldness of his words. He knew that he had never wanted anything in his life as he wanted her answer.

Her beautiful hands still lay in her lap, the wedding ring slipping forward on the third finger of her left hand. O'Dowd found time to wonder what manner of man had placed it there, and room in his heart to hate him, ere she said:

"So it was six for Mr. Fort and seven for yourself when you warned him against me!"

Silence, and the strong growing odour of cabbage water thrown out of the back door, and sinking slowly into the sun-baked earth of the yard.

A clink of glasses in the bar and a snatch of song from the swagman who was hurrying on with the knocking down of his fencing cheque. The

raucous voice of a cockatoo, a pet of the landlady's, screeched, "It's time to get the cows now, Jim, blast yer!" and they heard the rattle of china. The girl would be here in a few minutes to set the table.

"Is that all you can say to me?" said O'Dowd, reaching for his hat. He felt so hopelessly in the wrong. How was he to explain to her that he had never contemplated making such an avowal as he had spoken to her a minute ago. It had all come over him so suddenly, such a sweeping away of defences, such an overpowering rush of feeling — but she was not the woman to believe him. Treachery of the savage she might have understood, or the quick thrust and the struggle of the male for his mate, but not such subtleties of error as his heart and brain had made. No: she was not the woman to believe that this was unpremeditated.

She clenched her hands tightly, and her lips curled back over her strong white teeth. He quailed before the scorn in her eyes.

"Yes, I have one thing more to say," she answered, bitterly. "The last word between us. Go, and I pray that I may never have to look on your face again!"

The flop flop of the landlady's heavy slippers came along the creaking passage.

O'Dowd turned with no other word, and went out on to the verandah, calling to the knockabout to bring up his horse.

As he turned in his saddle to glance back at the Half-way House, its white roof glimmering in the sun, he saw Mrs. Armitage come to the door and stand, looking after him.

How could he grudge her her triumph! It was fairly won.

So his last sight of F.'s housekeeper was the tall light-robed figure, framed in the rough wooden supports of the door, and her lips were smiling, smiling.

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"You must come round the garden. We have made such a number of improvements, especially to the vegetable garden. Frank is taking such an interest in vegetables."

Mrs. Fort was a charming little matron in her wide hat and large white apron. When O'Dowd arrived to pay his formal call that afternoon she told him that Frank was out on the run, and that she had been making pie-melon jam all day.

"I burnt the first lot," she said, confidentially, and then offered to show him the garden. They skirted the grape vine trellis, and went down the path by the peach trees, and Rosie screamed as they caught sight of a black shining body among the long grass by the tennis court.

"So careless of the gardener to leave the grass long just there. It is a regular harbour for snakes," she said, as they paused near what had once

been the bed where the yellow roses grew.

It was freshly dug over, and there was not a sign of the Cloth of Gold.

“You've moved the rose!” said O'Dowd, regretfully.

“Yes; wasn't it a pity. Frank“ — in an injured voice — ”took it into his head that neither the gardener nor I understand roses, and he had them dug up and thrown away. I believe the man fed them to the cows! Wasn't it cruel? They did it one day when I was in the township. I cried when I came home. I felt so sorry for the poor things! And now Frank is having this made into a tomato bed. He said he hated the sight of the roses! Aren't men funny?” and she smiled wisely at her newly-acquired insight into the ways of the creature masculine.

O'Dowd was thoughtful as he rode home in the moonlight that night. Next week he was starting on a long droving job for the station, and he had several things to do before he turned in, but nevertheless he rode with slack rein, and let the horse choose its own pace.

Once he spoke his thoughts aloud.

“Rosie seems happy enough, anyway,” he said. “But Frank. ... I wonder. ... If he didn't care, why did he root up the roses?”

Later as his horse, drowsing, stumbled and nearly fell, he leaned forward and patted its neck softly.

“Suppose you had slung me and broken my neck, old man, would it have been a loss to anybody? Jove! To think that I should live more than 40 years in the world and not have learned to mind my own business!”

And then through the silver-scented night he rode on alone, as he was to ride all his days.

## **An Old Pocket Book — A Tragedy.**

### **Hunt Coleman**

It had been a hot and sultry day, and as the afternoon advanced the signs of the coming thunderstorm, which had been visible for some time, became more pronounced. A horseman, who had reached the brow of a hill, reined to a standstill and looked at the rapidly-gathering clouds.

He did not remain stationary long. Urging his horse into a canter again, he continued his way down into the picturesque valley which lay before him. A quarter of an hour later he had dismounted at the door of a wayside hotel.

The landlord, who, from his door, had watched the stranger's approach, called to a boy to "take the gentleman's horse."

"I shall not stay more than a few minutes," said the newcomer. "Let the boy hold the horse here."

"Better wait till the storm is spent, sir," said the landlord. "It may blow over in half an hour, and the horse will be comfortable in the stable."

The stranger made no reply to this, but straightway entered the house. The landlord following, he received an order for a tankard of ale, which, when it had been supplied, was quaffed with evident relish.

"How far is it to the property owned by old John Hazel?" the newcomer asked.

"Inside a mile and a half," replied the hotelkeeper; "on this side of the road. It's the fourth place you come to. Are you the gentleman who's bought the place, might I ask?"

"Yes."

"Then you will be Mr. Davis?"

"That is my name."

"We heard, up here, that the Crown had sold the property some time ago. But Christmas Eve, if you'll excuse my saying it, seems a peculiar time to inspect it — for I suppose that's what you've come for?"

"And why should Christmas Eve be a peculiar time?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied the other, "except that most people spend Christmas at home."

"Oh, I had to take advantage of the holidays. I suppose I can have a bed here to-night? I must ride back to the railway station to-morrow."

“A bed? Certainly. But why not put up now, instead of going on in the storm, and ride over to the place in the morning?”

“The storm will not break for a couple of hours yet,” replied Mr. Davis. “I shall have plenty of time to do what I want to do. But tell me, if you can, what sort of a place it is. I bought it, of course, entirely on the description given on paper.”

“Well,” said the landlord, “the land is good enough, but the house is falling down. I suppose you have heard the story about old Hazel?”

“No, I have not. You may tell it me when I come back, if you like. I'll move on now. You'll have something to eat ready by the time I return?”

“All right. I thought I'd mention old Hazel, because when a man is going into a house where a supposed murderer has——”

“What's that?” exclaimed the other, stopping on his way to the door and turning sharply.

“Why, it's only a supposition, of course. But what was one to think, in the circumstances?”

“What circumstances?”

“Well, that's the story. In as few words as I can put it, seeing that you won't be persuaded to stay, old Hazel many years ago was disappointed in love. The girl he wanted married another chap, and went to live in Sydney. Some little time after, there was a terrible tragedy in the city, and Hazel went down with the express purpose of taking vengeance into his own hands. After a while he came back, but he was an altered man, aged-looking, and very silent. And, strangely enough, the man he went out to hunt was never seen again. People round here got the impression that he had found the man and had killed him. It might have been wrong, but things seemed to justify it. And he would never say anything in reply to hints. There was only one man bold enough to tackle him straight out and ask how he had fared in the city, and if things were all right; and all he said was that he was satisfied, that a big debt had been paid in God's own way. Mighty queer answer it was reckoned, but it was all he would give. And so there was no proof that he had done anything criminal. He lived on here for many years; lived all alone after his mother died, and presently he died himself. That was years ago. He hadn't a soul in the world related to him, and, as he died without making a will, the little farm went to the Crown. But, as you've bought it, you know all about that.”

“So that's the story?” said the stranger, moving to the door again. “I am inclined to think your suppositions were wrong. Because the man chose to nurse his sorrow alone, busybodies wove this tale of mystery and imagination about him. Pity they hadn't something better to occupy themselves with!”

He mounted his horse and rode off along the winding road. It was not long ere he reached the place he had come in search of. It was much

neglected. Much of the fencing was out of repair, and what had once been a flower garden in front of the house was now a wilderness.

The house itself was valueless, save that its timbers might be used in patching up sheds, and the new owner decided that it must come down at once. Dismounting, he peered in through a broken window: and then, noticing that a door had fallen partly from its hinges, he tied his horse to a dead peach tree near, and proceeded to enter.

But just then the storm, which had threatened so long, broke with unexpected suddenness, and stepping back he untethered the horse and led it into the old house.

“Not so good a place as you shall find yourself in presently,” he said, as the animal seemed rather disinclined to enter; “but we shall be out of the wet here, at all events.”

The front door opened directly into a room, there being no hall to the house. Finding an empty box near the dilapidated fireplace, the new owner seated himself thereon, holding the bridle reins loosely.

He sat thus for nearly half an hour, waiting for the rain to cease. Once he spoke to the horse, which was restlessly pawing the floor.

“You'll drive a hole through there if you stamp so heavily, old chap,” he said. And then, a moment later: “There, you've done it now. Stand over!”

Looking idly at the gap which had been made in the rotten floor, he was surprised to see a packet. Hastily securing and opening it, he found an old pocketbook, the sheets of which were closely written on. The light had faded rapidly, and he was unable to decipher the writing.

Putting the packet carefully into his pocket, he looked out to see if the storm was spent. His scrutiny satisfied him, for in a few minutes he was cantering briskly back to the hotel.

He said nothing to the inquisitive landlord as to his discovery, but, having partaken of a meal which had been prepared, retired at once to the room set apart for him, and then, locking the door, he lighted his pipe, took the strangely-found packet from his pocket, turned up the wick of the lamp, and settled himself to read. And this is what was written: —

It is a strange story I am about to write, but I deem it well that all should be set down in black and white, so that the truth of things be known. Yet that must be till, in the fulness of time, my bones have been laid in their last resting-place, being convinced that no good end would be served by publishing the facts before then, but only increased trouble and care brought upon me. And as, of all those concerned, I am the only one still on this side of the great dark river, there will be none, when I am gone, to be injured or embarrassed by the recital.

I am but a poor hand with the pen, my muscles having been hardened by the grip of plough handles and the jarring of heavy farm tools. The writing of a letter was always a difficult task, and one which I always

avoided performing if my business could be done by word of mouth; so that I fear the setting down of what I desire will be but poorly accomplished. Nevertheless, having set myself to it, I will endeavour to carry it on to the end. Then, it mattering not much in which generation it be read, I shall place the paper in some unlooked-for place, and leave its discovery to the working of chance.

Having written this much of myself, it is well that I proceed with the history I have set myself to chronicle. In early life the comeliness of face and figure and winsome ways of Mary Ford won my heart, and engendered an affection which strengthened as the days passed, and which remains to this day unchanged, though its object has long been but a memory. Her father's farm adjoined that which was owned and managed by my widowed mother, aided by my able-bodied self. My love for Mary grew as I grew to manhood, yet I worshipped at a distance, for she seemed too refined to be mated with one of such rough exterior and unpolished manners as I. Yet, being such close neighbours, I saw her and was in her company frequently, and despite my awkward ways I felt that she must have seen that my heart was hers to do with as she would.

I never rightly knew how it came about, but one day, while Mary was still in short frocks, she became possessed of a violin. And when some time had passed there came to stay in our village an old man who also played upon this beautiful instrument. During the time that he was in our midst he took Mary under his care, and so led her on the way to knowledge of the violin. She speedily became a very proficient and sympathetic player. Often have I allowed my horses to stand idle while I listened to the beautiful music she made, and which, as it swept across the paddock from her house to where I was, seemed, to my simple and adoring senses, like harmony direct from heaven.

For a long time, as I have said, my love for Mary remained unspoken. Often had I said to myself that I must take firm hold of my courage and tell her how it was with me; but just as often I found myself wanting in courage when the opportunity came. So it was that, when she had passed her nineteenth birthday, I was still silent. The time was to quickly come, however — though I dreamt not of it then — when I was to speak and to be spoken to.

She was standing one evening by the sliprails opening on to the road. She told me a gentleman sent from Sydney who knew her father was at their place. The visitor had been very ill, and came to the country to gather health and strength. The moment she told me that I felt in my heart that this man would take my Mary away.

I saw him first on the morning of the next Sunday, and I noticed that he was a little lame. He was a handsome man, well-dressed, and with the city manner of speech. I was barely civil with him in returning the time of day.

He must have had a serious illness, for he stayed at Ford's for two months. When he had gone I breathed a little easier. But my peace of mind was soon to be again upset, and at a time, too, when I had at last screwed my courage up to speak. One afternoon I saw my heart's desire set out from home, and I awaited her return. When I saw her coming presently, I left my horses standing and went to meet her.

"Oh, John," she said, before ever I could open my mouth, "I am going to make my fortune. I am going away from this sleepy old place to Sydney."

"Going to Sydney!" I gasped. I stepped apart from him, and then, locking the door, he lighted his pipe, took the thought you were sorry. I thought you would be glad to know I am to become a great player."

"But you are not going to stay in Sydney?"

"Oh, but I am: and Mr. Sturt — that's the gentleman who was staying with us, you know — is the manager of a theatre company, and was so pleased with my playing on the violin that he said it was a shame that I should be buried here, and he promised that he would make a 'star' of me. But why don't you say something nice to me?"

"Something nice!" I said, when at length I found my tongue. "How can I say anything nice when you are going away?"

And then I blurted out that I loved her. She told me, as kindly as she could, that to marry me was impossible. She said she had a career before her, and if she married me it would be lost. She took my hand and said, simply, "Thank you, John," when I told her that I wished only for her happiness, and moved away. I stood where she had left me. In a moment she turned and came back, put her hands on my shoulders, and, leaning forward, kissed me on the cheek. I feel the spot burn now when I think of it. Then she ran away. I called to the horses, and, as they moved, the jackasses in the tree laughed. If I had had my gun they would have died in the midst of their mockery.

The world seemed empty after Mary went away. I read, after some months had passed, of her successful entry upon the career she had looked forward to. Then I read that she was engaged to be married. And shortly after this, to me, distressing news, came Mary herself. How beautiful she looked, and how improved by her sojourn in the city among accomplished people. She came to the gap in the fence in just the old way on the very day of her arrival.

There is no need to here set down what was spoken between us. She stayed but a few days at her old home, and then returned to the city, her mother going with her, for the marriage was to take place in Sydney. I saw the heading in the paper, but could never bring myself to read the account of the ceremony.

One day, nearly twelve months after, I entered the house and found my mother had been crying. She strove to hide a newspaper from my sight,

but I was too quick for her. She urged me to be calm and brave before she would give me the paper, for, good soul, she well knew my passion for Mary. Well might my mother have pleaded with me to control myself. Mary was dead. She had been struck down by a murderous blow, and, her husband having disappeared, suspicion was fastened upon him.

Presently I told my mother — and I was surprised at the calmness and steadiness of my voice — that I was going to Sydney at once.

“But why?” she questioned. “Surely it is no business of yours? She has a father, and she has a husband.”

“It's her husband I am going to find,” I replied. “Did you not read that he has not been seen since the terrible thing was done? He is responsible, I tell you. He has done this.”

“You always disliked him,” murmured my mother, “and in your bias you misjudge him.”

“I will wring the truth from him,” I said.

“But no violence,” pleaded my mother, putting a hand on my shoulder.

I made no answer to this, but I left home intent on taking this man's life unless his explanation satisfied me fully.

There is no need to recount my vain search in Sydney, and come to one soft, summer, moonlit night, when I had gone out near Watson's Bay to pay a visit to an old friend of my mother's. It was, as well I remember, Christmas eve, that special period of the year when men should be at peace with men, and nought but goodwill for the present and future prevail. Peace! Goodwill I smiled quietly as the thought came to me, for, so far from being at peace with all men, there was something very like a murderous thought in my heart against one man. I had left the house to return to my lodging, and when near the garden gate I noticed a man passing along the road; not going towards the city, but away from it. By the moonlight I saw — and my heartbeats quickened at the sight — that this man limped a little as he walked. The next moment I was following him.

For some reason, which I did not at the moment perceive, he kept himself as much as possible in the shade of clumps of trees and such growth of scrub as there was beside the road. I kept him in sight, however, determined to follow till he was well clear of what few houses there were in the vicinity.

Presently I perceived that, while I was so carefully following him, he was with equal care and caution following someone else, and that he sought the shade as much as possible to avoid being seen by the man he was in pursuit of. So that it was a double chase. I had decided to come up with my man at the first favourable spot, but, finding matters as they were, I determined to see something of what was afoot before bringing my own affair to the front.

Shortly after this, when we had almost reached the seafront, my man

suddenly plunged into the scrub on the left-hand side of the way, and for a few moments I lost him. Darting after him, I soon caught sight of him again making his way up a little incline some distance ahead. Determined now to take no further risks of delay, I hastened forward to such good purpose that on the edge of another little patch of scrub I overtook him.

He gave a start of astonishment when he saw and recognised me. Then, holding up his hand in caution, he said, just above a whisper:

“Speak softly. Don't make a noise.”

“You and I have a few words to exchange,” said I, “and I see no reason why we should be particular about speaking in whispers in this lonely spot.”

“Pray speak softer, good John,” he said, glancing hurriedly and anxiously over his shoulder.

“Call me not ‘good John,’ you,” I retorted, hotly. “I have a few questions to which I want answers, and I will have them now.”

His manner had angered me almost beyond my controlling, and I felt that at the next moment I must have taken him in my arms, and, with the strength of my hardened muscles, crushed the life out of him. For in those days I was a very strong young man. With a single blow of my clenched fist I have felled a horse. But I kept my hands at my side, for I knew that if I struck him it would mean death, being in the mood I then was; and I would not do that until I had learned the truth of my suspicions.

“In the first place,” said I, when he again interrupted.

“Hash!” he said. “He comes at last.” Then he smiled, such a smile that I hope never to see on a human face again.

“I think I know your questions, good John,” he whispered. “Wait but a few minutes more and you will get the answers. But” — and he raised his hand threateningly — “interfere not.”

As he finished speaking I heard the sound of a footfall. We were beside the road, which at that point ran quite near the edge of the cliff, whose bluff wall was washed by the sea.

Sturt, of a sudden, stepped forward and stood full in the moonlight. A man who was approaching stopped with a cry of alarm, and then made as though he would run off.

“Stand!” cried Sturt, quickly producing a revolver. “Stand, or I will blow your brains out.”

I witnessed this, and what followed, from the shelter of the scrub. Standing as I was quite close to the road, I heard all that was said. And I got the answers to the questions I had not asked.

“You are my wife's murderer,” said Sturt, who, with folded arms now, stood but three paces from the other.

“No, no!” cried the man, shrinking back at the accusation. “You cannot say that. 'Twas you who struck the blow.”

“True,” said Sturt, his voice cold and level, “I grant you that.”

I half stepped forward, at this confession, to lay hands on him; but, recollecting that there might be more to come, I withheld. Nevertheless I put my hand on a little weapon in my pocket, determined that if any attempt at a runaway were made. I would stop it effectually.

“I grant you that,” Sturt went on. “But how came the blow to be struck?”

The other man made no reply to this. I saw him glance furtively over his shoulder, as though to see a road where flight would be of avail. It was but a momentary glance, and then his eyes were again fixed on the face of the man speaking.

“You villain!” Sturt went on. “You were received into my house as a friend, and of the freedom allowed you there you sought to take advantage. My wife spoke to me of you; and returning once, as you remember I returned, I found you there again, and charged you with your perfidy. Is that true?”

The other did not speak, but I saw him glance again over his shoulder.

“And then I struck you,” said Sturt; “and having struck you, grasped my heavy stick to strike again. Then my wife” — his voice faltered at the word, and it was a moment or so before he proceeded — “my wife, tearful of what might result to me, rushed between, and the blow meant for you fell upon her. Is that true?”

A mechanical nod of the head, but no sound of the voice.

“She dropped at my feet,” said Sturt, his voice hardening as he proceeded, “and while I was attending to her you fled.”

At last the other found his voice.

“No, no!” he cried in a whining voice, “I struck no blow. 'Twas you, but it was a mistake; her own fault.”

“You struck no blow; no. But if you had never darkened my door, if you had been a man instead of a serpent, no blow would have been struck. But that is past, past, and we have reached the present.”

He unfolded his arms and advanced a stride, and then said, in a low, tense voice:

“That, I say, is past. And now I am going to take your life in payment for hers.”

I heard the other emit a dreadful scream of fear. The next instant Sturt's arms were about his body. His strength surprised me, and I could not help thinking, even in that intense moment, that if I had come to grips with him, strong as I was, I should have met a strong man.

The man who had been seized so suddenly spoke but once during the early stages of the great struggle.

“Let go!” I heard him say. “Let go, or I'll tear your throat out! Hands off; I'll strangle you!”

“I shall never let go again,” hissed Sturt. “The law wants my life; I

want yours. We go to-night together.”

Stepping from the shade of the scrub, I went near them, and stood, silent, watching the struggle. Never had I seen such a pitting of strength, for both were strong men. Sturt's lameness seemed to have disappeared, and he held his man in an iron grip, never heeding the blows which were rained upon him. Whenever he got a chance he loosened his hold. He reminded me of the tactics of the bulldog, with this difference, that having got hold and never letting go, instead of working up he worked down. I saw his meaning the first time I noticed his arms move, and knew then what was in his mind.

Yet, though I knew that murder was being enacted before me, I made no effort to separate them. I had hunted for days with murder in my own heart, and the sight before me increased my blood-thirst. May heaven forgive me my thoughts of the moment, and of the days I had passed through. For my proper senses had left me for the time being.

I know a strong man when I see one, and I know when I see a strong man who knows how to use his strength. The men before me were both strong, and both knew their strength. Both knew, also, that their struggle was one of life or death. And death was very near, for Sturt was slowly but surely forcing a way to the edge of the cliff. His purpose was plain to me. The death he feared not himself, but which he was determined the other should share, was waiting a hundred feet below.

No blows were struck now by the man whom Sturt held in his mighty embrace. It was a trial of muscle and weight, the one to reach the precipice, the other to force back from it. The turf was torn and scattered by their heels. Not a sound came from either, and not a sound came from anywhere about the scene of the awful struggle.

They were on the very brink, and I scarce dared breathe. But now a reversion of feeling came upon me, and I stepped forward to pluck them back from the plunge into eternity. Yet, even as I took the first hasty step forward I stopped, for the voice of Sturt's victim sounded again.

“For the love of God, let go!” he gasped. “I will do anything — anything — for you.”

At this I, too, found my tongue.

“Loose your hold, Sturt,” I cried, stepping nearer. “Let him go. I have heard the story, and I myself will help you. Spill no more blood.”

Then came the crisis.

With a supreme effort Sturt lifted the struggling and terrified man clean off the ground, and held him there despite his struggles.

“Yes, you shall go,” he cried. “You shall go — with me!”

With an exultant cry he sprang outwards from the cliff's edge.

## **Seen in the Biograph.**

### **Laura Bogue Luffmann**

She did not expect to find it interesting! She had attended so many lectures, shows, entertainments got up for the delectation of the factory hands, and they had all amounted pretty much to the same thing — a hall crowded to suffocation, a vitiated atmosphere, “cat-calls,” and similar interruptions meant for wit from the lads, giggles and “Oh, mys!” from the girls — how weary she was of it all! Life in this crowded centre grew more and more uncongenial. Her soul was sickened by the dingy streets, the smoke-blackened walls, the heavy air, the ceaseless whirr of machinery, the all-pervading ugliness and gloom. She longed with a passionate longing for a breath of God's free air and a glimpse of mountain, wood, and plain, not only for herself — oh, no! — but also for all those languid, heavy-eyed operatives filling the gaunt walls of her father's factory. She did all that lay in her girlish power to alleviate their lot — taking soups and jellies to the sick and giving little pleasures to the young — but this was only a drop in the ocean of sordid, unlovely poverty. When she urged her father to give them a day in the country, a day when under the pure canopy of Heaven they could drink in the exquisite sights and sounds and scents of rural life, he shook his head sadly.

“Times are none too good, my dear Stella,” he answered, with a heavy sigh. “I have no money to spend on travel or philanthropy. You must wait.”

So the vision of purling streams and shady woods and flower-sprinkled hedgerows, and meadows where cows were standing ankle-deep in the sweet, green grass, faded away, and she was back in the present — in the smoke and din and gloom of the English manufacturing town where her lines were cast. Day by day she grew more dispirited, more dissatisfied, more conscious that she was out of her natural element. It was simply in obedience to her father's wish, and in order to “set an example,” that she came to the biograph entertainment, bringing thither a heart little attuned to enjoyment. But strange to say, in this very hall, where her nerves had so often been racked by displays of the vacant folly that too often passes current for recreation, the answer came to her vague longings. Views of

great stretches of country, mighty flocks of sheep, quiet homesteads, cattle moving sedately towards the milking-shed, acres of golden wheat, great green patches of lucerne, fields of tall maize, orchards, glimpses of illimitable plains and trackless forests, and enchanting blue distances, passed before her charmed eyes and satisfied her heart. Last of all came the picture — was it of a Roman charloteer or of a Greek athlete? No. Only an Australian youth seated behind a plough! On came the powerful horses — on, on, on — moving as it seemed straight out of the picture towards the spectators — the forelegs planted firmly, the great breasts straining, testing to the utmost the strength of the young arms holding the reins. The figures grew larger and larger as they moved towards the corner of the sheet — the ploughman's swaying figure revealing the curves of his lithe frame and the fine poise of head and neck on his stalwart shoulders, and then — the whole picture suddenly disappeared, and only a blank sheet remained.

“Isn't that better, now, than selling staylaces behind a counter?” the lecturer asked humorously, and the audience with one voice shouted back. “Yes.”

“It's better than standing day after day feeding a machine till you feel no better than a machine yourself,” remarked a man with a pale, refluenced face, standing close to Stella. “Good Lord! How sick I am of it.”

Stella drew a deep breath. She could not analyse her impressions. The pictures seemed to have given her new life, new hope, new heart. The figure of the young ploughman was a revelation of virile power set in a grand framework of nature.

Henceforth the girl dreamed of those great stretches of country, those entrancing glimpses of primeval forests, those strange animals and stranger forms of vegetation which carry the mind back to geological periods before the history of man began. These Australian scenes took such a powerful hold on her imagination that, walking along the narrow streets of the dreary manufacturing town, she saw before her not a smoke-laden atmosphere and dirt-encrusted walls, but immense stretches of country swept by the pure air of heaven, great rivers acting as waterways and affording infinite possibilities to the skilled irrigationist, miles of virgin bush, wide, fertile plains, while above all towered the joyous figure of the stalwart young ploughman, the type of perfect manhood.

Changes came to Stella. The factory trembled on the brink of ruin, and before its credit could be re-established her father died suddenly. She was alone in the world — and poor. How was she to gain her living? Was she to become one of the factory “hands” whose hard lot she had so often bewailed? The thought was too terrible. She answered advertisements, put her name down on registers, wrote innumerable letters, trudged here and there during long, weary days, but all to no

avail. Overcrowded England had no room for her. She had nothing special to offer, nothing to distinguish her from the throng of other girls eagerly looking out for positions as governesses and “mothers' helps,” so that she stood small chance of success. Then one morning, when hope was at its lowest ebb, when her stock of money was giving out, and starvation was staring her in the face, came a cablegram which changed the face of her life. It was dated from Beulah station, New South Wales — “Uncle Dick offers you a home. Come at once.”

Uncle Dick! She just knew of the existence of this kinsman with whom her father had quarrelled in youth — that was all. She was not even aware that he had made his home in Australia! Her heart leapt at the thought of leaving this sordid misery behind her and going to a land of sunshine and of boundless opportunities. Those who knew nothing of the fascination exercised upon her by the biograph views were amazed at the indifference with which she bade farewell to her old life.

In spite of the beauty of the harbour, she experienced on landing in Sydney a sense of disappointment. Here were streets again, and crowded footways, and pallid, restless-looking people! But, when a long train journey and a drive across 40 miles of country brought her to Beulah station, she realised the fulfilment of her dream. Uncle Dick, the image of her father, only browner and healthier-looking, was standing at the gate, while a pleasant-faced, white-haired lady, whom Uncle Dick subsequently introduced as “Aunt Susie,” awaited her arrival on a verandah whose pillars were wreathed in banksia roses.

“May you find a happy home in Australia, my dear child,” said Uncle Dick, with moistened eyes, as he folded his brother's child in his arms.

“Oh, I know I shall be happy, Uncle. I love Australia already,” Stella answered, fervently. And that night as she looked out from her lattice window upon the curving outline of wood and plain, flanked by a bold mountain range, and illumined by the brilliant silvery light of the moon, she realised that her lines were cast in pleasant places. The one black drop in her cup of happiness was caused by the remembrance of the pallid anaemic girls she had left behind her in the old home.

“Can you ride, Stella?” asked Uncle Dick on the following morning.

“No, Uncle.”

“Well, you must learn, my dear. You will not be able to go anywhere if you can't get on a horse's back. Ask your aunt to lend you a shirt, and come out and help me to ‘round up’ the cattle.”

Stella fairly gasped. This had been one of the occupations portrayed by the biograph. And now she was going to take part herself in the fascinating exercise.

Soon, under Uncle Dick's able tuition, she became a good horsewoman, and she also learned to saddle her mare, and to harness her to a buggy. Aunt Susie taught her to make butter, to knead bread, to make jam, to

roast, boil, and bake, and, although the work was new and hard, she grew daily rosier and brighter, and the old look of discontent faded from her face.

“Oh, why don't more people come on the land,” she exclaimed one day as she sat on the broad verandah by her Uncle's side watching the sun sink behind the ranges.

“It's a good deal the fault of the country people, Stella. They take no pains to make their homes attractive. They cut down every bit of timber, and the poor wife has no shade to sit under and do her sewing. They don't take the trouble to make a garden, and the children get ill for want of vegetables and fruit. I could show you a striking contrast within an easy ride. Two young men took up land about the same time. One has never taken the trouble to make his place attractive; the other has created a veritable garden of Eden — a paradise. I'll take you there to-morrow.”

“I think not, Dick,” Aunt Susie said, warningly. And Uncle Dick, shrugging his shoulders and exclaiming, “Oh, you women, you women!” went laughing away.

“Why did you say that, Aunt Susie?” demanded Stella, whose curiosity was roused. Why should she be forbidden a glimpse of Paradise?

Aunt Susie fidgetted about a little before she gave her reply.

“You see, dear, to speak plainly, Mr. Gaunt is looked upon as the . . . the . . . eligible bachelor of the neighbourhood — and — I — thought it would look rather . . . like . . .”

“Like throwing me at his head,” laughed Stella. “So it would, Aunt Susie. I perceive that I can't have my glimpse of Paradise because Adam is in possession. Dear me, I wish he was 90 — or married! I do so want to see his place!”

In the evening Stella wandered off by the side of the creek — a mass of shining water with grey gums standing in the middle of the stream — and then struck across the paddocks. She loved the great stretch of open country, and the sight of the sky dipping to meet the earth. The evening air, sweeping across the ranges, was cool and sweet. She stepped on to meet it — her glad face raised to the sky, and then — something gave her foot a horrible wrench. She had trodden on the side of a narrow fissure, and her ankle had given way. She stood still for a moment, and then tried to hobble on, but the pain was too great.

“I'll just sit down and take off my boot,” she said to herself. She did so and the pain was eased at once. But the foot had swelled a little, and how to get the boot on again was the problem. But this did not trouble her. It was so lovely to sit there in that great stillness, encompassed by sky and plain, and to revel in the sense of solitude. But she was not left to enjoy it for long. A black moving speck appeared on the horizon, which, taking shape as it grew nearer, revealed the silhouette of a horseman against a wide background of sky. Stella watched it with a strange fascination. The

outline seemed familiar. Somewhere in the past she had seen the fine poise of that stag-like head, and the play of the arm, set in a framework of earth and sky. ...

The rider made straight for her, sitting his horse with the ease that comes of perfect mastery.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked.

With the sound of his voice the illusion vanished. She had never heard those tones before.

"Oh, nothing much. I have only twisted my foot a little."

"I'm glad it's only that. I feared it might be a snakebite."

"I'm thankful it's not anything so horrible! I think I can walk now," glancing down at her boot.

"No, you mustn't think of it. I'm going to put you on my horse and take you home."

Before Stella had time to consider the proposal she found herself lifted from the ground by a pair of strong arms and deposited in the saddle. It was a despotic proceeding — but she was not displeased. To the end of time woman — whether belonging to the "old" or the "new" order — will love the sense of being mastered by man.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Walk by your side and carry your boot. We shall reach Beulah in fifteen minutes, so the exertion won't kill me."

"How do you know I am going to Beulah?"

The man's lips parted in a smile that illuminated his grave face as a sudden ray of sunlight lights up a dark sky.

"Because I know every girl in the country-side, and you are not among: the number. So I infer that you must be Mr. Marsh's niece from England."

"Yes; you are right."

"And I am Ralph Gaunt. Now we are 'introduced,' as you say in England. I suppose you look down upon Australia and Australian ways."

"No, I don't. I love Australia," Stella said fervently. "I loved it before I came here, and I love it ever so much better now."

Gaunt looked at her curiously. "Was this mere schoolgirlish 'gush?' " he wondered. But she didn't look that sort.

"Why do you love it?" he asked.

"Oh, I love the feeling of space — of distance — of there being room for all. When I get on one of the great plains and think of all I have left behind me in England, the crowded cities, the cramped dwellings, the want of any elbowroom, the contrast almost makes me cry." And then Stella, usually reticent with strangers, poured into her new friend's ear her experience of life in the dreary manufacturing town where her youth had been spent.

"I see you love the country," Gaunt said, his face flushing with

pleasure. "Most girls prefer the town. They love the shops, the gaslight, and glitter. They never think of the people there who lead starved, miserable lives to minister to their enjoyment. I tell you, I get more pleasure out of the sight of a field of wheat than anything the town can afford. There's something splendid in seeing the wild bush tamed and reduced to bondage by the power of man. A year ago a good part of this country was virgin bush, and already the whole face of the land has changed, and in a few years" — Gaunt drew a deep breath — "thousands of bushels of wheat will be poured into the markets to feed the hungry poor herded in the great cities of the old world. This is the thought that makes it a real inspiration to take up land."

There was no time for any reply, for the horse had turned in at the gate, and Aunt Susie, scenting disaster, was running towards them. Stella was thankful that the little fuss created by her slight accident diverted the minds of her uncle and aunt from the strangeness of her meeting with the "eligible bachelor."

The acquaintance thus made was not suffered to drop. Hardly a day passed that Gaunt on some pretext or another did not ride over to Beulah. Sometimes he brought a newspaper for Mr. Marsh, or a clutch of eggs for his wife, or a book or some natural specimen for the English niece.

"He's always been very friendly," said Uncle Dick, "but" — digging his wife facetiously in the ribs — "I don't think he was quite so attentive before Stella came, do you?"

Meanwhile the girl herself walked about in a trance of silent happiness, which she did not attempt to analyse. Something very sweet and strong had come into her life, moving her inmost being with its strange power. The sunsets seemed fairer, the air purer, the blue distance more enchanting when Gaunt rode by her side. All that she had loved best in this great new country seemed to find its consummation in the personality of her friend. He loved nature as she did — its voice stirred his heart. The breath of the plains, the scent of the bush, the notes of the birds, spoke to his soul. Stella could read the rapture in his face when some great grey plain, flecked with dark blue shadows, was unfolded before his eyes; or when the solemn recesses of the bush closed upon them with a sense of mystery. But his poetic love of nature did not end in mere sentiment. He consecrated it to the service of man.

Stella went at last, under her uncle and aunt's wing, to visit Gaunt's homestead. She found it just the framework for such a character. Everything in the house was plain, strong, and serviceable. There was little attempt at ornamentation, although one or two good pictures adorned the walls, and a bookcase showed a choice selection of volumes. But outside were gardens, and shade walks, and pergolas covered with gorgeous creepers, and every part of the premises — stables, kitchen, garden, fowlyard, apiary — revealed that the owner was a lover of order.

“My word, what a contrast to Tom Rivers's place,” ejaculated Uncle Dick. “He's making money out of his farm, I allow, but how he can live in such a state of hugger-mugger passes my comprehension.”

“He ought to get a wife to keep him in order,” Aunt Susie said, laughing. But Gaunt answered, with great seriousness, “I should think a man would be ashamed to ask a woman to share such a comfortless home.”

As he spoke his eyes fell unconsciously on Stella. Aunt Susie nudged her husband, and the two moved discreetly away. There was silence for a little space, and then Gaunt asked quickly:

“Stella, do you like my Australian home?”

His face was white with suppressed emotion.

Stella realised this was the crisis of her fate.

“Yes,” she answered, simply.

“I made it all. It is the labour of my own hands. Some of my life has passed into it. I — love the place, but — something is wanting — a mistress. Stella, will you come?”

\* \* \* \* \*

They had told each other all that was in their hearts, and still they sat on the garden bench conjugating over and over again the tenses of that wonderful verb, “to love,” which has entranced mankind since the beginnings of history. And then Gaunt bethought him of a little case which only that morning he had slipped into his pocket, containing a ring bequeathed by his mother to “My dear son's future wife,” As he drew it out a photograph fell to the ground.

“Ah, look at this, Stella. My mother always treasured it. It was taken when I was a student at the Agricultural College. Why, dearest, what is the matter — you look startled — almost wild. Is anything wrong?”

“Wrong — oh no!” cried Stella, with an excited sob. “It is only, oh! so wonderful — so beautiful. Oh! You were calling me then — calling me across the seas — before you ever saw me or knew my name! Here you are ploughing, just as I saw you in the biograph! Oh! How blind I was not to recognise you at once. Didn't I tell you there was something familiar — that when I saw you against the sky-line I felt I knew you. I felt that somewhere, somehow, our spirits had met before. Oh! what a happy, happy girl I am! Nature — this wild, beautiful nature — is mine, and love is mine, and now both seem rounded into one — into — ”

“The personality of your husband,” Gaunt said. “We must keep that photograph, darling. It has given me my wife!”

## Little Father.

### Will Carter

#### I.

Jim Briscoe turned the hydraulic nozzle slowly, directing the water to a patch of rough cement that offered very stubborn resistance.

“There, you can bore your way into that while I get a smoke.”

He found his knife missing. “Um! Must have left it up at the hut at crib time, I suppose.” He moved the nozzle a point or two again, and, drawing a plug of tobacco from his pocket, proceeded to tear off a smoke with his fingers, staring in absorbed fashion at the jet, which was roaring loudly on a flat stone in the wash-dirt, and sending up a white spray, whereon the western sun was flashing rainbow tints.

Suddenly the roaring ceased, the rod-like column of water broke into spray at the nozzle mouth, and Briscoe, turning to the bank, where his mate was pointing a fork with a hatchet, yelled, “Water off, Joe; look slippy.”

Joe was off in an instant, running up the hill along the course of the distended canvas till he reached the race and turned off the water. Meanwhile Briscoe, as soon as the pressure had eased sufficiently, took off the nozzle and extracted a piece of wood that had caused the obstruction.

“Blessed nuisance, these sticks, Joe,” he said to his mate upon his return. “We must use a finer screen up there. That wire-netting's no good — too coarse. We'll be having a bust up in the pipe soon.”

When all was ready again for action the water was restored, the canvas coil wriggling along its course down the hill with the first onrush of water, till, meeting with confinement in the nozzle, the canvas began filling back, and presently hundreds of needle sprays shot out on all sides of the coil, suggesting thoughts of pleasant fountains in city parks, and creating longings to lie in the pleasant sun, cooled by the fairy showering spray.

“Well,” said Briscoe to his mate after knock-off, as they looked down at the claim from the home path on the crest of the little bill, “this place is a puzzle to me. Johnstone says that Ratliffe got 11 weights to the paddock there below the bar, and old Wright claims to have taken 14

ounces out of that patch near the wattles, and coarse gold, too — that's what beats me. We can't raise anything better than mustard where we are. That's the worst of it. If a man knows there's coarse gold about he's always in hope of getting a piece that'll make up for lost time. Look at that gold we got up at the Junction; some sense in that.”

His mate having acquiesced, they started for home, Briscoe remarking that “if the next paddock didn't pan out better he intended to ‘ding’ it,”

The miner is of all men sanguine of success in the face of difficulties, but then troubles never come singly in the world of washdirt, but even as in the non-auriferous walks of life and industry; and there must necessarily be times when the race requires more fall, the canvas wears out, the prospecting dish fails in its reward, and, still worse, the all-important factor of water begins, under the influence of drought, to slacken off. At such crises it takes a brave heart to struggle through, and, let it be said to their eternal credit, the heart of miners are truly “hearts of gold.”

Briscoe, nearing his cottage, spied his little son Ralph, aged 7, toddling down to the gate with his only sister, Fan, aged 5. They were coming, as usual, to meet him.

The father's face brightened.

“Well, this won't do, Mr. Briscoe,” he said, half aloud. “You must shake off the blues, old son. It won't do to carry all that mullock home for the missus to worry over.”

The children shouted and raced towards him gleefully.

“Hello, dad! Mother killed a snake — great big snake — near the chimbly. I got the shubbel and Mum watched him, and I got the shubbel and Mum killed his head off with the shubbel, and——.” Here Fan broke in lispily, “ 'N Muvver put the thnake on the arnth next 'n it wiggled and wiggled, dardy.” Here the young lady clapped her hands triumphantly.

“And, I say, farver,” cried Ralph, impatient of his sister's interruption, “the sewin' machine man came to-day; and Flora got off her chain at him; and the parrot got out, and a nasty ork was at him, farver; and mummy shooed him orf, and ——.” Here Briscoe held out his hands, and the lad, seizing them, climbed up, or, rather, walked up his legs and body, and perched on his back: while Fan was borne in front. Presently the verandah was reached. “Boots, daddy, boots!” cried Ralph. “Bewth, dardy, yeth; bewths, pleath,” yelled Miss Fannie, and gently the fond father set them down, and a moment later he had a jockey on each instep, their little legs stuck out straight behind, and elevated above the floor to assist locomotion. Splodge, splodge went the gum boots through the house, the children rising and falling alternately as he proceeded.

“Muvver, come quick, and look,” cried Fan,” and, of course, mother did come, even at the risk of burning the toast; came, as she did each

evening, to laugh and say. "Well, Jim, I wonder how you can carry those big lumps like that!"

## II.

A week later Briscoe entered the kitchen at the close of day, with the wash-up in the gold dish under his arm. Reaching up to the top shelf he got down the blower and pushed the dab of sand and gold into it with his finger, and, walking quickly to the store, placed it thereon to dry. This accomplished, he got down the scales box, and proceeded to clear the gold, shaking it from side to side in the blower, and fanning it with his breath till the black sand was all blown on to the sheet of newspaper before him; then, with his finger, he poked out the shot and odds and ends of ironmongery that remained, and, tipping the blower, sent the thin yellow run of gold into the scales. His wife leaned over his shoulder.

"What luck, dad!"

He pointed to the gold, and gave her a look that fully explained. She made no observation, but went inside and fetched his dry socks and slippers.

"Might go a quarter. Um! Well, well! Look at that! Four weights, twelve grains! What miserable weighing stuff! That much of the 'Gully' gold would have weighed seven pennyweights easily. I'll have to rob the blowings, I suppose, to make up the quarter."

These blowings were an accumulation of sand and what gold escaped the blower for perhaps six months. They were carefully kept in a little bottle till some defaulting wash-up needed swelling into an even weight.

"She's getting worse, Missus, instead of better; it's enough to give a man the blues."

Late that night they sat talking things over at the kitchen fire.

"I hate leaving home," said Briscoe. "I'd sooner stay here on half pay than go; but what's to be done? The place is worked out. Of course, Ferry has written twice, asking me to go over to the West, and, God knows, Ferry had nothing when he left here. And look at him now! I could be sure of wages with him at Cue, anyhow, and, once there, he might lay me on to something good. Clarke and Jackson and Brownley have all bettered themselves since they left, and why shouldn't I?"

Mrs. Briscoe had a very awkward bit of darning in hand, and seemed inclined to evade the question. At last she looked up and said softly, but earnestly: —

"Yes, perhaps; but it's such an awkward place out there; so much sickness, and so hot, too; and so little water, and——" she finished the sentence with a sigh, and again directed her darning needle in its steeplechase over the alternate threads. She did not care to speculate upon the chances of a fortune hidden in the West. She felt it was but

building castles in the air; her husband was nearest and dearest to her; and there was a strange feeling that this awful West would steal him from her in some way — that he would never return.

“Never mind the heat, Rose; other men have had to take their risks, and have survived, and won their fortunes, too. I'm not afraid of that. We'll whack the money we have; it is about £ 40 — halve it for luck. The £ 20 will carry you along for six months, and, besides, I'll send you some every month. Keep the garden going, and you and the kinchins will be all right. Your brother Dan is living within a stone's throw if you want help at any moment.” He paused, and held up her face, and kissed her cheek, wet with tears. “Cheer up, little woman. I see the bright sun shining. A voice seems calling me. What if I should make a pile, and come home and quit mining, and buy a grand, snug little farm, and settle down for life?” Her face brightened as she rose. His words of hope had carried their sway, and melted her opposition.

“Very well, Jim; do what you think is best.”

Just thirteen turns the little clock got each night, and no more, and was then set back between the two pink vases. And in winding up her clock she wound up her day's work, and it was only then that one knew her day had ended.

In a few days Briscoe had sold his half interest in the claim, and stood with his wife and children at the road half a mile from the house, waiting for the coach. Soon it rattled up.

“Hello, Jim” cried the jovial handler of the ribbons. “Sending the family off to the smoke for a change? What! No? Going to steer West? Well, good luck, old man! Wish I was goin', too!”

As the old red rattletrap turned the next curve a handkerchief fluttered from the window, and a woman's eyes sought the ground, as if tracing a plan of future days; nor did she feel the little hand of her child tugging at hers, nor hear the question put oft again, “Muvver, wath this?” as she held up an old rusty buckle she had found in the dust. At length she called Ralph to her side, and slowly returned to her home.

The time passed on slowly till the first letter came, telling of Jim's safe arrival at Sydney. Her children were all in all to her now, and good little Ralph seemed to realise, as some children will, his fresh responsibilities in his father's absence. One evening he set his mother's chair at the tea table for her, and placed his own at the head, where his father had always sat.

“I want to be father, now, mother,” he said. “You must call me little father, coz father's away.”

Jim's second letter lay on his wife's lap. “I am leaving to-night for the West. I go by the Bolaro, and we start at 9 p.m.”

She watched the hand of the clock creep to 9, and then felt her loneliness indeed. “I must be brave and strong,” she said. “Jim is right;

he will do well — he might strike it rich. Who knows?"

Suddenly the clock stopped at a minute past 9, and there was absolute silence in the room. She started up and shook the timepiece.

Whatever does it mean? It never stopped like that before." She replaced it, and again it stopped. "I couldn't have wound it properly last night," she thought, and gave it a few turns, when off it went once more. She sought the children in their beds. Both were sleeping peacefully, and she felt, in her loneliness, tempted to speak to them, that she might find companionship in their voices.

### III.

Some little while after Briscoe's departure a family named Nancarrow came to reside in the village and to be neighbours of Mrs. Briscoe's, scarcely a stone's throw separating their houses. George Nancarrow was of Cornish extraction, likewise his wife. "We be Cousin Jack and Cousin Jennie, Mrs. Briscoe. Wafe 'an I were borned not tew male apart, lass, and we're gotten fave yungsters in Ostriliar and fave in Old Contray, that'l make cloath on tane, woan't it? We're gotten one poor thilly boy; leathway he's not thilly-but dafe 'n dumb. Tookun t'arl the best doctors in Ole Contray, and last year tookun to Sydney, forth and back, but they kain't do-un no good; he kain't yabber, pore chap. Wafe 'll bring un raound and show thee."

A queer-spoken fellow was Nancarrow, or so Mrs. Briscoe thought after he'd gone, nor was she less impressed with Mrs. Nancarrow when occasion brought her round with her deaf and dumb lad, Josiah Edward.

"He do be a sore trubble to we, Mrs. Briscoe, but Lord knows best."

Strangely enough Ralph and he became fast friends. But not many hours after their acquaintance Master Ralph realised the hopelessness of trying to understand Joe. Ralph decided that Joe must understand him as best he might, and he merely pointed in the direction of his plans as it were, and ere long the big, vacant-looking boy ran hither and thither at his beck, like one devoted.

After they had gone Ralph came in with an important request.

"Cut my hair off short, like Joe's, will you, Mum?"

"What, child, have your pretty curls cut?"

"Yes, I'm too old now; they look like a girl."

"I'll see," said his mother, anxious to evade the task, but in vain, for Ralph kept on with the petition till it was granted. And the pretty flaxen locks were shorn and put away in a box in his mother's drawer to keep for father. The change in appearance was surprising. His closely-cropped poll looked quite dark now, his features bigger, and his mother declared "his father wouldn't know him again when he came back."

Mrs. Nancarrow said, "he was little fayther now, right nuff, 'n no

mistake,” which pleased him immensely.

#### IV.

Briscoe suffered a good deal after leaving Sydney, his ocean-going had been very limited, mere coastal runs on one or two occasions, and hardly calculated to test his swivels and balances. He found that he was a poor sailor, and left the vessel at Geraldton with inward rejoicings. Arrived at Cue, he soon got on to wages under his friend Ferry, and wrote cheerfully home to his wife.

Rose kept him regularly posted. A bright star gleamed through his window eastward. He called it “Home,” and, oft as he lay in his bed, he fell asleep while watching it. By day another star gleamed ever before him when he closed his eyes. It was the white star of Hope.

Hope is the day dream of our lives,  
And we are dreamers,  
Daily the present into future slips,  
To glide away in past, forgotten hours,  
Hope is the sunlight, aye, the very sun,  
And at his setting all our spirit fails.  
And gloomy night succeeds, till o'er her sha dowy brow  
The rosy morn of his command appears.

And, indeed, Briscoe was ever listening to the voice that whispered in his working hours: “Better times ahead. You'll strike it rich some day.”

He wondered and wondered.

He would soon be able to strike out across the arid country. He had saved enough for the purchase of a camel equipment, and looked out towards the world of dry-blowers, eager as a stalwart hunter for the chase.

At last the time came. A letter was posted home. His wife was to write to Naneen, and, if necessary, the letters would be forwarded on to him. “He was going to have a hunt round for a while. He would be all right. He would write as often as he could; but she must not worry if letters were slow in coming. ... He might be out a bit from post-office reach ... He was grand; never felt better. She would find £6 enclosed. She should ask Billy Goddard to draw some wood, to see her through the winter, and send the mare to Leuwin's till spring. She was to kiss “little father and Fan a thousand times for him, and keep her pecker up.”

I shall not tell the tale of his wanderings after that day, but leave the reader to drop in some evening after 10, and learn, over a pipe, of his doings at Naneen, Garden Gully, Abbots, Peak Hill, and even out at Horseshoe. It is too long a story to tell here, with its tolls, privations, and

dangers. Many a brave fellow has sunk into oblivion in the North-west enterprise — gone as a drop of moisture into the absorbing desert sands. But I will tell that he won through all, and made a strike at Peak Hill, in the famous valley flat, where, in the white pipe-clayish looking stuff, rich reefs outcropped and crossed the flat like the rungs of a ladder.

Jim Briscoe's day-star gleamed brightly indeed. He, or rather, they, were rich. Two crushings had yielded handsomely, and, with the money netted from the sale of the mine, he was shaping homewards to the star of his dreams — to Rosie and Little Father and Fannie, and poor old unlucky brother Dan, and his father, and his widowed sister, with £3000. How he gloried in the thought of helping to brighten all their lives on reaching home! The vessel was cutting her time out well. He would land in Sydney on the twenty-second of December. Then a day to look round and get a swag for Santa Claus, and home on Christmas Eve! What a surprise, too. He hadn't breathed a word to Rose of his great luck, beyond stating that he had a good show, and that some were making fortunes. He had kept her "in the dark," wishing to bear the glorious news in person. He had not been definite, therefore, in advising her about his return. He would just pop in like a Christmas-box for her, he thought.

## V.

Christmas was going to be warm, but the hop vines clambering round the verandah posts made Briscoe's home always cool in the front. Travellers, calling for a drink, looked longingly at the cool retreat, where bloomed hydrangeas, geraniums, and other plants.

"When dardy comin' home?" Fan asked.

The needle waited. Mrs. Briscoe rested her hands in the sewing in her lap, and her eyes fell on the low, easy chair in the corner of the verandah, covered with goatskin. Ralph called it "the tippy chair," because it played strange pranks at times, if unwary sitters sat too near the end.

"When dardy comin', muvver?"

"Daddy will come back, dear, when he can." She had been waiting anxiously for a letter for more than a month, and now Christmas was at hand, and no word nor sign of him.

"Mother, Joe wants me to go down to the hole for a bogey. Can I go?" asked Ralph, who spoke through the window.

She gave her consent, urging him to be careful, and keep out of the deep water. Once at the bogey-hole, their fun began — splashing each other furiously, and then running out to the edge of the hole, where they daubed themselves over with black mud, and ran chasing one another as Indians.

"Here comes mother and Fan for a walk" cried Ralph; "bet they've been after eggs."

Joe looked fully impressed, but whether he knew the import of his mate's words I cannot say.

Again the chase was renewed, and Ralph, in order to defy pursuit, leaped upon the big dry log that stretched across the deep part of the hole. Never had he ventured there before, and it was a mad impulse that drove him back step by step, the elder lad following.

Presently there was a slip, a scream, and Ralph was in the deepest part of the hole. Mrs. Briscoe saw it all, and rushed screaming to the place. The poor dumb boy ran up and down the bank pointing to the spot where Ralph had sunk, and making his strange cry, "Oor, oor, oor!"

Out on the log the demented mother climbed, hoping her boy would rise within reach of her hand. Suddenly she saw his head. "Oh, God!" she cried, "help me!" The next moment a man plunged into the water from behind her. She had not observed his approach. The lad was seized in the strong rescuer's arms and taken to the bank. The overwrought mother climbed back along the log, grasping desperately for fear that, in her giddiness, she might fall. A wild scream of joy, of surprise, and thankfulness escaped her. "Oh, my God! It is Jim, my husband, and ——." Falling forward she fainted in his arms. Gently laying her on the grass he turned to the child.

One searching look of scrutiny he gave the little pale face.

"Great God!" he cried, "it is Ralph, and I never guessed it."

Fortunately, the lad had not been long immersed, and the efforts of his father to resuscitate him soon proved successful. He had been snatched from the very jaws of death. Presently the eyes of his mother opened. Wildly she stared at the little naked form before her. "He lives!" she cried, "he lives!" She covered him with passionate kisses. "Oh, my sweet little comforter, thank God for your life. He surely heard my prayer."

\* \* \* \* \*

There is no more flourishing farm along the North Coast of New South Wales for its size than Elmhurst. Everything is run on good, practical lines. The one thing needed now is a railway, and that is already in the air. As the long summer day closes a sturdy youth comes from the field, driving his two plough horses, or, rather, following in their wake, for they know the evening path to the nosebag and rest too well to need driving. A little distance behind a man and woman are walking and chatting as they come. The woman carries a little basket, known in the kitchen as the "4 o'clock basket." They are the youth's parents.

"How Ralph has grown, Jim, this last year."

"Yes, he's a fine lad. What could I do without that boy? What a mercy I came home at the very nick of time to save him that day."

"Oh, Jim, it was God's work. Little did I dream at the moment it was

you who splashed into the hole beside me. All my thoughts were on Little Father.”

And the red sun set behind the elms as a sweet girl of 14 came singing towards them: “Hot beans and bread and butter. Ladies and gentlemen, come to supper.”

## **Billy-Boy.**

### **Mildred V. Campbell**

The wedding trip was over, and they were driving from the tiny siding at which the train had left them to his station.

She was a city girl, this young wife of his, and he wondered anxiously for the first time if she would adapt herself easily to the somewhat solitary life before her. He turned suddenly, a vague fear clutching at his heart.

“Hilda, do you think you'll be lonely, dear, away from all your people?”

She laughed deliciously. “Not a bit. I love the country and the riding, and all the dear fat old sheep. Everything is on such a vast scale, Peter; that wide plain we have just crossed, stretching away for miles. And look at this bush — oh, Peter, it's heavenly!”

It had been a good year, and as far as the eye could see there was grass — dazzling green grass, through which an occasional rabbit fled in terror at their approach. Peter gazed round him contentedly. Yes, it was heavenly, and with all prospects of returning a heavenly profit.

Two miles more, and Hilda stood up in the buggy, eager for a glimpse of her future home, nestling like a mushroom among its surrounding trees. The garden was gay with flowers, chrysanthemums and vivid zinneas. Whilst high above them waved pale, feathery pepper-trees. Outside the closely-clipped saltbush hedge were slender-limbed myalls, their bushy, silvery foliage showing up well in contrast beside pale, bluey-green pines, stately and stiff in all their dignity.

As he lifted her down from the buggy, Hilda clung to her husband for a moment.

“Oh, Peter,” she whispered ecstatically, “fancy this being all yours.”

“Ours,” he corrected, smiling, and pride shone in his eyes that the old homestead he had loved so dearly should find favour in her eyes too.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hilda's arm ached with turning the machine handle, and she wondered dully why men wore their shirts out so quickly. “I made him four only a

few weeks ago," she murmured resentfully to herself, and now they're rags — absolutely rags."

"Mum," came a shrill call. "Mum, quick."

Hilda rose and went out on to the verandah.

"What is it, Billy-boy — a scratch?"

The child was struggling to hold an ancient fat terrier, endeavouring amiably to upset his youthful master, and thus free himself.

"Mum," panted the babe, "lemme go out wif Stumpy and kill wabbits."

"No, Billy-boy, not by yourself. Suppose a big snake chased you, like that one Daddy killed near the dairy?"

His wee hands relaxed their grasp on the terrier, and, Stumpy fleeing, he stood up, a chubby, golden-haired cherub, blue eyes wide with excitement.

"I'd take a big, big stick, Mum, an' kill him dead."

Hilda smiled at this valiant assertion. "Well, don't kill him to-day, Babe. Play in here like a good boy, and when Daddy comes home he might take you for a ride on the poison-cart."

He turned away obediently, and wandered round the verandah.

Hilda looked out into the garden. It was absolutely bare. Three or four pepper-trees were dead, and stood up, dismal reminders of long years of neglect.

When Hilda had first come to live there the garden had been her chief joy. She and a hoary-headed old man tolled unceasingly among the flowers, and the results were most gratifying. Then there came a drought, withering everything she had tended so carefully. Her gardener was found unnecessary, also too much of an expense. Hilda wailed when he left. Peter assured her he could return in the autumn when rain came. But autumn went by three times, and still the stricken land groaned under pitiless suns, blinding duststorms, and raging, fiery winds.

Hilda found herself thrust to one side, forgotten almost, in the terrible fight to save stock. It only worried Peter when she tried to sympathise with him; so gradually she let him alone, she and her child living entirely a life of their own.

Rain did come at last — inches of it. Hilda's hopes rose. Surely Peter would become his happy, loveable self again. Perhaps they could go away for a trip, just the three of them. Eagerly she asked him one evening as he sat smoking on the verandah. The never-ceasing croak of myriads of frogs luxuriating in a cowl close beside the house was delightful because of its rarity. Plover shrilled to each other now and again, and once a belated wild duck quacked forlornly as he flew over the house in search of his mates.

Peter looked up as she spoke of her plan. "How can I leave now? My dear girl, there's enough work ahead to keep me busy for months," he said irritably. "You can go, Hilda, with the boy. I think we can afford it.

Heaven knows how we managed to pull through the drought, though. Confound that child!" angrily, as Billy's childish voice floated outside, uplifted in a weird melody of his own composing. "For goodness sake, make him be quiet."

Hilda knelt down beside the chair, and put both arms around his neck. "Peter," she said, entreatingly, "don't let us go alone. Can't Boy and I have you for one short month? I feel I've lost you somehow, Peter," she ended with a sob.

A trifle disturbed, he patted her shoulder mechanically, thinking rapidly. Perhaps he might manage a few weeks before lamb-marking.

"There, there, don't cry, dear girl. I'll fix things, and we'll get away for awhile, probably in about five weeks. Jove! The rabbits are getting thick," he said, once more absorbed. "I'm getting rather scared about them."

She rose with the nearest approach to excitement she had known for a long time, and going inside picked up Billy. He would cling his arms about her throat, and she kissed the soft baby cheek pressed so closely against her own.

"Oh, my baby-boy," she said in a happy whisper. "We'll work hard, and bring back the old Daddy who used to love us so much."

That Christmas season the land had a prosperous look about it. Rabbits accordingly throve and waxed fat. Peter, already wrestling with his new trouble, worried himself to a shadow. They seemed to come in "waves," and at last he desperately realised he was being eaten out. Paddocks that should have been green with feed remained startlingly bare, grass having absolutely no chance of growing. He wire-netted the entire run at a great expense to check the invaders; then began frantically to kill them. Rabbits were the sole topic of conversation. Poison-carts, fumigators, and jam-distributors arrived daily, until Peter's rabbit-destroying plant assumed enormous dimensions. He gazed in blank astonishment at Hilda when she ventured to remind him of their intended holiday.

"My dear Hilda," he had said with a curt laugh, "unless these rabbits are got under control we very soon will be going away for good."

\* \* \* \* \*

The gathering dusk recalled Hilda's straying thoughts. She hurried indoors, lit a lamp, and returned to the machine and the shirts. When it was quite dark she heard the rattle of a late poison-cart returning, and soon after Peter strode along the verandah.

"Where's Billy?" he asked, coming into the room.

Hilda looked up in surprise. "I haven't seen him for some time. He must still be outside."

Peter pulled from his coat pocket a fluffy, fat ball of fur, with two

black eyes, which blinked sleepily at the lamp.

“What is it? Oh, a puppy, Peter; how he will love it.”

“Morris gave it to me this evening. I thought it would be grand for Boy. Call him, Hilda.”

She went to the door. “Billy!” she cried. “Billy-boy, where are you?”

Getting no response, she moved along the verandah towards the kitchen. Both maids said he was playing at the foot of the garden when they had seen him last. Hilda ran there quickly, thoroughly nervous. Here and there she searched, but found no trace of him. At last she returned for Peter, terrifying thoughts flashing through her brain.

“I can't find him anywhere,” she cried. “Rose said he was away down at the garden-end. He may have opened the gate, and gone down to the creek. Oh, I feel so frightened something has happened him.”

Peter jumped up. “He'll be alright, Hilda. We'll go down and see if any of the men have seen him.”

They ran to the hut, but there disappointment awaited them. No one had noticed the child anywhere. Peter gave orders for the men to turn out and search. Meanwhile he and Hilda rode off on two quickly-saddled horses. Up and down the creek they went distractedly, a brilliant moon lighting their way.

Towards morning, when about eight miles from home, Peter turned his horse's head. “We'd better go back,” he said brokenly, “and wait for daylight. He'd never have come so far as this. Hilda, don't — don't cry, dear. He's a cute little chap, and is probably sleeping somewhere. Let us ride on to M'Gregor's; we may hear some word there.”

Another mile brought them to a wire-netting fence. Opening the gate he led the two horses through and up to a tiny two-roomed selector's cottage. The dogs barked furiously, and a man came out on to the verandah wrapped in a yellow oilskin coat.

“Helloa,” he cried, “are youse after a kid? Oh, it's you, Mr. Harding,” as both stepped up to him.

“He's fine,” in answer to their breathless question. “I picked him up this evenin', late, when comin' home. He was fair done up, and wouldn't tell where he'd camed from. I sort of wondered if he was yours, but thought I'd wait till mornin'.”

He was leading them into a tiny bedroom, opening off the kitchen, and they followed him, hand in hand, like two tired children. Seeing the dear little curly head peeping from out a voluminous blanket, Hilda ran to the stretcher, and gathered up the limp little body in her arms.

Peter turned to the man, explaining the situation volubly, to force back a lump rising in his throat. Hilda, clasping the child, came over to them, her eyes shining with joy.

At her almost hysterical gratitude the man reddened with embarrassment, and hauled the coat yet more closely round him, making

it crackle loudly.

Then Peter hurried her off, and, mounting again, they rode homewards in the glow of a rosy dawn.

“Hilda,” said Peter at last, his eyes resting anxiously on hundreds of small grey forms hurrying away on every side into the sheltering scrub, “there's an awful struggle ahead of us to live. We've not been exactly hitting it of late years. Help me now, dear — I need you.”

He stretched his hand over to her, and she clasped it firmly in her slim fingers.

“I didn't think,” she said, hesitatingly, “that you wanted me, Peter.” In a whisper “Do — do you still love me?”

“Love you!” There was a husky tremor in his voice. “Dear, you are life to me. I've been such a surly brute. Really, Hilda, when these rabbits got so bad they worried me quite off my head.”

Hilda patted his arm sympathetically. “Dear me,” she said with a tremulous little laugh, “it's decidedly serious when they start coming between a man and his wife, isn't it, Peter?”

## **The Passing of Dickie.**

**Harry S. Gullett**

At last old Dickie was dying. The wrinkled old face was still, quite still, and wasted to the bones. The tongue that had made its noise in the world for two and ninety years was silent, perhaps for ever.

The father — nay, the grandfather, the great-grandfather — of the district was gliding peacefully towards the realms of rest. Over Denton and the surrounding district there hung a strange expectancy. For old Dickie had kept his counsel. The solicitor from the city, with witnesses, had been with him a few days before. Something had been done, some settlement reached. But what?

Dickie's thousands! Who would possess them? For he was the father of ten, all residents of Denton. And they were the fathers or mothers of scores more, and the grandparents of hosts. To-day grey-headed men and gossiping old women, men and women in their prime, youths springing into manhood, girls blooming into womanhood, merry children by the score — to-day all of these waited and prayed and hoped. And all their prayers and all their hopes centred round that simple old wooden bed in the dingy old house amidst the pines where Dickie lay surrendering his earthly ghost.

Twenty thousand pounds, some said thirty. Who would possess them? Who?

Brown-faced stalwart fishermen sat beneath their brown sails out on the blue waters of Port Phillip Bay, and considered their chances as grandchildren. They gazed across at the township, faint in the distance, and with their eyes on the dark clump of pines showing on the hillside, they bought new boats and new sets of nets, they built new cottages.

The old white-haired farmer out on the slopes trudged deep in thought and calculation behind his team, secure in the rights of eldest son. He was surely safe, for he, too, was a Dickie. That mortgage obstinately growing for twenty years would at last be wiped away.

A storekeeper, another grandson, made bad parcels in his uneasiness about his chances. Several mothers and a couple of grandmothers waited feverishly. There were dreams of new furniture, new frocks, and boots for the children; even thoughts of “college.” Little Edwards would be

turned by Dickie's thousands into gentlemen, into doctors maybe, little Evas would march two and two in the city parks, and the world would know that they were on the highway to becoming genteel. Many-coloured brilliant schemes, all supported by Dickie's hard-won gold. A miserable woodcutter, a few labourers, a rouseabout in the township for whom Dickie had been buying beer for years — they all hoped hard.

There were recollections of Dickie's visits, of Dickie's smiles; hopes based upon a nod here and a sovereign or a playful pinch of the cheek there. For Dickie had broken the law of averages. Sixty had seen him working young men blind on the haystacks of midsummer. At seventy he was still disputing their strength and activity, and unshaken in the love of his beer and his yarn. He had raced up to eighty, his shoulders, perhaps, a little closer to his head, his wiry body perhaps a little hooped, his booked nose, that he had stamped on all his race, apparently more hooked, his face with a few more furrows. But the alert grey eyes which had seen so many years go past seemed to shine out of the ageing face with increasing lustre: and Dickie's spirit was indexed by his eyes.

Through the eighties he had worked less, walked less. But he must be about, and so he rode. He had not jogged about on old stagers. Not he. At eighty-five he had handled a young 'un, a harum-scarum chestnut with a blazed face and a deal of white in his eye. "He be a bit wicked," rasped the old man. "But you help me up, and I be his master." And he showed it by feeding the colt well, and riding him into submission.

I had the misfortune to be away from Denton at this crucial moment. My friend in the little town, a cricket enthusiast, sent me the wire. "Dickie fluking badly. Won't see century," I, too, began to weigh the chances. I thought of dashing into my chief and asking for leave. But I didn't. I was only a great-grandson, and to hasten down would be indecent. "Let 'em scramble," I muttered; "I'll trust to the will."

But I recalled with sneaking pleasure some preferences which old Dickie had shown for me. Perhaps it was because I left the district and used to go home only once a year or so, when I wore a high collar, a city-cut suit, and yellow boots. And I was among those who inherited not only my great-grandfather's hooked nose, but also his sharp grey eyes. I chuckled as I thought of one day at Denton a couple of springs ago. That would surely be worth a thousand. Old Dickie and I had ridden together along the beach and had come on to a mile stretch of good grass going. "Be he fast?" asked the old man, indicating my horse. "Too fast for you!" I replied, lightly. "That he be not!" he shouted, and a moment later we were racing neck and neck. I recalled with pride my fine presence of mind in letting my little old great-grandfather win by a length or two, and thought what a different story it would have been if my bridle reins had broken. Dickie was too fond of a win even at ninety, and too good a sport to think of me "pulling." And so I, too, passed the hours praying and

hoping.

Dickie was dead. Yes, he had slipped away quietly in the presence of a dozen of his many relatives; slumbered off happily to the "other side" that had so long awaited him. There was a decent silence in the room; even a tear or two. But not many. And Dickie had really been so long about it that he could not expect a flood. My great-aunt Kate, a feminine replica of Dickie, with the same hooked nose and the strangely keen eyes, was there in charge, and after a pause she murmured: "Doctor." And a great-grandson, another Dickie on diminutive lines (I can't tell you how many Dickies there are among us, such is the feminine hope and trust in the appellation) was sent speeding off for Doctor Grover.

The doctor was only an infant beside Dickie; but still he was sixty-five, an ancient for a rough country practice.

"Dickie's dead!" gasped the youngster irreverently; for the old man was "Dickie" and "Old Dickie" to man and child for twenty miles around.

"So!" said the doctor. "So! I expected it. A great age, a great age. I am coming, my boy."

Young Dickie, thus relieved, went flying down the township bearing the news. "Dickie's dead!" he panted. "Died just now. I saw him die." And the little shops put up their middle shutter, and tattered old flags floated out half-mast in the breeze.

On went the news from tongue to tongue and house to house, on beyond the township from farm to farm, until the last relative, ten miles out, had picked it up. There was dressing in hot haste, and much harnessing of horses, and hurried setting out for the dingy house among the pines. They rolled like a cloud into the town, all in decorous black, fished out I know not where.

There was halting in the township. Little knots lumped about the stores and hotels, questioning and answering. No one mentioned money, no one touched upon the will. It was: "Poor old Dickie!.. A great age!.. Do you mind how he used" ... and "I can remember. ... A great age! A fine old age!" And much more of a sort. The "great age," however, was an easy first. It served to apologise for all the thoughts not expressed, and the hopes half realised.

My friend strode across to the telegraph office, and I got the wire: "Dickie clean bowled. A great innings." That, too, was his idea of consolation.

Meanwhile Doctor Grover strode under the dark pines, past the slightly tearful women, the silent men, and the curious children, into the room of death. He carelessly took the wasted old hand, felt momentarily for the pulse, and replacing it with more than professional tenderness, he muttered: "A great age! A great, great age!"

And great-aunt Kate laid Dickie out, and spread over the form a snowy sheet. Then she went quietly out and closed the door.

The little house was filling up with generations of old and young — the farmers from the hills, the brown fishermen and their brown children, the labourers, the woodcutter, the storekeeper, and the rouseabout — the latter, with the assistance of a couple of nips, weeping genuinely. Perhaps he would miss my great-grandfather more than any of the rest, so why should he not weep? And they all stood about awkwardly, with solemn faces and silent tongues, that belied their eagerly expectant hearts. Then the women sipped the tea and the men the wine that my great-aunt Kate produced — a quiet and apparently very sad function. There were whispered allusions to Dickie's funeral, and orders, with indications already of trouble about supremacy in control. But, so far, great-aunt Kate continued to hold the wheel.

She bustled in and out, and soon a flutter spread. They were to go in and see him. They rose awkwardly, with much shuffling of heavy feet and conventional sniffing from the women, and followed Aunt Kate. Those who could pressed into the room after her and made a wide circle round the bed; the others stretched their necks from the doorway. And the white-sheeted form lay still, very still. Aunt Kate advanced to remove the cover from Dickie's old face, but hesitated. They waited nervously.

Then the men started violently, the women screamed in chorus. For the sheet moved. Undoubtedly it moved, and then settled again, plainly crinkled. The scream died away and there was a hushed, tremulous pause. Again the sheet moved, more distinctly than before. The screaming began afresh, and there was a crush towards the door. My great-aunt Ellen, who affected a weak heart (although it had bravely pulsed her into the sixties), fainted quietly into one of the brown fishermen's arms.

The sheet moved repeatedly. There was a clutching about its top edge; bony fingers appeared, caught it, tore it down; and Dickie's grey eyes, bright as ever, and his hooked nose peered out on the throng. For a few moments he surveyed them, lifting himself slightly to get a better view. Then, as his faculties returned, and he glanced from them to the sheeted bed, the situation burst over him. A strange smile was followed by a hoarse chuckle, and he croaked: "You all be beat. I be alive!"

And I got the wire: "Umpire's decision reversed. A short ball. Dickie lashing out strongly. Century assured."

## Old Wallaroo.

### E. C. Morrice

The evening of my life has come;  
The few friends I have known  
Are scattered far and wide, and I,  
An old man, am alone.  
Yet still through all the changing years  
One steadfast friend and true  
Has ever shared my roving life —  
My horse, old Wallaroo.

When journeying o'er the desert wastes,  
The Never-Never lands,  
With nought in sight but earth and sky,  
Across the burning sands,  
The last drop in my water bag  
We've shared, for well I know  
Together we should live or die,  
My faithful Wallaroo.

Full many joys we two have known  
That ne'er will come again;  
We've chased wild cattle in the scrub,  
And brumbies on the plain;  
We've won the stockman's race, we've worn  
With pride the ribbon blue,  
For rides and jumps at country shows,  
My stanch old Wallaroo.

We've gone a-droving on the roads,  
And camped on flat and hill,  
In feast or famine, shine or rain,  
We've stuck together still.  
'Mid flood and fire and hostile blacks  
You've safely brought me through,  
And many a time have saved my life,

My brave old Wallaroo.

Now we are old and like to spend  
Our life in easy ways,  
He dozes in the sun, I smoke  
And dream of bygone days.  
But when our last great journey comes,  
Ah! may it be that you  
And I together cross the bourne,  
My dear old Wallaroo.

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