

Inheritors

A Novel

Penton, Brian (1904-1951)

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2003



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Source Text:

Prepared from the print edition published by Angus and Robertson Sydney
1936 530pp.

All quotation marks are retained as data.

First Published: 1936

823.91A *Australian Etext Collections at novels 1910-1939*

Inheritors
A Novel
Sydney
Angus and Robertson
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FOR CECIL MANN

At last the old man died
And left his sons a legacy,
Of hate and fear and broken pride,
To wear beneath their finery:
And the dream's lie, and the pain
Of the seed that dies to be born again.

— ANDREW PRYOR.

The characters in this book are fictional. So are the institutions, mines, banks, etc., named and described.

This is not to say that the book is a work of imagination. On the contrary. To acknowledge the memoirs, travel books, histories, letters, and manuscripts on which the author has drawn for the details of background and period would require a big volume. He would like to confess his indebtedness especially to Sir Timothy Coghlan's *Labour and Industry in Australia*, to Professor Shann's *Economic History of Australia*, to Ann Williams' history of the Vigilantes of San Francisco, which opens up a little known by-blow of Australian affairs, and to the truly splendid pictures of life, industry, and the eccentrics of the outback to be found in the writings of C. E. W. Bean.

INHERITORS

Part I: The Family at Cabell's Reach

Chapter One: The Old Man

UNDER the ferocious heat of the Queensland midsummer afternoon the iron roof cracked and strained. The family sitting round the table in the big dining-room of Cabell's Reach stared down anxiously at their plates as though expecting the flimsy shell of rafters to splinter over their heads. About them lay the debris of festivities into which fear had intruded, petrifying them with their hands full of tinselled paper and the gewgaws vomited by bon-bons. Against the distress, anger, or resentment on their faces, these wilted proclamations of "Peace and Goodwill" and "Merrie Christmas" had the sardonic prominence of some monument of human aspiration and piety left standing in a landscape rifted by war.

Derek Cabell, glaring at the bowed heads of his wife and children, brought his fist down on the arm of the chair again and cried, "Shams! Makebelieves! Lies, I tell you. Lies, lies, lies, like everything else in the country." He sucked the breath back through his lips and held it for another long silence before he growled, "Christmas! In a hog-pen — in a den of thieves, upstarts, scum!"

Emma, at the bottom of the table, pushed a wisp of hair from her damp face, glanced at him impatiently, a trifle defiantly, reached out to pull the fly-cover over the remains of the pudding, and edged into her chair again, primly upright with her hands in her lap. Beside her Larry, their eldest son, lanky, morose, dark, turned a cup of tea in his big hands, sunburnt, work-stained, with the tar caked under the nails. Next to Cabell, Larry's younger brother James fidgeted a finger under his high, stiff collar, opened his mouth to speak but thought better of it, brushed a speck of confetti from the lapel of his coat, and concentrated his disapproving stare on the wall.

For half a minute longer the only movement at the table was from the youngest boy, Geoffrey. His plump hand stabbed a fork into pellets of bread and his washed-out little eyes flashed sly glances towards his father. The girl, Harriet, on her father's right, pressed herself back in her chair, with one hand on the edge of the table and the other at her throat. Her eyes were fixed on her father's hands, clutched round the arms of his chair, the knuckles shining whitely. In the grip of those hands she seemed to find the essence of some terrifying proposition. Her eyes widened looking at them, and the heat flush deepened on her face.

Thus they awaited the next spasm of a familiar outburst — brought on them, as always, by some trifle, some chance word — the bitterness of which confirmed dim suspicions they did not want to have confirmed, rumours that threw the shadows of a dishonourable past across their young lives. Fights, bloodshed, trickeries, shameful liaisons, and all the inhumanities of a time when men had struggled for a foothold in the new land — out of this dark drama their parents had come, scarred and stained by it, twisted and embittered. Strange things were said of their father, Rusty Guts Cabell, who arrived in this valley in 1847, forty-one years ago, with a handful of sheep and cattle, slaughtered the blacks, fought everybody, dug himself in — very strange things that threatened to burden them for life. But still stranger things loomed intimidatingly behind the personality of the old landtaker himself, behind his outbursts of irascible protestation. His shifty eyes, always sliding sideways to door and window as though he expected someone to come creeping on him, his secretive habits, the ugly marks on his face, but above all the eagerness to justify himself, which spoke through all his outcries against the country — these things hinted at alarming mysteries, mysteries he seemed always threatening to reveal, to concrete as inescapable facts, as disgraceful episodes in their own personal histories, that would shut them off for ever from their fellows and from all hope of fulfilling life's bright promises.

To Cabell, glancing from face to face, their silent opposition and dislike were as tangible as the dusty air in his lungs, as the glare of sunlight beating in through the rattans on the veranda. It exasperated and saddened him, made him want to take hold of them and shake them, made him droop his head and sigh.

He laid his hand palm upwards on the table in a gesture of appeal and muttered argumentatively, "There are two sides to every story — if anybody took the trouble to trace it back."

But in the rigid mask he turned on them he left no chink through which they might have pried out the forgivable motives of his life. His left eye was blind and patched with a raw-hide leather patch, the right peered out through lids narrowed to a slit by forty-six years in the sun of a land where an iron roof ten miles away flashes back cruel thumbs of light to gouge the eyeballs. Forty-six years of the bullocking labour that makes a man drain even the muscles of his mouth for the extra ounce of energy to move a bogged dray-wheel, for the extra spark of endurance to survive some inhuman ordeal, had pressed his lips into a thin, tight line. A weal bitten into his cheek by a myall's spear dragged his mouth up at the left corner into a mirthless, supercilious smile. Healing dry and hard, the wound had left a furrow of red cicatrice to stand out, like a fresh raddle stain, against the pallor of his face and the inky blackness of his beard. No flesh remained to soften the gaunt cheek-bones or the line of his jaw.

His neck rose out of his collar like a bone, bleached and stiff. And dominating every other feature — underlining, with its hawklike immensity and truculence, the calculating glance of his eye, the challenging twist of his mouth, the hostile jut of his chin — his beak of a nose curved its sharp bridge out and down, and its indrawn nostrils suggested strain, expectation, and ceaseless irritability.

The father's words passed a slight stir round the table. Harriet turned her eyes away quickly. Larry grunted. Emma's impatience leaked into her fingers, become suddenly busy among the litter of food and plates on the table. Geoffrey slumped deeper into his chair behind his barrier of sly glances. But reaching James the stir became articulate. He licked his lips, pushed his chair back and said, "Well — if we've finished I'll go and write some letters."

He spoke out the brutal intolerance of their youth resenting the dead hand of the past and the law which visited the sins of the father upon his children.

Turning in his chair to focus his one eye, Cabell found a jaw as obstinate as his own pushed out towards him.

"No, we haven't finished, you puppy," he snapped. "You'll please to hold your tongue and listen."

The boy tried to hide the nervousness of his hands in his vast cravat. "But we've heard it before," he said doggedly, "and it's — it's . . ." But he balked at telling the old man that his life, with its stories of violence and suffering, was unpleasant to the ears of a new generation, a new and gentler code of ethics and social decency. His eyes wavered and he finished, ". . . so hot sitting in here."

Cabell sniffed. "Too hot for your namby-pamby hide, is it? Well you'll get broken in. You'll sweat the starch out of that clerk's collar the same as I had to."

The fresh young face, with full red lower lip and clear eyes and rounded chin, seemed suddenly to hang at the end of a long vista of years — his own face before this country had clawed it. "Perhaps you don't believe I was ever the spit of you. Ask your mother here. Or that you'll ever be the spit of me now. Wait and see." He found malicious satisfaction in the thought. This damned generation, with its fancy clothes and soft hands and everything made clear and easy for it, was beginning to put on airs and look down its nose. But it wasn't going to be all so clear and easy as that. They'd learn. Even saints learnt. Even kings. Life was bigger than men's little jumped-up notions of themselves. It could give. It could take away. It could make and break. So, musing on this, he had a moment's relief from the obscure annoyance which rose in him whenever he looked at their young faces. Yes, they would grow old too. "Chockablock with skite," he growled. "I know. I was your age once. Think you know it all, that you'll be able to get through life better

than anybody before. Think you'll come out at the other end without a spot on your dandy shirt or some mark like this about you." He tapped the scar on his cheek. "Huh, you'll find out in good time. I was young once too."

Young once! The rush of memories jostling his senses dazed him. He felt cold English sea mists blowing in his eyes — saw the yellow burst of broom on Dorset hills in May — himself as ardent with unadventured hopes. . . . Then he was lying on a roadside watching convicts in dirty yellow jackets tramp through a haze of red dust — he was shouting at a roomful of men with unfriendly faces — fighting for his life — driving sheep, driving bullocks, driving men — always angry and fighting and driving. The vision of nearly sixty years flashed by in less than the instant it took him to run his finger down the furrow on his cheek, and left him clutching the overhang of the table-cloth, with his heart leaping in his chest, as though he had just crossed a precipice and only now seen the risk he had run. He had to clear his throat to say, with slow conviction, "You're lucky if you don't end up on the gallows. Just damned lucky — that's all."

In outraged silence they considered this verdict on his life. It wrung from James the courage to protest, "But many men *have* lived upright lives and died honest."

"Not many round these parts," Cabell answered. "I've seen it from the start. I've seen Pat Dennis in chains and now his sons could buy me five times over. I knew the McFarlanes' old man when he was nearly on his uppers, and Sir Michael Flanagan when he had hardly two pennies to rub together. You don't think they lined their pockets by observing the Commandments, do you?"

James flushed. "Sir Michael Flanagan is — well, I like him."

"You do? Never heard you knew him; did he tell you what he did to me?"

James swallowed, flushed deeper, and talked at his plate. "You told us that — about the land and . . . all that. But . . . perhaps there was some mistake . . . misunderstanding. Anyway, it was years ago, before I was born, or Harriet, or Geoffrey. We don't think . . ." He tried awkwardly to find some place for his hands on the table, finally thrusting them away in his pocket.

The old man drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair and cleared his throat impatiently as he always did when somebody else talked too long. "Well?"

"We don't think anything that happened so long ago concerns us. Not properly speaking. Really, sir, it's not just — nor proper. You can't ask us to go about and not talk to anybody who quarrelled with you before we were born. You quarrelled with so many, sir. We think . . ."

"To the devil with what you think," Cabell roared. "I'm telling you now

for good and all, Flanagan's a Dublin rat and a shyster. I won't have his name spoken in this house again, see."

The water drip, drip, dripping into the earthenware jar of the filter on the veranda, the scraping of the yellow bone studs in the starched front of Cabell's shirt as he breathed, counted off twenty slow seconds while the eyes round the table fixed expectantly on James. Then Geoffrey chuckled. His little eyes, sideways on his brother, glinted with delight. "It's not old Flanagan you like so much, eh, Jimmie? Tell the truth, you humbug."

James glared. "Hold your tongue, you."

Cabell shifted his eye questioningly between them, caught the flutter of Harriet's finger across her lips, James's answering frown. Secret signs. Conspiracies in his own family "Here, what's this?"

"Some joke of Geoffrey's. Nothing."

Geoffrey smiled. "What about you sitting out on the veranda with her at the Todhunters' eh? That wasn't nothing."

"That's a lie."

"Sitting with who?" Cabell demanded. "Out with it, boy"

"Jennis Bowen," Geoffrey said.

"Oh, Geoffrey!" Harriet cried. "You sneak!"

Cabell gave his daughter a worried glance, then demanded of the table at large, "Well, who's Jennis Bowen?"

"The Bowens of Penine Downs, of course," Geoffrey told him. "Flanagan's granddaughter."

James began to rise.

"Sit down. Explain yourself," Cabell said.

James glanced guiltily at the others. "It's nothing, sir. Really it's nothing at all. Can't a chap talk to a girl and . . ." But he stopped and burst out rebelliously, "Of course I sat with her. Why shouldn't I? I said I liked Sir Michael and I do. And I like her. I intend to ask her to marry me as soon as I . . ."

Cabell rose. "A conspiracy right under my nose. And with Flanagan! The fellow who robbed me of my land. God Almighty, what next?"

"It's no conspiracy," James protested. "I've been intending to tell you since I came home. About the mine too. Really . . ." He gestured apologetically. "I can't go on studying mines, sir. I've got no aptitude. Sir Michael has promised — suggested — if I study law. . . . He says he would use his influence to get me into politics. He is sorry for that quarrel. Genuinely sorry. He would push me out of friendliness for you."

"Shut your mouth." The old man cleared a space before him with a sweep of his arm. "You've been intriguing with Flanagan, eh?"

"I haven't been intriguing with anybody," James said sulkily. "Jack Bowen is studying at the University. I met him there."

"He'd've been digging peat in Irish bogs if his grandfather hadn't stolen

the price of a fare to Australia. Studying — bah! To become another politician and parasite like his grandfather, I suppose. Politics! Rubbish, boy! What this country needs is engineers, not log-rollers.”

“Jack Bowen is a gentleman,” James said bravely.

“A gentleman whose grandmother came out with her convict husband and had him flogged to death.”

There was a nervous shuffling round the table. It voiced itself in James's grimace and cry, “For heaven's sake, sir, can't we forget all that? We — we want to start a fresh leaf. That's all over and done with.”

“Hmn, well.” Cabell glanced furtively down the table to his wife, and rubbed his beard. “Yes, yes. But they're not good friends for you, that mob,” he said hastily, “putting crazy notions in your head. You go straight ahead studying the mine business and we won't say any more about Flanagan. Understand?”

“But sir . . .”

“Don't argue. You don't understand. The teat's hardly out of your mouth. But you ought to have the nous to see that there are millions in that mountain — millions!” A curious elation came into his voice, a kind of ecstasy. “Before many more Christmas Days are gone it will be mine. Enough to buy a Carnegie out, to make a king crawl after you.”

“But sir . . .” James looked at his father and protests, arguments, appeals melted in his throat, the passion of his own desires in his heart, as he realized once more how completely the old man's wilfulness and greed blinded and deafened him to all arguments and appeals and all desires except his own tremendous lust to get and to hold.

“But we've got to hurry,” he was muttering. “Don't you see how they're raking the stuff out as fast as they can. Listen!” He grabbed James's arm. “Hear them?”

Faintly across the valley came, from time to time, the rumble of distant explosions.

“Even to-day — Christmas Day — they waste no time. They rob me day and night.”

“And enrich you too,” James said, more to protest against his father's insane phantom-mongering, greed, and hatred, to the service of which his life was being enslaved, than to state a fact.

“A paltry seventh share. When it's all mine by rights. I came here first, didn't I? I made this valley so men could live in it? On that very mountain I shot down a tribe of blacks.” He dug his fingers into James's arm. “But I'll get rid of them — if I have to gamble everything I own.”

Emma's face, tattooed with brown wrinkles, stiffened. “Gamble the Reach? You couldn't be so mad.”

Cabell glanced at her, at Larry, sitting with his elbows on the table, and his sullen face, propped in his hand, staring down at his cup. “By God I would.” And as a sort of challenge he said, “I'd do anything. *Anything*.”

Haven't you said it often enough, you two.”

Harriet covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. “Oh, what a family! Is there never to be anything except strife amongst us? Even on Christmas Day?”

In dismay, anxiously, Cabell gazed at the crown of her head where the rift of parting split the shining masses of brown hair, reached out and laid a hand on her shoulder. “You don't understand, child. One of these days you'll be worth your weight in gold a hundred times. Then you'll know.”

Under his hand, his eye brooding over her, she shuddered — and under the eyes of her mother and her brothers watching her jealously.

Chapter Two: Brand

HARRIET was nineteen then. She was delicate, with a pale, transparent skin and no blood in her lips. In the crude old house, hewn from the bush with axe and paling knife, its walls buckled by the heat, its rats and cockroaches, its smell of sheep and dust and sweating men, her peculiar beauty was as strange as the English flowers that blossomed with sickly haste in the garden. Cabell had planted them there, against the background of grey scrub and grey immense distances, coaxed them out of the unfriendly soil, with the absorption of a man who tries to evoke dreams of an unattainable beloved from a stick of opium. Just so had he tended his daughter, till she bloomed with an exotic delicacy and refinement which fulfilled some frustrated longing of his own. Governesses had taught her a language her brothers and her mother could not understand, tastes they could not share, so that she lived amongst them, under his infatuated eye, almost like a courtesan he had set up in his house. And as something of the kind, vaguely, they thought of her — as the symbol of an ungovernable lust in the old man which no loyalty to them and no sense of propriety or honour could restrain. “He'd do anything. *Anything*,” they said, and saw all their personal ambitions being sacrificed to her.

The words were Joe Gurseys. “He's barmy as I am. He'd do anything. *Anything*.”

There was no doubt about Joe. He was barmy right enough. One of the hatters, bewitched by the nibbling, bleating sameness of sheep, loneliness, and the blind stare of the bush. There had been other things — back in the days of The System, when he came out in the bottom hold of the old *Osprey* to do a stretch for inciting cotton workers in Manchester. He used to talk about them to Larry, in the storehouse at the bottom of the yard, where the semi-darkness, scented with leather, tobacco, and rum, was streaked by the silver of light in the cracks of the wall. There he was a mere agitated heap of rags behind the counter, muttering an incessant gibberish of hatred and self-pity, from which would emerge before the eyes of the young boy a picture of a man cruelly maltreated by the fates and his own kind — a picture as vivid and incredible as the face, pitted, twisted, starved, that thrust suddenly from the dim shape in the corner and hung for an instant in the beam of sunlight striking across the gloom.

“ ‘Give him a hundred at half a minute,’ says the Beak. They liked to make it last, see? So they took me out in the yard and there was a cove walking back from the triangle with the blood squelching in his boots. A dog was licking it off the triangle and there was as many black ants as you'd see on a meat-safe. One of the police that was taking me stopped to pat the dog. ‘That's Darky's dog, a bloody fine ratter,’ he says. Then they tied me up. I couldn't see nothing in the sun for a while. Then I saw where the flogger's foot had worn a hole in the ground with the last bloke. . . . That was in Bathurst courtyard, fifty years ago. The first red back I ever got.” He spat. “The sods!” His curse startled the motes swimming lazily in the beam of light. They whirled upwards, settled again. He sank back into his corner and brooded with his chin on his chest. For the rest of the day he would brood there, in his rat-hole of malodorous rags behind the counter, till the sun began to set. Then he would come out into the yard, blinking at the light, dragging one leg behind, casting myopic glances about as he sneaked to the gate, down the slope, and into the scrub. He would skulk there for days, muttering, squaring up to the trees, coming down to the river at night like the wild cattle to drink, hiding himself, trembling, whimpering at the sound of Cabell's voice shouting at cattle and men. But sooner or later he would be back at the kitchen door, his cabbage-tree hat in his hand, cringing, whining, “Won't you give a bite of tucker to an old timer that never wished you anything but well, missus. I been walking around a long time, missus. Spare something from the dogs.”

Emma would bring him the food hastily and thrust it into his hands. “Thank you kindly, ma'am. It's good to think there'll be more like yourself. It must be fine always being the way you are.”

Emma was always pregnant in those days. She would shut him out quickly and go back to her work, but his voice would keep on for a minute or two, ingratiating, but somehow indefinably abusive.

“Nobody knows how you deserve the good things better than Joe Gursey, missus. Old Joe knows a thing or two. Breeds a bit himself, he does — breeds lice. Ha ha.”

Emma would stand with her eyes sideways on the floor till his feet padded away in the soft dust and they heard the door of the storeroom bang. Then she would turn to Larry. “You keep away from that trash or I'll know why.”

But he could not keep away. The intense imaginative life with which he solaced his loneliness between a silent mother and a scowling father took stuff to feed on from Gursey's mad tales. Back in the storeroom he found Joe chuckling to himself. “Breeds a bit himself, I told her. Breeds lice. Ha ha. Ach, the bloodsuckers.”

He munched the food noisily between bony gums, muttering, “. . . country soon be lousy with his brats — fattening on it — eating it to the

bone — then hop it — back to England — chuck the bone to the scum. . . .” His hand appeared in the limelight of the sun, clutching a mutton bone. “They’ll crawl for it. ‘Thankee kindly, sir’ — lift their lids — ‘thankee for chewing all the meat offa our bone. For stealing our land. For emptying our rivers. For burning our timber. Thankee kindly, sir.’ ”

Larry ducked, and the bone hit the wall and rattled the the bottles on the shelves.

Out in the yard a man was hard at work filling the water-butts at the kitchen door. The old water joey, Tom, stood on three legs quivering the flies off his rump till the butts on the sleigh were empty, then turned and plodded down the slope and into the river, knee deep. The man, with his trousers rolled up his thin horseman's legs, followed slowly, flashing the tin dipper in the sunlight.

Gursey sneered. “Look at that poor gazook, Sambo. He'd call your old man God Almighty even if he starved him to death. Thirty quid a year and tucker — the same tucker and the same amount they used to give us in the bug-house.” He hitched himself up to the counter to peer through the door at the valley spread out before them in a sweep of blue shadows and grey, still scrub. Away in the distance, up near the Three Mile, men were digging post holes. Their minute immobility magnified the hills and the open grassland. Here and there sheep, cattle, horses, and the slow smoke of scrub burning off.

“A hundred thousand quids' worth, and what did we get? Damn all.” His voice that was like a bad-tempered dog's yapping went up half an octave. “There were five of us come here with him — me, Sambo, Cranky Tom, Old Dan, and a bloke named Penberthy who made a pile at Ballarat later. The blacks killed Tom and Dan. Sambo's working a dead horse, in debt to your old man for the duds he's wearing. And here's me.”

He pushed his grey face into the sunlight as if to lay before Larry irrefutable evidence of his father's avarice. “It isn't the way he kicked me out in the flood the night you was born, after I brought him here in the first place. And it isn't the way he walks round me in the yard now as if he might catch something. He knows what I know — that there's nothing behind his aristocratic mug now but fear. No, it's none of that. It's just that once, ten years before you saw the light, he slammed the door of chokey on me for life. I nearly had my ticket and he put a trick on me to make me escape. And a man can't escape. There's nothing left for the man that tries to but watching and waiting to be grabbed. That's what he did to me. For the sake of a thousand sheep. He'd've done it for less. He'd do anything. *Anything*.”

A hard lump was beginning to form in the pit of Larry's stomach. He flew into sudden rages, hammering his horse with the handle of his stock-whip, slashing at the piled bales of wool in the woolshed. After that he felt easier for a bit. Now, as he listened to Gursey, it was like the

pain of dry vomit. He felt he had to get something out or stifle. Pity for Gursey was not the only thing. He felt he had known this all the time, as though Gursey was only blowing the ashes from his own smouldering fire. Things he had forgotten came back to him, and things he did not know he had seen: his mother standing in a doorway; his father watching her for a moment, then brutally pushing her aside so that her head cracked against the wall and her hair tumbled over her face; his father shouting at his mother and threatening her in words he could not understand; his father sneering at her, "You and your family — dregs! Scum!" His father looking at him with glassy eyes, never talking to him as a son, calling him in another room, "Your brat!" He was eighteen now and still growing, with Cabell's nose and the sensual lower lip of the Cabells, his mother's shiny jet hair, sunken, secretive eyes, and gipsy skin.

Gursey watched him intently. "And why? Why wouldn't he stick at nothing, even at robbing the shirt off Sambo's back, even at murder? Because we're just dirt to him. So *everything he does to us is right*. That's bred in his bone." He tapped Larry's arm. "Mind this, lad, there's only two kinds here — them who came free and privileged to make a pile and spend it in England, and them who came because they had to — lags and the offscourings England had no place for but a stinking back-street tenement in Manchester." His ranting voice died wearily in the back of his throat. "We reckoned it would be a new heaven, but we didn't reckon with your old man, and his like."

Larry began to see his father as the apotheosis of all evil as he had learnt to understand it from the affairs of the little world locked in between the two blue ranges of hills. This much he got from listening to Gursey — a moral principle of hate, a rationale for the hard pain sprung in his vitals.

He spent more and more time in the storeroom, sneaked down every night to sit in the corner, where the guttering candle threw the blackest shadows, and listened while the men, strolling up for a plug of Barrett's Twist or a packet of Holloway's Pills, lounged about arguing, grunting, telling tales in high, laconic voices.

They had a sheet of old newspaper, and Jack Berry, the stockman, was reading bits out of the advertisements, laboriously, his head sideways, his eyes screwed up, the paper tilted at arm's length towards the light.

"One brand new music-box for sale," he read. "Plays 'Killarney,' 'Home Sweet Home,' 'Irish Jig,' etc. Quick sale, two pounds."

Monaghan the rouseabout listened with his mouth open, in guileless wonder, Sambo, lounging cross-legged against the wall, in sardonic disbelief.

"Ye could buy one of them things yeself then," Monaghan said. "Ye could too."

"Set of Bengal razors. Good as new," Berry read. "Five pounds in leather case with velvet lining and mirror in back."

"Velvet!" Monaghan made a papery noise with his fingers in his beard. "Velvet, eh? Only a fiver. A man could buy that."

"Effects of the late Sam Goossens, of Spring Street, Fortitude Valley. One silver watch and chain, one suit white ducks, one straw hat and pugaree, one pair new spurs, three pairs boots, size nine, one picture in gilt frame, one Odd-fellow's apron. Widow will take twenty pounds to clear."

"Twenty quid!" Monaghan exclaimed, goggling at the hitherto unsuspected richness of the commodity market. "And here's me knocked down twice that much in one go down Mother O'Connor's last month. Next cheque I'm taking it down to Brisbane and buy some of them things. Jist you make a note of them names, Jack."

"Wouldn't catch me wearing nothing offera dead man," Sambo mumbled. "It ain't safe."

"Aw, I ain't scared catching nothing off a music-box."

"Ain't catching nothing," Sambo said. "It's the bad luck."

"Jeez!" Monaghan detected the snag in a too alluring proposition.

"Had a dog here once," Sambo said, "belonged to a bloke named Herb Tutt. Spanker the dog's name. Collie mongrel. Tail as long's yer arm. Dog died — haunted Herb to death."

The light washed into Monaghan's mouth, gleaming on the two hard ridges of bone that had grown to replace teeth long wasted away, danced shadows across Jack Berry's red face and naked, hairy chest, painted Sambo and his splendour of a stockman, red shirt, speckled handkerchief, Wellingtons, snowwhite moleskins, and snake-skin belt, flat on the darkness.

"Bloke died in the scrub off Pyke's Crossing road. Swaggie found five bob in his pocket. Swaggie kicked the bucket down the Five Mile. Tells Herb about the five bob to ease his mind, but Herb's a ignorant sort of bloke and don't know no better — pockets it. Coupla days after comes riding in hell for leather. Reckons something's after him. 'That there Spanker,' he says. 'Keeps sneakin' round behind me.' A week later, riding home in the moonlight with the boss, sees a man get up on the track just ahead with his arms stuck out — *and you could look right through him.*"

"Jeez, a ghost?"

"Ghost! Ain't no sich thing. But the boss, he near had a fit. Near pulled the mouth offa his horse. That old chestnut mare it was. 'Who's that?' he says. 'Speak!' And it don't say a word. Just stood there, shivering like a mirage. And the funny thing was *it didn't have no face.*"

Gursey's rasping cackle made Monaghan jump. "He didn't wait to ask twice, I'll bet me bottom dollar."

“Whatyamean? Boss ain't scared no man.”

Gursey winked. “Supposing it wasn't a man? Being like a mirage and having no face to speak of.” He cackled again at a good joke. “Might've been something the boss hadn't expected to see again this side of nowhere. Might well've been.”

“Eh?” Monaghan said nervously, and they all looked at Joe, questioning.

Joe frowned and slid back into his corner. “Mind your own business.”

“Supposing!” Sambo jeered. “It wasn't nothing but that bloke Tutt, see. We went back in the daylight and found him lying on his back along the track, dead's mutton. Maggotty. Boss seemed pleased. Said it was an option on something. But I reckon it was that there Spanker. Herb shouldna et that dog's tail.”

“Et a dog's tail?”

“Yeah, that's what he done. Got swept away in the Fifty-one flood, night young Larry here was dropped. Got washed up a tree, hangin' on to Spanker and a billy. Up there four days, starving. Always reckoned Spanker kept waggin' his tail in his face to tempt him. So he cuts it off, boils it in the billy, gives Spanker the bones to eat, and drinks the broth himself. Anyhow, Spanker went mad from the flies after and bit a sheep and the boss put a blue pill in him.” He nodded sagely. “Always said that dog had a lot of dinger in him.”

Jack Berry picked up the paper again. “Those unemployed blokes been making it hot down Brisbane,” he said, “pelting the police and shouting, ‘Bread or blood.’ ”

Gursey stirred. “They'll make it hotter one day. Shouting don't scare these lousy landgrabbers.”

Berry's heavy frame rolled on the tea case. “You talk a bit fierce, Joe. You talk a bit too fierce!”

Gursey's head appeared over the edge of the counter again. The dancing shadows and the perpetual twitch in his cheek — relic of his last flogging, he told Larry — blurred the outline of his face, but his eyes were vivid. “A bit fierce, you think? Well you've got a lot to thank them for, Jack Berry. You've got your woman here maybe? Or didn't I hear the boss saying, ‘Be damned if I'll provide you with rations for wife and brat?’ ” He laughed scornfully.

“That's a fact,” Monaghan said. “Stone the crows, a bloke ought to fork out an extra ten pounds of mutton when a bloke get's a chance to do a line with a shielagh.”

“I don't hold with agitators,” Berry said stubbornly.

“D'you hold with them bringing in Chows to do your job?”

“No, I don't hold with Chows in a white man's country.”

“D'you hold with kanakas and coolies?”

Berry wriggled.

"Huh, you don't hold with nothing, but you lickspittle just the same."

"Never lickspittled to any man," Berry said. "It's no business of mine how he runs his affairs. Let him pay up my cheque next year and nothing else concerns me. I'm going across the border to get some of that selection land and get married."

"You've got a mind like a sheep, Jack Berry," Gurseley sneered. "For one thing thinkin' he'll let you get off with a full cheque, putting up the price of your snout and pickles the way he does whenever you get a rise out of him. And thinking there'll be any land but stony ridges waiting for you in New South Wales. Or d'you expect the squatters to come and ask you to pick the eyes out of their runs, eh? You're just gettin' the willies dogging sheep, Jack Berry. That's the matter with you."

"I'm going, anyway," Berry said. "I been wanting a place of my own and there's a lot like me."

"Hope they got more guts'n you," Gurseley said. "Or they'll soon be piggin' it on rice like the Chows."

Berry shook his head. "Never get anywhere being so fierce, Joe. We're all men and every man's got his rights."

"No, we ain't," Gurseley said, "we're men and bosses. Two different races. One's got his fist on the land and the other's just let work on it. That's where the difference comes in."

"Yes, men and bosses," he said, when they had gone, stumbling each in turn over the doorstep on feet unused to walking the earth, "and there can't be nothing in common between us but hatred. We're not even the same nation of people any more. We belong here. But they're never done thinking of the day they'll be back in the Old Dart with a deer park and a mansion. So they go away and change back and their children ride with both hands on the rein and look at you as if you were a shape in the air like Tutt's mirage. Absentees — throwbacks, still hanging on to the land and gutsing up the profits, milking the country and us."

The thick hot darkness outside, coagulated under the shards of black cloud gathering for the rainy season, shuddered with spasms of sheet lightning that lifted a hill, a black silhouette of grasping boughs, a glitter of tree-tops from the nothingness and dropped it back — a world agonizing to be born.

Larry tried to think of England but he could think only of his father talking about it, half-shouting at his mother with an exacerbad intensity of grievance, glaring at him as though England was all the strife and bitterness between them.

"But you belong here, Larry," Gurseley was saying. "Weren't you born with a birthmark?"

Larry shook his head. "No, Joe. I haven't got no birthmark."

"You've got a brand," Gurseley said. "You've got a birthmark all right." He grinned. "Inherited it from your ma, you did."

The rains came. The brown of the valley turned yellow.

"Looks as if it might be a good year," Emma said. "The dam's running over."

Cabell, in his rocking-chair on the veranda, stared across the flooded country-side. "Let it," he growled. After twenty-nine years he was tired. Ahead he saw only a procession of years as monotonous as the dribble of rain-drops leaking from the roof. Lambing — shearing — carting wool. Lambing — shearing — carting wool. Year in, year out. . . .

One night Larry woke and heard between the gusts of rain hissing on the roof the peevish cry of a baby, the sound of his mother twisting and groaning in the next room. The other babies were wailing in their crib. Emma was forty-nine then. She had a hard struggle before she could cut the cord with her scissors and take the baby to her breast. A girl. There were three babies now. Larry watched his father fondling them.

"Harriet, that's what we'll call you, little one," Cabell said, dandling the sickly newly-born. "And when you grow up we'll send you Home to kiss the Queen's hand and marry the handsomest man in England." And looking at Emma he repeated it defiantly. "So we will, by God."

"Your ma's done her dash," Gursey said. "She won't drop no more." He was lying in his bunk wrapped up to the ears in blankets. His gums chattered with ague and the tic leapt up in the chalky skin hanging loosely on his skull. His voice kept breaking back into a hoarse whisper. "But she never had more than one of her own kind and that's you. These others — he'll take care of them. You see. They'll be Cabells. They won't have the brand on them." He lifted himself on his elbow and let the blankets fall. "See?" he said. "See the brand?"

Larry's eyes widened, looking down at the thin shoulders calloused like the hide of a working bullock with the weals of many scourgings. "My mother!" he said scandalized.

"They stripped her in the streets of Sydney and the mob stood round and watched her flogged. She was a real devil, was Em Surface, your ma."

He died the same night, leaving Larry the legacy of an inexpugnable hatred that had kept him alive through sufferings unimaginable to generations to come. In Larry's brooding imagination his wrongs and humiliations became the dark shadows of Emma's own story, which she kept locked up behind her squawlike face. He soon forgot Gursey, but the pictures of floggings and starvings bit deeper into his mind. It was his mother he always saw in those pictures in place of Gursey, and in place of the English mill owner, the English judge, the brutal soldiery, the squatters using the convicts like nigger slaves, he saw his father. Pity, shame, and hatred burnt him up — pity for his mother, frail in her simple blue dress of a vanished fashion, with big, ugly hands hanging at her sides, wrinkled face, everlasting patience — shame for his birthmark

— hatred for his father.

Cabell, on the homestead veranda, watched Sambo and Jack Berry shovelling the damp clods on to Gurseys grave behind the woolshed. “They’re dying out. The times are changing. Maybe my luck will change, too,” he murmured to the child in his arms. He was always a great believer in omens.

Chapter Three: Climacteric

“BAH! It never changes,” he muttered in the next breath. He was forty-seven then, suspended in the climacteric of scepticism that is the spiritual *malaise* of middle age. He could remember so many years of promise, so many promising omens — shining baits to trick him into optimistic drudgery. “Like the carrot they hang in front of the donkey to keep it jogging,” he used to say.

Looking back on his life now he felt as though he had been risking his neck to climb the wrong peak. But the disillusion was too profound for regret or self-reproach. There was even a sort of comfort in it, revealing as it did the process by which the blind will of the seed, to flower and fruit and give forth seeds to flower and fruit again, got itself fulfilled. What was the use fighting any more? The aspirations men fought for were only the lure of powers that breathed their incense from the luxuriant vitality of the thing they had created, from the sweat and suffering of men. “Like the dung I put on the flowers to buck them up,” he told himself. “That's what these silly damned notions are.”

Once he had tried to believe that it was his own will that had made his life what it had been, even what he wished it had not been. Then he had had to explain why, after nurturing it for twenty-three years, he had suddenly renounced a dream of going Home to end his days in the placid security of a little village by the sea. If he had not willed it so then he would have had to admit that such things came about in the adventitious way of a world bereft of all rhyme or reason, or that Emma, weaving her own ambitions into his life, had trapped him, led him by the nose. Had either of these been true what could he have expected from the future? Scarcely less alarming than the potentialities of a madhouse given over to the caperings of Chance, was the alternative which delivered him up as a bond slave to Emma's will. No, no, that could not be true. It *must* not be true. It had all been his own doing. To prove this he crushed out of his heart the resentment which festers from defeated longings, made gruff overtures of friendliness, let a spurious kind of intimacy grow up between them, half-ashamed after years of estrangement. Behind all this, really, was his desire to forget what he had lost, to placate the still watchful schemer in her eyes, to salvage his courage and battered self-respect. Besides, he was tired. He wanted a truce. He wanted rest.

So Emma was pregnant again. To him the children came as a diversion

in the arid monotony of a life from which the spur to think and act had vanished. To Emma they represented God alone knew what blind urge of fertility ebbing to its close, what obscure motive of triumph or revenge, or what merely provident expedient against the unpredictable vagaries of his spirit. But he accepted these new responsibilities without any explicit comment, except a vague expectation as her time drew near, a vague surprise when he found her up and about the house again, as well as ever, and, perhaps, a vague annoyance. As the sight of Gursey, emerging from his annual bout of fever, a little more wizened, a little more cadaverous, but still vividly, ominously alive and full of spleen, wrung a spurt of indignation from him. But it passed, swift and gestureless, leaving him, stretched out in his rocking-chair on the veranda, to contemplate the valley with the blank, uncritical stare of resignation.

His comfortable theory of triumphant wilfulness had given way by then to an immense lassitude and indifference, for he had begun to perceive, in his twenty-five years of hard graft, a constant pattern of hope and disappointment, hope and disappointment — the subtle disappointment secreted in success. He was like a gambler to whom the inevitability of mischance has been mathematically demonstrated. His power to project new plans, ambitions, wilted before irrefutable logic, which tore the veils from his future and showed him its years, days, hours, minutes spread out in the same sterile and fore-ordained design. He still bullied the men, weighed their rations in skinflint ounces, haggled with carters, cursed the shearers, but merely from habit and without zest. He ought, he told himself, to begin fencing properly like Miss Ludmilla over at Ningpo, ought to build a new shearing-shed, ought to do something about the offal dump. But he did nothing, except by fits and starts, sunk in a terrible stasis of boredom after a generation of days filled every moment with action, dreams, and conflict. His cattle wandering off into the bush with the wild scrubbers to return, within a few years, to shaggy, hump-backed primitivism, the shed leaning eastwards from the winter westerlies in rain-sodden, ant-eaten decrepitude, the rats obscenely squealing and fighting around the offal dump in the dusk only served to deepen the conviction that effort was wasted in a world given over to inevitable decay. The kangaroos began to come back and ravish the pastures and the neighbours' fences. There were quarrels. He didn't even want to quarrel. Yes, he ought to do something, he agreed. He hired men to sink the post holes but forgot to hire men to cut the posts, put it off till the holes had caved in. The dingoes came down from the hills again to prey on his sheep, the blacks came back too. He sent the poison cart out every day for a month, then forgot about it for the next six. One day he went down to the blacks' camp and chased them all across the river with his stock-whip; a week later they were crowding round the table where he was salting meat, stealing bits under his nose.

"Aw, patch it up," he said when Sambo came to tell him that the white ants were getting at the stockyard.

"Oughta see the yard they just put up over Black Rock," Sambo said. "Iron bolts 'n' all. Putting up a cement washpool too. Got a ram paid a hundred quid for."

"More money than sense," Cabell said.

"We usta have the best stockyard round here," Sambo said. "Usta have the best rams 'n' the best horses too."

"Damn you and your rams," Cabell flared with the irritability of a sick man protecting the blessed coma of half-death from the lure of a resurrection to life and suffering. He brushed Sambo's equine face, with its caricature expression of outraged pride, from the empty, the mercifully inhuman field of his vision — that blue-grey arc of sky and hills at the end of the valley where nagging thoughts and all fretful sense of personal being dissolved in vistas of immemorial unchange.

If Sambo's alarms had disturbed him at all it would have been only for the moment. The times conspired to bemuse him with a false security. They were bad years: rains were poor, banks dried up, squatters who had borrowed heavily had to sell out and go looking for a job. Dirk Surface, Emma's brother, failed for a mortgage of ten thousand and Winbadgery was sold. Bellamy drank himself out of Black Rock and one of the new agricultural companies bought it. Down in Brisbane the Government was bankrupt, men were rioting for bread. By contrast Cabell, owing no debts and getting fairly good prices for his wool — thanks to years of careful breeding — seemed almost to progress. At least no urgent cause for thought or action came to rouse him from the trance in which he tried to forget the debacle and horror of the past and to sterilize the future of all motive to hope and struggle and be again disappointed.

Emma watched him, marked how his beard grew shaggier, how his teeth blackened and broke away, how he wore trousers frayed at the heel, saw the casual habits of inert and aimless reflection gaining upon him. Her eyes, blurred in their cavities of bone and wrinkles, like the foreknowing eyes of an old cat, watched him sideways through the doorway as she worked in the house, covertly under their lids at the meal-table, her only comment the satisfied silence of her catlike waiting.

One, two, three years went by. Then, "You better quit wasting time and learn some real work," she told Larry, sullenly, in the usual way of their intercourse.

Through the kitchen door and across the half-darkness of the living-room they could see Cabell mummified in his chair.

"That drivell of Gurseys won't help you much when you're boss here," she said.

"I won't ever be boss here, Gurseys says."

"You'll be boss here. One day. You better get some real work and learn

how to be boss. You'll want to do better than your uncle Dirk."

"I won't be boss if I live to be a hundred, Gurseey says."

"You'll be boss before you've learnt how to be if you don't start soon."

They were husking corncobs. Their heads were close together, his skin fresh and clear like a dusty ivory — the gipsy blood of the Surfaces — hers wrinkled in deep, tiny wrinkles, like taut wires holding her jaw tight so that she to speak out of the corner of lips scarcely movable. They looked as if they were hatching a plot, as if they knew it.

After a while Larry slunk out with lanky, loutish clumsiness, his face, as always, bent sulkily to his feet plodding in the dust. He too had a crisis of age to fight through or be damned. It took him to the men's hut where the plump face of Berry's bride-to-be, smudged with Berry's thumb print, smiled down, drifted him out again to lounge over the fence and watch the sun sink into the gold and opal Valhalla of gathering clouds, left him stranded in the black chaos of night and his own frustration. Turning back to the house he saw his father's head cameoed against the light from the living-room. He hesitated, thinking of the long legs sprawled across the top of the stairs where he must go. The knotted dry retch of anger came up in his stomach again, then he sheered off to the back door.

But under Emma's eye and nagging he abandoned his life of pottering about the backyard and the scrub, and rode out with the men. Cabell saw him driving in horses for the muster, and at the muster saw him swinging his whip easily in the thick of the dust and moiling bullocks. He was down at the washpool working the race and through the shearing slaved at the woolpress with the dogged industry of a paid hand. He took the poison cart out again, hunted the kangaroos with Sambo, put new posts in the stockyard, patched the shed.

"A proper Currency Lad," Sambo said, approvingly. "Give him a paling knife and a bit of number nine wire and he'll build a humpy fit fer Queen Victoria."

The genius of the bushman was in him. He would fit a tyre on the wagon, forge a horseshoe, turn a tea case into a piece of furniture for his mother, break a horse, douche a sick cow, mend a saddle, pull out a tooth for Jack Berry, carve his rosewood whip-handle and inlay it with mother-of-pearl, kill the ration bullock, salt the meat, tan the hide and make a pair of shoes out of it — all in the day's work.

These glimpses everywhere he went of Larry working among the men as one of themselves but with an undefined authority startled Cabell under the swathes of preoccupation. He did not understand why until one day he rode down with a buyer from the meatworks to see the men cut out a mob of fats. There was one large bullock, a big red brute, which the buyer particularly wanted, but it kept in the centre of the mob and Sambo was a long while bringing it up to the coachers, which were grazing a few yards from where Cabell and the buyer sat watching on their horses.

Suddenly it sheered off and made, head down, for the scrub by the river. Cabell pulled his horse around and galloped across to turn it but he was careless and it swung aside and got past. He sank his spurs and tried again, and again it beat him. He tightened his knees then and was riding full tilt, angrily, at its shoulder when, in a flash of chestnut horse and red shirt, a man rode past, cutting Cabell off from the bullock and shaking him in the saddle, took the bullock like a football from Cabell's toe, forced it round, and sent it with a flick of the whip into the middle of the quiet mob.

"God blast you and damn you for a clumsy dog," Cabell roared, then cantered out of the dust and saw Larry riding away, half-turned in his saddle to look back. The sweat and dust were caked on his face, a mask to the shine of his eyes, from which the excitement of riding had burnished the dull, sullen glaze.

They exchanged a quick glance, with the ground racing away between them, then Larry rode back to the men, leaving Cabell to swallow the dust from the chestnut's hoofs as he yelled, "Be more careful where you're riding."

The buyer laughed. "Bit too smart for you now, Cabell. Getting stiff like me. Ah well . . ."

"What? Getting stiff? Me?" Cabell frowned at an impertinence.

"Ah well, got to give the young'uns a chance," the buyer said. "It's a young man's country. They don't do the old man in with a club like in some places I been — that's something."

But glancing round quickly at the valley, unchanged in its grey antiquity since first he saw it thirty years ago, frozen in some instant of past time, fossilized in time like a fern frond that was green when this stone was a handful of living, breeding mould, Cabell could not believe in his fugitive mortality, the sudden image of himself laid out, the shiver of fear in his bones, the wind of fear rising suddenly in his ears. "Huh," he muttered. "Huh." But the wind, like the breathless, fierce wind in the shell, persisted in his ears for days as he sat in his chair on the veranda and watched Larry among the men in the yard, head and shoulders above them now, strong as a young bull; as he watched him eating at the table with eyes downturned, sulky and evasive eyes like Emma's, face like Emma's, patinaed like Emma's, with a soft black beard already beginning to lick sideways from his habit of pulling at it with his right hand; as Larry passed him in the yard, his hat pulled over his eyes which he kept fixed on his feet striding along in eager search of the promising but elusive destination for which youth is always setting out.

"Damn it all, I've got another thirty years' work in me." Work? And here a new resentment came to plague his long hours on the veranda. Work for whom?

That woman's brat — thought he'd gone through all that — chucked

England, exiled himself — just to provide for him. That woman's brat! Well? For what had he “gone through all that?” A question the tone of his disillusioned musings was not likely to solve. A rich station, ten thousand pounds' worth of freehold, fifty thousand acres of leasehold, thirty thousand sheep, cattle and horses — what was to become of all this when — well, one day he would have to decide. “That woman's” other brats, crawling about their mother's feet in the kitchen, were just as little his, just as discouragingly, when he thought of them, the symbol of aspirations come to nothing. He let his hand slide down his beard and lie upturned and inert in his lap. Oh, well, one of them would have to get it. And the brief revolt of the life in him against the daily maturing death in him ebbed away, and the drumming in his ears ebbed away, into the horizon where his thoughts, ambitionless, automatic, decomposed in silence and haze.

Chapter Four: Excuse to Live

A MONTH later the girl was born. She had brown eyes and a round chin and a short, straight nose — unlike the others, her mother, or Cabell except in the colour of her eyes. But hers were darker than his. Stopping at Emma's door to take a casual look at the newly-born — the last, he guessed, from Emma's drained lips and jaw gone loose after a night's struggle — he was swept out of the room, where the heat-and-rain-buckled timbers of the walls were like trees still writhing from the brutal axe scars on them, back into a room with damask curtains climbing to the sky-lofty ceiling of a childhood memory. Between himself and the direful immensity of the room hung brown eyes and the reassuring smell of something known and trusted.

"I'll be jiggered. My mother had eyes like that." He picked the child up awkwardly and held it at arm's length. "And a nose and chin like that too. No, that's Harriet's chin."

The child began to cry.

"Harriet, that's what we'll call you, little one," he said. "And when you grow up we'll send you Home to kiss the Queen's hand and marry the handsomest man in England."

He had a vision of a young man dressed in the Cossack trousers and Byronic cravat of the thirties, wooing a girl in the green gloom of a lilac bower. In this vivid picture he could see the medallion holding the low neck of the girl's dress, the dark up-curling side-levers on the young man's cheek, could hear the birds, smell the lilac. Not far away the sea shuffled the pebbles on the beach in a long, slow, heavy surge like the pounding of his own heart. Why, yes, it was himself — that afternoon. . . . Or had such a thing ever really happened? He shook his head — as if the confusion of dream and reality could be so easily dissolved.

It was Emma's eyes looking up at him which turned the scent of lilac into the smell of mud steaming under the floorboards, the soft rush of the sea into the sound of the rain thrashing the iron roof and making the river hiss and splutter as though each drop was a globule of melted lead. She looked at him through eyes smoky with pain, like eyes of glass that had been breathed on, and closed them again, leaving him in a muddle of angry emotion — exasperation at the sight of her thin body persisting through yet another ordeal, revulsion from the thought that here was just one more of "*her* brats," resentment when he remembered the sacrifices

which permitted her to look at him in that reproachful way, as though to wish for anything apart from her wishes would be to rob her of her just dues. Ach, she was thinking of that sulky brute out there! And his face hardened as he stared at Larry for a moment before leaning over the bed to say, "So we will, by God."

But his life did not change. He was content to dandle the child and think, watching the valley and its sheep fulfil their yearly cycle of breeding and wool-growing through seasons invariably fair, "Oh, well, there'll be enough for her. And I'll make my own will, confound them." The pleasurable malice of that thought, as he saw Larry toughening into manhood and authority under the eager watchfulness of Emma, reconciled him to the futility of the too splendid hopes into which he had been betrayed the morning Harriet was born. But sometimes, in a pang of previsioned pain as he felt these same hopes stirring again out of some inextinguishable core of folly in his heart, he would not look at the child for days. Or was it that he did not put them away, that he had never put them away, that hopefully he was trying not to hope, afraid to arouse, by the merest whisper, the merest gesture of desire, the diablerie of bad luck always impending. . . .

But something was astir in the country now. He heard no more of bankrupt squatters and mobs rioting for food. The road that wound in from the south, across the valley, and out to the north-east and the Never-Never between Black Mountain and its sister at the end of the valley forty miles away, was busy again with the coming and going of wool drays, travelling cattle, people in search of land and work, drovers, swagmen, and "lone lean bushmen on lean horses with lean dogs trotting in their shadows."

A swaggie came to the kitchen to beg. "I been walkin' round a long time, missus. Could ye spare me that much beef and tea ye wouldn't miss it in the fine place ye've got here, bless ye!"

Emma went to get the things and he unloaded his bluey and sooted billy and sat down on the doorstep. The children gaped shyly from their mother's skirt at his face like an old boot withered round the two, still bright, brassy sprigs of his eyes, his cabbage-tree hat with corks dangling from the brim to keep the flies off, his clothes held together with bits of fencing-wire.

"Fine kids ye've got there, missus. And I've got an eye for fine kids. Wasn't it me, Pat Doolan, cured a deaf and dumb kid they had up Mulberry Creek on the Downs there that they never thought would speak a Christian word. 'Git along wid ye,' says I, 'that's no bewitch'un that. It hasn't got the dead face of one on it. 'Tis nothing more,' I says, 'than a kid ye've never spoke baby lingo to. That and nothing more,' I says. For the da and ma was Scotch folks, missus, that never spoke a word to each other because of the terrible loneliness that was over the place they was

in and nothing new happening from one shearing to the next.”

Emma gave him his meat and tea.

“Bless ye, missus. Thanks, now. And would ye have a bit of snout knockin' around the boss didn't have no use for?”

James ran across to the store to get some tobacco. “But it ain't the same up there no longer,” the swaggie told Emma as he stowed the meat away in his sack. “With them putting down the track for the steam horse, it's like being in the centre of town if you live on the Downs. Not like in days gone by. With fences and suchlike, and gentlemen jackeroos dressed up to the nines and smoking the best Manilas after tea, and telegraph poles, and new houses, and them bringing in new-chums fast enough to empty the Old Country. And money to burn, missus.”

“Is that the way it is?”

“That's the way it is. I've been humping my drum up along the Darling and Balonne and Condamine these ten years and never seen such things.” James brought the tobacco. “Thank ye, missus. Thank ye now. I'd be ashamed to nip ye for one thing more if it wasn't for matches.”

Emma gave him matches. “You didn't hear tell of railways coming out this way, did you?”

“Didn't I too? Why, ain't they bringing a line in to Pyke's Crossing. There won't be enough Irish navvies to knock them hills flat at fifteen bob a day. Millions to chuck away, missus. Millions. . . .”

Larry lounging behind the flame-tree in shyness of a stranger, Cabell pottering about his rose-trees in the garden, listened to the wheedling blarney of the swaggie, who went on for a long time pouring into Emma's ears the tales of great new roads, great new cities, of a great wave of prosperity looming, which fed her dream of Larry's great future wherein her heart found recompense for its old pain. He talked of the gold pouring out of Gympie, the new buildings in Brisbane, the toffs at the Melbourne Cup, the steamships which came through the Suez Canal to Australia in a third of the time the old Indiamen took. He told them of houses the rich squatters had built, “as big as an Englishman's castle in Ireland,” of land selling at a hundred pounds a foot in Brisbane, of civilization spreading everywhere across the Continent, “even to the banks of the Barcoo, even to the verge of the Nullarbor Plain.”

And when he had shouldered his bluey and departed, plodplod-plodding, with the terrific persistence of a fly in a bottle, towards a blue horizon always unfolding on a blue horizon, Cabell and Larry stared down the road till he was no longer visible in dust and distance. The image he had evoked, of a teeming, fruitful life lapping round the hills that shut them in, stirred both of them and left them both frustrated — the one because he was young and afraid, the other because he was no longer young and therefore more afraid.

But more swaggies came, and bullock-drivers, the much-travelled men

of the bush, and the strange nomads who worked a while and wandered on, stockman to-day, miner to-morrow, navvy, cook, or well-sinker the day after, and they were all excited at the things they had seen — steam trams in Sydney, telegraphs, railways. They were germ carriers, men on whom something like a fever was working — the fever of a boom.

The landtakers, like Cabell, for whom the country would always be alien, grey, inimical against the sharp image of England's loveliness, were dying out and with them the weariness of those who had had to fight too much. The old hands like Gurseay were going too and with them the despair of those who had had to suffer too much. There was a new generation, and for the young life is always full of promise, and death is a mirage, and wisdom, disillusion, and despair have to be won afresh by every son.

After the dark years of the sixties the price of wool was shooting up again. They had at last discovered how to send meat to England. People were clamouring for land. "More land." Investors were clamouring for borrowers. "Take our money."

"Oh, I've seen it all before," Cabell muttered to himself and it was like a prayer to some fiend not to tempt and torment him any more. "Wasn't it the same in Fifty-one when they discovered gold? In Sixty when they made a new State? Didn't I let them pull the wool over my eyes? Bah, it never changes."

But it changed as he watched. Merchants were opening up big stores in the very street of Brisbane where, thirty years before, he had seen convicts march to a flogging. The telegraph had conquered the Dead Heart of Australia. Politicians were talking about filling the empty spaces with a hundred million people. Squatters were borrowing easy money, fencing, cutting down costs, growing richer than he could believe. "No more droughts," everybody said.

"Why not let Larry boss the board at the next shearing?" Emma said.

"Larry?"

"He's old enough."

"And old enough to sign my cheques and pay the undertaker, I expect."

"We won't live for ever."

"I'll live long enough to see that brat doesn't grab everything!"

Harriet was four years old now. Her eyes were bigger and browner, with a faint iridescence in the core of the iris — the spit of his mother, he thought. She was already frightened of him, his big, black beard and the way his one eye, with the blood spot in the white, like a second pupil, stared into hers. He went down to the offal dump and got some knuckle-bones and polished them and taught her to play. He took her out walking on his shoulder. But whenever she could she wriggled out of his hands and hid in Emma's skirts.

"Governess, refined widow. Newly arrived in Colony, seeks country

employment,” he read. “Best English references. Mrs Alice Todd, G.P.O., Brisbane.”

He rode to Brisbane with the wool and found Mrs Todd extremely refined and not too young — forty or so. While she was packing to join him at the coach for Pyke's Crossing he wandered round the sprawling, busy town, lost his way in its streets crowded with women in styles grotesque and unexpected, men in white ducks and straw hats with pugarees. On the top floor of the Town Hall he found his old lawyer Samuelson, face still yellow and damp with beads of viscous sweat as though he had just been sprayed with oil.

“Could a man borrow ten thousand?” Cabell asked. “Don't say I want it, but could he?”

Samuelson rubbed his hands. “Get you twenty thousand on your security. When you want it, eh?”

“I don't want it. And I've got to catch the coach now. Good day.”

Mrs Todd, jolting among her trunks and wicker baskets in the back seat of the chuck-me-out, which was all he could hire in Pyke's Crossing where the coach stopped, babbled her protests about the heat, the dust, the flies, and the barbaric roughness of colonial roads into a deaf ear. He was looking ahead where the sun was setting low down on the earth in a transparent haze of golden bars and red dust rising from the mobs of cattle, the drays, and the horsemen pressing north. In this alchemy of light even the gums and the muddy waterholes were transmuted to gold, even the flesh on his hands.

Chapter Five: Vain Challenges

CABELL confided an idea to Mrs Todd. “In two or three years' time I'll send you home to England with the girl. I've got a sister down in Dorset. This is no place for a girl to grow up in.”

So Mrs Todd lived in hope. She endured her yearly dose of blight, like grains of hot sand in the eyes, her yearly dose of the shakes, the appalling fecundity of little black ants, rats, flies, and snakes. More difficult to bear was the malice of Emma.

“That's nice lace you've got on your dress there,” Emma said, pointing down, and Mrs Todd looked and saw a band of fleas, two inches wide, round the hem of her tarlatan skirt.

But she endured the fleas, consoling her loneliness in this outlandish place with rambling stories of the way she had walked in the fields around Hampstead when she was a girl, picking buttercups in May. In England it was always May.

Harriet clung to her. Then she clung to Harriet, when five years had passed and Cabell, sooty from a bushfire, stinking of foot-rotting sheep, of the sweat of horses, stopped at the door of the schoolroom to watch Harriet's little hands struggling up and down the keyboard of the piano and say, “In two years' time I reckon you ought to be about ready to go home to your Aunt Harriet with Mrs Todd here.”

Harriet sat on the high piano stool with her red-stockinged legs dangling and looked down at her hands in her lap. She had her mother's trick of submission behind a dead face. But Cabell saw only her brown eyes and straight nose like his mother's — her difference from the rest. Two years. Twenty-four months more. He picked her up and kissed her on the lax mouth. “In ten years it won't be me kissing you but some flash young new-chum, eh?”

When he was gone Mrs Todd burst into tears. “He promised — he promised . . .” She did not change perceptibly, but by the end of the year no longer worried the boys about holding their forks too far down and the way they said “school,” and “girl,” about the fleas on her skirt and the rats nesting in her boxes. She gave up laundering her stiff tarlatan and her innumerable white petticoats, and, as though only the starch in them had supported her, collapsed into a shape, like a cottage loaf, of three super-imposed spheres of skirt, bust, and damp face.

She drank a lot of tea.

"You drink too much tea," Cabell told her. "That's what's the matter with you. Look in the pot and you'll see what your insides are like."

"It isn't all tea, Papa," Geoffrey said, ingratiating Cabell's indifference towards his sons. "There's a lot of Hollands in it too."

"What's that?"

"Mummy gives it to her. I saw."

Mrs Todd cowered. "A lady needs something to sustain her."

"Even a *lady*," Emma said, "that's been brought in to teach the children their mother eats like a bullocky." And a rare smile moved her lips, silky and dry like the skin on an old scar.

So Mrs Todd departed next morning, protesting feebly the deceit and injustice of Cabell. Finally he lost his patience, picked her up, bundled her head first into the buggy beside Sambo, then lashed the horses across the rump and sent them careering down the hill. The buggy skidded, lurched, rattled over the bridge, and carried Mrs Todd, ludicrously clutching her hat in one hand, Sambo with the other, out of sight in the scrub.

Harriet went away from the window quickly and sat down in the corner of the schoolroom pretending to sew her sampler. But she watched the door out of the corner of her eyes and her hands shook. When her father came in, still angry, slamming the door, she started to cry, with a detached, uncontrollable passion. It was not for Mrs Todd that she cried. It was the sound of Mrs Todd's dress ripping from waist to hem in the scuffle, the thud of Cabell's whip-handle on the horses' ribs, and the wild scamper of hoofs across the bridge which filled her with a sick fear. That image of her father abandoned in violence would never be wiped out.

"Harriet, little Harriet! What's the matter?" He bent over to pick her up, but her body stiffened in his arms, her teeth clicked together, and she vomited.

Emma nursed her for a fortnight. When Cabell came near the bed she edged towards her mother. "Go away," Emma said, "you frighten the child."

"By Christ," he said, "don't you try to turn that child against me."

"Don't be a fool. Go away. You only make her worse."

He dashed off to Brisbane to get another governess, and the air in the house seemed suddenly easier to breathe.

James ran wild. He was ten years old, with a high-boned face, freckled and gay, the Cabell nose and jaw, and the mischievous, head-erect stare of a young wild bull. Sitting at the window of the schoolroom through the dusty afternoons he used to see Larry riding about the valley. He wanted to be like Larry, who could stick any buckjumper, shoot a kangaroo from the saddle, or jerk a steer off its feet with one gigantic throw.

He had soon become sick and tired of Mrs Todd's maunderings and the

futile labour of copying out her pothooks and hangers. The smells in the valley excited him, the smell of the grass burning, the smell of cattle. When the rain, breaking the long dry season, had departed, the sky was a hazy saffron-blue, like a soft plush cushion in which the whitewashed, red-roofed buildings of the station had embedded themselves. The shallow water lay about in sheets of broken mirror with the grass growing out of it and a strange, reversed world inhabited by dim birds. In the midday heat a musky smell came up from the flocks of glossy ibises standing motionless in the water. From relief after the long months of dust and heat and the weeks of rain and mud he wanted to rush out and throw himself on the ground, alive with new grass — feathery wild parsnip, sweet marjoram, that scented his hands, pigweed with sappy, red stalks. His voice was hysterical. He wanted to chatter to his father, press himself close to his mother. But the self-absorbed lives of an adult world excluded him. The personality of his father looming grimly over their uneasy meals, of his mother remote and busy among clattering pans, brooms, and torrid ovens, of Mrs Todd dankly obsessed by her hard fate, kept him in rebellious submission.

A day would come when the black shadows in the scrub and the lace of sunlight on the lagoon at the Three Mile were irresistible. Mrs Todd would look everywhere, silently for fear of letting Cabell know that he was wagging it, and not find him. He was wandering about in the bush looking for honey, or cat-fishing with Sambo, listening to Sambo's stories of horses and dogs and blacks.

"Oughta see them myalls down the coast fishin'. Got two first fingers off. Tie a bit of hair round them till they rot, then put their dook in a bull-ants' nest and let the ants eat the flesh. Better to hold the lines with they reckon." Sambo spat in the yellow water. "Aw, but they ain't proper myalls. Oughta seen them me 'n' yer old man shot. Burned 'em after — and the grease run out like butter . . ."

"My father must've been — fierce," James said.

"Fierce? By gum, if he went in a paddock with a sapling in his hand all the horses'd jump the fence. That's how fierce he was. Just oughta see him stoush a bloke!"

"Can he fight?"

"Pity you wasn't here to see when he put Black Jem, the bushranger, in his bunk and when he stoushed that bloke M'Govern."

"Who was he?"

"A bloke." Sambo pulled his line in and baited it again slowly. But his lower lip overlapped the upper for some time after it had helped to solve the difficulty of making a lump of damper paste stick on a hook. "A *funny* bloke," he said. "Come up from the south and started bossin' yer old man round. Bossed me too! Then he mizzled."

"Did they have a fight?"

Sambo frowned. "Of course. Bloke don't mizzle in such a hurry he leaves a three-year-old chestnut behind without being hoofed out. Mind you, no one actually seen it. Night the old humpy burnt down it was, and yer old man was just gettin' better from bein' blinded. Fell in a bush they reckoned. That was funny too. Never heard of yer old man fallin' offera horse before. Funny the way he looked when we see that cove without any face down Ningpo way that night just after. And funniest of the lot a bloke leavin' that chestnut . . ." He was silent for some time, pondering. Then he shook his head and abandoned a mystery for an indisputable truth. "Chestnut's best kinda horse. Gimme a chestnut any day."

These stories scared James. All at once the glitter of the day was tarnished over. "I better go home," he said. He sneaked into the house and hid in the room where he slept with Geoffrey, heard Emma setting the table for dinner, Cabell washing his hands behind the kitchen, heard them sitting down. Silence, except for the flies and the drip-drop-drip of water in the earthenware filter.

Then Geoffrey spoke up. "Miss Todd couldn't find Jimmie this morning. But *I* know where he is."

Nobody encouraged him.

"He's hiding in the bedroom, if you want to know."

"Sssh-shhh! Eat your dinner," Mrs Todd said hastily.

It was not that they expected Cabell to get up and belt James. He did not expect that himself exactly. He didn't know what he expected. He was terrified of a violence — rumoured, sensed in the cringing of men when Cabell shouted — as vague and terrible as the past from which came Sambo's stories. The ugly scar on Cabell's face, the patch on his eye, the other eye that seemed to concentrate all the light that had once been in two, the ruckles of purple flesh on his arm where a fire had scorched him, were a hint of this past and of the terrific spirit which had endured it. But it was hidden away, buckled down, and that was what frightened James most of all, for Cabell, biting his teeth on a retort to Emma, thrusting his fist in his pocket when Larry answered him back, seemed to be buckling down the devil in his heart.

All day he hid about the house. The smell of the meat roasting for tea made a painful hole in his stomach, but he was afraid to come out and get the food Emma left about for him. He was hiding among the flower-pots at the end of the veranda now. The sun was going down. Monaghan was bringing a mob of sheep across the flat: the yap of the dogs and his shrill voice wailing "Hoy-hey," breaking down into a rumble of bass snarls at the dogs, "Gedaway back, Blue. Gedaway back, blast yeh," rose clearly through the froth of noises marking the end of the day — the rhythmic creak-creak, creak-creak of a wagon coming through the scrub, Sambo and Larry bailing up a wild cow by putting a noose over its horns and hauling it in on the windlass, the calf's frantic moaning, the rattle of

buckets, the tame magpie whistling in the garden, cockatoos squabbling like bad-tempered old women, the dry patter-patter of sheep on dusty ground, the clink of trace chains in the yard, cicadas, a stir of breeze in the trees like leaves turning in a book, voices. . . . This excited chatter of men and animals and birds finishing another day swirled round the house but did not enter it, as though the place had a hard shell to protect the soft kernel of its silence, spongy, rotten, yet ever threatening to give forth some monstrous, unexpected foliage.

Cabell came up the steps and settled into the rocking-chair with a sigh. An oven door slammed in the kitchen and James heard the clatter of his mother's big, greenhide boots in the passage.

She stood in the doorway watching the back of Cabell's head. The wrinkle-wires jerked in her face.

"Well, what d'you want?"

The silence, that always seemed about to burst and give forth some rank growth, like the yellow nut-grass that sprang up in the semi-darkness under the house, clotted around them.

James shivered. "They're going to have a row," he thought and felt the earth tremble under him as if its pillars were being shaken.

"Well?" Cabell turned in his chair. "What the devil are you standing there for?"

The sun flamed behind the silhouette of his skull for a moment, as though trying to keep itself in the sky against the slow, pitiless will of the night closing in upon it from the east, then sank into the hills in an impotent fury of crimson light which left his face ashen and pinched.

The wrinkle-wires relaxed and Emma laughed abruptly. "Oh, well, you can't go on for ever — no more than the sun can. And you can't take it all with you — that's certain."

"Bah!" he turned away.

She laughed again, without mirth. "You had your chance and you passed it. Now it's too late, see. *Too late.*"

"Stop your clack!"

"I won't stop my clack," she flared up. "You seem to forget that I'm not here on charity. I *earned* it. And Larry's my son. To hell with your fancies."

"To hell with you," he shouted, but lowered his voice and began to argue, waving his hand against the washed-out blue of the western sky. "Christ, it didn't give you a lien over my thoughts and feelings for the rest of my life. I'm grateful for what you did that night — whatever it was — but . . ."

"But — be damned. I'm not talking about liens and gratitude. I'm talking of what is. You know what happened. I know what happened. And nobody else knows."

The cow went on moaning bleakly for its calf.

“And so what?”

Emma was a long time answering. “Nobody wants to die in their bed more than I do,” she said at last, “but Larry’s my son. He’s nearly twenty-seven. It’s time you gave him a chance. If you throw away what’s his by right — what I earned for him that night . . . Oh, I don’t know what I’d do.”

He jumped up and the chair began to rock, with an increasing tempo, as if moved by the vibrations of his anger — then stopped. The bodiless shadow jerked a cardboard arm across the dwindling arc of light in the sky. “Nonsense, woman. You’re obsessed. Larry’ll get his due. Why not?”

“Obsessed?” Emma sniffed. “And you?”

“The run’s been going to ruin and now I’m putting things shipshape again. Is that anything to make a song about?”

“And the next thing you’ll be up to your neck in debt with the place overstocked, thinking to make a fortune and serve some barmy idea you’ve got about Harriet. Then there’ll be a drought and where will Larry be? Or Harriet or anybody?”

“You talk as if I didn’t make this place.”

“You’d’ve made it different if I’d had a say. And now I have.”

“You can mind your own business.”

“That’s what I’m doing. So watch yourself, Derek Cabell. You’re not the only one with notions on this earth.”

The darkness came in from the east like a tide, in long, slow, peaceful waves. A man marched up the slope under a load. As he approached the cowyard the cow bellowed again and tore at the rails with her horns. The man stopped to throw a stone at her and came on. It was Sambo. He went round the back of the house and knocked on the kitchen door. “Where y’want this veal hanged up, missus?” The sickly-sweet smell of fresh blood filled the house.

“You’d do anything. *Anything*,” Emma said. “And so would I.”

Her feet clattered back to the kitchen and James lay shivering quietly, crushed by the discovery of his world’s instability in the hands of adults, passionate, untrustworthy, given over to a struggle in which *he* counted for nothing.

Cabell was talking indignantly to himself, “Bleed me, would she . . .”

But James did not want to hear. He let himself over the edge of the veranda and crept off to a new hiding-place.

When Cabell had gone to bed Emma dragged him out from under the house where he had fallen asleep among the weeds and the big, golden fungi.

He wanted to hang on to her and be caressed, but she dug bony fingers into his arm and shook him till his teeth rattled. “You little fool! D’you want him to *see* you and belt the hide off you?”

At the age of ten James lacked the key to the drama of his fears, longings, and day-dreams. Sometimes he saw himself rounding up a mob of scrubbers single-handed and heard his father say, "That's fine bit of work!" Again, he dreamt that his father chased him with a stock-whip and his mother got between them and snatched the whip from Cabell. But at the breakfast-table next morning, when Cabell kept the impassive profile of scar, hooked beak, and eye-patch turned to him throughout the meal, the sharp terrors of his adventure died away in anticlimax. He returned to the schoolroom, subdued by the implacable indifference against which the challenges of his awakening ego were hurled in vain.

Chapter Six: Ideal

GEOFFREY was no comfort to his loneliness among these self-engrossed adults. He hated Geoffrey — his plump, clean face and piggy eyes; hated him for the way he curried favour with Mrs Todd by copying twice as many pothooks and hangers as James, for his sneaking tittle-tattle, and for running unasked to fetch his father's cigars and boots, so that Cabell had begun to expect it and to repay him with a grunt from time to time.

He wanted to be like Larry — gruff and independent and unafraid.

The shearers had knocked off for the day. "Who told them to?" Cabell demanded.

"I did," Larry said. "I told them."

"What for?"

"The wool's wet."

"What if it is?"

"Men can't work wet wool."

"Men can't work my—— — . See here, you get those men back to work!"

"Men can't work wet wool."

"Men can work what I pay them to work. When you pay them it'll be time for you to say when they can't work."

Larry did not answer. His face was swollen and heavy with stubbornness.

"You get those men back to work. D'you hear?"

He did not answer.

"D'you hear?"

James's teeth chattered.

Larry got up and went out. They watched him ride up the valley past the shearers' hut without stopping. The shearers sitting at the door listening to a man play his accordion waved as he passed.

Cabell grabbed his hat, rushed down to the shed, flung the accordion away, and in ten minutes the men were back at work.

"From now on you're a paid hand here," Cabell told Larry. "I give all the orders here."

"Men ain't dogs," Larry insisted. "They can't work wet wool."

James tried to make friends with Larry, but it was not easy. Larry was sullen and knew about two hundred words, which flowed only when he

was talking to his father. Knowing Geoffrey, he was suspicious when James hung round the door of the stockmen's hut in wet weather watching him and the men padding their saddles, mending shoes, frying pancakes, and playing "flip the sixpence." They had a chalked circle in the middle of the floor with a sixpence in it. The game was to turn the sixpence over inside the circle with a stock-whip. James crawled about on the ant-bed floor recovering the sixpence from corners. Once he got too close and Larry's whip took a sliver of skin off his cheek. From his idea of his brothers and their relation to Cabell, Larry expected James to run wailing to his father. He was surprised to see Emma shake James for five minutes without finding how he came by the wound on his cheek. Cabell did not even notice it.

"Want a whip?" Larry offered the next time he met James in the yard. "Might make you one some time."

James hung back.

"When I get time," Larry grumbled, retreating into his sulky shell at once.

But the ice was broken. He made the whip and let James help him, showed him how to stretch the bullock-hide on a wheel and cut out a circle, round and round, till there was one long thong which they pulled out and straightened; how to make the sixteen strands, thick in the middle, tapering at the end, so as to get a good belly; how to scrape off the hair and pare the greenhide into beautiful, thin, flat strings as pliable as a kid glove. When the whip was finished and greased, with a strip of red silk handkerchief in the end for a cracker, Larry said, "Better not let *him* see it. He'll take it off you."

James glanced at the house where his father sat in the rocking-chair with Harriet on his knee. He was tempted to tell Larry what he had heard, to share with him the burdensome knowledge that some awful disaster overhung their lives. But shame at revealing, even to Larry, that these demi-gods were capable of quarrelling and cursing each other made him blush. From some budding sense of social prudence he turned away and mumbled, "Who, Papa? Oh, he wouldn't."

Larry was quick to feel the boy's evasion. He turned away. "Don't suppose you'll ever have any use for it, anyway," he said, "learning lessons from that old crow. You and Geoffrey'll be like them Jardines out Narrow Gut that live in Sydney and never come near the place in case they get their hands dirty."

He stalked off, and James ran after him. "I don't want to learn from books," he said. "I want to be a stockman like . . ." He stammered, blushed again, "like Sambo."

Larry glanced at him doubtfully, shyly.

So when Cabell was away getting another governess James ran wild in the valley, and this incoherent friendship deepened — eager and

admiring on James's side, heavy, sullen, monosyllabic on Larry's. They went shooting quail together in the dry thistles, went out at night after scrubbers, laid baits for dingoes, hunted kangaroos. Larry showed him how to tan a kangaroo pelt and make a knife-sheath out of it afterwards. On Sundays, when the stockmen prepared themselves to appear in dandified glory on Monday morning, James helped Larry polish his four-and-a-half-inch silver spurs and concertina his Canton moles to remove every speck from them, and on Monday morning at daybreak he would be down at the hut to see Larry put on his new elastic-sided boots, greasing his feet with tallow first because boots had to be a size too small so as to fit like a glove. The vitality of James's mind, wanting to know everything — why cattle stampeded at the smell of blood, how to break a horse in, how to make a cabbage-tree hat, why the sheep would not eat the clover till it dried off — stirred Larry's gloomy, inturbed thoughts, and replaced, with a pride in knowledge he had not been conscious of, a resentment against the kind of learning Mrs Todd had been brought to drive into his brothers and sister — a learning that was drawing them farther and farther from his mother and himself. Already James's accent was clipped and slightly domineering, strange among the slurred, lazy voices of the men. Geoffrey's was more so. But it seemed less important to Larry when he saw James trying to copy the way he rode or cracked a whip.

They were sitting down to dinner one day when the chuckme-out creaked wearily up the slope. Cabell handed out a stocky, rawboned woman in a gaberdine dust-coat.

The new governess. "Miss Montaulk," he introduced her.

Her eyes looked fixedly just over Emma's head and her face, like a jailer's, repudiated the stare, disparaging and hostile, which Emma returned. She discarded her coat, washed her hands, and ate her meal without a glance at Emma.

As he was taking her to her room after dinner Cabell stopped at the door and told James and Geoffrey, "You two had better get ready. I'm taking you down to school in Brisbane to-morrow. Miss Montaulk can't be bothered with you."

When he returned Geoffrey bawled, "I don't want to go. Don't make me."

Cabell did not notice. He was absorbed. He seemed anxious, and paced up and down the veranda looking out at the valley. Emma grew restless too, and snapped Geoffrey into silence. She recognized symptoms she had not seen for years. Instead of lying down after dinner with a paper and cigar, as he usually did nowadays, Cabell went to the stable and saddled a horse. Emma followed him.

"Where're you going?"

"Up the river. Where d'you think?"

“What for?”

He climbed into the saddle and turned the horse towards her, but she stood her ground.

“Well, if you want to know I'm going to look at some country I bought.”

“What country?”

“The scrub.”

She stared. “Going in for selling firewood?” But she could not hold her anger back. “*So you're going to start it again!*”

He spurred his horse and pushed her aside.

“Where did you get the money?” she yelled after him.

“Picked it up on the road.”

“Thief!” she screamed. “That's what you are. Robbing your children.”

“I can look after *my* children,” he yelled back, and rode out of the yard.

Now there was a revolution at Cabell's Reach. Fencers and well-sinkers were busy over the run. A gang of Chinese came to ringbark and burn off ten thousand acres of scrub, which carried the Reach back to the boundary of Black Rock on the south. Cabell brought in new rams and culled over his flocks and shot the scrubbers. Where the delicate native grasses had been eaten out he planted rich English grass. His appearance changed. He got a set of false teeth, had his beard clipped, and began to wear the starched shirt, low stiff collar, narrow black tie pinned with a golden horseshoe and frock-coat which he wore to the end of his days, long after such clothes were out of fashion. He stopped thinking about the past and its lessons, and the peace of a will resigned to death departed from him. If he sat down for five minutes he would start to fidget. “Wonder if those cattle are all right on that grass?” He would send for Sambo. “Think we better move those cattle? Can't you smell a fire?” His superstitions returned. Thirteen sheep in a pen or a ladder put up where he couldn't help walking under it made him storm. He dressed in a ritualistic order: tie, collar and shirt first, then trousers, then waistcoat and coat, then socks and shoes, and if anything compelled him to change the order went round all day expecting the skies to fall. His meanness returned too. His room at the end of the veranda was soon full of scraps of iron, bits of leather, rusty nails, boards, sheep-skins, and old clothes. “Never know when it might come in useful,” he grumbled. He pared shavings off the men's rations, and instead of giving them flour worked out a combination of bran, pollard, and a third flour. “Headstones,” the men called the heavy black damper this made, and threatened to strike, but Sambo laughed them out of it. “What's the matter with it. It stays. This fancy bread — you wouldn't know you'd eaten it.”

“He's cheating you,” Larry said.

Sambo was indignant. “Never been a better boss'n Rusty, and any bloke calls him names gets a head put on him.”

That year Cabell cut five pounds off Sambo's wages. Yet Sambo's faith was unshaken.

But the most significant development at the Reach was the wing he built on to the rambling, low-roofed homestead. Here Harriet lived under the jailer's face of Miss Montaulk. The room was walled with rough slabs and overfurnished. There was a grand piano, a Turkey carpet, a pair of big, blue vases with sticks of pampas, gilded mirrors, screens, a sofa, a suite of near-Sheraton, and lace curtains. All this display around a little girl with startled eyes and pasty face seemed crazy, slightly evil; perhaps because the magenta hills and sky pressing against the window and the omnipresence of half-wild animals and men caked in mud and dust revealed, through the room's lavish incongruity, a mind lost in a fixed idea; perhaps because of the personality of Miss Montaulk, as inevitably a part of its furnishings as the lock in the door between the little girl and the life outside at which she was always peering through the curtains.

"Bête! Imbécile!" Miss Montaulk scolded her. "Leave prying and do your lessons or God will make your wicked back smoke with his branding-iron like those cattle down there."

She had a jagged, dull voice. She spoke little, but always irritably in a hissing accent, slightly foreign. Crapulous, untidy, and precise in niggling details, just like a jailer, she was utterly unlovable. Her hair, which hung in rat's tails over her ears, had been dyed some time ago and since had grown three or four inches, so that the top of her head seemed to be covered with a dirty-white, inadequate skull-cap. Her upper lip had a black moustache, bristling and tough from treatment with depilatories, and black hairs grew out of the moles on her neck. She had a nose like a pug dog's, with the nostrils turned out, and strong buck teeth. She was not old, thirty or so, but it was impossible to imagine that she had ever been young, smelt young, or looked out with any but repellant eyes, which peered fixedly at people with quick appraisal, the eyes of an old bawd Cabell would have recognized if he'd been a bit less innocent.

She was a French woman and a Protestant, she said, and had good references. But most important, she was repulsive — no child could grow to like her — and she was capable, she assured Cabell, of protecting a charge against disagreeable family influences.

"I want her to be fit to take the place that belongs to her when she goes home in a few years' time," Cabell said. "I want her to play the piano, to converse — you know, all the fandangles."

Miss Montaulk understood. "And you want her protected." (She said "brodected" and it had an ominous sound even to Cabell.) "A girl needs careful protection in this place. The men!" She shivered. "So bold! So animal looking!"

"She's only a child yet."

"But she will grow up. And young ladies! I've had experience."

He felt shy before her intense, questioning gaze. "Ugly bitch," he thought. "Like a hungry snake. Well, that's all to the good." He was thinking of Emma and Mrs Todd.

Now the silence of the house, buried in its grove of orange, plum and peach-trees, was complete. Emma lived in the kitchen (she refused to have maids in the house), Larry with the men, Cabell among the cattle and sheep. Lost between these monomaniac, closed worlds Geoffrey wandered aimlessly. "I don't want to go to school," he had kept blubbering. "I'll do my lessons. I won't bother Miss Montaulk."

"All right. All right," Cabell said testily. He reflected once or twice that Geoffrey was getting to look like one of his brothers, John who used to ride with the Barminster and always stuck around his father like a leech. The same incessant whine and fat face. "He'll come to nothing," Cabell thought and dismissed him from the list of his potential enemies in the family and indulged him off-hand.

But James went to school.

"I'll break the chestnut gelding in for you while you're away," Larry said.

"Oh, Sambo reckoned you wouldn't give that up for anything."

"I'll break it in before you come back Christmas."

James was overcome.

Chapter Seven: James Makes a Discovery

JAMES came back from school early in December. Cabell forgot to send any one to meet him at Pyke's Crossing so he borrowed a horse from Danny O'Connor, proprietor of the Travellers' Rest, and rode the two hundred miles alone. He arrived at midnight on the fourth day and went to his room without waking anybody. Geoffrey overslept himself as usual next morning, so James was unexpected when he walked into the dining-room at breakfast-time.

Cabell looked up. "You! Of course, your holidays."

"Why, how did you get here?" Emma asked.

"I borrowed a horse."

Emma looked at Cabell. "You even forgot the boy was due home!"

"I've been busy," he said. "Anyway, that bit of a ride won't do him any harm." But a fugitive pang of remorse, as he noticed the boy's slender, fine hands lying on the table, made him add, "Grown a bit, haven't you? Must've liked it down there?"

James's heavy lower lip pushed out. "I didn't. I hated it."

Cabell laughed. "Tanned you, eh? I bet you deserved it."

"I won't go back," James mumbled. "I want to go to a new school."

"What's wrong with the school? It's the best school, isn't it? Ought to be at the price."

"I don't want to go to any school in Brisbane. I want to go to Sydney."

"Nonsense," Cabell said. "What's the matter with you?"

"Didn't they give you enough to eat?" Emma asked.

James glanced resentfully from face to face, repudiating them all, even Larry. "I won't go back. I don't care what you do to me."

Cabell pushed aside the stock-market summary which he was trying to read. "Damn it, boy, if they didn't thrash you and they didn't starve you — they must have done something. Did they give you a report?"

James brought it out.

Cabell read and frowned. "There now, that sounds pretty. 'Impudent, aggressive, rebellious, and has several times been punished for rough and overbearing conduct towards his comrades.' So you've been kicking over the traces, you young guttersnipe . . ."

"It's a lie," James burst out. "They started first. They called me a . . ." But the enormity of the insult and the hopelessness of rousing sympathy in his father's stony face choked him. He turned his head down.

“Seems I should've paid a bit more attention to your manners before sending you among decent folk,” Cabell growled and picked up the stock-market summary again. When he rose from the table he left the report crumpled beside his plate, forgotten.

Larry rose too. “See you later, Jimmy. I broke in that chestnut all right.”

James wiped his eyes on the back of his hand and said nothing, buried in incommunicable sorrows.

When they were alone Emma learnt over the table and asked, “Called you names, did they? Who?”

James turned his face away. “Doug Peppiott.”

“Peppiott.” Emma nodded. “What did he call you?”

James scowled. A flush of shame and anger wiped out the freckles round his nose.

“Well what?”

But he would not answer.

“Anyway,” Emma said, “you *know* now. As for the Peppiotts, they've no call to put on side.”

In the yard he found Larry waiting for him with the chestnut and a brand new saddle and bridle. “Get your whip and I'll take you over the river and see the new Hereford bulls. They're bonzas.” He was excited seeing James again, and waited anxiously to hear what the boy would say about the chestnut and the new saddle and bridle.

James ran his hand over the shining hot coat of the chestnut, then turned away. “I don't want to.”

“Don't want to ride the chestnut!”

In the last nine months hardly a day had passed when James had not fortified himself against the brutality and snobbery of boys towards a stranger with the thought of this horse and his whip and the life, so familiar, secluded, in the valley. And now suddenly he was sick with disappointment. The horse was only a bony, grass-fed hack after all, not the horse he had imagined. Think of the horses he had seen in the carriages that brought the day boys to school — sleek and fat and highstepping, in silver plated harness with a coachman, in livery and a shining top-hat, on the box. Doug Peppiott's for example. What would Doug say to this?

He felt unspeakably thankful that Doug Peppiott would never be able to see it and say, “What, this the hunk of dog's meat you were skiting about?” But he flushed again, remembering what Peppiott had said: “Got a prize blood horse, have you? Well so you ought to. Your old man pinched enough. He nearly got into jail for it, like your old woman.”

He had retaliated furiously with his fists and more and more outrageous proud lies. “My father's the richest squatter in the north. He's got ten thousand cattle and a hundred thousand sheep.”

“Go on, young Cabell, you're thinking of the number of stripes on your old woman's back.”

He had fought and lied heroically to the end. And now he could no longer lie. With the horse before him his dreams of it evaporated. He hated it now. An undisguisable brumby, it symbolized all the hollow pretences he had indulged in during the past year. He was ashamed of it, as he was ashamed of his father, ugly and rough, compared with the men he had seen in Brisbane — Doug Peppiott's father who wore a big, gold ring on his finger and had white hands; the schoolmasters who talked in precise, soft voices. As he was ashamed of Larry, who talked and looked like an ordinary stockman, who sucked his tea out of his saucer and picked up bones from his plate with his fingers, who slouched along on slightly bow legs and had never been to school. As he was ashamed of the homestead with its rough walls and battered furniture, when he thought of the homes other boys had — big mansions with men working in the gardens and servants and stables and coachmen. As finally he was ashamed, humiliatingly, cringingly ashamed of his mother, her difference from the women who came to see their sons at school and left behind, wherever they went, the scent of their perfumes; her hands, with the broken nails, and the grime bitten into the coarse lines of her fingers; her wrinkled face; her old-fashioned dress of faded blue; and, worse than all, unforgivably worse, the things they said about her. All this the horse brought home to him again, as he looked at it with the eyes of Doug Peppiott, the magically endowed and fortunate Doug Peppiott who had a beautiful mother, a handsome, rich, and kindly father, and a birthright to look down on the rest of the world.

The freckles came out big and burning against the sudden pallor of his face. “No,” he answered Larry. “I don't want to ride it.”

“Aw,” Larry said, “you must be dog-tired, eh? Ride it tomorrow.”

“I don't want to ride it at all,” James said, and hurried away.

Larry opened his mouth, then closed it tight. Simple fellow, he was dumbstruck at first, then broken-hearted, then angry. He thought that James was going out of the way to avoid him, but James was avoiding everybody. Oppressed by gigantic problems, he hung moodily about the house, bereft of books and companions. Each morning he counted another day off the six weeks that were racing him towards the moment when he would again be in that big, echoing hall with the hard and scornful eyes of other boys looking him up and down. In his rebellious misery he was forced at last to make conversation with Harriet, sitting at her window.

“What're you always sitting up there for?” James asked her. “Why don't you come down here and have a game?”

“Because I'm not allowed, that's why.”

“What's stopping you?”

"The same thing that makes you go to school in Brisbane."

"Papa? I'm not scared of him. I won't go to school."

She looked at him gravely. "What will you do?"

James kicked a cloud of dust out of the dry earth. "I'll run away."

She gazed over his head at the scrub. Where ringbarkers had been at work the trees were shedding their leaves. The bark hung in long tatters from the trunks, like the hide of a bullock bogged in a waterhole during a drought and picked over by hawks and dingoes and crows. Underneath the white bones were beginning to show through. The trees writhed up into the sky, knotting their black branches in death pain and clawing at the brass vault of the heavens. The birds were gone, all except the crows, cawing invisible among the dying timber like the trees talking sadly together. The Chinamen, like vindictive underground creatures come out of their darkness to destroy the earth, went about the scrub in wide pantaloons swinging their axes and fleeing with frenzied gabble from the earth-shaking fall of a big tree. Their thin, naked backs, shining sweatless in the sun, were yellow, like the grass that grew under the house. Their moaning cries frightened her. The dying trees frightened her. It was like the landscape of some ghastly fairy-tale.

"Aren't you afraid of Chinamen?" she asked.

"Of course not. I'm not frightened of anything," James boasted. "What can they do?"

"They take you away and hide you. Then they burn the bottom of your feet in a fire so you can't run away. Then they take you to China and sell you to an old Chinaman, Miss Montaulk says." Her precocious eyes glittered against her hollow face with its high cheekbones and wide mouth. "I wish they'd take *her* and *burn her feet right off!*" she said passionately.

James was shocked. While he gaped at her a hand wrenched her away and the window slammed.

"For that," Miss Montaulk said, rapping her knuckles with a pencil, "you shall not leave this room for three days."

Harriet snatched her hand away, grabbed the pencil, and stabbed it into Miss Montaulk's arm.

Miss Montaulk exhibited her blood-stained sleeve to Cabell. "A wicked child," she said. There was a joyful glint in her eyes. They looked slightly crooked, like drunken eyes. "You must allow me to be more severe or one day she will do something. . . . And as for that evil boy . . ."

So James found himself under the care of Mr Shaftoe, who looked after the station books, and kept the store, and filled in his spare hours providing Geoffrey with the elements of a gentlemanly education. He was bald, with a fringe of red hair over his temple like a thin scurf of rust, which was beginning to pit his bald forehead with little rusty red

freckles. He had a fleshy pale face, like soft wax, a pair of watery blue eyes, half a dozen red hairs on his eyelids, and a brick-red, swollen nose. His duck suit was dirty, the trousers concertinaed up his thin legs. He rarely changed his shirt or laced his boots, but he kept half a dozen strands of bear-greased hair punctiliously brushed across his crown and was always fingering them delicately and uttering a deep "ah" afterwards, as though from this vestige of better times he extracted the moral strength to go on living in a hard world. His fate — barring a miracle — was to drift farther and farther west to smaller towns and simpler people as civilization improved the standard of cardsharps and confidence men in the east. Once every three months he got a remittance from England and went to Pyke's Crossing to blow it. From Cabell he got no wages — they all went in gin, of which he kept a bottle always uncorked on the table beside him as he discoursed, in an urbane but slightly Cockney voice, of bare-knuckle champions, Derby winners, cock-fights, and wealthy, noble relations, to Geoffrey dozing over the table.

"Wake up," he would say, knocking Geoffrey's elbow off the table and slapping his fat thighs with delight as the boy fell out of the chair, "or you'll miss something. Never want to sleep in a land of opportunity. Here, I'll deal you a hand."

He shuffled a pack of greasy cards and dealt five of them to Geoffrey and five to himself. Geoffrey picked up his cards.

"And now," Shaftoe said complacently, "I'll tell you what's in both hands. In yours — four jacks and a ten of sparklers. What? And mine — a brace of spades and four one and onlys. Ah." He turned his cards up. "See, smart boy Albert Shaftoe. But you wouldn't want to play that one too many times." He drained his glass and yawned, gazing through the window at the yard littered with old cart-wheels, horseshoes, and clinkers from the forge. "What a dickens of a life for Albert Brighthurst Shaftoe, fifth son of Brighthurst Shaftoe, Bart., the old so-and-so." He swaggered a bit, then collapsed into his soft pointed belly and gulped another gin. "Pity you weren't a bit older, son. I'd play you a game."

"I'll play," Geoffrey offered, reaching for the match box.

Shaftoe frowned. "I mean a real game. For real shekels. What d'you think? I don't suppose the old man would give you any. No," he sighed, "he wouldn't — the tight-wad. Just like mine — the methodistical old—— — " He pushed the cards wearily away and poured himself another drink. "Mind you, where there's a will there's a way, and yours truly didn't go unprovided for, not by a long chalk. Oh, no."

Geoffrey watched him admiringly. His friendly patter, his mysterious tricks with cards and dice, his thrilling stories of racehorses and fighters, his nods and winks and assumption of dark knowledge stirred Geoffrey's lethargic imagination with the dim picture of a world where nobody was

lonely and everybody was rich who knew how to be. Assiduously he copied Shaftoe's English voice, his winks and sighs, his contemptuous way of talking about Larry and the hands — "Mere hinds, boy, and badly paid ones at that. Not worth boning" — even beargreased his hair.

And occasionally he got a chance to see Shaftoe putting his attractive theories into action, as when he condescended to fill in a dull evening winning tobacco or Epsom-salt from Sambo, or when some traveller called at the store and risked his spare change on a game of euchre. Then Shaftoe would jingle his pockets and give Geoffrey a few shillings — and win them back.

James spent a month taking in wisdom from him.

"Lead with your left and cross with your right. Good." Shaftoe took a couple of hits on the belt and returned to his gin-bottle. "Pity there isn't somebody here your own weight. I'd lay an even dollar with Geoff — if he had a dollar." He raised his glass. "Well, here's to the day when he has!"

James returned to school, rebelliously but with an experimental interest. As he drove across the bridge beside Sambo they met Larry riding in. The sadness of leaving home for another adventure in the unfriendly world made James remember the happy times they had spent together — long, long ago it seemed to him, looking back with a child's exaggerated sense of his scurrying days and pleasures and his present unmitigable pains. Now he was sorry for the way he had behaved about the chestnut. He leant out to say good-bye, but Larry rode past with his head down. "Stuck-up little swipes the pair of them," Larry was thinking of his brothers. "The way they talk — like that limejuicer Shaftoe."

He hated Shaftoe, whose easy flow of words made him uncomfortable. He thought Shaftoe was trying to take a rise out of him, and so he usually was.

At the store of an evening the stockmen and boundary-riders forgathered to goggle at Shaftoe's card tricks. He offered a card and a pencil. "Now our gifted colleague, Mr Larry Cabell, will oblige the company by inscribing his name. Mr Cabell!"

Larry hung back outside the pool of lamplight which gapped with unfathomable darkness their upturned mouths, like fledgelings at Shaftoe's feet.

Monaghan shoved him forward. "Go on, Larry. He wants you to write down your monniker."

"Go to hell."

"My ultimate colonial experience without a doubt," Shaftoe chuckled, "but not to-night, Josephine."

"What's he say?" Monaghan asked.

"Aw, clean your ears."

Larry seized the pencil, wet the point with his tongue, and laboriously,

agonizingly, wrote his name, LARY CABELL.

Shaftoe took the card and examined it, screwing up one eye, then the other, holding the card at arm's length, rubbing it on his trousers, grimacing. "Mercy sakes," he cried out at last. "What's this? 'I'm a Scandinavian cockatoo.' " He blinked at Larry. "Dear me."

Sambo and Monaghan rocked on the tea cases, Geoffrey's squeaky voice rising above the others.

Larry reddened. "That's not there. My name's there."

"Gentlemen!" Shaftoe held up his hand. "I put the case to you. I ask the young gent to write his name on a ten of hearts. You see him do so. And the words you see him write, as you can read for yourself, are 'I'm a Scandinavian cockatoo,' and now he has the face, gentlemen, to deny it. Is that a ten of hearts and is that the gent's handwriting?" He handed the card around.

Monaghan, with his tongue hanging out at the corner of his mouth and one eye closed, pretended to read. Larry snatched the card from him and slowly spelt out "I'm a Scandinavian cockatoo," written in his own handwriting. He threw the card on the counter.

"Don't trouble to beg pardon," Shaftoe said mockingly.

Monaghan's raucous laughter hooted up into the rafters while Larry, confused and maddened by such inexplicable tricks, slunk back to his corner and pulled his hat over his face.

"I don't believe Larry wrote that," Geoffrey piped up, "because he doesn't know how to spell long words. He doesn't even know how to spell his name. He never went to school."

"Sad," Shaftoe said. "I daresay he spent his youth running after those blackgins."

"Haw! Haw!" Monaghan roared. "Now I know where all them crossbreeds down Pyke's Crossin' come from, Larry. Haw! Haw!"

Larry slunk out. In the darkness he stumbled over a bucket and kicked it across the yard. "Bastard," he muttered. "Could he ride a brumby or chuck a steer? Skite." He repudiated the whole brood of them with their superior, easy, educated voices and manners. Here was a world different from his, where the things most valued were not the things he did best. He had been used to hearing men applaud him for the way he broke a horse or handled a mob of cattle or sheared a sheep, but Shaftoe and Miss Montaulk and Geoffrey, and now James, seemed to look down on him, and his father, with every word, made it plain that from this mysterious other world to which his brothers and sister belonged he was shut out, that Sambo and Monaghan, not James and Geoffrey, were his proper mates.

"Who the hell cares about them piano tunes," he jeered to Sambo as they hung over the fence one afternoon listening to Harriet practise her pieces.

“Aw,” Sambo protested. “It's real pretty. Like cow-bells a long way off.”

Larry nodded to the shearers' hut, whence came the wheezy chug-chug of a concertina. “That's the kind of music I like.”

Chapter Eight: Larry Finds His Mates

THE shearers were beginning to arrive. They came, generally in pairs, a man and his mate, from the north-west — big fellows in flannel shirts and stained moles, with an oilskin, like a cavalry pack, tied neatly across their saddles, and their packhorses laden with frying-pan, smoke-blackened billy, patched tent-fly, and newspapers trailing behind. Their great yearly trek had begun, from shed to shed, from the far Outside — where the stations were little lonely townships in treeless plains of brown grass haunted by mirages and the fear of men holding a perilous redoubt at the caprice of burning skies — to the verge of the matted scrublands of the coast, to the rolling grass seas of the Darling Downs, and, beyond, across New South Wales, to the Alps, to the Southern Ocean; and with them went a wave of excitement, keying up the flaccid days with work to be done quickly, with fights and anxieties and the tangible assurance, in the mounting piles of wool-bales, that the struggles of the year had not been wasted. Here the stir was just perceptible. Cabell was restless, worried about his sheep and the way the men would handle them. He rode around the stations telling the riders when to bring their flocks in so that the shearers would be kept busy and no time wasted, driving in cattle for rations, going over the stocks in the storeroom to see that there was enough flour and tobacco and tea for the coming rush and fixing with Shaftoe the exorbitant prices at which these things were to be sold, watching the sky incessantly, for fear of rain that would wet the wool and leave the shed-hands, “a pack of day-labouring idlers,” on his books. In a month's time it would all be over. The last shorn sheep, astoundingly tiny and white, would be trailing back to their paddock in long lines, ungregarious from bewilderment at the brutal revolution in their placid lives. The shearers would be departing as they came, casual and aloof in their nomadic detachment from any circle of familiar faces or any web of local loyalties and affections, like sailors homeless, and pledged like sailors only to their own clan and an endless wandering at the skirts of the season.

Sambo, Monaghan, and Larry leant over the fence of the horse-paddock watching the shearers ride in at sundown and turn their horses out. Sambo disliked shearers, as the homekeeping man always dislikes the footloose soldiery which billets itself on him, struts in his sight, and steals his women. But for Larry the shearers had the glamour of

travellers in lands with strange names — “Croajingolong,” “the Snowy River,” “back of Bourke,” — in waterless plains where you wet your throat with the few drops of water you could drain from the end of a sapling by burning it in the fire, along the Darling where the sheep-dogs wear little leather shoes to protect their feet from the bindi-eye, in the far, red west where you wouldn't see a tree for miles. Shearers went anywhere they wanted, no boss, no nagging mother, and all mates together. They talked of beautiful barmaids in pubs far, far away. Glamorous fellows!

On the homestead veranda Harriet and Miss Montaulk, and farther off Emma, stood shielding their eyes against the level rays of the sun and watching the shearers go down to their hut, as though these were troops who had raised a siege on the place. And so they had — a siege of monotonous days and dusty sheep and monotonous dusty faces. Shaftoe came to the door of the store and rubbed his hands briskly. Geoffrey, at his heels, already impressed like a little fat puppy with the personality of his master, rubbed his hands briskly too. The dogs trotted into the yard and barked, and the sheep drying off from the washpool on the green river flats huddled into a mob with a faint crepitation of alarm. Shearing tomorrow! The burden of the year's waiting, in momentary expectation of fires or drought or disease, lifted from the station.

Cabell, riding home from the washpool, calculated, “Thirty thousand at four pounds each and ninepence a pound — ought to cut close on four thousand quids' worth.” He leant down and patted his horse affectionately.

Sambo stretched his leathery neck over the rail and spat towards a shearer who was taking the saddle off his horse and rubbing a handful of grass over her back. “Whatya call that for a horse?” he asked, disparaging the man in the most final way he knew. “Clothes horse, is it?”

The shearer straightened his broad shoulders and said mildly, “That's the cheapest horse to feed in Australia.”

“Too thick in the hock,” Sambo said.

“Anyway you haven't got the money to buy her.”

“Me buy that dinger bait! Whatya take me for?”

The shearer picked up the saddle and walked slowly over to the fence. “Some poor cow-chaser, I bet. I thought so — Sambo.”

They peered through the dusk. “Berry,” Larry said. “Jack Berry.”

“Whyn't you say so before?” Sambo growled. “I took you fer one of them bloody shearers.”

“So I am.”

“Still shearing another man's wool?” Larry said, remembering the arguments in the storeroom twelve years before.

“That must be Larry,” Berry said. “A grown man, eh? Well, yes. I'm

still shearing other men's wool. My place down there didn't turn out too good. Got to keep the pot boiling."

"Gursey told you it wouldn't," Larry said. "You got stony ridges like he said, eh?"

"Perhaps I did. Too many in before me. But it's a big continent. I'm taking a place near Pyke's Crossing now. And what became of Joe? Died, eh?"

Larry nodded.

Berry shook his head. "He was a bit too fierce. You don't get anything being too fierce."

"You don't get anything not being fierce either, by the looks of it."

Berry laughed. "Sounds as if Joe made a bit of a redragger out of you down in that store."

Larry did not answer, glowering over Berry's shoulder at the ringbarked trees that raised their frustrated boughs into the limpid sky of the spring evening. At the top of the slope the plum-trees, domed in white, lay close to the earth with the placid, pregnant stillness of blossom. The scent of the honeysuckle came down in heavy waves, as though it was the slow breathing of the night. On the hills the day lingered for a moment longer in a terrific apotheosis, then the stars flickered out and the colour drained suddenly away through these holes in the indigo sky. The despairing sadness of the young, always sensing, fearing the doom of their own unfulfilment, made Larry walk away from the men and shut himself into his room, slamming down the window to keep out the gay skirling of the concertina, the babble of the shearers' voices, and the tremulous suspiration of the scrub astir in the moonrise.

The coming of the shearers had put him in this bad mood. From beneath the sluggish drift of years given over to his father's obscure purposes they evoked, with their aura of adventurous activity, a hectic picture of life beyond the valley — spacious, ripe with opportunity. It was a picture on which he had spent much longing, but there beside him was his mother, always promising, threatening, beseeching him to be patient and think of nothing but the run and the day when he would be master of it, and there before him was his father, tough and lasting as iron. Caught between their wills his own was bewitched, as in a dream: he was frantic, not knowing what he wanted, only that he most agonizingly wanted. At moments like this he hated them both, Emma as well as Cabell.

A murderous rage took hold of him as he worked at the woolpress during the shearing and watched his father triumphantly asserting his truculent personality against the strong and resentful personalities of the men — all hating him, trying to work some little point against him and all losing in the showdown. Bitterly Larry despised the tarboy for scampering eagerly down the line to daub a wounded sheep when Cabell

shouted for him, the lads who swept up the tailings and pieces for the industrious clatter of their brooms, the rouseabouts who carried the ruglike fleeces from the floor to the classer's table and from the table to the press when, in Cabell's presence, they ran to and fro and strained themselves to hook the finished bale out and stow it away, instead of loitering and poling on each other as they did when his eye was not on them. But for special hatred and contempt he marked any shearer who cringed on to his sheep while Cabell stood over him and roared, "That's my hogget you're mutilating, curse you. Have a care or I'll take a patch out of *your* hide."

But few of them cringed. They were not like the halfwitted shepherds whose spirits had been crushed under the incessant pitter-pattering feet of sheep. When he entered the shed they seemed all to draw together behind a wall of deaf and dumb hostility. Nothing was heard under the long, low, half-dark roof, but here and there the bleat of a sheep, the rattle of the blades, the creak of the press, and the impatient stamp of his heels on the floor. The glassy boards, polished black by the grease of the wool, mirrored the bars of the sun striking through cracks in the wall, a bony, excoriated sheep, as it struggled to its feet before the shearer thrust it down the shoot into the pen outside, the white curve of Cabell's shirt-front, and the white faces of the men overworking themselves to out-do each other, not for Cabell's sake but because it was an honour to be ringer of the shed. The light, which lay like a sheet of brass across the door, locked them into a voiceless gloom where the undercurrent of their hatred was as vicious as the rasp of their shears in the thick fleeces. It expressed itself in the flick of an eye sideways as Cabell thumped past, in a stream of spittle fired covertly at his heel, a murmur of voices as he left the shed and a more significant silence as he returned.

At dinner-time, as the men were trailing off to their hut, Berry went up to Cabell in the yard and said: "You raddled ten of my sheep this morning, boss. What does that mean?"

Cabell hitched a bandanna handkerchief from his coat-tails and wiped the grey salt of dry sweat from his lips. "It means you ought to be working in a butcher shop, not shearing good sheep."

Berry's broad, simple face, shiny red like a good honest apple, stiffened a little at this blow to his pride. He glanced down at his shears, which he always carried with him in a greenhide sheath because, he said, only half-jokingly, they lost their edge if left out in the wind. "But no man ever told me I was a bad shearer before, boss. I never took a second cut since I was a learner."

"I'm telling you now," Cabell said. "The sheep in your pen were a disgrace. I'll pay you fifteen bob a hundred for to-day's lot and perhaps you'll have a bit of care in future."

Berry rubbed his hands, soft from working in the greasy wool,

together. "That's not what you agreed on, boss. You agreed on seventeen and six."

"And you agreed to shear my sheep like a man."

The others stopped at the door of the hut watching them. Scenting an argument Joe Goggs, the bush lawyer of the shed, bustled out and wormed his sharp nose to the front. "What's the matter, Jack? He can't sack you without cause."

Berry waved him quiet. "It's not right nor true. No sheep were ever raddled with less reason."

Cabell's ever-ready temper flared. "You take it to law and see if it's not right."

"It's not right just the same," Berry said. "And if the law says so, more's the pity, for you as well as me, for it'll be helping to set honest men against you."

"Hear. Hear," Goggs shouted. "Bloody squatters' law."

The men huddled closer together. Loitering in the hot sun, the flies darting at their faces, the glare beating into their eyes, and their dinner-hour running away made them irritable. "Hear. Hear," they chorused.

Cabell put his handkerchief away and faced them, menacing in his long, black coat, with the leather of his eye-patch burning in the sun and the scar standing out like a fresh wound on his cheek.

The men in the front ranks shuffled and they all stopped shouting, except Goggs, who had no idea what the argument was about, only that it was an argument. "Jack ain't broke the agreement," he began. "We'll get a summons for wrongful dismissal. . . ."

Berry cut him short again. "That being so I hope you'll give me my cheque, Mr Cabell. I wouldn't like to go on with a man who wasn't satisfied with my work."

"And we're with you, Jack," Goggs shouted. "Ain't we boys? Let him shear his own bloody sheep. There's plenty more waiting for us."

Cabell glanced round the ring of faces, distorted by the painful glare, and spat deliberately into the dust at their feet.

"Have it your own way, men, but whoever takes a step off this place before the cobbler is through those gates goes without a penny bit. Understand?" He turned and strode off up the slope.

The men made grumbling for the shed. Berry shook his head and shouldered through the crush at the door, followed by Goggs demanding to know the rights of the matter.

Larry, standing in the yard, found himself clutching the pole they used to prod sheep up the ramp to the catching-pens. He threw it aside, glared after his father, and walked across to the shearers' hut.

Chapter Nine: The Young Bull and the Old Bull

GREASY BILL, the cook, was draining a calabash of pumpkin into one big tin dish and piling charred mutton chops into another. He skidded the dishes down the table and the men took their places and scrambled with their knives for a share of the food. The din of blowflies was loud and savage. The men scraped them off the mushy pumpkin, spat them out with mouthfuls of tea.

The long, low hut was a noisome place for men to eat and sleep in. The only ventilation was through wide gaps in the twisted slabs of the walls. Tiers of bunks ran round the shed. They looked a few inches shorter than most of the men, suggesting a horrible proximity of faces and unwashed feet. The walls went straight down into the dirt floor, uneven, dusty, and flea-infested, where pools of water in the corners nurtured the mosquitoes which began to drone and torture human hides when the flies vanished at sunset. The bunks were made of rough slabs covered with straw. When there were no shearers to live in the hut Cabell used it for calving dairy cows, as clumps of cowhair on the sides of the bunks, pancakes of dry cowdung on the floor, and a heap of ammoniac straw near the door suggested. The shearers called this hut, which was their home for six weeks, "the black hole of Cabell's Reach," but it was really no worse than most other shearers' huts.

"A proper pigsty," Jack Berry called it, glancing round a little more fastidiously than usual and sniffing the clothes soaked in sweat and the yoke of wool, dogs, a near-by latrine, and odds and ends of garbage left lying about by men bound to the place only for a season of back-breaking toil. "Damned if I'd stable my nag in it."

"Neither would Cabell," Joe Goggs said. "See the new stables he's building up there? Cement floor bloody sight cleaner'n this table."

Snowy Wagner, a hulking, sprawling, good-natured brute of a man with a big blond beard and hazy blue eyes inherited from some south German peasant ancestor, shouted through a mouthful of pumpkin, "Cabell's not the worst. What you ought to see's them planter blokes down the coast — the way they treat their kanakas. Wouldn't ask them to bog in the places they give a white man to sleep in. Seen a boss give a black bastard a lift when he'd passed me by."

"Whatya expect?" Goggs said. "Coons is cheap. They'd knacker us white bushmen if they got the chance and let them Chows and Jimmy

Tannas breed like rabbits.”

“And this Cabell, he's the king-pin of the lot, you ask me,” Greasy Bill said through whiskers rat-tailed with soot and sweat. “Mean as a dunnekin rat.”

“Greasier'n you, Bill,” Goggs said. “He's that greasy your eyes slide off him.”

“Yesty seen him sool the dogs on old Ike, the hawker,” Bill told them, “because he had a bag of flour to sell. Three bob for a fourpenny bar of soap and two pound ten for a bag of flour that wouldn't be worth a quid in the Crossing — that what he's hittin' yous blokes up.”

“Yes, that's not right,” Berry said. “It's not honest.”

“He ought to be took to law,” Goggs said. “It's against the constitution.”

“He is the law,” Wagner said. “Ever heard of a shearer who was a J.P. or a member of parliament? And dingo don't eat dingo.”

Goggs banged his pannikin down. “So ought we. Ain't there more shearers'n bosses. We oughta strike. He'd soon come running after us when he seen the grass filling his wool with seed.”

“He'd come running after you all right, with a troop of mounted Johns. That's how he'd come.”

“You can't put twenty thousand bushmen in jail,” Goggs said. “We'd soon run the squatters and bosses out the country. You should've been down the Eureka like I was. We showed 'em something then.” He jerked his face at them as he spoke, like a dog snapping at the air. It was one of those shoddy, plebeian faces that seem to have been jerrybuilt from odds and ends — eyes too small for the nose, one cheekbone higher than the other, ears uneven and outsized for the small bullet head, which bristled with closely shorn hair of a nondescript colour, like wire. He had a mongrel shifty gaze and his voice a formless, mongrel tone as though words were not so important for the ideas they conveyed as for the savage tone in them. He looked a nasty customer, snipping at the air with the razor-sharp blades of his shears, not a simple yokel at all, but the child of centuries of ill-nourished growth in the back alleys of a great city.

Berry glanced at him and frowned. “That's mad talk,” he said.

“It's only talk,” Wagner said. “Shearers ain't fighters. Being ringer and dodging putting shears on the last wrinkled cobbler in the pen — that's all interests them.”

“You think it's mad, do you,” Jerry Coyle said. Sitting apart at the end of the table with a book propped up before him he looked at Berry over a half-eaten mutton chop smoking on his knife. “Is it mad to stop somebody robbing you?”

“I can look after my rights without any Eureka stockades, if that's what you mean.”

"*You* can look after your rights." Coyle tore a mouthful of meat off the chop and chewed it slowly. They waited respectfully for him to speak again. A shrewd-head, they thought him. He could quote pages of Tolstoy and Marx and Donnelley and Winwood Reade, trailed a packhorse-load of books from shed to shed across eastern Australia. But although they respected him, somehow they did not like him. He was not one of the mob, had no mate, was never seen in the bush shanties knocking down his cheque, and never took part in sentimental interludes of song and dance around the concertina at night. His face was lean, ascetic, his eyes grey and without depth. Their gaze stopped just short of you in a cock-eyed sort of way. He seemed to be thinking hard about something all the time — about what you could not guess, for behind those eyes and toneless voice his personality was evasive. "You can't get to the guts of Jerry Coyle," they said. Like Goggs he was no simple child of the bush. He had fine features and small fine hands. "Dead spit of his old man." Years ago old Jimmy Coyle was hanged for robbing a bank and going back to hack the teller's head off with an axe. An old lag who had been transported at the age of eighteen for rioting in Dublin, where he was a student. A red-hot Tipperary man. Well, there was no hot blood in Jerry, they said. He was as cold as a lizard — went to see his old man hanged!

He fed the rest of his chop to the dogs sniffing round the men's heels. "You're no better set up to get your rights from Cabell and his like than an abo is," he told Berry. "They own the land — they took it before you were born. So they own the parliament. Therefore they own the law. You're just a wage slave. You want to walk out of here now, but you can't. You're leg-ironed."

"What's to stop me?"

"Starvation."

"Well, a man's got to work."

"Sure. For himself and society? Or for some greedy big bug who just had the luck to get here first and collar the land? As long as he's got that you haven't even got the right to work — except when he says."

"That's right," Goggs said. "We ought to strike and burn them all out."

"We will strike — one day," Coyle said "when you get the brains to know what to strike for." He went across to his bunk, littered with papers and books, and brought back a big volume. "That's Karl Marx. Read it and you'll understand that it isn't only Cabell who's responsible for you being a half-starved cocky on a stony ridge, but a whole society of Cabells. Landgrabbers and Capitalists. And behind them all the gunboats of England."

Berry pushed the book away. "Gunboats," he said contemptuously.

"Sure. Who d'you think owns this country?"

"The squatters, you just said."

"And what're the squatters? The deputies of English money-lenders. That's where all this dough's coming from that Cabell is spending on fences and stables. There's too much money in England since the Germans began milking the French and got capital for themselves to drive the English out of the world markets, so the English are putting their spare rhino in here. That's why I say gunboats. A few shearers with sparrow guns ain't enough. We'll need every man armed to win a war."

"War!" Berry snorted.

"And then what?" Wagner said. "It'll be all rosy till you and me start being bosses and the bosses start being shearers."

"It won't be like that at all," Coyle said. "That's the English way. There's a history behind that — a long history of aristocrats and serfs. So we've got to drive the English right out of here and do it our way."

"What's *your* way?"

"Not *my* way — the Australian way. That's the way we eat here out of a common dish. The way the lags used to share a bit of rotten meat with a bloke that had none. The way a man goes into the bush with his mate and they stick together."

"To hell with your schemes," Berry said with increasing irritability. "I want to own my own land."

"All right. But to-morrow you'll be thinking my way. Wait till they bring in a few more Chows and kanakas and immigrants to cut down your cheques."

"There's getting too many dagoes and new-chums in this country, that's a cert," Wagner admitted.

"Just wait a bit then and they'll bring in more. Like they took shanty Irish into England. Then you'll see the triangle back in the streets and another hanging judge on the bench."

"Not in this country, by Christ," Goggs said.

"You've forgot how this country began," Coyle said. "Ain't we the sons of men and women it happened to. I saw the scars on my old man's back. So did you, Goggs. And Cabell's one of them that helped to put 'em there. He was an overseer where my old man was a lag. The sort who'd do anything to a man. Because he's an aristocrat, an English aristocrat — that is a bloke born with a right to look down on you like dirt. Don't you see — that's his guts. Getting the land isn't enough. We've got to get rid of everybody with that aristocratic superior guts before you can have the proper mateship, like there was between lags, between diggers, and between two men in the bush."

"Well, my old man wasn't flogged," Berry said. "He came of his own free will."

"He came because he couldn't stand it in England any more. He came because he was tired of the English way."

"The English way. Bah, you can't get your old man's back out of your

head,” Berry said. “But that's finished. It's all different now.”

“You think so?” Coyle rooted in his pocket and brought out a newspaper cutting. “Listen to this. ‘A beautiful place is England — in a coal mine,’ ” he read. “ ‘This is how a miner evidences it. “I have to hew coal one foot ten inches to two feet thick lying on my side for hours, all but naked in some inches of water and a sort of shower bath from the roof, picking and shovelling as best I can. This is not the place to sit down and take lunch or dinner in, so we work on except for having a sup of cold tea or a bit of bread and water till it is time to leave the pit. And I have been in other mines so full of gas that the trail of the safety lamp left a blue flame behind as you moved the light.” ’ That's the England, home and beauty they're always cracking up,” Coyle said. “The place where they transported blokes to Australia for asking for just more than enough to buy dog's food for themselves and kids. The place where they passed an Act of Parliament that when a man left his work for three days he could be branded on the chest with the letter B, and if he ran away they branded S on his cheek with a red-hot iron. And afterwards when they formed unions they had to meet in the pitch dark and call each other by numbers instead of names so that the police pimps wouldn't know them.” He smiled a thin smile which tightened the skin on his face and sharpened his sharp features. “It wasn't much different from that a few years ago here and it won't be any different if the Cabells have their way. Because they're tying their Jew-gold bonds of Empire round this place and they'll make it another little England. And that's why we'll have to get rid of Cabell and England if we want to keep Australia.”

Wagner laughed. “Stick your republics. Three meals a day — that's all I want.”

But Berry flared up against Coyle's entranced gaze watching him closely. “The stink of the jailyard's on everything you say.”

“Sure. Sure,” Coyle said quietly. “That's what I'm telling you.”

“To hell with you then. It don't concern honest men.” He stood up to leave the table, wiped his hand roughly over his face, sat down again, and looked round in a dazed way at the company.

Coyle took out his pipe and began to fill it. “Typhoid coming on, Jack? Must account for the rotten way you shore them hoggets this morning.”

When the last flock, bleeding at the noses, had bolted through the gates and fled on jerky toy-legs back to its paddock, and the shearers had taken their cheques and departed, leaving the viscous silence of days as blank as the stare of the animal they rose and set upon to ebb once more about the homestead, Berry remained behind in the hut and sweated the flesh off his bones with typhoid. On the box beside his bunk was a plate of greasy, untasted food, a mug of water with two dead flies floating on it, and a candle in a rum bottle. Larry came in the evening and lit the candle.

When Berry could talk Larry argued with him. “Wasn't it right what

Coyle said? *His* shed made you sick, but will he make it up to you for the cheque you lost at Black Rock?"

"It isn't right you talking about your old man that way," Berry said. "It's the bad ideas Gursey put in your head when you were a kid."

"Gursey was right. He said I wasn't the same as my old man. I'm not. I feel it here." He pounded the pit of his stomach with his fist. "I won't ever be a squatter. I'm on the men's side."

"No, no, one day you'll be a rich squatter."

"I'm damned if I will."

"He's your old man," Berry said. "You can't go against your old man. It's not natural. I don't blame Coyle. His old man was a trouble-maker and a convict. It's in his blood. But you — I mean — I mean. . . ."

"I know what you mean," Larry mumbled.

He left next day because he was due at Boondarooba, fifty miles along the road to Pyke's Crossing, and could not afford to lose another thirty pounds. The same day Cabell returned from a trip to Brisbane with a pair of white Sumatran ponies, frisky and sleek like kittens, and a little rubber-tyred gig, enamelled, with yellow leather cushions. It had been a good season and he had bought Harriet a present. "Cost me fifty quid apiece," Larry heard his father telling the child, boast-fully, anxiously, in an effort to rouse her from the indifference which hung upon her like the repellent starched petticoats.

"A hundred quid for those fancy horses and he did poor Jack Berry out of half a dollar!" Larry was filled with pity for Berry and all his kind, cheated, like himself, by his father's greed. He was reading a book which Coyle had left with him — *Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George. He would have made little of its long words if the hard, burning rage in his stomach had not illuminated it. How incontrovertibly right it made that rage seem.

He did less brooding now. He liked to watch the bulls fighting when they came down to drink — the young bull and the old bull. The young bull was quicker, the old bull more wily. Their horns crashed and locked and they circled, head to head, thrashing the grass flat. The cows, knee deep in the stream, their images reflected on the slime-painted waters, lifted their heads and watched and bellowed.

"War's the law of the system," Coyle had told him. "War between squatters and shearers, men and bosses, young and old, fathers and sons, the bloody English way and our way."

The old bull manoeuvred the young bull till its feet were in the mud of the bank, then threw up its head and sent the young bull tail first into the water. The cows splashed up on to the bank and the old bull roared and cantered after them.

"He'll try that once too often, that old bull," Sambo said. "He's gettin' older 'n' weaker and the young'un's gettin' older 'n' stronger. One of these

evenings soon he'll wonder what's hit him."

"Soon," Larry thought, looking at the gates of the sunset, unbarred for some climactic advent. "Sooner than he expects."

And then, in a way which nobody expected, which is the way of life, came something to shatter the peace of the valley and the serene maturing of Cabell's designs and Larry's.

Part II: Black Mountain

Chapter One: The Dirtiest Trick

ONE afternoon early in the summer of 1883 Cabell was lounging across the counter of Liam O'Connor's ironmongery store in Pyke's Crossing talking over the prospects of the season with the proprietor, whom he had watched grow from a tow-headed, pippin-faced child, crawling about the dirt floor of a lonely shepherd's hut across the Downs, into the prosperous burgess of a thriving town, no more than a single, tumbledown grog shanty at a river crossing when first he entered it thirty years before. Fencing-wire and rum had made its fortune and the fortunes of the two hundred and eighty O'Connors, wives and offspring, second and third generation, who owned every stick and stone and barrel along its one dusty street.

True, there was a foreigner in the place, a wizened and infuriated Scotchman named David Kyle, who had entrenched himself behind the fly-blown window of a druggist's shop, at the promptings of some suicidal impulse, to flaunt a yard of yellow ribbon on every 12 July and declare, wherever there was an O'Connor within earshot, that he would never rest content till he had eaten a beefsteak off the Pope. To save him from the consequences of these demented challenges the physical strength of many combined O'Connors was often called for. "We wouldn't have nothing happen to the boy," said Danny, head of the tribe and owner of its chief asset, the Travellers' Rest, "for isn't he bound to marry an O'Connor one day and quit larkin' about. There ain't no one else to marry." To which the Scotchman retorted by singing "Boyne Water" in a noteless voice of quavering fury.

It was this voice, shrieking through the suffocating stasis of noon, which now roused Liam O'Connor from behind the counter and made him exclaim, "That's the damn Scotchman. He's been pickin' on them Irish again." He grabbed an axehandle from the counter and hurried out of doors where fifty other round and freckled faces were blinking up and down the street, empty except for the horses tethered outside the Rest, and the Scotchman approaching on feet winged with dust plumes.

People shouted after him. A man began to pursue him, and one or two women, with their aprons thrown over their heads against the sun. As he drew nearer his wild yodellings took form. "Gold!" he was shouting. "Gold!"

Liam ran into the street with his axe-handle raised. "Stop or I'll brain

ye, madman.”

The Scotchman hesitated and his strength drained out. He collapsed panting into Liam's arms and goggled over Liam's shoulder at Cabell, still shouting “Gold! Gold!” in his punctured falsetto.

A crowd gathered.

“Ye've been drinking then, have ye,” Liam said, “or what is it?”

The Scotchman tottered on to his feet. “Gold,” he panted. “I've seen it. The telegram — the sergeant sent it — to the Government in Brisbane. That furrin mon come in the morn — he's wi' the sergeant noo — all the blinds down — he discovered it. Gold! Rich gold! Maggie O'Connor's father, the postmaster — he showed me the telegram — they're leavin' for Cabell Valley immediate — in secret — the Government doesn't want a rush made of it. . . .”

The gabble of voices broke out again.

“Where?” Cabell demanded.

“In yer ain country,” Kyle said. “In Cabell Valley.”

“Impossible!” Cabell said, and outraged by the mere thought that he could have laboured all his years away with a mine of gold undiscovered at his feet, he added, “It's a damn lie. I had a man fossicking all over the valley. Peters his name was. You remember Peters, Liam. He was a friend of your mother. He dug holes all over the place and never discovered anything worth twopence.”

“It's maybe just some blind of yours for leavin' the town and givin' Maggie O'Connor the slip after all,” Liam said, raising his axe-handle. “I've a mind to have the sergeant, me brother-in-law, lock you up for safety.”

But at this moment there was a rattle of hoofs at the end of the street and four horsemen galloped by — the sergeant himself, two troopers, and a man with a flowing white beard leading a packhorse between them.

The crowd gaped, then scattered shouting to their wives and families gathered in doorways, “Gold! They're discovered another Gypsie.”

Five minutes later the window of Kyle's shop was stripped of its goods. Ten minutes later his dilapidated buggy jolted out of the yard and disappeared north in dust. Half an hour later ten horsemen left the Travellers' Rest in the same direction. By this time a Dooley who was married to an O'Connor had had it from a Fagan, who was his third cousin and clerk in the bank, that a man named Larsen had that morning deposited five hundred and sixty-nine pounds' worth of gold-dust at the bank. At sunset a wagon drew away from Liam O'Connor's store loaded with picks and shovels, kegs of nails, tents, axes, and a ton of odd tools. At nightfall only Father Joseph O'Connor and the many Mesdames O'Connor, Fagan, Dooley, Farrel, O'Brien and O'Niell remained in the town. The coach for Brisbane, which Cabell had come to join, stood unharnessed in the yard of the Rest, from the parlour of which emerged

the shrill chaotic flow of women's voices, birdlike in their strange resemblance to reasonable speech.

Cabell loitered in the bar till it was dark, then called for a meal and ate it in the corner of the big room, bleak with unaccustomed emptiness and the reek of stale booze. Twelve-year-old Teresa O'Connor, deputy for her absent father, set the white enamel, two-gallon pot of tea before him. "Ain't you goin' to the gold rush, Mr Cabell?" she asked.

He gave her a malignant stare. "What gold? There isn't any, you fool."

She snatched her hand from the pot. "I mean the gold they discovered at Cabell Valley."

"There isn't any gold I tell you," and when he had wiped the smudged outline of her face from the blackboard of doorway with a fierce sweep of his hand he repeated it to himself, "Duffer rush to catch fools," denying with anxious obstinacy that all the bitterness and disappointment and tragedy of those years might have been spared him if he'd only struck a pick in the right place.

He was a young man when he went to the valley, nearly forty years ago. Why hadn't he discovered the gold then if there was any? Was there an inch of its ground he had not explored with bright eyes always urgently seeking the key to unlock the door of his exile. "I'd've been on to it like a shot." And yet — what was more eminently in the order of things as he had found them than that this wealth, which could have bought him out of exile, should fall into the hands of a pack of wasters who would use it to enrich blackguard publicans.

He jumped up and shouted for Teresa. "Get my horse. I'll ride across the Downs and catch the train."

But at the end of the street, where the bush began like a tidal wave frozen into a wall of menacing green as it curled to crash down and obliterate the town, he pulled his horse back on its haunches and turned in the saddle. Beyond the sporadic chirruping of insects and the gusty rustle of the dry peppertrees the houses lay in hysterical darkness. Over the place hung the rabid air of a gambling-table . . .

The twitter of women's voices paused as he galloped past the Rest again, splashed through the ford, and clattered away north into the hushed night.

"He changed his mind then," Liam's wife said.

"He said there wasn't no gold," Teresa said.

"Nor there won't be none for nobody else now," her aunt said.

Forty miles out he came on David Kyle defending his possessions across the body of his dead horse from a cavalcade of pressingly helpful O'Connors. His ginger side-levers bristled in the dawn like the attenuated pale flames of righteousness. "I'll no be beholden to ye apostate rabble," he shrieked.

Cabell got twenty miles more out of his horse before it knocked up.

Then he had to walk ten miles to borrow another. The infection had spread fifteen miles on each side of the road. Even the grog shanties were emptying. Trees were flat behind the haze of dust: two hundred horsemen were ahead of him. He passed a crowd of pigtailed Chinese, one with a crate of fowls on his head. With sad fatalistic faces they trotted on as though entranced by an approaching doom. Here and there he overtook prospectors, loaded with pick and shovel and rusty tin dish, lured from their fossicking by the rumour of a find. They went forward without haste, disillusioned but helpless automata of hope.

He snatched a mug of tea with one of them at the roadside.

“If ta's gold there we'll all be in time for a pickin',” the man told him. “If ta's nowt what's the use abustin' your guts?”

But to Cabell it seemed that half the population of the state was ahead of him and that they would have time to raze a mountain of gold and melt and sell it before he could get on the spot.

“Bless ye, this isn't the rush,” the miner said. “Wait till ta laads on Gympie and every other payin' goldfield up and down ta country gets wind of it. We'll see somethin' then. Nothin' like a whisper that some'un's found somethin' that looks somethin' like gold to get those softies away from a good livin'.”

Chapter Two: The Rush

THE gold was in one of the gullies among the foot-hills of Black Mountain, a stone's throw from the hole in which Peters, after prospecting for six years with undiminishable faith, had died and rotted to a tiny white skeleton. A creek, shrunk to a shallow gutter in this dry season, twisted through the undergrowth of ferns and vine. Where the rush had halted it swelled into a wide lagoon scaled with lotus flowers. Big staghorns hung from the trees and the maidenhair grew with a lush magnificence to the men's waists. There was a musky trace of ibises on the stagnant air, heavy with the scent of rotting gum-leaves and the intense, evanescent flowers of the tropics. Here no cool breeze ever penetrated through the intricate overlapping of hills, from the midst of which Black Mountain thrust a sugar-loaf head gashed bloodily and covered with cancerous outcrops of black and red rock. On a ridge of this mountain, four hundred feet above the gully, Cabell had shot down a tribe of blacks in the early days. Since then not more than half a dozen white men had come up the steep and stony seven miles from the road, stockmen looking for lost horses or cattle gone wild in the scrub. Cabell's Reach was forty miles away and Narrow Gut, the Jardine homestead and the nearest settlement, nearly ten.

Cabell arrived at eleven o'clock on the second morning after he left Pyke's Crossing, but already the first excitement of the rush was over. Larsen had washed out three pans of dirt to satisfy the sergeant that the field was payable and had marked the twenty-one claims that were to be his reward. Then, red-eyed from sleeplessness, he sat on the edge of the shaft and watched a hundred and fifty of the men who had gathered around him on the road, with bland, impetuous trust, scampering for claims near to his, cursing, quarrelling, hurling themselves into the treacherous undergrowth, numbed by fear of losing their share. Around them the gully preserved its aloof, immemorial silence, in which the ferns and palms had slept their graceful dancer's sleep long, long before there were men to be tricked into mad activity by the illusion of owning rare things. But already, as a forewarning of a new order, the sound of axes, the scent of trampled grass and flowers and earth laid bare, fretted the edges of its tranquillity.

All this was over before Cabell arrived and found the vanguard of the rush, still panting, bleeding, dazed, like somnambulists roughly

awakened from an almost fatal misadventure, seated on their claims or standing hostile guard over the sticks driven into the ground to mark their boundaries. He hurried on and came out in the little clearing which Larsen had made when prospecting and secretly working his find in the previous two months. There the sergeant, a trooper beside him, was sitting on a pile of saddles and listening to a dispute between two men. The sweat, drying from his cheeks, had left the dust in leprous patches. It had soaked through his boots, his cap, and the shoulders of his tunic. His hands, holding his unlighted pipe, lay heavily on his fat legs as he listened to the wrangling of the men with the diffused stare of a horse asleep on its feet.

Near by in the shade fifteen or twenty other people waited for the sergeant to decide where they were to scramble for the privilege of erecting their grog shanties and stores. Six O'Connors, representing almost every branch of trade and commerce, whose supplies were slowly approaching by pack-horse and wagon, sat their horses apart from the rest in a clannish solidarity of freckled faces cast to the same grave mould.

But others were already doing brisk business. Ike, the Syrian hawker, an itinerant of boundary-riders' and shepherds' huts in the valley, who had fallen in with the rush on his way to Narrow Gut, was busily spreading a slab of tobacco, a bottle, two sticky glasses, and a billy of water on a rock in the shade of a cabbage-tree palm, and soon the men were crowding around to pay two shillings for a nobbler of his vile, anonymous liquor and threepence for a fill of their pipes.

Now that the first excitement was over the hunger and weariness of the long, foodless scamper were savage. Quart-pots bubbled over the fires, the improvident many were going round trying to beg, borrow, or steal the makings of a damper, a trooper was boiling a mess of rice and raisins for the official breakfast. Only one man had brought a rifle. He sold the loan of it to others and they went off looking for birds to shoot. Two or three were chopping down a cabbage-tree palm for its succulent heart, but most who had nothing to eat tightened their belts, dragged their saddles on to their claims, and lay down to sleep out the hours till the first packhorse came. "Perhaps to-night," the O'Connors said.

Cabell pulled into the shade and looked around, wondering what to do now that he had got himself here at such an expense of horseflesh. Vaguely he had expected to see the men carting the gold away in great lumps under his nose, but all the gold in sight was the few unimpressive grains of it in Larsen's dish, which lay neglected beside the heap of police saddles, arousing a splutter of tired curses from the sergeant's cook every time he stumbled over it on his way to the fire. The owner of it was kneading a damper on the back of his shovel with gluttonous concentration, the discoverer, one might have thought, of some infinitely

precious particle of sustenance in a world famished for food, not for gold.

Cabell became aware of his own hunger then, catching a whiff of bacon frying and tea on the boil. They belonged to a man in bowyanged moleskins and cabbage-tree hat, who sat on his heels quietly smoking a corncob pipe in the shade, swagman by the looks of him. He caught Cabell's eye on the billy as he hooked it off the fire, took a second look at him, and said, "How about a mug, mate? Thirsty?"

Cabell climbed down and tethered his horse to the tree behind which the swaggie was hiding these preparations for a good breakfast.

He poured Cabell a pannikin and took the billy for himself. "Ain't you Cabell from up the valley?" he asked.

Cabell nodded.

"Thought I spotted you. What d'you think of it, eh?" He jerked his thumb towards the clearing. "You been here twenty, thirty years . . ."

"Nearer forty," Cabell corrected sourly.

"All right, forty. And the dirt's been here a couple of million and it all has to be settled before 11 a.m. on 15 November 1883, or whatever the day is."

"Twelve o'clock will be a bit too late for somebody."

"Don't you believe it. I saw them washing off this morning. There's a lot of gold around here. But I doubt if there's much in this gully. Just shallow stuff, poor man's stuff."

"You've got a claim?"

"Not on your life. No, sir. I got no claim. And don't want none." He buried his face in the billy and swallowed long draughts of scalding tea.

"What're you here for then?"

The swaggie laughed. He had an engaging laugh, deep from the pit of his thick chest, which was burnt, like his face, the colour of mahogany. "God knows that," he said, wiping his mouth on the palm of his hand and reaching for the bacon, "because it takes a man a long time to learn nothing, I suppose, even when he started learning it like I did at the age of twelve in a tough house like the Sacramento."

"You were in California?"

"Yessir, I was. In the blessed year of forty-nine. That's why you'll hear them call me Yankee Jack. Yankee Jack Cash — that's my monniker, but I was born in Surry Hills, Sydney, forty-six years ago." He lifted a rasher out of the boiling fat, dropped it into his open mouth, then chewed it slowly with his mind on something else, as though it was cold meat he was eating. "Yes, Lucky Yankee Jack," he said. "Yet I been on every field from the Ovens to the Towers and never raised more than enough gold to buy me a blind to forget it. No, gold ain't my lucky stone."

Cabell, waiting for his own tea to cool, paid a polite and drowsy inattention. The two miners were still wrangling with the peevish and

reiterative monotony of the tired. The sergeant no longer listened. He was settling business with the tradesmen, who had marked out their sites somewhere back in the scrub, and trying to finish his arrangements for the rush to come and get a few hours' rest. Many of the men, spuriously exhilarated by food, were beginning to sink shafts in their claims. They were new hands at the game. Those who had been at a rush before either busied themselves cutting bark for a gunyah or slept, or sat waiting for someone to start work in the claim next door to see whether it was worth digging up their own.

The heat flowed in glutinous waves from the high wall of the gully. Flakes of light crystallized turned to butterflies in the shade. Parrots, brilliant, episodic, fluttered among the trees and made a sound like silver bells carelessly disturbed. Dragonflies played with their own images on the still lagoon, where lotus flowers, crushed from the surface by miners dipping for a drink, burned through the yet clear water as though behind glass. For this last moment in its long history the gully, hence-forth to be known as Larsen's Bakehouse, slept in Edenic serenity; and the men slept in Edenic serenity, too, upon dreams of wealth.

Cabell, worn out now that he had rested a moment, gave in to the tug of the earth's inertia and flopped his back against the tree. "What were you lucky at then?" he asked, now for the first time taking a good look at his host, garrulous and alike unaffected by the stirring events around him and the over-powering heat of noon.

Behind his black beard, as solid with tight, close curls as a lump of carved jet, his big mouth was constantly twitching with vivacious amiability, like an energetic little animal eating its way through a hard rock. It was the only feature which moved in that face, cut to an attractive monkey-ugliness, or rather moulded out of brick-clay and baked hard. His eyes were wide and hard and looked straight out, impervious to the glare. But they were really not like eyes at all, they stared so hard and fixedly, more like two thin sheets of coloured mica behind which his eyes were hidden. Yet there was nothing cunning or secretive about him. On the contrary, the flat squat face was without depth or guile, unless in its up-turned corners his mouth secreted a faint irony.

At a first glance a commonplace character of the bush, which exposed itself in gestures of a simple and innocent frankness. But Cabell had had time to take a second glance over the rim of his pannikin, and was puzzled to fix this man in any simple and innocent class of bush life. His voice was crisp and vigorous, not the voice of a bushman drawling on and on over meandering tracks of thought that petered out, sooner or later, in the vast, uncharted wilderness of day-dream. He had not the soft hands of a shearer, the dandyism of a stockman or horse-breaker, the swagman's air of a broken-spirited straggler from a defeated army for

ever doggedly retreating across the waste. His boots were out at the toes and mended with fencing-wire, but he wore a heavy gold ring on the little finger of his left hand and a gold bracken-leaf tie-pin jauntily in the silk handkerchief around his neck. His hair was brushed into an arrogant scythe of curl over the right eye and his beard was neatly trimmed.

Cabell repeated the question, sharper with interest. "What do they call you lucky for then?"

Cash swallowed the last piece of bacon, wiped the pan around with a piece of damper, swallowed that, and took out his pipe. "Lucky not to be stretched on a hundred-and-thirty-foot Oregon flagpole erected in the name of liberty and justice," he said.

Cabell started. "Oh?"

Chapter Three: Apprenticeship to Life

“YES,” Cash said, glinting his teeth in an equivocal, apelike grin, “justice was pretty rough in San Francisco, but we were a sight rougher, and it took more than those cat-lap hicks from the East knew to hold us. There was maybe a couple of hundred coves from this side the Pacific hanging round the El Dorado in Kearney Street or hatching mischief in Sydney Valley or Little Chile. Not many of that mob was looking for a place to dig gold out with a shovel and sweat. They knew a better lay. They were some of the flashest bugs from London and all old fakirs. Stuck together, too — been mates in a hotter place. If you wanted to get in a vault there was plenty of bricklayers to tell you how, and plenty of blacksmiths to cut a key for you, and plenty of clerks to tell you where the dough was planted. There was even a Sydney-sider looking after the lawful property of the hard-working frock-coats of San Francisco. If you couldn’t make a do of it with all those outside pals there was always a bumboat in cooee with a couple of willing Australian arms to pull you off to an Australian ship.” He stroked his beard where drops of grease from the bacon were beginning to harden in waxen icicles and winked. “Come the night when I wanted one of those boats myself. . . .”

He shifted his hard stare from the fire to Cabell’s face and examined him coolly for several seconds. “No saying what you blokes in frock-coats will do when your pocket’s been touched,” he said, and grinned derisively back at Cabell’s tight mouth through the gossamer of his pipe smoke. “They took my old man up a lane once and cut his ears off. But he was a right smart cove and they never laid hands on him again till the night I’m speaking of. They were coming back from church and caught him lugging the safe out of old MacPherson’s warehouse, with me holding the horse ready for him. All Vigilantes they were — hot for law and order and topping off a few Sydney Ducks for an example. But my old man had been near stretched so many times he didn’t set any store by threats. ‘Just you keep your glib shut,’ he says, ‘and we’ll be home in bed in half an hour. These fancy traps ain’t got the bone to kill their own chats.’ They’d got us into a house by that time. ‘You better confess,’ they said, ‘and we won’t make it so hot for you.’ ‘Kiss me backside,’ says me old man. ‘We’ll hang you,’ they said. ‘You couldn’t hang wall-paper,’ says the old man.

“And sure enough they looked a damn sight whiter round the gills than

he did. 'Look at 'em,' says the old man. 'They look the dead speaking spit of hangmen, now don't they?'

"But I was listening to something else. A sound like a beetle crawling on paper. It was getting louder. I took a look behind me through the window and saw the street outside crowded with people, standing there not talking, just moving their feet impatient in the dust. 'I wish we hadn't gone near that place to-night,' I says to the old man. 'Aw, stop snivelling,' he says. 'I never been hanged yet.'

"And things did change a bit brighter then because there was a bit of a lull and one bloke blows his nose and says, 'Well, gentlemen, if there's a reasonable doubt . . .' He was a little fat cove who kept a draper's shop and his collar had gone like a bit of wet bread round his neck. 'I, for one,' he says, 'would never agree to topping off a man unless . . .' But while they're hanging in the wind up jumps a fellow called Barrett, a real nasty looking bastard. 'What's the use beating about the bush,' he says. 'We come here to-night to hang two men, I reckon. Let's get down to business. Call the parson.'

" 'But are we sure enough?' says the fat cove.

" 'I'm sure of one thing,' says Barrett. 'If we don't we'll get laughed out of town.'

"The little fat cove looked out the window — sounded as if there might be two or three thousand beetles there now — and blew his nose. 'Well, yes,' he says, 'perhaps for the public good . . .'

"And then I knew our number was up. In comes the cushion-smiter and starts trying to make my old man pray, but Barrett cuts him short. 'That's enough talk. Get the praying business over. I'm going to hand these men in half an hour.'

" 'Not this youth, surely,' says the parson. 'He's so young.'

" 'Younger the better,' Barrett says. 'Like bugs.'

"So he goes to the window and asks the crowd and the crowd yells, 'Yes, hang 'em both. Chuck 'em down here.'

" 'That's all right. You'll see 'em hang,' Barrett says. 'In half an hour at the Old Adobe. Go and put a block and tackle on the Liberty Pole.'

"With that they cheered and marched off. It took 'em about fifteen minutes to get clear and then Barrett turns round and says, 'Are you ready, gents?' So they grab hold of us and push us downstairs and into the street. There was a wind getting up. I could smell the sea strong. 'Wish to Christ you'd stayed in Australia,' I says to the old man. 'What're you saying, you damned whelp?' says he. 'You know if I stayed in Australia I'd 'a' been hanged.'

"All the Vigilantes were crowding round us now, holding a rope fence round us with about ten men on each side and in front, and half a dozen outriders with carbines. Barrett shoved his gun into my old man's back. 'March!' he says.

“It must've been near two o'clock. The crowd had lit torches. You could see the glow a mile off. Suddenly the engine companies' bells start to toll. Up Sansome Street to California we went, then up Clay and Montgomery to Portsmouth Square. Then my heart come up hot in my mouth. I heard a cooee, and a mob from Sydney Valley rushed out from the side of the street and start pulling the outriders down. But we went on and after a bit the outriders come up and said they shot a man.”

He paused to look in his pipe, knock the ashes out, and fill it again. The sun had moved the shade away from him and its flails beat down on his back and bare head now. He did not notice. Sitting there unwearyingly on his heels he seemed, against the background of his story, encased in an invisible mail of imperviousness to, more than mere discomfort, all possible vagaries of a reckless destiny.

Cabell, man of order and property, hardened against him, instinctively recognizing the eternal soldier of fortune, race-course tout to-day, jailbird to-morrow, and strutting gentleman of brilliant means the day after, but through all of them glazed over with this impervious, because contemptuous, fortitude to change and disaster. Still, he had had too many troubles in his own life not to admire fortitude and envy it. “Well, what then?” he said.

“One thing about that night,” Cash said, “I got finished with dying, if you know what I mean. I mean I died fifty times crossing Portsmouth Square, and after that living was like getting a second run for your money. It's just so much for nothing, so you don't worry about losing it again. That's why my old man took it so easy. He'd slept in the condemned cell twice and been pardoned. I'd begun to hang back, but he only cursed harder. The mob was all around us. They sounded like a lot of niggers singing — you know, without a tune. And then we come round the corner all of a sudden and there was the hundred-and-thirty-foot Oregon flagpole and another mob around it with torches, holding the rope ready. We stopped then, and Barrett tried to get hold of the noose, but the cove that had it didn't want to give it up. He held it in both hands close to his chest and kept his eyes on me. So they had to crack him on the head with the butt of a gun to get it off him.

“Barrett looked at it and tried it, with the mob waving their torches and yelling, ‘Put it on, Barrett. Don't waste time. Put it on the old bloke first. Put a torch to him. Burn the dog.’ And just at that moment somebody grabbed my shoulder. It was the little fat bloke, the draper. He was hanging on to my shoulder breathing hard. His face looked like a lump of lard melting. I saw he was going to be sick and gave him one shove and he staggered back and fell and they walked over him.

“When I looked round Barrett was holding the noose up over the old man's head. I thought, ‘This is the stone end,’ and stopped feeling scared. The mob, and the torches, and the horses rearing and kicking hell out of

the mob all got mixed up, and I felt a bit lushy and as if it was nothing to do with me anyway. Barrett had hold of the old man by the beard and was pulling the noose on. They'd made it a bit small so it took all the skin off his nose. He put his hand up and felt his nose and yelled something, and then he stumbled suddenly and went on his knees and somebody started to shout, 'Look out. He's escaping. They got him by the legs.' I looked down, and sure enough there was somebody, some Sydney Duck, had crawled up in the dark and got my old man by the boot and was trying to pull him out under the rope fence, with Barrett white as a sheet pulling the other end of the chit and my old man's head in between with his tongue hanging out and wagging like a long, red leaf — like the leaf round the end of a bunch of young bananas. It looked nearly six inches long and I expected to see his face turn inside out any minute. He was hanging on to the noose too and they were jabbing at his hands with a torch trying to make him let go, and then he let go and Barrett looked over his shoulder and yelled, 'Every lover of liberty and good order lay hands on the rope,' and about fifty of them grabbed hold of the loose end and my old man went up the pole like a rocket, hung with his legs in the light for a moment while they got another grip, then disappeared into the dark."

His pipe had gone out again. He stowed it under his bowyang, and drank a few mouthfuls of lukewarm tea from the billy. The afternoon was settling in now with a stir of birds rousing from the midday heat and the rasp of insects, like the audible brazen clang of the sunlight striking down on the rocky walls of the gully.

There was a commotion in the bushes and Ike, the hawker, appeared, leading a miserable pantomime horse with a cloud of flies round its head like a nimbus.

"Sold out, Ike?" Cash asked.

"Ah, Yankee, I sell too chip." He began to whine in a thick, slightly rancid voice. "Zat's my trouble."

"That's all our trouble," Cash said. "Still, if good rum was cheaper than kerosene and lampblack I bet you'd still use kerosene and lampblack. You're just made that way."

The Syrian bobbed his head over a pair of intent, viperous eyes and grinned, "Yis, Yankee."

"Where're you sneaking off to now? Just stole something?"

"No, Yankee. I jist go bringa bifstek." He waved down the gully. "Plenty more come. Plenty hungry. I bringa bifstek to-morrow."

"Public benefactor," Cash said.

"Yis, Yankee." The Syrian flashed his vindictive glance between them and went on.

"There's a shrewd-head," Cash said. "You wouldn't catch him swinging a pick after gold that mightn't be there. They reckon he owns a street of

houses in Brisbane.” He leant forward and touched Cabell's knee. “You weren't thinking of navvying in this sweat-house, were you?”

“I'm not here for the scenery,” Cabell said.

“I always heard you were a shrewd-head too.” Cash laughed. “But perhaps you don't know goldfields like I do.” He nodded past the tree. “Look at those poor plugs digging. How much gold d'you think they've got? Nothing. And not likely to. No, Cabell. I could lay you — both of us, that is — on to a better thing than that.”

Cabell jerked his head round with the exaggerated turn necessary to focus his one eye. The hard confidence in the eyes of the other repelled and alarmed him, but attracted him too.

“My face mightn't appeal,” Cash said, “but my name ought to. Then there's my luck.”

“Yes,” Cabell said, hedging, “but you didn't finish your yarn.”

“Neither I did.” He swung back on his heels again. “But there's not much more. While everybody was looking up at the pole, jerking about like a rod with a big fish on it, someone reached over and cracked me on the head with a torch and laid me out. I felt a lot of feet around me kicking and then I didn't know where I was till I come to running down Clay Street for the lick of my life. The bells were still tolling. I just kept on running towards the smell of the sea . . .”

Cabell grunted. “You were damned lucky.”

“A lot are lucky,” Cash said, “otherwise a lot more would go up the pole.”

“Eh? Lucky? Yes, yes, you're right there.”

“So with my luck and *your* luck we ought to get along,” Cash said. “Is it a deal?”

Chapter Four: Partners

THE partnership began with an innocent transaction in beef, mutton, flour, tea, molasses, and tobacco.

“To-morrow,” Cash said, “nobody will be thinking about gold except to spend whatever they've got of it or expect to get on tucker. By breakfast they'll be ready to sell their grandmother to a Chow for a handful of bird-seed.”

So, with the aid of Cash, Cabell sold meat at eightpence a pound, flour for two shillings a pint, and tea by the spoonful before Tim O'Connor could bring a load of steer beef from Narrow Gut and the packhorses arrived at sunset next day. He rode home with two pounds' weight of gold in his boot and his confidence in Cash was much deeper.

Cash inspired confidence. The miners liked him. After a bit, when the gold began to flow, the Cabell Valley Goldbuying Agency and General Store opened its doors on Larsen Street with Cash as the amiable and hard-fisted manager. The place was always full with a roaring crowd — men for the most part in cord trousers, red shirts, and long California hats, the regular miners from Gympie, the Palmer, and Charters Towers, from Ballarat and Bendigo, even from New Zealand — wild spenders and simple fellows, simple as children, craving bright gewgaws, eye-glasses, and drinks in silver-topped bottles.

“True scales and rum pretty well all rum, that's what fetches 'em,” Cash told Cabell.

“That fellow Kyle doesn't trouble himself much about whether his scales are true or not,” Cabell grumbled. “I bet he makes a couple of pennyweights on every ounce.”

“One night they'll kick Kyle down Larsen Street into the lagoon,” Cash said. “Then you'll admit it was a lucky day you met me.”

“What d'you mean?”

Cash only laughed. Cabell's rampagings didn't worry him. “Patience, man. Who's raking it in as fast as you?” He ran his fingers through a pile of gold-dust which he was weighing and packing into little chamois-leather bags for Cabell to take in the night coach to the bank at Pyke's Crossing. “Ten bob on every ounce you buy, 200 per cent on everything you sell.”

“Yes, yes.” Cabell walked to the door and looked out. The ferns, palms, and maidenhair were gone. The trees were gone, cut down for

firewood or timber or bark. Everything green was gone, and the earth lay bare and mauled, wasting in an arid miasma of dust. There was a kind of gratuitous evil in the hasty ugliness of the scene — the holes, abandoned and half-filled with water by a shower of rain, the muddy piles of sludge at the edge of the ochreous lagoon, the clumsy miamias of bark and calico sprawling across the slopes of the gully, more like kennels than human habitations, the sardine tins and broken bottles at their doors, and the stench they breathed of human sweat and human garbage — as though the place had been mutilated, not by men strong and brave and steady in a decent cause, but by terrified ravishers, clutching and demented. The beastly mark of this fear was on everything and everybody, on the miners digging in the earth, afraid that they would not find gold, afraid that the gold they found would peter out; on the faces of men hearing about a new find up the gully, afraid to leave what they had, afraid of missing something good. It was as though a jocular and infantile god of Chance had been given this square mile of earth and the two thousand men on it to play with. Under his paw there could be no certainty, peace, or contentment.

The fear had bitten fatally deep into Cabell's susceptible heart. Here was a store of riches momentarily dwindling, slipping through his fingers — such wealth as he had never imagined within his reach. So easily to be come by, so easily to be lost. Henceforth he would be inescapably chained to this adventitious stone, plagued by the thought that under the slow grass of his pastures gold might lie waiting to enrich someone else, lacerated by regrets and a sense of colossal injustice.

“Patience! Damn it all, Cash, I've been walking round this stuff for the best part of my life, drudging a few miserly quid off the backs of sheep when I might have been . . .” A vision of fields ploughed into straight furrows rising peacefully to the skyline of an English evening confronted him out of the broken earth.

“Might've been!” Cash said. “What's the use thinking of might've beens.”

“I might've been a different kind of man, that's what I mean. A lot of things wouldn't have happened.” He gestured towards the miners scurrying up and down the gully. “I feel as if they've robbed me of everything I wanted — confound them.”

Cash stroked his beard. A dribble of smoke seeped through it like a rich, blue liquor he was wringing from the hair. “Trouble with you, Cabell, is you're . . .” A word eluded him and he continued to stare at Cabell's back and ponder. “Blokes say you're hard as nails — think of nothing but money. But it might be better if you did think of money just as money, I mean. But you don't. It's not just money in your brain.”

“No, no, it's not the money.”

“You put me in mind of a bloke,” Cash hitched his chair around. “He

was pretty tough too — had that reputation. Men were civil to him where men aren't usually civil, but behind his back they reckoned he was mean. Mean and inhuman. No more feeling than jerked beef's got juice. A blackbirder out of the Mary River — that was his line. Chuck a cargo of coons in chains overboard as soon as spit in the sea. And all the time that bloke was in love with a shielagh about half his age down in Sydney. He hadn't even spoken to her and she didn't know he existed. Saw her in a theatre one night and fell in love. Only once, mind you, and he used to go and stand outside her house for hours in the hopes of seeing her again. He was a bank clerk on thirty bob a week, and she was Sir Somebody Something's daughter. So he chucked his job and went north to make enough money to marry her. Reckoned he had eight years. He had a crazy old ketch you nearly went through the deck of when you walked about, leaked like a sieve. I don't know how he bought it, probably robbed the bank for a start. Anyway he made money — hand over fist. I went one trip with him. Nobody else would. And he told me about the tart in Sydney. Tears come in his eyes. This bloke they called Bill the Body-Snatcher. Imagine that. The day before I saw him go and shoot up a chief who wouldn't trade any boys, and here he was blubbering about her 'beautiful raven locks,' or something of the sort."

Cabell turned away impatiently. He was getting used to Cash pulling his leg.

"No, but wait a bit," Cash said. "He went back to Sydney. Sold his boat and bought a new pair of flash duds and washed the smell of coons off his hands. And what'd he find? Of course the shielagh had married. She had a right to, but he didn't think so. He got into the house and beat up her husband and called her every kind of bitch under the sun. He would've done her in too, had hold of her by the throat when they came in and rescued her. She didn't know who he was from Adam and nobody knew what he meant by saying that she was responsible for him killing and enslaving decent coons, so they put him in a rathouse. But he wasn't mad. He wasn't sorry for what he'd done to her either, only wished he'd done worse. You couldn't get it into his head. He was . . . ah yes, infatuated. That's it, infatuated. That's what you put me in mind of — an infatuated bloke." He nudged Cabell gently. "It's not that tart over your place, is it?"

"What tart?"

"The one with whiskers. I saw her the other day. She looked at me as if I made her mouth water."

"Ah," Cabell said brightening, "then you saw my little girl too, did you?"

"That funny looking kid dressed up like . . ." He checked himself. "Yes, I saw her in the jinker. Pretty."

"Too pretty for this hole," Cabell said. "I'm sending her home to

England. That's what I need money for now, if you want to know. Not for myself — for her.”

“Some bloke'll be lucky,” Cash said, packing the last bag of gold into a sweat-stained valise and snapping the lock on it.

“Yes,” Cabell said, “some lucky young devil,” and sighed. Again the grimy chaos of dirt and toiling men faded and left him staring at the ever more vivid picture of a girl and a boy clinging to each other under a canopy of lilac blossoms.

“That reminds me,” Cash was saying, “you ought to keep an eye on that other kid of yours.”

“What other kid?”

“The little fat one. He was down at the races with Shaftoe last Saturday. I don't like that kind of crook.”

“I know. I know,” Cabell said. Then his eye lighted on the bag and he picked it up. “How much?”

“About nine hundred quids' worth. Buying's been good.”

“Ah!” He balanced the weight of it in his two hands, slightly huddled, turning his predatory beak and staring eye from Cash to the open door and back to the bag like an old jealous hawk. “Ah!”

By the middle of February there were three thousand men on the field. Larsen's Bakehouse was a town now. Twenty miles off across the valley you could tell where it lay from the clouds of dust always whorling redly up under Black Mountain. In Larsen Street there were ten grog shanties, four general stores, a bank, butchers' shops, embowered in rusty leaves, one for each station in the valley, and a post office where a wild-eyed postmaster received the mailbags from the coach, dumped the contents into a heap on the floor, and rushed back to his claim yelling, “Mail's in. Help yourself.”

Burrowing, indomitable, destructive, like a plague of insects that would soon eat the place out and depart, the men swarmed in the gullies, along the vanishing, viscous creek, and about their tentative homes and resorts. Day and night the creak of drays, caulked up lest a handful of their load escape, carrying dirt to the creek; the crack of whips urging wagons and packhorses up and down the stony road to the valley; the shouts of men; the agglomerate mad roar in the pubs; the clang of blacksmiths' hammers sharpening picks; the melancholy wails of drunken blacks enriched by selling bark and firewood; the hysterical gabble of Chinese, working over deserted tailings, since they were forbidden to take up claims of their own, with the multitudinous and incomprehensibly nourishing industry of white ants in a dry log; fights; celebrations around a bucketful of champagne; and above everything the rustle, like a quiet sea, of gravel in the cradles at the creek-side.

These were the lawless days. A fight on St Patrick's Day, which began through Kyle strolling into the Miners' Arms, calling for Scotch whisky,

and whistling “Boyne Water” reflectively on his way out, ended with everybody going down to set fire to Chinatown. Next morning Sergeant Flaherty arrested Kyle on a charge of feloniously wounding. The Sergeant had lost the top joint of his right-hand forefinger, and he gave evidence that Kyle had bitten it off and swallowed it. The O'Connors had to use their influence again.

Two miners had an argument about a shovel and fought a duel around a shed with shot-guns. The fight went on all day until one of them threw a jam tin with a plug of dynamite in it. When they were both recovered with brandy, the owner of the shed took them down and threw them in the lagoon.

A miner came in and spread a rumour that he had found gold in a gully about two days' journey away. At once there was a rush to the new prospect. The miner looked over the deserted claims and jumped the best. Legally he was entitled to it, but a week later the man who had left it returned with his friends, and the claim-jumper would have been lynched only he took refuge in Cabell's store. Cabell recognized the man who had given him a cup of tea when he was riding up from Pyke's Crossing. Cash soothed the mob. The claim-jumper's name was Custard, a north countryman with a mean, pinched face and a cunning eye. He knew a lot about mining fields. He told Cabell that hundreds of pounds' worth of gold was being stolen from Larsen's claim and sold to the Chinese. Cabell gave him a job. Soon Cabell was buying the stolen gold.

It was midsummer now. The ragged shard of sky over their heads was the colour of sand. At midnight the rocks were still warm. The miners awoke and looked out and saw the stars. Reassured they dropped off to sleep again. In the day a distant rumble paralysed them, and they stood, faces uplifted, their uproar hushed with an uncanny, insect-like spontaneity. From across the ridges to which they had driven it flowed the waiting silence of the bush, where birds and cicadas were hushed like themselves in expectation of something hovering behind the hills to the north-east. And then, more clamorous than ever, more fiercely burrowing, indomitable, and destructive, they returned to work. In the afternoon a black cloud thrust an edge over the valley and withdrew behind Black Mountain to make the stars shudder with the St Vitus's twitch of its lightnings.

But at last, inevitably, the rain came — the cloud-burst of the wet season that lifted rivers twenty feet in a night and turned the bone-dry valley to an islanded lagoon. Just before dawn the creek broke through their dam and rushed down Larsen's Bakehouse like a fury bent on cleaning the valley of their pollution. At sunrise the sky was cloudless, and the only assurance that they had not heard it all in a bad dream was the broad ribbon of creek flowing with a soft purr of satiated anger. The piles of dirt that might have made them rich men were gone, with a

blacksmith's forge, the road to the valley, and a few Chinamen. Their sluices and cradles had disappeared too and their shafts were flooded. The rain seemed to have washed a thick fur of rust off the sky but it had only cleaned the air.

The grog shanties did good business that day.

The storm that night was longer and more savage. It razed bark humpies, pounded the roof off the Ningpo station's butcher shop and left sides of beef buried in the mud a quarter of a mile away, scoured the earth from the treeless gully as a knife cuts butter, washed a side out of Cabell's slaughter-yard and stampeded fifty prime stores into the hills, then settled down into its well-known perpendicular drizzle, which cased off of an afternoon to let the sun steam the marrow out of every living bone in Larsen's Bakehouse. The green bark walls of the humpies buckled like paper in a fire and the town fell to pieces about its soaked and dejected inhabitants. Flour caked in its bags, tools rusted, the creek crept farther across the gully, whirling more and more of the precious unbound earth away, and finally an epidemic of fever began. The carpenter turned from making cradles to making coffins and David Kyle from taking the miners down with crooked scales to tramping the flooded gully night and day with physic for the sick, a top-hat on his head and a Bible under his arm, to give a "decent Chreestian burial" wherever it might be needed by the way. "Earning merit," Cash said, against the time when there would be more gold to buy.

Cabell earned merit too. He got a drayload of beef through bog and torrent and landslide, and half-starved miners and miners' wives poured from the hovels and mobbed him, women in gunny-sacks for skirts, children, men shaking with fever whom a few weeks before he had seen in his store with nuggets and gold-dust, overbearing with success. The sight of them now scared him. Not because he was afraid they would rush his dray and rob the beef he expected to get high prices for, but because of their abject lack of spirit to do more than stumble along beside the dray and beg. So potent was the ever-imminent malice of Chance. He trembled for his own fortunes. To placate evil powers he distributed twenty pounds' worth of beef.

They cheered him. "A thousand blessings go with ye," an old woman called.

"Go to blazes," Cabell muttered, and drove on, calculating how much more he would have to wring out of his customers to get back that twenty pounds.

Chapter Five: Sambo Looks for the Stores

THE store was locked up. Cash, as usual of late, was over the road at Joe O'Connor's Golden Sunrise, a rickety shack with a tattered calico sign now rain-smudged. The patrons were not making so much noise to-day, and as he backed the wagon up to the door and took the tarpaulin off, Cabell could hear Cash roaring out one of his yarns.

"I only had fever once," he was saying, "when I was gullyraking with a mate in the mountains at the back of Richmond, down south. We had a mob of horses planted. Then me and my mate went down with fever together. I couldn't hardly move an eyelid and the only living thing in fifteen miles was our dog. We kept him starved and chained up in the hut to make him savage. And wasn't he, by Christ! Turn your back and he'd be up on it like grease lightning. I must've been out to it about eight days. I lost count. Used to stagger up and get a drink and tear my duds out of the mongrel's teeth and fall down and lie there dreaming he was eating me. And by God when I came to and looked round damned if he hadn't. Not me, but my mate. He'd slung his hook and the dog had chewed his right leg clean off."

Their interest was lethargic. He gave them up and lurched to the door to look at the rain, like a great rat slowly eating the town away. Up the street a wagon, with a dead bullock beside it, was bogged to the axletrees and abandoned. Outside Kyle's Aberdeen Emporium a youth was auctioning picks and shovels. "'Ere ladies and gents, we 'ave a bran' new pick, shovel, and cradle — never turned an ounce of gold. Carried all the way from Pyke's Crossing on this 'ere bloke's back, ladies and gents. A pick and shovel to start a market garden with and supply the Chows with greens, ladies and gentlemen. 'Ere's your chance." A week ago a pick and shovel would have brought twenty-five shillings the set. Now no one would bid even five.

Cash scowled at the wreckage of the town. The scene, no longer pregnant of that sensational action in which his spirit found its only assurance of being, made him restless. "Dead as meat," he muttered, and staggered through the mud to the shelter of the Goldbuying Agency, where he found Cabell, to whom all action, all toil and sweat and violence, had long ago become slightly unreal, dreamlike, against the conviction of the fantasies they served, hard at work unloading his dray.

"Here," Cash said, "it's a caution to snakes in this dump. I'm clearing

out. Give me my dough and we'll call it quits."

"Clearing out?" Cabell's jaw went down. Why, Cash was his lucky token. Hadn't he prospered more than ever before in his life with this man at his side? Besides, Cash's clearing out must mean that the gold was nearly done. "But there's a ton of gold here yet," he protested. "Larsen told me. He says the top's hardly been scraped off."

"To hell with the gold. I've got enough. I want a change of scenery."

"I'll give you a cheque to-morrow," Cabell hedged. He hoped Cash might be sober and reasonable by then. For, all other considerations apart, the business would suffer if it lost Cash, a man knowing in the ways and means of goldfields — how to spot doped gold, how to coax a miner with a tight fist on his bag of dust, whom to back with credit, whom to watch.

"See you do," Cash said, then laughed and slapped Cabell's shoulder. "Old Rusty Guts, eh? Well, I reckon you're not a bad bastard, Cabell. I've seen plenty worse and better thought of."

And there, strangely enough, was not the least of the reasons which made Cabell regret losing Cash. He liked nobody and nobody liked him. When he walked into a bar men stopped talking and looked round at him. He knew they called him skinflint and Rusty Guts, and that there was a new generation in the land who had never known the old days and therefore could never, never understand. That young prig James for example. Dressed up like a sore finger and going round the house with his nose in the air. He'd been hearing things from a parcel of nincompoops at school, and now he was beginning to look down his nose at his father. From the loneliness of his shame and bad conscience Cabell took refuge in the robust amorality of Cash, who had seen so much life and concluded that he was not a "bad bastard" after all. Not that he felt any affection for Cash. That pottery face and derisive eye invited no tributes of gentle regard and Cabell was many, many stressful years past feeling them, past feeling for anything except the kindly phantoms of his brain; but he did feel a sort of gratitude to a man who thought less badly of him than others.

Next day Cash was dead drunk on the floor of the Sunrise. That was better for Cabell's purposes than having him sober. He remained drunk for three weeks, and by that time the first stage in the history of Black Mountain was past. Discouragement, as rabid as hope, had emptied Larsen's Bakehouse. Even many of the regular miners, who knew that there was gold in the place, had departed — a strange legion tied, like Cabell, to no steadfast star and therefore with no use whatever for gold when they found it. A kind of rakish joy in seeking moved their arduous lives, but the treasure itself they fled from at the first excuse as though they were afraid that it would seduce them to quiet days. About fifty of them were fossicking around the hills and another fifty were waiting in

the pubs for the flood to go down. Apart from these only Cabell, Larsen, Ike the hawker, Joe O'Connor, sole remaining representative of his clan, John Flagg the warden, a couple of troopers, some storekeepers, a horde of Chinamen, and Kyle — fixed to the spot not by any faith in its potentialities now but, more obstinately, by the efforts of O'Connors to lure him back to the Crossing — were left under the sagging roofs of the mushroom town. The rain had cleared and the river was still several feet deep over the claims, though it had fallen enough for the old hands to come back from their fossicking and start to potter about the debris when the second phase of the story opened.

That was on a sunny day in April 1884, when Sambo and Monaghan were riding across a spur of Black Mountain in search of the fifty prime stores which had broken out of Cabell's slaughter-yard the night the rains began. They had pulled up in a fern gully, cooled by waterfalls, to rest and light their pipes.

"They bin coming down here for a drink," Sambo said, examining some cattle tracks in the rocky ground. Then he bent and picked up a piece of stone, about as big as his head, which had broken recently from a weatherworn and moss-grown outcrop. "Cripes!" he said, letting the reins slither off his arm. "Stone the crows! Whatya make of that, Mon?"

Monaghan took the stone and examined it, and instinctively held it away from Sambo, reaching over to point at a delicate line of reddish-yellow, veining its crystals like a chain of lightning. "I seed one of these here gold specimens down Larsen's," Sambo said. "If that ain't one . . . Here, give it here, I found it."

"What're you going to do with it?"

"Sell it. Whatya think? Boss'll give you a fiver for that." He gathered his reins and prepared to mount.

"Wait a bit," Monaghan said. "There might be more."

So they tied the horses up and spent the afternoon chipping lumps off the outcrop. Some had gold in them but not much that they could see.

The shadow of Black Mountain, intruding on their rapt research, made Sambo look up and say, "Four o'clock! Cripes! Them stores. Boss'll be sore."

"To hell with the boss 'n' his stores," Monaghan said, then looked at Sambo slyly. "Unless you want to go and look for them. I ain't working for him no more."

"You ain't . . ." Sambo gaped at a changed Monaghan. The sagging lines of his sun-blackened face had tightened as a rope tightens in the dew. His lack-lustre eyes, like the neglected knobs of a door long closed on disused vacancy, were shining and alert, concealing a cunning idea.

But at last it had dawned on Sambo too. "Gawd stiffen the crows. Why, we could start a goldmine of our own!"

"We could," Monaghan admitted grudgingly. "Suppose we *did* both

discover it.”

Sambo was in the saddle. “We oughta be gettin' back soon's we find them stores. Tell the boss . . .”

“Tell *him*! What for?”

“We don't know nothing about goldmines. He'll put us wise.”

“Here, wait a bit. You're barmy. Look, we'll take this,” Monaghan picked up the first piece of rock Sambo had found, “and we'll cover all the rest over in case any of those prospector blokes come bummin' around, and we'll go and tell the warden and no one else, see? Or by Jeez, Sambo, they'll grab it offen us like a dinger grabs the lights offen a bogged cow.”

Sambo glanced round and licked a leathery tongue over his lips. “Cripes, Mon, but the boss'll be dead sore.”

Chapter Six: Waterfall

CABELL *was* angry, but with a wordless, helpless anger when, called from the Reach by an urgent message from Cash, he arrived on the new field, which had depopulated Larsen's Bakehouse as completely as the Bakehouse had depopulated Pyke's Crossing, and found Monaghan, in top-hat, monocle, and new elastic-sided boots, entertaining a select company of advisers to champagne in his tent. The top-hat was once an accessory of David Kyle's "Chreestian burials," and Monaghan had been overcome to discover that it could be his for the mere trouble of signing an IOU. He was sitting in an arm-chair acquired on the same terms from the postmaster, and his tent was stuffed with odds and ends of apparel, furniture, and toilet articles wherewith he fulfilled a lifetime's yearning for commodities hitherto as remote, in the fables of newspaper advertisement, as the Grand Cham's treasure.

When Cabell walked into the tent he was waving an empty bottle and declaiming his plans to a humble audience of shopkeepers: "And none of your lousy twist for me no more. Nothing but the best Manilas, see? Then I'll get married and have a bloke come in and shave me every day and . . . and . . ."

He blinked at Cabell and bobbed his head like a dog that expects to be kicked, glanced round his possessions, so like the jumble of an opulent dream, felt the dreamlike softness of the upholstery under his buttocks, and half rose. But the realistic smell of dust, in the haze of which Cabell looked bodiless and without danger, the rattle of shovels, the shouts, the crash of trees reassured him. His nostrils closed and he pushed his chinless face out defiantly. "Nor I won't eat no more of your maggoty burgoo neither!"

Cabell turned stiffly away and met the eyes of Sambo, modestly drunk behind a heap of bottles. He swung his long equine face from side to side looking for a way of escape, then his jaw dropped and his mouth opened as if habit had taught him that the best way to take the bit was quietly. "Them stores, boss," he said. "They musta got through the Pass. I'll track 'em down to-morrow first thing."

"So you're a miner now, eh, Sambo?"

"Something like that, boss. I ain't rightly got the hang . . ."

"Huh. What d'you think you're going to do with it?"

Sambo fingered the new handkerchief round his neck, looked at a pair

of new boots on his feet, a new hat on the heap of bottles, considered cases of bottles unopened, and scratched his head for an inkling of wants unsatisfied. "I might buy a racehoss."

"A racehorse! Jesus!"

Sambo twisted his handkerchief like a garrot round his neck. "I dunno then. Was you thinking of something, boss?"

Cash steered Cabell into the open air, noisy with the new rush. Here were only hard-bitten miners yet, and they were going to work with deadly expertness to strip the ridge of its trees and ferns. Already Joe O'Connor and Ike the hawker, had grog shanties in full blast, and deformed hovels of bark and wattles marked the future main street of Waterfall Town — Monaghan Street as it was to be called.

"Steady now," Cash said, shaking Cabell roughly. "Take a pull or you'll cruel our pitch."

Cabell took a handkerchief out and wiped his face. "Sambo! Think of it! I remember when he'd never seen a two-story house, and now . . . He's going to buy a racehorse!" He stared vacantly at the tent. "Yes, yes, that's the way it is."

"Stop moaning a second and listen," Cash said and shook a preoccupied attention out of Cabell. "There's a big rush coming, understand? Bigger than Larsen's. Big money. The day before yesterday Sambo found a nugget with nearly five hundred quids' worth of gold in it. When the telegraph sends that round Australia they'll come in thousands. So you better take your finger out."

But Cabell was looking round Sambo and Monaghan's claim, a prospector's claim of twelve men's ground running nearly two hundred yards up the side of Black Mountain. "And all to enrich the first blasted crook that comes along and spins them a yarn!"

"Well?" Cash grinned. "Why shouldn't we be the first . . .?"

As he had foretold, the news of Sambo's find brought a new and bigger rush to the valley: miners who had resisted the first rush, station hands, clerks from the city, their women and children, their tykes and camp-followers, swept on by a snowball story of nuggets lying about on the ground as big as a man's fist, as big as a man's head — as big as hope and imagination. Coming, they met the despondent and footsore fugitives from the Bakehouse. "Go back — it's a duffer," these told them. "The poor sods there are living on grass." And some did turn back, but most came on, and before the winter had settled six thousand people were living at the foot of Black Mountain, which rose from its gullies like an old barnacled octopus asleep on fabulous treasure.

Almost from the start Waterfall was a more solid town than Larsen's. The masses of iron-stained stone cropping from the ridge — most abundant in the Lost Stores Prospect but scattered over nearly the whole mountain-side — which looked to the old miners like quartz containing

plenty of low-grade gold, promised the place a long life. Companies were forming and machinery was on the way to extract this thin peppering of wealth, but in the meantime life seethed about the almost daily finds of nuggets and free gold lying in pockets on the spurs of the hills and their gullies. For half a mile along the erratic creek, dammed hastily with logs and stones but nevertheless evaporating, seeping slowly away, men and women and children were hard at work sinking and panning off. Every one had an assay to talk about, a glittering specimen with which to tempt credit from storekeepers and effort from their own weary bodies. From the first streak of dawn till the quick night came down they slaved with pick and shovel and pan, then sat up till the early hours of the morning hammering the stone to dust in their mortars, for there were no stampers on the field yet. Their shadows crouching on the hessian walls of the humpies or fierily across a doorway, the incessant crunch, crunch, crunch of their thousands of hands slowly turning the skeleton of the earth to powder, made the dark gully seem like some strange Nibelung underworld.

The road wound precipitously three miles from the valley, the last half-mile out of Waterfall a perilous razorback which broke the legs of bullocks and the hearts and whip-handles of their drivers. The wreckage of many wagons was strewn about and many dead bullocks, bloated and hived with blowflies. Precisely at four o'clock every afternoon, as the mercifully early shadow of Black Mountain was spreading across the blistered town, Cobb and Co.'s coach toiled up that boulderstrewn rampart, past the Chinese market gardens — a mirage of incredible green against the barren hills — through China-town — set in pariah isolation but breathing a pleasant perfume of *samshoo* and joss-sticks on the dust-clogged nostrils of the poor devils in the coach — past the hessian and bark and packing-case houses of the outer suburbs, furnished, many of them, with piano and sewing-machine, glazed with windows of piled bottles — turned the summit into Monaghan Street and completed the last two hundred yards of its two-hundred-mile dash from Pyke's Crossing with a bravura gallop past David Kyle's Aberdeen Emporium and Mortuary, past the Ningpo Butchery, Peter O'Connor's Shamrock Hotel, Liam O'Connor's Hardware Store, Joe O'Connor's Golden Sunrise, Jake O'Connor's Auction Mart, the Bank, the Police Station and Lock-up, the Cabell Valley Goldbuying Agency and General Store, Aloysius O'Connor's Produce Exchange, Ike the hawker's Queen Victoria Tavern, Shaftoe's Billiard Parlour and Gymnasium, McFarlane's Butcher Shop, the Grand Opera House — with a poster of a waxworks outside — the Stock Exchange, and the Post Office to draw up, in an all-obscuring cloud of dust, like a pack of red devils that had been chasing it for nearly two days and had at last caught and swallowed it, in front of the Grand Central Hotel of Danny O'Connor.

Grey with grime and weariness the travellers climbed stiffly out and staggered into this the town's choicest resort — a rambling iron building with a long, low roof, which collected the thirsty heat of the day and held it, an adjunct to a bar trade which roared on till early morning, like an oven. How Danny found room for this unending flow of visitors, new hopefuls, travellers from far lands, investors, salesmen for mining machinery, shady company promoters, newspaper correspondents, or the merely curious, was one of the town's major mysteries.

Danny winked. "Now haven't ye never heard tell of the Yankee plan by which you put the first mob to sleep then stand them up in the corner. They don't take up so much room that way. Then you put the next mob off and stand them up till ye've got 'em all stowed away as snug as sardines."

The visitors arrived at the climax of a day of whispers, rumours, finds. From the stout slab walls of the Stock Exchange across the street emerged the roar of the late afternoon trade, the fierce, angry, frantic, outraged, waspish, despairing wails of brokers selling "Hit or Miss," "Southern Cross," "Kyle's No Liability," obliterating even the clatter of pots, the steady noise of guzzle, badinage, quarrel, and conversation in the Grand Central bar, and the moiling struggle about the window of the post office next door where the mailbags from the coach were just being opened.

Perhaps, while they waited for the coachman to finish his phlegm-cutter and unload their baggage from the boot, they would see a gentleman in an unexpected top-hat and a still more unexpected carriage and pair, passing up the street with a florid and amiable looking lady at his side. Driving from the back seat with the box vacant he looked like a drunken coachman taking the cook for a drive — generally pleased with himself but slightly oppressed by anxiety about time, for he kept drawing a tremendous gold watch from his pocket and studying it with puzzled concentration.

"That's Monaghan, the man that found the first nugget," Danny would tell them. "Now owns a quarter-share in the Lost Stores. And that's German Lizzie, his wife, that was one of my best barmaids. And that's a coach he paid a hundred quid for to Miss Ludmilla, from over Ningpo, who had it from her father, the Colonel. And the day Monaghan and Lizzie was married in it the boys put golden shoes on his horses and chained him and his missus together with a golden chain."

They certainly would see Cash, bustling out of the Exchange when the day's business closed and the crowd transferred itself across the street to moisten its rasped throats at the Grand Central. And as he passed, slapping Danny's back or stopping to hitch his trousers and look at the new arrivals if there were any ladies among them, Danny would whisper behind his hand, "Now there's a feller! Owns a quarter-share in the Lost

Stores with Cabell from over the Reach. And there's another feller.” And he would nod over that two or three times with one eye closed. “As me old mother used to say, ‘A man that's got as much as that one on his brain-pan,’ says she, ‘and don't never touch liquor will be hollerin' for a blanket to keep him warm in hell.’ ”

Chapter Seven: Chisellers

HE felt no bad conscience when he set about chiselling Sambo and Monaghan out of their claim, anyway. It was almost a crusade of righteousness. But before he had gone far he found himself up against a spirit as dogged as his own, righteous too, but in a way Monaghan was more likely to understand.

“Ha'e no truck wi' the cut-throats,” Kyle told him, “or sure as your name's Monaghan they'll strip ye of every brass farthin' bit. Why, isn't tha mon Cabell known for a dirty, horse-stealin', wife-beatin', goddam rascal from one end the country to the ither? Ask Dugald McFarlane. Didna Cabell no steal mares from his old mon and try for to drive him off his verra hearthstane by legal chicanery? And wasna it no clearly revealed in the courts of law at the time that he was mixed in with Black Jem the bushranger? Och noo mon, ye'd save ye'self a lot of heartburning by gi'in' ower yer purse to the blackguard wi'out more ado if ye've got it in mind to let him back ye in the claim.”

That was the first stage of the fight. Who was to put up the money for working the big Lost Stores claim? Wages had to be paid, powder and fuse and food bought, and finally expensive machinery.

“Noo, I'm no a bloodsucker,” Kyle said. “I'll gi'e ye two thousand pounds for one half-share in the claim.” Considering Sambo and Monaghan athwart his thin, red nose he stroked his ginger dundrearies. Renowned whiskers these, said to be worth a couple of thousand a year to Kyle. When he was buying gold he fingered the fine dust and hummed and hawed about the quality and the risk of its being dosed — and stroked his well-oiled side-whiskers. They said he washed a couple of pennyweights of gold out of those pale, aspiring flambeaux after every customer. “Mind ye, it's no so certain there's a muckle gold in yer claim,” he told Monaghan. “Ye havena no jewellery shop here like is in the Hit or Miss or the Black Crow. A prudent mon wudna look for more than an ounce to the ton from that red stane.”

Cabell and Cash had Sambo in a corner. “Let Monaghan let that Scotch bastard in and you're as good as done for,” Cash told him. “See what he did to those poor ginks he backed up the gully — backed them right out and put his own name over the mine.”

Torn between loyalty to Cabell and loyalty to his mate, Sambo could only keep repeating, “I dunno, boss. Gawd, boss, I dunno.”

Their haggling ended in the Lost Stores Goldmining Company Ltd posting its name at the Stock Exchange. It had a nominal capital of ten thousand pounds in ten thousand one-pound shares, a quarter held by Monaghan, a quarter by Sambo, a quarter by Kyle, and a quarter by Cabell and Cash. With four thousand pounds to spend the company put a dozen men to work, sinking shafts, timbering, building log stages for the windlasses, and piling up heaps of mullock, carefully stockaded against thieves, in readiness for the stampers, which were on their way.

Cabell fretted to see the gold hidden from his eye in these heaps of stone. He was always crawling about in the stockades, fingering bits of stone, chipping them.

Cash laughed. "Looking for something?"

"It might be a duffer after all, Cash. I don't see a trace of gold."

"Because you're looking in the wrong place," Cash said, pointing up the street to the Stock Exchange. "That's where our gold is."

In those early days of Black Mountain, when there was still much free gold to be found, the real centre of the field was the Exchange. Shares rushed up and down between sixpence and two pounds or more. The look on a miner's face, a wink, a whisper was enough. At nine o'clock in the morning the news that the exploratory drive in Hit or Miss had opened a likely-looking piece of dirt sent Hit or Miss to twenty shillings in a few minutes, but when at four o'clock in the afternoon there was no sign of gold in the buckets coming up the shaft Hit or Miss began to fall, and after the Exchange closed the selling went on in the street and in the bar of the Grand Central till Hit or Miss were hardly worth buying for shaving-paper.

Cash was a hard gambler, an unwearied collector and distributor of tips and clues at Danny O'Connor's bar. This it was which held him to Waterfall, the swift, daily dramas of the Exchange, not the prospect of wealth to be acquired by a long and laborious development of the Lost Stores property. But Cabell held back from a dangerous game. There was not much of the adventurer in Cabell. His dreams were not of money but of a great mine which would swallow all the other mines and belong to him. He saw its batteries, windlasses, sluices, chimneys, shafts, windmills, engine-rooms covering the hillside, and himself the man of power, owning a mountain of gold, with bankers, politicians, capitalists, promoters, and "all that mob in Brisbane" kotowing abjectly. And, of course, Harriet marrying the kind of man such wealth would entitle her to. Yes, dear little Harriet: it was all for her.

"No gambling for me," he said. "Look at Larsen. He came from the Bakehouse with eight thousand quid and now he's a wages man for Miss Ludmilla."

"Pooh, this is no gamble," Cash said. "It's a drummond. Look, to-morrow we'll sell a thousand Stores."

“We'll do no such thing. Kyle will buy them.”

“Not him. Not at the price they are. He's got too many irons in the fire.”

“But I want to buy shares, not sell them.”

“All right. We'll buy some later.” He took out a pencil and paper. “Look. We sell a thousand. Say at eighteen bob. Then I oil up the mob at Danny's and we'll slam in another thousand and they'll come down with a bump.”

“Well?”

“Well what? Buy them back of course. Say they go down to ten bob. It might shake Monaghan out of a few if the market started to jump a bit. Or even old Kyle. He'd gamble on the sunrise.”

They sold a thousand. Stores was not sensational stock, but it was known to have a lot of low-grade ore scattered through the claim and a fair dividend in the mullock heaps, and its machinery was due any day. They were good for anybody who didn't mind waiting. Eighteen and sixpence a share they brought.

In Danny's Cash received the news that somebody had just unloaded a thousand Stores. “Must be Kyle,” he said and frowned.

Next day he sold a thousand and let everybody know he was doing so. The price came down to seventeen and six. “What's the use sitting on your rhino like an emu,” he told Danny. “Between ourselves, strictly, they just got word the stampers won't be here before Christmas.”

“There now,” Danny said, “and you told me they'd be crushin' next month and here's me hanging on to five hundred of them things I give Monaghan a pound each for.”

“Well, we've got fifteen hundred more to unload before the news gets round.”

In the afternoon Stores slumped to twelve and six, sellers. Cash and Cabell bought back fifteen hundred and the market rose to sixteen shillings. They picked up the other five hundred in dribs and drabs within a week at an average of eighteen to nineteen.

“There you are,” Cash said, handing back the scrip. “Two-fifty quid for damn all.”

Cabell was relieved to have his shares again. “Never more,” he said.

“Never's a big word,” Cash said. “Wait.”

A week later the Lost Stores announced that it had laid open a rich vein of gold giving seven ounces to the ton in the drive from No. 1 to No. 2 shaft. Stores leapt to fifty shillings, no sellers.

Cabell stood all day at the head of the shaft watching bucket after bucket of yellow-veined stone come up.

Cash drew him aside. “It won't last, so you needn't kid yourself. Let us get rid of a thousand while the selling's good.”

They sold a thousand. Kyle sold a thousand and Monaghan sold a

thousand. Next day the buckets brought up less and less gold and at last the same old red stone. Kyle persuaded Monaghan to sell another thousand, and himself sold a thousand short at thirty shillings. At twenty-five shillings Monaghan wanted to buy back, but Kyle told him to hold on till they reached a pound, and himself bought back Monaghan's thousand for a cover and at twenty-two shillings the thousand he had sold at fifty, thus finishing with a profit of sixteen hundred pounds and his own block intact. There were now two thousand five hundred shares on the market. Cabell and Cash held fifteen hundred, Kyle and Sambo their original quota, and Monaghan, who was four thousand pounds in pocket, most of which he owed to Kyle for money advanced and goods purchased, none. But at twenty shillings he got back five hundred, and as the market was weak decided to wait and see about the rest. Cash and Cabell were about three thousand pounds up, having speculated energetically all the way down the scale from fifty shillings. Cabell wanted to square up now, but Cash persuaded him to wait and see too.

Sure enough, Stores went down to nineteen when the Exchange opened next morning, but the market was still weak so Monaghan put off buying a bit longer. At sixteen shillings Cabell overruled Cash and began to buy in, but unexpectedly there was hot competition. The price went back to thirty shillings, no sellers. On the way he bought five hundred. He was now five hundred short and very angry.

Cash was puzzled. Why the rush on Stores? Nothing unusual had happened in the mine. The buckets were bringing up the usual red stone. "If I'm right, Monaghan was two thousand short when we started to buy. That makes two thousand five hundred on the market. Who's got them? Kyle? No, he would have sold on the way up to thirty bob. He knows there's nothing to back the rise up."

"I told you. Curse your schemes."

"Keep your hair on. Anybody'd think you'd just been ruined."

Cabell's eye bulged. "My — your luck must be changing."

"Don't worry," Cash cheered him. "Somebody's caught somebody short. Wait till there's another big find somewhere. That'll bring Stores down."

Cabell clung desperately to his easy, impervious optimism. But they did not pick up the outstanding shares, and the price, instead of falling, climbed slowly on the strength of a number of puzzling, vague rumours that unexpected developments were to be looked for at the Stores and that somebody was trying to buy Sambo and Monaghan out.

Sambo denied it. Then his eyes drooped and he confessed, "She made me promise to keep it dark, boss."

"She?"

Sambo beat about the bush a bit longer, then it came out. Miss Ludmilla had offered him ten thousand pounds for his shares and he had

sold them. "That bloke Shaftoe reckoned he knew where to get a roan filly'd win the Melbourne Cup if I had the dough to train it."

"Ten thousand pounds!" Cash and Cabell were both flabber-gasted.

"She's off her nut," Cash said. "That's what happens to these old tarts that don't marry. But just wait till we start crushing next month and she finds out we haven't got a lot of nuggets hid away under the mullock heap." He rubbed his hands. "There'll be some nice short selling then."

He was wrong. Ludmilla and Larsen came to the weekly meeting of shareholders.

"Welcome," Cash said. "You must hold about half the shares in this concern."

"Yes," Ludmilla said. "Just five thousand."

She was a big woman of middle age, with big pleasant eyes and a hard mouth. Her body was gaunt mannish, her complexion weather-beaten, but she had tiny hands and feet. Men laughed at her behind her back but they were afraid of her bitter tongue and her temper on a hair-spring. They told how she took on a new-chum to jackeroo at Ningpo years ago and married her sister Aurelia to him — at the point of the gun, they said. Observing how she bristled when Cabell was near and how, in her presence, he was fidgety, almost furtive, the knowing ones winked. There had been queer doings in the earlies.

"Why?" she asked Cash. "Would you like to buy us out?"

"Well — how much?"

"Fifty thousand."

Kyle grabbed his whiskers in both hands. "Woman, ye're crackit."

"Will you sell out then?"

"Weel and I might. What wud ye . . ."

Monaghan jumped up. "I . . ."

Kyle pulled him down. "Hold yer peace. It's a most palpable deceit, Mon." Then to Ludmilla, "Wud ye let this yin and me retire to consider the matter?"

Ludmilla nodded and they went outside.

"If you're handing out any more charity, Miss Ludmilla . . ." Cash said.

Cabell nudged him. "Shut your mouth."

Ludmilla smiled sourly. "I've bought things from Mr Cabell before. Sheep."

Cabell licked his lips.

"Yes, he'll tell you about it. I suppose he's told you already," she said, challenging them.

"No, no, Ludmilla," Cabell said hastily, "not a word."

She laughed. "Oh, it wouldn't trouble me." But her eyes shifted timidly between them as if she expected to catch them laughing.

The door opened and their attention turned to Monaghan and Kyle who came back looking pleased. Monaghan picked up his hat from the table

and went out again. When the door had closed Kyle said, "Noo I control three thousand shares. Will ye gi'e a price for the lot?"

"Ja," Larsen said, "eighteen t'ousand."

Kyle's mouth came open, then set tight. "I'll no sell them," he said and sat down.

"Very well," Ludmilla said. "If you won't you won't. And you?" She looked at Cabell.

"Not at any price."

"Good. Now listen. Mr Larsen here has made a discovery which may cause this company to change its plans. He has found that your battery of stampers will be quite unsuitable for treating the stone in the mine, which is much richer than you suppose. He has been able to have specimens treated in the laboratory by a method of his own and believes that if this method is tried out on a big scale it will bring you six ounces to every ton of rock. Isn't that so?"

Larsen nodded his white head.

She silenced their incredulous outcry with a wave of her hand and went on, "Mr Larsen and I, as joint shareholders of all rights in this process and of the largest number of shares in the company, want to have a new company formed with at least half a million shares. We will take two hundred and fifty thousand and each of you will get ten shares for every share you hold. The rest will go on the market. We'll need every penny we can get. The plant will be expensive."

They were silent for a while, then Cash asked, "What's to prove this?"

Larsen brought out a paper and handed it to Ludmilla. She unfolded it and laid it on the table.

Kyle and Cabell read over Cash's shoulder:

This is to certify that treatment of the stone, submitted by Lars Larsen, in the modified Wheeler pans resulted as follows:

#1. Brown haematite	3 oz. 6 dwt.
2. Red ditto	6 oz. 16 dwt.
3. Aluminous sinter	3 oz. 15 dwt.
4. Stalactite brown haematite	6 oz. 11 dwt.
5. Silicious sinter veined with quartz	4 oz. 5 dwt.
6. Mixed mass of ironstone and silica	6 oz. 3 dwt.
7. Ironstone silicious sinter	10 oz 14 dwt.
AVERAGE	6 oz 1 dwt.

A specially selected mass of silicious red stone yielded up to 20 oz. When treated separately.

"It's a trick," Kyle said.

"Well, sell and get out," Ludmilla said.

Cabell grabbed Kyle by the shoulder. "I'll give you twenty thousand."

Kyle walked around the table two or three times, then sat down again.

“Nae, I'll abide and consider.”

Ludmilla drew her gloves on. “Consider well then. We'll see you tomorrow.”

It was hard to keep a secret in that rumour-stricken place. That Sambo had been paid four pounds each for his shares and that Monaghan had sold out to Kyle was soon common gossip. Stores leapt to six, seven, eight pounds and stopped there, with nobody selling. The whisper went round that Larsen and Ludmilla had found a way to extract fabulous quantities of gold from the red stone. Some of the other claims, particularly those along the same ridge as the Lost Stores, had red stone, too, but not so much. They sent specimens to Brisbane and found that it did contain gold in unsuspected alloy, but that the process of extracting this gold would be complicated and expensive.

But Kyle had found that out for himself. He returned from a visit to Brisbane in a hurry to sell before the news broke. He got thirty thousand pounds from Cabell for his three thousand shares, and when he had the money safely in his pocket showed Cabell the letter in which the experts reported that by no process known to metallurgy could more than thirty per cent of the gold be profitably recovered.

Reassured by Cabell's look of dismay, he could not forbear selling a thousand shares forward to Liam and Danny O'Connor, certain that Cabell would have to sell as soon as he made public what he knew and Stores collapsed.

They did collapse for a day or two, but Cabell did not sell. He was in so deep that he could only cling hopefully to his link with Cash's fortunate destiny and Cash said, “Don't sell. Ludmilla wasn't spinning a yarn. Larsen's got the goods.”

This miscalculation led to a rapid, dramatic change in Kyle's affairs. As he could not meet his obligations to the O'Connors he was utterly at their mercy. They held a family conference which resulted in Kyle's repaying nine thousand pounds plus interest to Liam and Danny and taking a trip to Pyke's Crossing. Three weeks later he returned with a wagonload of furniture and Maggie O'Connor. The wedding breakfast lasted a week and suspended all operations on the field, because Liam O'Connor filled the water-tank with rum and each morning the guests, staggering out to drink themselves sober on water, renewed their intoxication until the tank ran dry.

Cabell now held five thousand of the ten thousand Stores and had laid out fifteen thousand pounds in buying up shares in all the claims along the ridge where there was any show of the precious red stone. His plan was to offset his bargaining disadvantage with Ludmilla and Larsen by offering these shares as the basis of a new amalgamation when the time came to float the company. But when that time arrived, after nearly twelve months' haggling and intrigue and backing and filling, he found

that Ludmilla and Larsen held a controlling interest in these companies.

In the winter of 1887 Waterfall Amalgamated issued its prospectus. It was capitalized at seven hundred and fifty thousand, in one-pound shares, one hundred and fifty thousand held by Ludmilla, one hundred thousand by Larsen, one hundred and twenty-five thousand by Cabell, seventy-five thousand by Cash. Three hundred thousand went on the market. It was the height of the boom and they sold at a premium.

Cabell extended the mortgage on the Reach and bought ten thousand more shares. He had now cleaned out every penny he had saved and owed twenty thousand pounds beside, but he owned a station worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds at a moderate estimate and one hundred and thirty-five thousand shares. He was scared, never had a full night's rest, but extravagant dreams of power and affluence never lifted from his brain. Why shouldn't he drive out Larsen and Ludmilla, put in his own men, Cash as manager, James, Custard, people he could trust or dominate? They said there were millions of pounds' worth of gold in the ridge. With that behind him he could become as rich as Carnegie — beyond all reproach and contempt. Why, already they were beginning to bow and scrape, “that mob in Brisbane.”

Chapter Eight: Father and Son

THEY detested him, but they bowed and scraped just the same. Even the big men, politicians and bankers, thought it was worth while cringing to placate his arrogance and unfriendliness. Indeed that hard, ugly front only deepened their respect for him as a man of ruthless power, a popular view of his character confirmed by an incident which happened at the Reach about this time and was talked of throughout the country.

Three years had passed since Cabell's quarrel with Berry. In those years the big national groups of shearers and miners had become more and more aware of their solidarity, more and more annoyed by the tight grip the squatters kept on the land and the tremendous prosperity of men like Cabell. There had been small strikes in mines and shearing-sheds. Newspapers were born to sharpen and define the men's hatred, which was as old as the first convict and the first migrant who came out under hatches because they had no choice and knew that whatever of the good things of life they were to have they must get from the soil of the new land. Not many of the old lags were left, but their sons were there, the Coyles and Goggses and Larrys, heirs to their parents' hatred, disgrace, or hopes of a new and freer life, of their parents' stories about the ugliness, injustice, poverty, and despair of life at home. This generation had grown up in the bush and saw its stark and graceless beauty against no memory of English lanes. All they knew about the Old Country was that it had famines, poorly paid workers, slums, unconquerably vested powers, hanging judges, and an aristocracy with a "birthright to look down its nose." Australia seemed a fine, free place beside this, and they were determined to keep it so. In the prosperity of these years they thought they saw the earthly paradise dawning which their fathers had hoped for and not lived to enjoy. But at the same time it was borne in upon them more clearly than ever that all this wealth was enriching not themselves but men like Cabell who, because of *his* memories, would always be alien to Australia, and therefore hostile to what they wanted the country to be — an Englishman at heart however the land had changed him, however crude and un-English he had become on the surface, an Englishman in the intimate, secret chambers of imagination where alone a man lives his life. And this was the difference between the two states of mind — one was orientated towards Australia and the other towards England, one impatiently towards the future, the other

regretfully towards the past. The difference had become very clear in the last few years. The squatters were sending their children Home to schools and universities or even themselves going to live there, like the Jardines of Narrow Gut who left a manager on the property and reappeared at rare intervals, astoundingly white of skin and immaculate of dress, to stay awhile till the mosquitoes and boredom drove them back to England. But the sons of the lags and the immigrants were a hard-bitten proletarian stock raised in mining-camps and shepherds' huts and the homesteads of poverty-stricken selectors, and had no use for "these Nancy English ways." Their genius was for using their hands and enduring heat, thirst, and bullocking graft, a sardonic contempt for anybody unlike themselves, and a strange gift for mateship, which Coyle said was their legacy from the jailyard and men sticking together in the bush. They were dug into the country, and their struggle with the bosses was taking on the grand outlines of a nationalistic crusade.

True, a part of Cabell, too, was well and truly dug into the Australian soil. The bush was no longer repulsive to him as once it had been. When business took him away to Brisbane he was always restless to get back to the Reach. The first glimpse of the homestead roof among the orange and peach-trees never failed to give him a pleasant sense of home-coming. Against the crudities of an ungracious life he had grown a crude hide to protect himself. Equally as any native-born he was impatient with new-chums "who can't work, can't ride, and can't stand in the sun without getting sunstroke." And finally no old lag had been more utterly shut out of England than he. But these changes in his character had not touched the inner life of his fantasy, which everything he did must somehow serve before he could get the energy to do it. Himself in a mirror was another man — a disreputable fellow whose life he did not want to think about. All he cared for was planning Harriet's future and how she should go back to England and marry a handsome young man and become a great lady — "just to show them what a 'voluntary jailbird' could do." He thought of that with a joyous expectation, as though it was himself who was to inherit, after so many years, the fruits of his hard work and tribulation. Out of these thoughts and expectations came his resolve to be rich and powerful, the meaning of life, the very urge to live.

Only one obstacle frightened him — Emma. For thirty-seven years she had been fighting him with a cunning, conscienceless obstinacy as effective as his own — more effective since everything she wanted (though he didn't like to admit this) had come to pass: he had married her, provided for her brother, bought land, had not returned to England, and had given her children. "*Her* brats." And now through one of these brats she was trying to overreach him again. She was determined that Larry should be master of the Reach.

He did not understand that thereby she sought to fulfil a fantasy of her

own which gave *her* the power to go on living and lighted a little torch of warm light in the darkness of *her* life. To see Larry a great man, looked up to — her son, Emma Surface's son — would wipe out her humiliations, but if she failed what would her life have been but just humiliations? Watching Larry grow up she looked out anxiously for a sign that the old leaven of Surface recklessness was still at work — the recklessness she had had to fight in her father, in Dirk, her brother, in her cousin, Black Jem, which she felt in her own passionate heart. And sure enough, there it was — making him risk his neck on wild horses, making him go out of his way to anger his father, making him sullen and restless under her strong hand, less and less like a solid, respectable flock-master every day and more and more the friend of Coyle and “that trash.”

Larry was thirty-seven years old now. He looked the dead image of Black Jem as she had last seen him, despite his Cabell nose and mouth. Like Black Jem he drank for hours without getting drunk, merely staring at the floor with puffy, sulky face. If you asked him what he was thinking about he didn't know, really didn't know, but suddenly he would go out and pick a fight and either be half-killed defending himself against a barful of men or have to have his fingers prised off some poor devil's throat. The only time his face lighted up was when the shearers were around.

But Emma remonstrated angrily. “You keep away from the shearers' hut. It's no place for you.”

“Why, what's wrong with it?”

“The trash inside — that's what. You keep away.”

“They're my mates.”

“They're trash. You keep away or they'll get you in trouble.”

“They're my mates. They're not trash. *He's* the trash and it's him the trouble's coming to, one day. . . .”

“That's none of your business, all that nonsense they talk. You don't listen to it. You're not a shearer — a lousy good-for-nothing set of tramps.”

“I'm just the same as one. I'm not a boss.”

“But you *will* be.”

“I don't want to be. I'd rather hump my drum. And I will too one of these days.” He looked at her. “It's no good rousing. I'm going. There are places I want to see and — things.”

“You want a wife,” Emma coaxed him. “Some nice girl like Florrie Heffernan, the manager's daughter over at Black Rock.”

He blushed and stammered. “I don't want no wife. I'm going on the wallaby.”

“Oh, Larry, Larry,” she cried out. “You ungrateful fool. What d'you think I've waited for all these years. To see you cadging snout at homestead doors?”

The vehemence of her cry startled him. He looked up again shyly. How frail and helpless she seemed against the background which her words conjured up, of scourgers, jailers, drunken squatters. His lips, thick with stubbornness, smiled suddenly, and he rubbed a hand across the knuckles of his fist. "You should've seen the old bull this morning. That Hereford near tore the ribs out of him. He's over the back there now licking himself, and the Hereford's with the cows."

Emma narrowed her eyes. "You keep away from the shearers' hut, I tell you. It won't be him who licks the wounds. He's dealt with harder men than you or any of them."

But Larry was with the shearers that morning in 1889 when they came down to the washpool and clustered in a silent circle round Cabell.

Coyle stepped out. "We want a word with you, boss. It's about what you're going to pay this season."

"I'll pay the usual if you come up to scratch. Don't worry."

The men shifted their feet in the dust. "Haw will yer?" Goggs said. "Very kind of yer."

Coyle turned his empty eyes and Goggs fell back. "Righto, you go him."

"It's like this," Coyle explained. "The boys think they're due for something more."

Cabell glanced round, recognizing some of the men who had been shearing at the Reach for years — Goggs, Wagner, Greasy Bill, and, in the back rank, Berry picking anxiously at his thumbs, and Larry. "You think so, eh? Well, you're wrong. I pay the same."

The disarticulated features of Goggs's mongrel face collapsed in a heap around his mouth. "What'd I tell you? No use wasting words on a dingo."

Cabell took a step forward and Goggs got behind Coyle. A stir of alarm passed through the crowd.

Berry's voice turned their eyes. "After all, boss, you've had a good year and got more coming. The boys don't want much." He plucked nervously at the buttons on his shirt. "Only what's a fair thing."

"A good year! A fair thing!" Cabell snorted. "D'you think I've been slaving here for forty years to give it away to you. Get to work or get out. Shearers aren't wanting." He looked about for a break in the ranks but they stood solidly together, encompassing him with their mob hostility, which irritated him. He made straight at Goggs. "Get out of my way."

But Coyle pulled him back. "A word before you go," he said in his quiet, reasonable voice. "If you don't fork out this year you'll have to next. There'll be a union of shearers next year and they might say all hands off your wool. The carters wouldn't cart it, the wharfies wouldn't ship it. You're short-sighted."

Cabell pushed him aside. "Oh-ho. Threaten me, eh?"

Coyle smiled.

The thin, mirthless smile struck a spark in Cabell's memory. "You're the spit of your old man, Coyle," he said. "A bad egg. You can get off this place now. You're leading these poor fools by the nose."

"That's all right. I was going."

"And the rest of you get back to work," Cabell said, and while they were waiting for something to happen pushed his way out.

Goggs spat angrily. "You shyster," he yelled. "Who robbed his mates? Who pinched their goldmine?"

His infuriated squeak stirred the men out of their anti-climax. They turned to watch Goggs run after Cabell shouting, then followed.

"Yes, who skinned Sambo?" they took it up.

"Who robbed his mates?"

Cabell got on to his horse and rode off without haste. His stiff shoulders flung their insults back, maddening them.

They were running on each side of him now. From the tail of his eye he could see Larry out on the right wing, striding along, saying nothing, watching him with a grin of venomous satisfaction. Every now and then he stopped and tried to shake off Berry's hand and trotted on again to catch up with the mob.

At the gate, as he bent to lift the catch, a lump of hard cowdung hit Cabell stingingly on the side of the face. In a spurt of rage no longer to be repressed he turned his horse and galloped into the crowd knocking the men over and scattering them in all directions.

At a safe distance they halted and drew together again. "Yah. you bastard, if we had you off that horse!" Goggs yelled.

Cabell went after Goggs. He caught the flying figure by the slack of the shirt, dragged it round in a circle, climbed off, stood it on its feet, and laid it flat with one swingeing blow between the eyes.

The men ran up babbling and clustered around them.

Goggs rose dizzily and smeared the stream of thick blood over his face. "Who yer — hit one yer own size."

Cabell had his fist raised for a second blow when a strong hand seized his wrist from behind and jerked him away. It was Berry. "There," Berry said. "You've given him enough."

Cabell saw the big moon-face through a red haze, swung his fist up, and sent Berry staggering into the arms of Larry. Something snapped in the pit of Larry's stomach and the hard aching pain of hatred came up into his throat like vomit. He'd hit Berry, even Berry, who'd always stuck up for him and held the men back. The rotten, unjust dog!

He pushed Berry aside, and while Cabell was turning his face, tense with anger, around the semicircle of faces, planted his fist on his father's mouth. Only when he gazed down at his father, spreadeagled among the men's legs, did Larry realize that he had moved at all.

“Larry!” the men roared, and fell away.

Berry took a step forward, but Coyle restrained him. “Leave them. They've been waiting for this.”

Cabell rose, licked his lips, pulled his cuffs back, and came slowly towards Larry, his head thrust out and sideways to focus his eye, the patch, slightly skew-whiff on its string, revealing the purple, ball-less gash of his blind eye-socket. The red blood-spot in the white of his eye seemed to glow and grow like a live coal and the scar on his cheek was like a lick of flame.

“Stop them,” Berry shouted. “He's too old. Larry will kill him.”

“Let him,” Coyle said softly.

But Larry backed away, intimidated by his father's white, speechless fury and the slow, animal persistence of his advance. Cabell followed him round and round the ring through ten long seconds, then sprang across the space between them and socked a vicious one-two on to Larry's face. It was enough to have laid him out for a long time, but he swung back and the fists just grazed his jaw, ripping the skin as though Cabell had drawn two pieces of raddle across his cheeks. Larry fell on his knees and stayed there, not shirking but trying to control the trembling in his hands and knees.

Goggs pushed through the crowd with a hat full of water. “Here, take a drink, Larry.” He splashed Larry's face. “And don't let him close on yer.”

Cabell was waiting with his fist drawn back, ready to hit. His lip was swollen from Larry's blow. The sight of it gave Larry the strength to rise.

The men cheered and pressed in.

“Go it, Larry.”

“Stick it into him, Larry.”

“Dump the bastard.”

“Look out for his dirty left.”

They met in a fleshy slash of fists, conscious of nothing except their unbearable detestation. Through Larry's brain, as he sparred and swung and threw himself on his father's tireless battery, raced images of insults nearly thirty years old. . . . “*Your* brat. Dregs. Scum of the earth.” Cabell pushing his mother aside. “Take it you're a paid hand here . . .” A feeling of relief, release, joy swept him. “I can beat him and go away,” he thought. And in an interval, when he stood back from battering his father's head, the revelation came to him, “I couldn't go away *till* I'd beaten him.”

They rushed together again.

“His eye,” Coyle shouted, in a piercing, unrecognizable yell above the men's voices. “Hit him in the eye. Blind him.”

Larry smashed through his father's guard and sent him staggering among the men, followed, and pounded at his body.

Suddenly the men stopped shouting. They felt, all at once, that this

fight did not concern them at all, that it tapped sources of hatred beyond their understanding, which would not be satisfied with a bloody nose or a black eye. Their own hatred cooled. The brutal abandon of father and son shocked them now.

“Stop them,” Berry shouted, struggling away from Coyle. “It's gone far enough.”

But just then, measuring Larry's onrush, Cabell landed squarely on his jaw and spread him out, unmoving, in the dust. The men looked down, appalled, at the bleeding wreck of Larry's face, then at Cabell, also bleeding freely and waiting for Larry to rise.

“Jesus, your own son!” Wagner said.

Their shouting broke again in jeers of disgust. “Swiped his own son!”

“Tried to murder him!”

“What a swine!”

Lumps of cowdung began to fall in the ring and break upon his face and bare head.

Berry held up his hands. “Boys! Give him best. He hit him square.”

Cabell turned on them. “Who wants best? I'll fight any man here.” He looked round for the biggest. It was Wagner. “I'll fight you.”

Wagner grinned. “No, you won't. I'll wait for the Utopia and summons you for back pay.”

“You!” he shouted at Coyle. “Come out here, you crawler. I'll give five pounds for a hit at you.”

“Wait a bit,” Coyle said, “and I'll give you a chance for nothing.”

“You then,” Cabell roared at Greasy Bill.

“I get enough fight cookin’,” Bill said.

Crouching before them, the blood pouring down his shirt front, he looked like a bull baited half-mad.

“Get out. Get to hell,” he said. “I'll shear without you.”

They carried Larry to the river and brought him round, and an hour later rode past the homestead and out the gates, boo-hooing as they went.

For miles around they raddled on sheds and fences:

DON'T SHEAR AT CABELL'S REACH
HE TRIED TO MURDER HIS OWN SON
WHAT WOULD HE DO TO A SHEARER?

Chapter Nine: Father and Daughter

“EVEN your own son!” Emma said. “And now you'll kick him out, will you? *Will* you?”

“Bah.” He jerked the rocking-chair away and raised his paper between them, but the menace of her anger, like the sensed presence of a snake in a dark room, made him put it down and look at her uneasily.

Twisting her apron into a rope between her brown hands she was leaning over him with an expression of such viperous threat in her eyes and the sprung wrinkles of her mouth that he started back.

“There's only one way to deal with a man like you,” she said, summing up a long train of thought.

His alarm became audible in the rustle of the paper on his lap. “Do your damndest,” he muttered, but as though in her eyes, sunk into her head under the weight of their evil knowledge, he read what that damndest would be, he shot his hand out and caught her arm. “What I mean . . .” He waved towards the shearers' hut. “You know yourself, he's been getting thick with Coyle and Goggs these last four or five seasons, and what are they out for but to work up troubles for me.”

She shook his hand off. “And whose fault was that? If you'd treated him right and not driven him into their arms he'd've been different. But you did it on purpose — to destroy him, like you're trying to destroy the others. Letting Geoffrey go down to Brisbane with Shaftoe and his racecourse crooks.” She put her hand out appealingly. “Can't you see? You're like what you said about your own father — that he was to blame for your brothers being wasters and you being what you were. And now you're to blame for Larry being mixed up with a lot of bad eggs instead of — oh, doesn't the world ever get any better?” She leant against the railing and beat her fists together in a kind of exasperated despair. Her apron, released, writhed to the ground, spending the energy her hands had twisted into it, and lay in still folds about her body, drably creased like her face, which sagged with sudden discouragement. She let her hands fall limply into her lap. It was as though claws had dragged across her face, scarring it with wrinkles. She looked old.

The energy seemed to have flowed into him. He threw the paper aside. “He didn't need me to make a blackguard of him. He was one by birth. *Your* brat.”

A slight convulsion round her mouth turned into an ironic smile. “*You*

can say that! *You* can call somebody else a blackguard! Why, you couldn't even call Black Jem . . . you couldn't even call another man a" — she leant over and whispered at his upturned, gaping face — "*a murderer.*"

"Eh?" He bent and picked the paper up and folded it slowly, watching her.

She smiled again and nodded. "You must forget that sometimes, or you wouldn't be so free with your tongue. Men weren't just made convicts for that, you know. They were . . ."

He waved his hand in front of her mouth. "I know. I know."

But she insisted, with slow, malicious, ruthless pleasure, "Hanged." And, her voice rising, her two hands about her scraggy throat, repeated it, "Hanged — hanged — hanged!"

He beat the air with both hands, looking fearfully around while she bent over him laughing. "They hanged them. They were worse than the common thieves. They were the lowest of the lot. And they hanged them."

She spluttered into silence against his hand, pushed roughly over her mouth. But he could not cover her eyes, vindictive and evilly knowing. He took his hand away, felt for the chair, and sat down again.

She nodded. "You just remember *that.*"

The evening was settling. From the other end of the house came the subdued sound of a piano and a clear, low voice singing.

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss, was ich leide.
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss, was ich leide.
Allein und abgetrennt
Von aller Freude,
Seh ich ans Firmament
Nach jener Seite.
Ach! der mich liebt und kennt
Ist in der Weite.

The sad melody ended on a discord and a murmur of harsh protest. Emma sniffed.

Cabell's shifty eye met hers. "I never said I was going to kick him out, did I?" he said. "Only keep him out of my sight, that's all."

Miss Montaulk nodded over her embroidery frame. "A very nice song, Harriet," she said, as Harriet's voice died away. "Your father's favourite."

Harriet grimaced, brought both hands down flat on the keyboard, and rose.

Miss Montaulk jerked up her stubbled jailer's face. "Harriet! What are

you doing? Sing. Your father will be listening.”

“I don't want to sing.”

“Go back to the piano and sing your father's favourite song, Harriet,” Miss Montaulk said. “Ach, you do not deserve the love of such a father. You are a wicked girl. It is beautiful the way he loves you. When he strokes your arm at the piano there it is beautiful to see. He looks almost — handsome. You will never have such a pure sweetheart as your father, Harriet.” She licked her lips. “They'll paw you, the others. Ugh! It's horrible to think of.” She sat thinking of it and shaking her head.

Harriet shuddered and moved away to the window.

With bright eyes appraising the thin, girlish figure burgeoning breasts and hips, Miss Montaulk watched her, then frowned. “Harriet, you're not wearing your dress right again, you disobedient child. It should hang below your shoulders, not on them. You know your father admires your neck.”

Harriet crossed her arms on her breast and pulled the dress higher. “I won't wear it like that. I won't. I don't like it.”

The bright, probing, pricing eyes swept her from head to foot. “Modesty is all very well, Harriet. But he *is* your father. If you're afraid to show your shoulders to your father what will happen when you have a husband?” She laughed her grating, derisive cackle. “Husbands don't stand on ceremony, child.”

She went on, cracking her smooth mask of rouge and powder, while Harriet sank into the chair at the window. For a moment the girl stared at her reflection in the window-pane — the long flat planes of her sallow cheeks, shadowed slightly in the hollows of her deep, intent eyes, her wide red mouth, her heavy eyebrows. “I'm not beautiful,” she told herself, remembering the regular features and creamy complexions of the beauties she read about in novels. The thought pleased her at this moment. “I'm ugly. Loathsome.” She stretched her mouth between her fingers and pressed her nose flat and disordered her wavy hair to make the image in the window-pane more unbeautiful still. “I'll go to England and nobody will marry me and I'll be able to live all by myself like Aunt Harriet.”

Her eyes escaped past the reflection on the window to the steep wall of the southern range. In the light of the setting sun the hills were burning up in a purple fire, glowing, shimmering like a coal. Then the glow faded and they were ashen black against the sky, with the white stark skeletons of the ringbarked trees wandering about the dusk like sentinels watching her.

“No, I won't go to England,” she told herself, confronted suddenly by a picture of her father sitting beside her in a bower of lilac blossom with a great castle in the background where she would soon be taken and shut up in a high tower behind barred doors. “I'll run away.” She imagined

herself slipping out of bed in the night, careful not to disturb Miss Montaulk repulsively asleep under a flannel night-cap, dressing, tiptoeing out to the stable, and galloping away down the winding tape of road, away, away. . . .

“Where to?” She relaxed in her chair and stared again, disconsolately, at the darkening wilderness. These childish fancies would no longer serve. For nearly eighteen years she had been gazing out of this window — watching the clouds of red and blue butterflies that came to play over the purple flowers of the lucerne on the flats, imagining herself one of them that would soon rise and flutter away into the scrub, high above the murderous reach of the Chinamen, escaping, gone; imagining herself a thistle ball torn from the dry, hot earth by the wind and whirled away into the cool blue. Sitting up in bed at dawn to watch the coach for Pyke's Crossing go by with a thud of hoofs, she had pretended that it was carrying her off on an endless journey of escape. In the winter, when the westerlies fell and the day was like a big shining crystal, she would make-believe that there was no one except herself in the glittering, clean world. And in the fever time when the rains came, throbbing against the iron roof at night like the beat of her own sick blood, she would lie in bed and let her imagination go — how she would burn Miss Montaulk with a branding-iron, tie her in barbed wire and drag her across the valley behind a horse, throw her into the cactus plant which Mr McFarlane had planted on his ridge. Thus she had tried to revolt against the will of her father, which lay over her life like a kind of fate, shaping her, for some obscure end of his own, to a personality foreign and friendless in her home. What this end was she sensed, in a rush of anxiety and distaste, when he came eagerly to see her at the end of each day and sat brooding over her as she played the piano, when Miss Montaulk fussed about preparing her for these visits like a knowing old cocotte.

Obliquely, in the hothouse intimacy of their lives, she had learnt a lot from Miss Montaulk — things, supplemented by the hints of novels (she had glanced into the Paul de Kocks Miss Montaulk stuffed behind sofa cushions), which alarmed her for a future where some mysterious evil awaited her.

“Men. Ugh!” Miss Montaulk's eyes seemed to swell in her head. “I can hardly tell you what I've seen. Girls your age — nice girls all shut up in a room with the soldiers outside banging on the door. That was in the war of 1870. I was only a girl myself and some might have thought I was pretty.” She leered and wriggled, giving out that faint odour of corruption, like stale flowers, which always made Harriet hold her breath and turn her head away. “At last the door began to give and they looked in — big drunken soldiers with black beards. And the things they said! One of them reached through the broken panel and touched me. I feel it now — that hand. Fortunately an officer came along and we were

saved.”

“Would they have killed you?”

“It would have been worse than that,” she whispered, her eyes dancing, glittering, “*worse than death.*”

Harriet shivered and wondered. Her thoughts were less distinct than her feelings, which concreted themselves in a dream that began soon after she discovered what “becoming a woman” meant. She dreamt that she woke up and found her father leaning over the bed. There was blood on his beard. She screamed and tried to get away, but Miss Montaulk held her down while her father kissed her. She tried to push his face away, and, when she awoke, so vivid was the feel of the clammy beard on her fingers that she had to get up and wash her hands before she could sleep again. Sometimes it was not her father who kissed her but one of the repulsive mad old shepherds.

Since this dream had begun, her fantasies at the window had become less and less satisfying till to-night, in sudden disillusion, she saw how childish they were. “Yes, where could I run to?” she asked, and there was no answer. She put her hands over her face and began to cry softly.

Long after the sticky tears had dried on her fingers she sat there with her face in her hands, afraid to look up and see the familiar hills and ringbarked trees mocking her. “I *will* run away. I will. I will,” she kept saying to herself, but only because there was nothing else to say.

From the other end of the house came the buzz, like a wasp disturbed, of angry voices, ending on the clatter of an overturned chair, the slamming of a door, and her mother laughing.

A clear picture of her mother, in the faded blue dress of an old fashion, full in the skirt and tight about the waist and fallen breasts, came to her. From some infantile memory of them she recovered a sensation of the reassuring strength in the brown hands holding her close to those skirts, clean smelling and capacious to hide behind. That was years ago before Miss Montaulk came to dress and bathe her and take command of her life. There had been a rift between them since. Harriet had learnt to speak French and Italian, play the piano, sing, paint watercolours, and eat little mouthfuls of food. She wore a different silk dress every day of the week, and when she went out in her gig walked across the dusty yard in mincing steps and carried a parasol to keep the sun off her complexion. Now her mother hardly ever glanced at her. When she did it was with such a strange look in her dark, deep-set eyes that Harriet was compelled to give back a stare of bewildered defiance. Yet how she yearned to be taken back into the security of her mother's arms, to be comforted by the low voice, in the sad tones of which spoke a heart wise from terrible experience. On the vague rumours of that experience, got mostly from James, she speculated now, not as at first with shame, but with admiration for the strength which had endured so much suffering. She

thought of the convict ship, the jailyard, the whipping-post, and Black Jem, as James had pictured them with the brutal over-emphasis of his offended pride, and her own troubles seemed paltry. Her mother, who had come through these things, who could, as Harriet had often seen, silence her father's testy humours with a glance, appeared to her now a woman of superhuman power — the only being before whom she had seen her father's eye falter and turn away.

Again she was tempted to go and throw her arms around her mother and put the shield of the still, wise face between herself and the rest of the world, but the impulse died among discouraging memories of that face watching her scornfully, as she drove out in her gig of an afternoon, from the window of the kitchen where Emma lived with shining pots, and black iron kettles singing over a torrid fire, and tables scrubbed as white as sand.

Only once had she tried to break down the barriers. That was over a year ago, on the day her father returned from Brisbane with a necklace made of little nuggets of solid gold strung together with pearls between. He had frightened her as usual with the over-emotional intensity of his words, which always became more pressing the more they chilled her. She was just then struggling with the morbid, pernickety self-disgust of her adolescence. She turned her nausea upon him with a sudden loathing for the rank male smell of his clothes, his sour breath, and the astringent silky flesh on his ageing cheek. When he was gone all her bottled-up longing for somebody to caress and pity her and take off her mind the load of fears which were becoming unbearable to her loneliness drove her to the kitchen. Her mother was there occupied, as usual from early morning to late at night, over one of the thousand trivial tasks her restless energy created to exhaust itself upon.

"Mother . . ." She hesitated before the old woman's unwelcoming stare, which fastened at once upon the necklace, where Cabell had doubled it in a heavy rope around the girl's thin neck. She began to whimper, "I'm frightened, Mother . . . I . . ."

Emma watched her coldly. "Frightened? What of?"

"I — I want . . ." But she did not know what she wanted or why she was frightened. Her whimpering turned to tears.

Emma wiped her hands on her apron and came around the table, and almost shyly put her hand on the girl's shoulder, but at the same moment a heavy step sounded in the passage and Miss Montaulk appeared.

"Harriet! Whatever are you doing in this place? Your father would be so . . . Why, what's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," Emma said harshly. "Except the girl's green-sick. Take her away and give her a dose of calomel."

Harriet opened her eyes and stared through the window at the thickening darkness to blot out this memory of a fiasco. No, there was

nobody to help her, to like her, or to understand.

Miss Montaulk was lighting the lamp and preparing the room for Cabell's evening visit. As the lamp burned up Harriet saw the reflection of her own face shining on the window-pane once more, vividly now. Her eyes, softened by tears, stared sadly back at her. Her disordered hair fell in curls around her cheeks, warm against the blackness of the night. Her dress had slipped down from one shoulder and the light falling upon it was like a radiance of her own skin. She shrugged the dress off the other shoulder, revealing the white spread of her wide, young breast, turned her head critically from side to side, patted the curls back into place, and smiled.

It was at a memory of her brother James that she smiled.

The day he arrived home on his last vacation he had come to the window and called her. He was excited. "Is *she* there?" he asked.

"No — why, Jimmy, what's happened to you?" A year's growth in James, a budding moustache of black down, a change from untidy clothes to a tailored suit, high white collar, and bulging cravat did not fix her immediate awareness of his change from youth, skulking nervously at the window, to manhood, flushed and triumphant and pleased with itself.

"Jimmy, you look like — like something out of a book." She had never seen such a man before, so well-dressed, so dashing.

He covered his moustache shyly with his hand, then laughed. "Harriet, I've got something to tell you." He looked at her doubtfully. "You'll keep a secret, won't you?"

"Who should I tell?"

"I wouldn't want *him* to know. Not yet. Later . . ." He pushed out his jaw, which was beginning to show a line as hard as Cabell's. "I don't care later. He can go to the Dickens."

"He's going to make you an engineer and work at the mine. Has he told you yet?"

"Yes, he told me, but . . ." James frowned. "I don't want to be an engineer. I want to study law and go in for politics and have a station of my own and breed horses. That's what I'm going to do. *I am.*"

She was impressed again by the quality of his new manliness. The recklessness of the young boy, who used to alarm them by staying away from meals and defying his father, was still a twinkle of light in the depths of his violet eyes, a wild simmer of excitement in his laughter and in his nervous hands, but his eyes had steadied and his voice was deeper and subdued and his hands gestured and folded themselves gracefully instead of wandering aimlessly about his person like lost animals. Harriet no longer felt superior, as before she had always been, looking down on him from the window and her precocious foreknowledge of life as Miss Montaulk's pupil.

"Will you?" she said. "Oh, Jimmy, won't he be angry?"

"He'll be angry all right," James glanced round with a fugitive return to the skulking indecision of boyhood. But his defiance recovered itself at once. "But that's nothing. That's only a flea-bite. Wait till I tell him that I'm going to marry . . ."

"Marry?" she said sharply.

He blushed to the ears. "Aw, Harriet, wait till you see her. You've never seen anything so beautiful, so . . ."

"I've never seen anything at all," Harriet snapped, "except Papa and Mama and old Montaulk and sheep and . . ." She paused, a lump of self-pity in her throat. Then all at once she realized that this it was which had changed James, this fabulous experience of love she had read about in books, which haunted her own life in the elliptical gossip of Miss Montaulk and her father's talk of the future.

She grimaced, horrified now, slightly disgusted by the hot eagerness of his words, remembering how, when driving once with Miss Montaulk, covertly under the brim of her hat she had seen a bull and a cow. "Filthy! Abominable!" Miss Montaulk had said when they were past. "To think that men are like that too!"

James reached up and touched her arm. "I met her at Doug Peppiott's father's. He had a house in Sydney for the races and she was down with her mother. She's so beautiful — it's like being drunk to look at her."

Harriet drew her arm away. "Who is she?"

"Her name's Jennis — Jennis Bowen. Her father used to own Penine Downs. He's dead now. Sir Michael Flanagan's her grandfather."

Harriet smiled scornfully. "You booby. Do you think Papa would let you marry Sir Michael Flanagan's granddaughter? Why, he's always talking about him. They had a quarrel."

James thrust his hands in his pockets and kicked up a tuft of grass. "I know. It was about some land. That's when all that came out about Mother and Black Jem and all. Everybody remembers it. It's awful. You can hardly hold your head up in Brisbane. You never know when somebody's going to come out with something else about him, something . . ." He glanced up under his black eyebrows, "*something you'd never live down.*"

In troubled silence they speculated upon the secrets, the potentialities of their father's face, on which the scars were like hieroglyphs with some bizarre meaning if one could read them. "What d'you mean, Jimmy?" Harriet asked nervously.

"Oh——" James drove the phantoms of the ugly past behind him, "I don't know. I don't care. It's got nothing to do with us. We're not responsible. We weren't born. What's it matter what he did or who he quarrelled with? It's none of our business. I don't care if he had a court case with Sir Michael. That's over twenty-three or more years ago. I'm

going to marry Jennis Bowen and do what I like. I don't want anything from him . . .”

Harriet had been deeply impressed by the change which the beauty of a mere girl had worked in her brother, making him look forward to a fight with his father and a new, independent life. At first she had not been able to think of it because she could not think of him kissing the girl without feeling her own flesh creep and tingle, and could not recall his excited rapture without recalling also the excitement of the bull on heat. But now, looking at her image in the window-pane, struck, in the sudden dissolution of her fancies, by the reality of her own personal being, and understanding that through this alone, not through any chance or miracle or the kindness of any one in her little world, was she likely to be rescued from the mad fatality of her father's will, she thought about the metamorphosis of James without shrinking and with such an immediate perception of all it involved that she seemed to have been thinking of it for a long time. Perhaps it was that very thinking, at work in some corner of her mind, which had destroyed her fancies and shown her that her only power was in her own body and herself.

The discovery presented itself far less explicitly — merely as a simple question, “Will any one ever fall madly in love with *me*? Madly enough not to be afraid of — anything?” And doubt of her ability to inspire in any man the tempest of feeling that had overwhelmed James when he talked of Jennis Bowen made her lean forward and examine fearfully her reflection in the glass. Oh, if only her mouth were smaller and her eyes wider and her nose a little less sharp and there were a bit more colour in her cheeks! Yes, she must be terribly, terribly ugly, for had not James said, “By George, Harriet, you don't know what beauty is until you see her. All other girls look like wet hens.”

Chin in hand she considered this gloomily for some time, then tossed her head. “Well, there are other men,” she thought. “They mightn't think so.”

What men?

The question plunged her chin into her hand again. The McFarlanes? Those tow-headed, bandy dullards! The Jardines? Why, she never saw them! Who else? There was nobody else, except her brothers and the shearers once a year — and oh, yes, Mr Cash.

Her forehead puckered. Thinking of Cash she forgot herself and her problems, for Cash was a problem in himself. Did she like him? She didn't know. He was so full of bluster and laughter and noise, she was a bit scared of him sometimes. Then he had that irritating way of talking to her as if she were a child who couldn't understand. And he was different from anybody she had ever seen. In what way different she could not say — that was the puzzle about him. But different in the same way that a person in a book was different from a person in life — clearer, more

real, more solid (of a piece, she thought, like ivory which was ivory all through, whereas there was nothing in the middle of a bone but some spongy stuff, and that's what most people seemed like, people like Mr Shaftoe or Miss Montaulk), and always fresh and — yes, exciting. He told them stories about shipwrecks, and fights, and running guns to Venezuela in a revolution, and blackbirding, and the time when a schooner he was on caught fire and when he went down to loose the kanakas somebody accidentally closed the hatch so that he couldn't get out and the kanakas went mad and began to trample each other in the dark, smoky hold. Even horrible things sounded funny when he told about them not like the stories her father told, which always depressed or frightened her. She decided that it was because Cash never felt any regrets about anything, and so it sounded all right, whereas her father always looked guilty and made you uneasy about him. Everybody liked Cash. Larry came to dinner to hear him, Emma laughed a little, and even Cabell, she noticed, took his advice and depended on him a lot. That made Harriet think of him as the only person beside her mother who was not afraid of Cabell. Still she couldn't be sure about liking him herself: he was so big and unusual in the little monotonous world her father had built up around her. She did like the laughter wrinkles round the corners of his eyes though, she thought, and catching herself thinking so she made a face. "Pooh, as if he'd do! He's old," and she dismissed him from her mind.

Who else then? Somebody like James — handsome and young and brave. No, there was nobody. And it came to her, as the essence of her misery, that there would never be any man except her father, jealously watching over her and excluding every one else because every one was frightened of him.

A shadow on the pane lifted her chin from her hands. She glanced up and saw the wraith of her father staring at her. He had come in quietly and tiptoed across the carpet. She pulled the dress over her shoulders and rose to face him.

"Did I startle you, dear?" he said anxiously. "I'm sorry."

She did not reply. Her breath moved the hand at the neck of her dress, and the bracelets and rings he had loaded on her sparkled in the light. Her fingers were too thin and she kept working the rings back on with her thumb.

"Poor child. Your nerves must be on edge. It's the heat."

"No," she said quickly, snatching the breath to repudiate his sympathy as though afraid it would commit her to a deeper liaison. "I'm perfectly well. Perfectly well indeed." She did not look at him directly but watched his feet come slowly across the space between them, knowing that in three seconds he would take her face in his hands, turn it up, and kiss her. She could not bear to look up and see his one intent eye, his beard, his

scar, his twisted mouth — ogresque in a memory, vivid and terrifying since early childhood, of his face as he bent over her.

He stroked her hair, traced the line of her jaw with a rough forefinger, and raised her face. His lips brushed her forehead.

Harriet opened her eyes and glanced at him quickly. Then her eyes fixed on his beard and widened. “Oh.” Her breath, held against the rank smell of his body, escaped in a startled gasp.

He grabbed at his beard. “What's the matter?”

“There's blood on it!”

He glanced into the mirror on the wall. “Confound it. I thought I'd got it clean.” He rubbed a handkerchief across his face. “There, is that better?”

But she was sidling away from him, pale with an inexplicit fear that was the fear of her dream returning irresistibly upon her.

“Why, Harriet child, nothing to be upset about. I couldn't help it.” He drove her back to the piano stool. “It was his fault. I couldn't stand there and let him belt me, could I?”

She saw he had been fighting. This reasonable explanation for the blood on his beard calmed her, and she breathed freely again, gazing at the carpet.

“Could I?” he repeated, and when she did not agree he burst out, “Damn it, you *all* seem to think I'm some kind of a monster. Even you!”

Her silence, parrying his appeal as though she feared that a word, a gesture, of denial would involve her in some unwholesome compact of emotion, loosed a torrent of reproach. “Even you, Harriet. You believe them when they say I'd do anything. Somebody's been telling you lies about me. Your mother? James, eh?”

She shook her head. “Oh, no.”

“Lies,” he growled. “Lies, lies, lies. All lies. They say I tried to steal land off McFarlane, duffed horses, robbed Miss Ludmilla, cheated Sambo. And now she says I . . .” He wiped his hand across his lips and went tramping round the room.

Harriet did not look up.

This unjust judgment of silence infuriated him. He stopped in front of her. “You all look down on me — you and James and all the rest. Huh. You don't know what it was like here forty years ago. Say a man held a gun at *your* head. What would *you* do? Sit there and let him pull the trigger? And say you didn't? Would it be . . .”

She preserved a dead face, trying not even to hear him.

He gestured helplessly. How could one explain and justify to the blind and unjust. “You couldn't understand,” he said quietly. “You'd have to trace it all back to the beginning.”

He walked over to the table, sat down, and wedged his face between his hands. “I was as clean skinned and innocent as you in the beginning,”

he muttered, gazing over her head at the square plaque of darkness and the stars sweeping away beyond.

There was a jingle of tiny, muted bells. A moth was fluttering under the frosted shade of the lamp at his elbow. Bells . . . the clang of ships' bells coming out of the sea mist, himself a boy with his face pressed against the cold window to watch the beacon glow on Tenterburn Hill and the ghostly topsails of a ship fighting away from the Cliffs — church bells on Sunday morning and the rustle of starched dresses in High Street, the lavender smell of his mother's gloves — the bell calling him once more to the ordeal of a meal-table shared with quarrelsome brothers and a father crude and violent and contemptuous . . .

The jingling ceased in an upflaring of the steady light and a sizzle of burnt wings. He started, looked at the lamp, and sighed. "Yes," he said, "I was young like you. Then I did something. If you understood everything — the years, struggling, thinking, waiting . . ." His teeth clicked.

He looked at her, but the stubborn uncompassion of her eyes held him off. "You!" he said bitterly. "Where would you be?"

"Oh, for goodness sake, Father," Harriet said, flashing her rings at him. "I don't want to understand. It's not fair. I want to go away. Send me away from here. Why do you always promise and never send me away. Send me to England."

"Harriet! Child! Dear!" He jumped up, went to the piano and put an arm round her shoulder. "Why, you're shaking like a leaf. Did I scare you?"

"Scared — no. I'm angry," Harriet said. "It's monstrous."

"Monstrous? Why, child, what d'you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know," Harriet said and her lips began to tremble. "It's the way you want everything. Oh, I can't explain."

"Me want everything! But only for you, darling. In a year's time — two years — I'll be as rich as Carnegie. You'll be an heiress to millions. They'll all want to marry you — fine young men, like I was. Believe me, dear, I was — young, handsome, in Owerbury . . ."

She struggled against his arm, crushing the breath out of her, then gave up struggling and went lax against him. In a flat voice she said, "You'll never send me away. You'll keep me locked up till I'm old and ugly like Montaulk. Never seeing anything but sheep — like a prisoner . . ."

"Good heavens, girl, what're you saying? After all, you're barely eighteen."

"Yes, and I've never been out of the valley — not even to Brisbane." She freed herself and went to the window.

Cabell was startled by this sudden rebellion of a girl who had been so gentle, so unresisting, so like his mother, he had always thought. Now, as she stood by the window watching him sideways with the shadows in her

long eyes he saw, for an instant, a resemblance to Emma, but pushed the idea away. “You're a bit overwrought,” he said. “Perhaps a change would do you good. As a matter of fact I was thinking I might take a house in Brisbane . . .”

She looked at her reflection in the mirror and shrugged.

Part III: The Nice People

Chapter One: James Hoists His Colours

EVERYTHING came to a head between Cabell and James after Geoffrey let the cat out of the bag at the Christmas dinner of 1889. Or rather James had his chance to bring it to a head. He puttered aimlessly about the place, pouring out his grievances to Harriet, or in one of his old hideouts along the river framing over and over the arguments with which he was going to shout his father down and prove how futile it was to make an engineer out of him or to try to prevent him from marrying Jennis Bowen.

But these powerful reasons and angry words, which welled up so fluently when he was alone that he had to talk them aloud to the trees, seemed feeble when Cabell was near and he felt, like a palpable chill, his father's blank indifference. Cabell often took him aside now and talked to him, but just as he might have talked to a clerk. "You get finished with your studying quick. By that time I'll be ready to use you." He talked too of Ludmilla and Larsen and of the way he would drive them out of *his* mine. James listened and despaired. How could he hope to prevail where so many had been beaten. Again, as in childhood, he looked at the battered face and read there how his father had suffered and fought, committed crimes perhaps, and emerged from all ordeals with energy and purpose unspent.

He went to Harriet. "I'm going away to-morrow."

"What, you've had it out with him? Oh, Jimmy!" She took his arm and huddled against him. "What did he say?"

"I didn't have it out — no. What's the use. He only yells."

"But you're not going back to Sydney! You're going to do what you said and marry Jennis."

James scowled. "Yes, I will. And I won't study till he's ready to use me. I'm damned if I will."

"Ah Jimmy!" She turned up to him eyes bright with admiration and the appeal of her own hopes. "But what will you do? He won't give you any money!"

"I don't suppose so," James said, worried. Then he threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. "Damn him!"

"Then you'll have to go and tell Sir Michael everything straight away," Harriet said briskly. "Tell him what an unreasonable man Papa is. He'll help you. He said he would, didn't he? He said he'd help you to learn the

law and go in for politics.”

“Yes, he said so.”

“That's all right then. You'll get a position and be able to marry Jennis.”

“Oh, I suppose so.”

“You only suppose so. But haven't you made up your mind? Oh,” she cried, “if I was a man and I wanted to marry a girl and Papa said I couldn't I'd — I'd buy some sheep and go out into the bush and start a station and get rich. Why, like Papa did!”

James smiled sourly. “That was all right for him. Look at the kind of man he is. He never thinks of anything but sheep and gold-dust. Besides, there wasn't anything else then. Now it's different. There are more nice people now. Like Doug Peppiott's father and Sir Michael Flanagan and all the people they have at their houses. You haven't got to show you're a man by fighting and swearing and talking about sheep. You don't understand. You haven't been in Brisbane and Sydney. It's civilized there.”

“I wouldn't care,” Harriet said, “if I was in love. I wouldn't care about anything.”

“Rot! You don't know what you're talking about.” Then he glanced up quickly and said, “And you don't want to go talking like that in front of people in Brisbane when you go.”

“Why?”

“A girl oughtn't to — that's why. It's only a certain kind of girl talks like that.”

“I must be a certain kind of girl then.”

“You don't know what you're saying,” James grumbled. “And I jolly well hope you don't go on talking like that in front of nice people. It's bad enough having Geoffrey down there running about the town.”

Harriet laughed and put her arms around him. “I won't run about the town. I'll sit at home waiting for someone to come and propose to me. And if they love me enough I don't care where they take me or how much money they've got.”

“A fat lot of need *you'll* have to worry about money,” James said resentfully.

Next day he left for Brisbane — two hundred and fifty jolting dusty miles by coach and another hundred in a tiny oven of a railway carriage, which he shared with a couple of drunken squatters from the Outside. They had a barrel of beer in the compartment and wanted him to drink with them.

“First time been Brisbane twelve years,” one of them confided, thrusting a tankard under James's nose. “No women, no nothing but sheep and gins. Out Never-Never. Got fifteen thousan' quid blow in. Goin' have bender. Me 'n' mate. You come along young plo'.” The train

lurched and he spilled half the contents of the tankard into James's immaculate lap.

James removed himself to the other end of the carriage and carefully sponged the spots off his clothes, thinking, "Twelve years and nothing but sheep. I couldn't. No, I *couldn't*. I might get just like *him*."

He took a room at the Royal Hotel in Queen Street, cleaned and dressed himself carefully, and set out for Sir Michael Flanagan's house on Bowen Terrace. The streets were full of well-dressed men and women, cabs and carriages and smart gigs. He looked nervously sideways at a reflection of himself in a shop window, appraising his clothes. Yes, they compared, he thought, pleased with himself, and covertly adjusted the set of his coat. Men passing waved to him and ladies bowed. He began to feel a little more confident. These people liked him. He was one of them. They would help him because of that and because they were generous. So everything would surely turn out all right.

A voice hailed him from the kerb. "Hey, young fella me lad!" It was Doug Peppiott, lounging in a flash-looking run-about with a pair of beautiful grey horses straining at the reins, which he held in his yellow-gloved hands so as to show off the fine arch of the horses' necks.

James hurried over and greeted him.

"Steady!" Peppiott said. "You'll scare the nags. They're a bit hot standing."

"What a match!" James said. "Where did you get them?"

"Picked 'em up off old Lord Bacon when we were down Sydney, Christmas. He wanted to give 'em to me, but the Pater wouldn't stand for it. Not a bad old boy. Cottoned on to me like a long lost." He gave the end of his red moustaches a flourish. "Matter of fact, he's going to give me some tickets for soup when I go Home to Oxford later in the year."

"You're going to Oxford?"

"Pater's idea. Just as soon stay and buy a place and start breeding nags myself. But it ought to be fun knocking about with the Johnnies for a couple of years." He glanced at James to see how he was taking this, and was pleased to see him taking it very badly. "Better than making stinks and mud-pies in a goldmine, eh?"

James frowned at him. He was bigger than James, with a full, florid, good-looking face, belittling grey eyes, and a drawling, scornful voice. A typical good fellow, a well-flushed, breezy young man about town — first-class polo player, dashing fellow on the cricket field (he had knocked up fifty against a visiting English team), generous spender, leader of wild pranks in town (he threw a piano downstairs in the Royal Hotel one night when somebody complained about the noise he was making), sentimental baritone balladist in great demand at "evenings," and hero to his mother and to the ladies of Frogs' Hollow. In his spacious

gestures and easy smiles spoke that assurance of a fortunate destiny for which James had always envied and, furtively, hated him. Since James's first year at school when Peppiott had hounded a merciless pack after him with the story of Cabell's early days he had become, in James's eyes, a symbol for all those who had no skeletons in the cupboard and therefore could afford to judge and despise others. How he had always wanted to be like Doug Peppiott — and how his heart seethed with spite against him. But he bit his tongue whenever it tried to speak out because he was afraid of the pack which Peppiott was born to lead. To stand in well with them, to be accepted as one of them, was all he desired. If someone had told him that as he stood there envying Peppiott, Peppiott was envying him for having a father who, all agreed, would soon be one of the richest men in Australia, James would not have believed it. Peppiott looked bigger and handsomer and more self-assured than ever as he gazed down from the runabout with the two proud-looking horses fretting against his strong hands, and James felt shabby and small. To make up for his sense of this he said manfully, "I'm not going into the mine. I've made up my mind."

Peppiott laughed. "We know all about that. I ran into Geoff down in Queenie's last night and he told us what your old man said about Flanagan and his granddaughter. He must be a bit of a doer, your old man. Is it true he makes the miners strip starbolic naked in front of him to show they ain't pinching any of his gold?"

James tried to glare, but Peppiott's sarcastic eyes were too much for him. "I'm not going into the mine," he snapped. "Geoffrey doesn't know what he's talking about."

Peppiott chuckled. "You want to be careful," he said, "or your old man'll be towelling you up as he did your brother Lar . . ." He stopped, confused, and turning, James found that Peppiott senior had come up while they were talking and was now frowning at his son.

James's only desire was to get away from them, but Peppiott senior seized his hand and pump-handled it. "James! What a pleasure." He pronounced it pless-shaw, unctuously, crouching slightly as though to drop these two little drops of oil on to the back of James's hand. He was tall and thin with a long, thin face set in rat-skin dundrearies. His head was long and narrow, like a melon, and he wore his sparse patent-leather hair brushed straight back and parted in the middle. He lifted a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles to the bridge of his sharp nose, then let them swing on their ribbon. "No i-deah you were down, my dear fellow. On your way somewhere? Let us drop you."

"There isn't any room with these high-flyers," Doug grumbled. "He'd rather walk."

"Walk in this heat? What rot. You move over." He moved over and Peppiott bundled James in and wedged his thin buttocks down between

them.

The horses pranced and shied and swung out into the traffic.

"I hear a rumour that your father is taking old Judge Bullenough's house at New Farm. Is it true?" Peppiott senior asked.

"I did hear something," James mumbled.

"It would please me," Peppiott said, "if it gave me an opportunity to renew my acquaintance with your father. I knew him years ago. A *remarkable* man. He deserved to get on. I suppose he will bring your sister down for a little amusement?"

"I suppose so."

"Ah. We must see that she is not disappointed."

"Mother coming too?" Doug put in.

Father and son exchanged looks. "Mind where you're driving you dam' fool," Peppiott said, spitting drops of venom, not oil, into his son's ear.

Angry and embarrassed James lifted himself half out of the seat. "You can put me down here," he said. "It's not far to walk."

But Peppiott held him back. "No, just a moment, James. I have something to ask you — if you don't think it would be impertinent of an old man who has seen you grow up and come to look on you as — well, you've been about with Douglas so much that it is almost as if you were my own son."

James blushed. "Not at all, sir. Anything . . ."

"It was about Jennis Bowen, my dear boy. Douglas tells me that you've quarrelled with your father."

"As a matter of fact — yes."

Peppiott put his spectacles on and turned to look at James. "Ah, James, I'm sorry to hear it. Very sorry indeed. Of course, crabbed age and youth, as the Bard says . . . But your father had great provocation, my boy. I suppose it's on account of the land Sir Michael . . ."

"Yes, he's still pretty mad about that," James said. "In fact, he's pig-headed."

Peppiott tut-tutted. "Adamant, you say? Quite adamant?"

"Quite."

Peppiott patted his knee. "Needless to say I'm extremely sorry for your sake, James, but I cannot help thinking it is for the best. Your father is a — sage man. You must let him guide you. Be sure he sees through Flanagan. I believe Sir Michael asked you to make overtures to your father? Is it true?"

"He asked me to let Father know that he was sorry for what had happened."

"He specially asked you to say that?"

"Yes, he was genuinely sorry. He didn't have anything else in mind, I'm certain of it," James said quickly. "He liked me, and he said . . ."

Peppiott laughed drily. "I daresay he was sorry. And you told your

father.”

“I tried to, but he wouldn't listen.”

“Ah!” Peppiott rubbed his hands together. “Ah! It was only to be expected. Flanagan did him a great wrong.”

James was put out to hear Peppiott defending his father like this and casting doubts on Flanagan's motives. “I don't know,” he said, “but it seems to me that what happened all that time ago shouldn't interfere with . . .”

“My dear James!” Peppiott pressed his fingers in a limp, dry hand. “Take my word for it, what Flanagan did was unforgivable. Perhaps if your father had taken my advice — I was his solicitor at the time, you know — the matter would have turned out more agreeably, but . . .” He sighed. “A very self-willed man. A very *re-mark-able* man.”

They were at the gate of Flanagan's house. Peppiott held on to James's hand and bent over it to dribble a few more drops of oil on to its palm. “James, old fellow, let a disinterested well-wisher advise. Beware of this specious affability of Flanagan's. All he is after is your father's money.”

“I'm much obliged, sir. Thank you, sir,” James stammered, tugging at his hand. It slipped out of Peppiott's fingers as though it were now too greasy to hold, and James stumbled backwards off the step of the runabout. Angrily he wiped his hand on his trousers as he hurried through the gates. Was the whole world in league with his father to thwart and torment him? Well, Flanagan wasn't anyhow — that much he extracted from Peppiott's speech. Flanagan was his father's enemy, Peppiott said. Encouraged a little he went briskly up the drive.

As he stepped on to the veranda the French lights opened, letting out a clamour of voices and laughter and glasses tinkling, and Flanagan, a paunchy, bouncing man, emerged. “I see ye come up the garden,” he said. “My, it's a treat to set eyes on ye again.”

James looked at him anxiously, but before he could speak Flanagan whisked him off the veranda into the room where a number of other paunchy men were standing about a table of drinks.

“Gentlemen,” Flanagan said, pushing him forward, “meet a young fellah ye're going to hear a lot more about one of these days, Mister Jimmy Cabell. Old Cabell's son.”

They welcomed James with lusty handshakes, backslaps, and words of congratulation for he knew not what. A few names he recognized — Fleck, a member of the Cabinet, Grose, a banker, Carney, a rich squatter, and one of the Dennis brothers, who were said to own half the land on which Brisbane was built.

Again he was irritated. They were *too* friendly. “Cabell's son, eh?” they said, and he scowled and mumbled. The power of his father's ego seemed to extend even here, crossing and dwarfing his. He was relieved when they took themselves off and left him alone with Flanagan.

Flanagan pulled a chair into the open doorway and pressed him into it. "I know it isn't me ye've come to see," he said, patting James's cheek affectionately, "but ye can spare an old friend a minute, now can't ye?"

"As a matter of fact . . ." James began and stopped. Thinking of what Peppiott had said he looked at Flanagan doubtfully, trying to estimate what lay behind the soft, beguiling brogue and pink fat. But whatever it was beside sheer kindness James's inexperienced eye could not discover. Obesity had long erased everything except an expression of complacent affability from Flanagan's face. The fat was like a vast bed of quicksands into which he was rapidly sinking. It had engulfed all but the tip of his nose, a glint of his eyes, a signet ring on the little finger of his left hand. He panted desperately and clutched the arm of the chair as though making a last frantic effort to save himself from being swallowed up once and for all. Here was no sign of the greed and cunning Peppiott had warned him against. His father was greedy and cunning — you could see that at a glance: he looked like a weather-beaten, hungry hawk. But these blue eyes expressed only a pathetic eagerness to be friendly. James thought so anyway. "I did come to see you," he said, rubbing his hands nervously on his knees. "You see — I . . ."

"Out with it," Flanagan said. "I'm your friend. Ye know that, Jimmy. It's a rumpus with your da, eh?"

"Yes, that's it."

"I thought as much. He's a quick-tempered man, too. Who knows if I don't. But what's he at ye about?"

"It's about — everything. First he wants me to be a mining engineer and I don't want to. I don't like mines. I'd rather do what you suggested."

"Ye told him that?" Flanagan paused in lighting a cigar and watched James over the match.

"I tried to. But he wouldn't listen. He said I'd got to study. Oh, it's no use arguing. I just packed up and came here."

"Huh." Flanagan jerked the match through the door and grunted non-committally again. "Huh."

The sound curdled James's blood. "You told me you'd help me, Sir Michael — put me in the way of studying law and getting into politics. You will, won't you?"

Flanagan put out a webbed hand and patted James's knee. "Sure, sure, Jimmy. Who would I help if it's not one that's not much short of being me own son." He laughed, spreading about James a prosperous scent of whisky and cigar smoke. Then the laugh ceased abruptly, like a stage laugh, killing the half-born smile of relief on James's lips. "But now let us get at the rights of the business. Ye've cleared out, ye say? Have ye done it on your own bat or did he kick you out?"

"Oh, no, I just came straight here to see you because I knew you'd . . ."

"Of course." Flanagan wriggled forward on his chair and made a

strenuous effort to force himself to the surface of his fat. A faint smile emerged and sank again immediately. "But ye'll understand, Jimmy, I didn't have no idea your da was all that set on making an engineer out of ye, and I wouldn't like to be coming in between a young man and his da. Now . . ." He waved James's protests aside, "Listen to me — an old man with no axe to grind. It's no use going against that fellah. Ye'll get the worse of it. If it's an engineer he wants ye to be, an engineer ye'd better be or by the Holy he'll cut ye off without a shilling."

"But I don't want a shilling from him," James said. "That's why I've come to you. I'm willing to work hard. I'll study and become a lawyer some day and then — perhaps — I'm young yet — but in a few years' time — oh, you know I'd like to marry Jennis, sir."

"Sure, I know it — and mighty proud of it too. She's head over heels, she is, ye lucky young scamp." He kicked playfully at James, but became serious and confidential again at once. "Still and all, Jimmy, I been thinking about that law business and politics. It's a dirty game. What's more, it would eat up a wad of your time studying, whereas what's the prospects in the mine business? A couple more years in Sydney and ye're well enough off to marry and yer own boss."

"My own boss!"

"Come now," Flanagan said shyly, "we aren't going to live much longer, us old'uns. Your da's had a hard life of it. Come the day ye'll be a big man up there — and down here too — and that right soon. It's worth waiting."

In his exasperation James pounded the arm of the chair. "But can't you understand, Sir Michael? It's not the mine. It's everything. He wants it all. He treats me like a paid hand. He only wants to use me for his own purposes. And he won't let me marry Jennis. And — and he'll never die."

"Did he tell ye that — about Jennis?"

James nodded.

Flanagan let go the arms of the chair and flopped backwards, as though abandoning himself at last to the treacherous swamp of pink, perspiring flesh. It closed slowly over his mouth and eyes. He sighed.

James watched him, hopefully at first, and as the seconds lengthened into minutes with increasing irritation. It seemed incredible that such massive inertia could persist against the cry of his urgent needs. He shuffled his feet.

Flanagan opened one eye at last. "Oh, he'll get over that," he said. "I'll be seeing him. I've got propositions that'll interest him more than keeping up a bit of a quarrel. Just ye take a pull on your patience."

"It's not a matter of patience," James said. "He'll never listen to reason. If I have to give into him about this I'll have to give into him about Jennis too. He'll just make a packhorse out of me."

Flanagan shook his head. "Now, Jimmy, my boy, it's not right to be

talking about your da that way. He's tough, I grant ye, but he's your da."

The tone of his voice, the words so much like Peppiott's, struck James's heart cold. "They're all against me — they're all frightened of him," he thought.

Flanagan considered him. "I see just what ye're thinking now, Jimmy — what a friend I turned out to be, eh? I've never been thinking better of your interests if you want to know. Ye can't turn your back on money — least of all in these parts. It'll buy ye anything mortal. And while I'm on that," he pulled himself gasping to the edge of his chair again and leant forward, "be careful of that Peppiott gang. They're a two-faced lot. Pretending to be your friends and thinking of nothing but how they can use ye to go crawling to your old man." He nodded shrewdly. "Peppiott done some things perhaps your father never heard of. Ye'll be wise to give 'em a wide berth."

"I suppose they're after my father's money," James said bitterly.

Flanagan slapped his knee. "Got it in one."

"Not in one," James said. "It took me a long time to find out how important my father's money made me." He jumped up, his lips quivering at the corners, and took his hat from the table.

Flanagan's knowing blue eye took in everything. He rose slowly and put his arm round James's shoulder. "We won't say nothing more about it for the time being, my boy. But ye'll understand and thank me some day. Now ye just run along and say how-d'ye-do to Jennis. I bet she's been sitting on pins and needles up there waiting for us to stop talking this nonsense we call business."

Chapter Two: Shows Them

JENNIS was in the drawing-room upstairs.

Lolling back on the sofa in a sensuous liquefaction of bones she gazed down at the garden and fanned herself. Her blue eyes were lost in a day-dream which held them wide and wondering, parted her full lips, and stirred her body with sad little sighs. Sometimes she almost stopped breathing for a few seconds and the pupils of her eyes would dilate and the tip of her red tongue come out between her lips. Suddenly a mighty, shuddering breath swelled her heavy breasts through swathes of petticoat and starched piqué, and she glanced round discontentedly at the half-finished water-colour on the easel before her, the half-finished crochet-work on the head of the sofa, the book open on her lap, and the clock eating its way through the day with such aggravating unhurry. She pouted then and sank back into the cushions, soon to be absorbed again in visions that moved to and fro in the cool shadow of the bamboos. The scent of the frangipanni, the pulsing waves of heat, like an excited breath on her cheek, the brown arms of the gardener, and the glittering thrust of his scythe in the grass wove through these dim fancies, which relaxed her body and thrilled it with a pleasant sense of expectation.

The sound of a step on the stairs made her start guiltily. She looked around and saw James coming down the passage, brushed the creases out of her dress, patted the heavy pile of her blonde hair, and through the corner of her eyes, while apparently gazing at her hands folded in her lap, watched him enter.

"Jennis!" He hurried across the room and took her hand and kissed it. "I thought I'd never get to you."

"Jimmy!" She uttered a little, high cry which, coming from such a strong bosom, gave James the delicious feeling that she was quite overcome with passion at the sight of him. The stiffness liquefied out of her bones again and her lips came damply apart and her hand seemed to melt between his. He clung to it, amazed by the softness of its flesh, which lay heavily in his palm, firing, confusing, and slightly terrifying him with its complete acquiescence. Before he could check himself he was filling it with kisses, bending it over his mouth, and hungrily breathing its faint odour of her body.

Sunk in the cushions she watched him with eyes expressionless, almost stupid, as though his mouth had drawn all her life into her hand.

Occasionally she uttered another of her faint, expiring cries which sounded like “Don't,” or “Oh,” but did not try to take her hand away.

“Jennis, I love you terribly,” James said. “I won't give you up. I want to marry you. And you want to marry me, too, don't you? Jennis! Don't you?”

He had to call her twice before he saw a glint of consciousness return to her eyes, which wandered vaguely over his face as she licked her lips and whispered, “Yes, of course.”

Now that he saw her again, her white neck, the thick, silky loops of hair, the swell of her breast, heard her voice, so gentle and shy, felt in the unresisting tenderness of her hand the assurance that all this loveliness wanted to be his, the worries of the last few weeks dissolved in a flash. That he had ever for a single moment thought of allowing his father to bully him out of marrying Jennis seemed unbelievable. Would he cut his throat if his father said so? And to lose Jennis would be worse than cutting his throat.

Yes, he decided, in a burst of courage and optimism, Harriet was right. He must make a life for himself, and since nobody seemed ready to help him he must go out in the bush and carve a place of his own.

“But would you leave here — all this . . .?” He glanced round the room, overfurnished with carpets and tapestries and gloomy pictures in gilt frames and hundreds of dusty odds and ends in mammoth cabinets. “Would you be able to live in the bush with me? On a station?” He watched her anxiously as she roused from the delicious hypnosis of having her hand fondled and crushed between his hard fingers.

“Yes, of course,” she said.

“But the bush! No theatres. No dances. Nothing. Perhaps for years.”

“I like being in the bush. We always go to Penine Downs in winter. It's nice.”

“That's not the bush. It's no different from being here. You've got servants and everything, just the same as here.”

“Yes, of course.”

“But what if there weren't any servants?”

She was puzzled, but gave up trying to understand, and wriggled her hand in his to remind him that it was waiting to be kissed.

He turned the palm up and looked at it. The thought that it was like a white, soft body lying there waiting for him to take it made his cheeks burn. “It's so soft,” he said. “Could it learn to cook and scrub and . . .”

Her eyes widened.

“Oh, you don't understand. I might have to start at the bottom like my father did.”

“But Grandpa says that you'll have a lot of money. He says your papa will be one of the richest men in Australia.”

“Yes, but . . .” James was stumped for words to explain the incredible

fact that his father did not want him to marry her. "Look, Jennis, suppose I had a row with my father and he wouldn't give me any money — would you run away and marry me and live out in the west?"

The look in his face alarmed her. She stiffened her back and withdrew her hand. "Run away? Oh!"

"I'd soon make money for you," James said quickly. "I'd soon be rich. You'd have everything — servants and all. I'd be a thousand times richer than him."

His eagerness, burning in his eyes, sent pleasant little shivers through her. She looked at him admiringly. "Oh, would you?"

"You bet I would. I'd do anything for you. I'd go through anything."

"Oh!" She gave him her hand again and abandoned herself to the pleasure of his mouth nuzzling her sensitive palm.

"You wouldn't give me up? No matter what happened?"

For her it was almost impossible to imagine that anything could happen except the dull, repetitive march of days swirling harmlessly past the serene tower in which she dreamed vaguely and excitingly of a young man filling her hand with kisses. "No, of course not."

"And you'd marry me — even if everybody tried to stop you?"

"Of course." But why did he waste so much time talking?

A carriage crunched up the drive and they heard a minute later her mother's agitated step climbing the stairs. He planted a last kiss in her palm before they moved apart, just in time. Mrs Bowen burst in on them, red in the face, out of breath, and plainly very angry.

"So you *are* here?" she said to James, who jumped to his feet and bowed awkwardly.

"I just dropped in. Sir Michael said I might."

"Sir Michael!" She snorted and looked around. "Where's that fool Griswell?" she demanded. "Jennis!"

Jennis stirred and looked around too. "Oh, Griswell. I don't know. Perhaps she went shopping."

"You sent her."

"No, Mother."

"You did. Don't deny it. You sent her out so you could sit here and compromise yourself with this young man — you deceitful little hussy you. In front of *everybody*. Making a public scandal of yourself. The talk of the town — that's what you are."

She slammed the door and rushed between them — a plump little middle-aged woman with blinking, myopic, blue eyes, Flanagan's button nose, a kind, fat face, a collection of innumerable trinkets, chains, cameos, and brooches flashing and tinkling to the rise and fall of her enormous bosom, and the distracted air of one who thinks she is being left behind in the rush of events and generally ends by being well ahead of them. She lived in a perpetual itchy awareness of cabals and

whisperings, plots, counter-plots, factions, and social mines, which excited her to such frenzied plotting on her own account that she usually managed to create the scandal she suspected and feared. Her grand delusion was her shrewdness and discretion, for she was really as indiscreet and innocent as a child.

True, there was plotting and whispering enough to appal the stoutest and purest heart in the little hierarchy of wealthy squatters and citizens who had become the leaders of society since the early days. The virtues of yesterday, when the wild, empty country had yielded itself only to the strong, were the skeletons in the cupboards of to-day. Out of the wealth which the tough and sometimes dishonest pioneers had got together the social graces were beginning to blossom. It was just one of life's little ironies that those who had the best means to cut a figure had also, very often, the least presentable of historical backgrounds to strut against, which made them no less anxious to strut.

With the past so painfully recent, with the gaunt pioneers, more than ever appalling in their old age, still haunting the scene, the skirmishes of social life in a little community were bitter. Money plus a clean history, with a titled second cousin somewhere in England, was unassailable. But some had money and convict ancestors, and others had money and no convict ancestors but were drunkards, or had broods of half-caste children on the escutcheon, or were reputed cattle-duffers, or had been indicted for selling sly grog on their runs, or had illiterate or low-born fathers or mothers at the roots of the family tree. All such drawbacks were eagerly canvassed and thrashed out and magnified over bars and tea-tables, as they would be for another generation till time and intermarriage had effaced the harsh outlines of the landtakers' ambiguous lives, of which only the effect would survive in stringent libel laws, a submerged sense of shame and inferiority, and an anxious abasement to all forms of gentility that would amount almost to a national disease.

James, who lived in constant dread of disclosures about his father, felt his legs go weak when Mrs Bowen began to use such words as "scandal," and "the talk of the town," which were the currency of his nightmares. He took a few steps towards the door and said, "I'd better be going. I only dropped in for a minute."

But, bubbling and outraged, Mrs Bowen turned on him. "You stay where you are, young man. You make all the trouble, then you think you can just run away. Indeed. Where will you run to? The public house, I suppose, and tell all those good-for-nothings your friends what a fine fellow you are, bringing disgrace on this poor girl . . ."

"I don't understand."

"Now don't lie to me, James Cabell. I know all. Deny that puppy Douglas Peppiott is your friend."

"He is my friend, yes."

"A fine friend! A harum-scarum hooligan. A nice one to talk. With his family. A grandfather who took a stockwhip to his wife and then drowned himself if you please, and a grandmother who . . . well never mind." She leapt at Jennis. "What are you listening for, you wicked eavesdropper? Have I wasted all my love and care to raise a girl who listens at keyholes as well as leads young men on to make a fool of her? Leave the room at once. I've got something to say to this — creature. And don't listen at the door."

Undisturbed by her mother's reproaches and flurried scurrying to and fro, to which she was used, Jennis obediently gathered together her book, crochet-work, handkerchief, and fan, rose, brushed her dress, and trailed leisurely from the room, smiling at James as she passed and for a moment blotting from his agitated spirit everything except his urgent desire. It swept over him when he saw the door close on her as a fear that he had seen her for the last time, and gave him the strength to say, "Mrs Bowen, there's something I want to tell you. It's about Jennis and me."

Mrs Bowen bounced off the sofa and plunged at him, seized the lapel of his coat, and shook him. "Never you dare to mention my daughter again. Making her name a byword in low places with your plots and schemes. That's what you've done. *My* daughter. She could hold up her head with any of you. There's no convict blood in her."

She bounced back on to the sofa and smouldered and panted for some time while James hopped from one foot to the other and cursed the Peppiotts and cursed his father and sweated in anticipation of some awful revelation.

"That Lucy Peppiott," she muttered. " 'I ought to warn you' she says. 'They say James Cabell is going to elope with Jennis. Douglas heard it at a place called Queenie's. It's all over town.' " She plunged at James again. "Queenie's? What's Queenie's? A — a place?"

"It — it's a bar in the Royal Hotel," James gulped.

"And that Peppiott woman had the cheek to say my daughter's name had been mentioned *in a bar*! With Mrs Astley looking on and smirking, mind you. Why, everybody knows what *she* came from. *Her* grandmother was nothing but a London fly-by-night and her father was that old Curry who got rich stealing other people's sheep. Once his wife had to publish her marriage certificate in all the Brisbane papers. He was a crow-minder in the old days and many's the time my mother saw him being flogged at the tail of a cart in Queen Street when she . . ." She stopped and wriggled on the sofa, then went a shade redder and looked at James more angrily than ever. "Well? What're you grinning at?"

"I'm not," James said miserably.

"You're thinking of that nasty, vindictive story about my mother bringing her first husband Duffy in to be flogged. Don't deny it."

"I . . ." James gulped. "I . . ."

"It's a nasty, vindictive lie of your father's. He'll hear from my solicitors about it. My mother was a lady and her first husband — he was sent out for — for stealing a loaf of bread."

James hung his head.

"You don't believe me? Oh, I know you think you'd be conferring an honour on Jennis, don't you? Yes, I heard what your father said about it. Or was it you said it in Queenie's?"

"I never said anything in Queenie's."

"Well let me tell you . . ." She took hold of his lapel again and nearly pulled the coat off his back. "If it was true, all the honour would be on the other foot, young man, because Jennis hasn't got any of Duffy's blood in her and everybody knows who your mother was — and what your father was too, for that matter."

James felt the room disappear in a sheet of flame. He came out of the haze to find Mrs Bowen squeezing his hands against her bosom and patting his cheek and crying, "Oh, my poor boy! What a wretch I was to say such things. It's not true. Your mother's a fine woman. And that's just what I felt like telling those two women this afternoon. 'You've got two lots of convict blood in you, Mrs Astley.' That's what I wanted to say . . . Oh, there I go again." She fussed around him, clucking and bubbling, and pushed him on to the sofa. "Sit down, dear, and take it calmly now. Just tell me the truth. I only want to help you. There. There."

But as soon as he opened his mouth and said, "I only know I love Jennis and . . ." she jumped up again and screamed, "There you are. I knew it. You *were* plotting to run away with the poor innocent girl and bring disgrace on us. You can't deny it. Lucy Peppiott told me. Thank God I've got a few friends left with all this backbiting and scheming going on. And vipers coming into the house and biting the hand that feeds them. Ah, blood will out!"

"I wasn't plotting to run away at all," James protested. "I mean, I want to marry Jennis some day. You knew that, Mrs Bowen. But my father says . . ."

She swelled over him. "What does he say?"

He hesitated, understanding at last that just this it was which had upset her — that his father should have forbidden him to marry Jennis. "He won't let me. That's all . . ."

She snapped her lips together and looked him up and down. Then she collapsed on to the sofa and began to laugh, rocking to and fro, her big bosom rattling its trinkets, and the tears running down her cheeks, while James stared uncomfortably at the carpet. "Well of all the funny things! Derek Cabell won't let you marry *my* Jennis, *my* daughter. Doesn't think she's good enough for him. And what did he marry? And what did his brother-in-law Dirk Surface marry? And what's that same ragamuffin now — a butcher boy in Sydney. Did you know that? A common butcher

boy!” (This was not quite true, and Mrs Bowen knew it as well as James. Dirk Surface, after leaving Winbadgery in 1867, had gone to Sydney and, nagged on by his wife, had become a very successful merchant. Starting with a butcher's shop he now owned many butcher shops and had interests in meat canneries and freezing works and other enterprises of the same kind. But it suited Mrs Bowen to distort these facts.) She went off into unreal shrieks of laughter again till James could bear it no longer.

“Mrs Bowen, please,” he said. “My father's old and obstinate . . .”

“Obstinate? He's wicked — criminal. And you can go straight back and tell him from me that I wouldn't have any of his sons marrying my Jennis if he *would* let them, if he came crawling on his knees. Tell him that. And let me tell you that my Jennis could marry anybody she liked. Not ragtag and bobtail, but real gentlemen. When we were in Sydney last year Lord Clanmorice's son, the Governor's aide, came to see her every day. Yes, every day. That's the kind of husband my Jennis will have. And now you take your hat and don't let me see your face in this house again. ‘A bog-trotter,’ indeed. Isn't that what your father called my father? ‘Her grandfather stole his fare to Australia.’ Didn't he say that? Don't lie now.”

“Oh, Mrs Bowen,” James cried, rising from her wrath. “I'm not responsible for what he says. I've finished with him. I'm going to work.”

“Work at what? Horse-racing and gambling and drinking like your brother?”

“No. I'll go out into the bush and take up land, and I thought that some day I might — if Jennis still wanted to — and I'd made enough money . . .”

“What, my Jennis in the bush! A cockatoo farmer's wife! Milking cows and breeding brats! So that's your plan! Here,” she dashed across the room, snatched his hat off the table, dashed back, lugged him to his feet, and hustled him to the door. “Leave my house at once. The bush! What impudence! She speaks French and plays the piano! Get out at once. Get out!”

James went clumsily, and benumbed by his thoughts hurried blindly down the stairs. As he opened the front door he heard a patter of feet behind and Mrs Bowen panted along the passage.

She took his hand. “Jimmy, forgive me. I'm upset by those women. You're a good boy.” She pulled his head down and kissed it. “Perhaps if you made money enough to keep Jennis like a lady, well — I'll see she waits a couple of years for you, anyway.”

A couple of years to make his fortune! James opened his mouth to protest but she slammed the door.

Chapter Three: Pulls Them Down

JAMES hurried away from the house where lights were beginning to appear against the dusk. He was lonely and full of self-pity now. The egotism of his youth, which had sent him to Flanagan with the bland assurance that the wily old politician would help him out of sheer affection, had had a sad blow. In the last two hours James had learnt something important — that life does not shower its gifts on the deserving. A simple and obvious fact, perhaps, but every one has to find it out for himself. James was very upset.

As he slouched along between big houses where the lamps behind open windows shone on tables laid for the evening meal he felt that no man had ever been so shamefully deserted and betrayed. Every one except himself had money and freedom to do what they wanted, marry whom they loved, go where they wished; but he, if he was to get what he wanted, must spend the best years of his life slaving like a nigger in the bush and turning himself into a bumpkin like those fellows he had seen in the train. No, it wasn't right, and James revolted against the idea that the only alternative to doing this difficult thing was submission to his father. Life could not be so hard, so cruel. There must be some way if only he could think of it. More and more depressed he strolled up and down Queen Street, thinking and finding fewer and fewer arguments to deny that he must either go west and make his own way or crawl ignominiously back to Sydney. Yes, it would be ignominious. What explanation could he give to Harriet, to Mrs Bowen, except that he was not up to doing what he had boasted he would do. He thought of Harriet's scornful eyes. Oh, hell! Oh, hell.

James did not know it, but he was passing at this moment the very spot where his father had sat by the roadside forty-seven years before, struggling with the same thoughts in the same crisis of his young life, when he had to choose between returning to England at the bounty of his aunt or fighting a tough country and its tough people for a bounty of his own. Like his father, James tried to shelve a decision by crossing the street to the Royal Hotel.

At this hour the bar over which Queenie, the town's most regal *demimondaine* presided in a gown of sequins cut low into her breasts, was always full of bloods young and old — squatters in town for a race-meeting, a wool-sale, or a spree, fat business men in side-whiskers and

pugareed straw hats, racketing young men about town, and citizens with white suits stained by the dust and sweat of the day, to all of whom, in this bebustled era of sanctified wives and pure sweethearts, the raucous humanity of barmaid and whore was a blessed release. Essentially the same mob Cabell had seen and cursed the day he came in here with Flanagan, but half a century sleeker and richer. Money was plentiful, drinking on a tremendous scale.

James entered the bar with the abashed shyness of a sober man among drunks, and looked around hoping to see Peppiott or Geoffrey and find some excuse for picking a quarrel with one of them. Peppiott was not there but Geoffrey was, plump and important beside Shaftoe, at the centre of a crowd drinking champagne out of beer schooners. They had just come in from the races, and the ex-mentor, ex-storekeeper, ex-gymnasium proprietor, now resplendent in clothes of a horsy cut, with a gold watch-chain on his fallen paunch, a diamond ring on his finger, and a grey billycock tipped on to the back of his rusty head, was holding forth on the afternoon's sport to a gathering of thirsty pub-crawlers who had accepted the invitation to crack a bottle with him. Echoing his curses, shadowing his gestures, and backing up his rowdy boasts Geoffrey revealed more than ever the idiotic resemblance of a poodle to its master. He too wore a grey billycock tipped back, thumbed the arm-holes of a check waistcoat, and had a watch-chain and the beginnings of a little pointed belly.

James elbowed into the crowd, their faces swollen and greasy in the hot lamplight. Standing beside Shaftoe he saw one of the squatters who had come down in the train with him — the man who brought fifteen thousand to blow in town after ten years in the Never-Never. He was very drunk and promised to be drunker, for as often as he emptied his glass Shaftoe filled it again.

"Yes, gentlemen," Shaftoe was saying, "we as good as had twenty thousand quid in the old stocking when they came into the straight. The mare was a length in front and going strong. Then something happened. She just dropped out of the race as if she started running backwards. It wasn't the boy's fault — I'll say that. He rode her like Old Nick, but she finished second last and — bang went four thousand. Well," he drained his glass, "Shaftoe can take a licking. Another bottle of pop, Queenie, and we'll toast the winner."

"Another bottle of pop, Queenie," Geoffrey's squeaky voice piped.

Queenie brought the champagne and Shaftoe filled the out-stretched glasses, with special attention to the drunken squatter. "To the winner, God bless him!"

"God bless the winner," Geoffrey chimed in, flushed with drink and gambolling around Shaftoe's heels. He caught James's eye and winked.

James turned away in disgust and found Cash behind him, smiling.

"Not drinking?" Cash said.

"With them!"

"Have one with me."

"I don't want to drink," James said. His desire for companionship was gone. He felt too miserable.

Cash looked at him. "You look as if one wouldn't do you much harm. But come and watch me drink, anyway."

James tried to protest, but Cash put a strong hand under his arm and pushed him up to the bar. "Besides," he said, "we're the only cold-sober men here, our friend's been so free with his tippie to-night. Great sportsman, eh?"

James grunted.

"Go on now, you don't see many shouting champagne when they lose." He banged the bar. "Queenie, dear, a rum."

Queenie sorted herself from the bevy of minor Queenies behind the bar, took the bottle from the shelf, and sailed massively towards them, pursued by yearning eyes, deftly evading eager paws, and sending back an impartial flash of gold-filled teeth. She had an eye like a piece of agate under the bang of golden hair and a voice accustomed to shouting down obstreperous cattlemen and miners, but both became liquid and warm when she looked at Cash and said, leaning her dimple towards him: "Oh, Mister Ca-ash. I am glad to see you. Where've you been hiding all this time?"

"Not hiding, Queenie, my love. Only down to Melbourne on business. I just got off the boat."

"I suppose you saw a lot of pretty girls in Melbourne," Queenie said wistfully, glancing at her reflection in the mirror, framed with fat gilt nymphs and cupids, over the bar.

"Nothing I liked as good as you, Queenie." He patted her cheek.

"Oh Mister Ca-ash!" She rolled her eyes and cuffed him affectionately.

Urgent voices called her and she went off, her gaze lingering.

Stroking his beard Cash speculated on her rich curves. "Love's a damn funny thing now, don't you think, Jimmy?"

James grunted again and turned away from the bar. "I don't know anything about it. And I'd better be getting along."

Cash held him. "Wait a minute now, mate. Did I say something?" He studied James at arm's length, his eyes concealed under their mica shields. "Well, if you're in that much of a hurry, I won't keep you, but here, before you go. Will you help an old friend?"

"Help who?"

"Sambo."

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's lying down in some drum in Frogs' Hollow with d.t.'s — skinned alive with his guts burnt out by this tippie they've been helping him

knock his cheque down on.”

“Who has?”

“Shaftoe — who d'you think?”

“But I thought Sambo got ten thousand for his share in the mine.”

Cash finished his drink and wiped his beard on a big, navvy's handkerchief. “That's true. And Shaftoe brought him down here and helped him off with it. They bought a racehorse and Sambo paid Shaftoe to get it trained. It ran to-day. Where did Shaftoe get four thousand quid to lose on it? It was Sambo's of course. Only it wasn't exactly as Shaftoe said. Sambo lost and Shaftoe won. The horse ought to've come in but they had a crook jockey and now the bookie, who was only another one of Shaftoe's outside pals, will get the horse too. He took a note on the horse against an extra five-hundred-quid bet.”

James was horrified. “My brother Geoffrey helped to do that!”

“No. He hasn't the nous. But he's picking it up. Cogged dice and marked cards and how to split a pound note — he'll know it all by the time your old man gets tired of paying his bills and kicks him out.”

James slumped against the bar. A crooked brother as well as an ill-famed father and convict mother. “But what can I do?” he asked, throwing himself on the quiet *savoir-faire* he felt in Cash as the last remnant of his own confidence to deal with the apparently depthless cunning and evil of the world collapsed under this new blow. All at once the young manhood was gone out of him, and he was again a nervous, frightened boy with sensitive mouth and uncertain eyes.

He made a curious contrast to Cash, squat, ugly, and sunburnt, with a stub of black cigar gripped in white teeth shining through his amiable mouth and rocklike beard. Everything about Cash was rocklike: he was like a squat, ugly rock over which many storms had beaten, weathering it to a core of impervious metal. Yet he was handsome, too, in a way. Vigour transfused his monkey-face, and even the stiff clothes and hard little hat of his new prosperity took a romantic flow and swagger from his energetic gestures.

Remembering the fat inertia of Flanagan, the oily piety of Peppiott, James grasped at a hope that Cash would understand how to help him and not be afraid. “What *can* I do?”

Cash shifted the cigar across his mouth. “One thing I'd like you to do right away, is hold my coat while I hammer that sixpenny bludger, but I wouldn't like to mess up Queenie's bar. You can do this though — you can take Sambo back to the Reach when I lay hands on him and get him sobered up to-morrow. I'd do it myself but I got business for your old man.”

He watched James closely as he said this and through the long silence before James blurted out, “I'm not going back to the Reach.”

“No? Oh, of course, you're on your way to Sydney.”

"I'm not going to Sydney either." James frowned at the bar. "He wants to make me an engineer so that he can use me to make money for . . . Oh, whatever he wants it for. And I'm not going to."

"What d'you aim to do then? You're not going to hang round here like your brother?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Maybe you got a job fixed up, eh? With one of your swell friends?"

"What friends?"

"Flanagan. I heard you were thick."

"I wouldn't take anything from him. I'll make my own way. I'll go out west. I'll take up land. And — and I'll show *him*." Tears shone in James's eyes.

Cash whistled, then slapped James heartily on the back. "That's the way to talk. To hell with the lot of them." He winked. "Now I'll tell you something. Coming up to-night from the wharf I ran into your cobber, Peppiott, and he told me you'd had a barney with the old man and cleared out and gone to Flanagan's. I'm glad you didn't let that old welsher pull the wool over your eyes. He's only using you to get in with your old man. But you saw through that."

"I suppose he was," James said with a long face.

Cash rubbed his hands. "I thought for a minute — fact is, I planned to get you out of town by sending you back home with Sambo before your old man found out where you was and come after you with a gun. I ought've known you better. You were always a game chicken by all accounts, with too much spunk for knuckling down at the Reach."

"But what am I to do?" James repeated. "He'll stop my allowance."

"You'll find plenty. You've got two hands. You don't need an allowance."

"But I want to get married. Not now — in a few years' time."

"It'll cost you a quid for a parson."

"But — she's a lady, don't you see?"

"Aw, a lady. I don't know much about ladies," Cash admitted.

The doubt in his voice pleased James — he did not know why. All at once a light broke on his troubled mind. "You see it's not so much the mine I object to. It's because he doesn't want me to marry Jennis Bowen. But perhaps if I went west I couldn't marry her either, whereas if I stayed here I could — well I could go on arguing with him and he might give in. You see, I couldn't take a girl like that into the bush, could I? She's never done a hand's turn in her life. Oh, she'd go all right but — it would be sort of selfish, wouldn't it? That's what's worrying me. If I'd only got myself to think of it would be different." This point of view, though new, was yet so plausible that James decided at once that it really was the core of his problem and that he had been thinking about it all the time.

But Cash understood and smiled. "Now, Jimmy, don't let it get you

scared at the start. The world makes a big noise but it's nothing to be scared of. A bit like Shaftoe — a hell of a thing if you don't crack it at the start to show who's boss. Let it get you on the run and you're done for. That young Peppiott, now he'll be on the run all his life. No guts — a proper sheep. Take your sister — a different proposition. Got enough spunk for two, that one. You can see it in her eye. And a regular little lady, eh? If it was her you were for marrying you'd have nothing to worry about. She'd see you through. I reckon a regular lady might have white hands but as much gumption as the next one if you happened to be her fancy."

Suddenly, irrationally, James felt annoyed with Cash. The fellow was supposed to be his father's closest friend, and here he was urging him to disobey his father, backing him up anyhow. If he was a true friend he'd tell him to go to Sydney and no nonsense which, James admitted, not explicitly, but with a prevision of the enormous relief he would feel if someone were to *force* that decision upon him, would be one way out.

Cash lighted the stub of his cigar and puffed at it. "Take your old man. He's different again. He's got guts — one kind of guts. He can fight all right, ain't scared of anything or anybody, but there's another kind of courage and he hasn't got it." He studied the end of his cigar, framing a difficult exposition. "The way I figure it, a bloke's got to make a clean break and tell everybody to go to hell. He's got to do that often, and not only just say it, like perhaps your old man done, but mean it. Because there are things you can and things you can't have, and the quicker you get over feeling sorry for yourself the better. It's up to a man. You don't live at all, hankering. You're in one place and your brains in another, 'whoring after strange tarts,' as the parson says. Well, strange tarts are all right, but so's all tarts. Now your old man, he never made a clean break. Them brothers of his for example: he never got over them living on the fat of the land while he was grafting here. Of course he reckons he hates his brothers, but hate and envy is pretty close and if he could've been like one of them he would. So all the time here he's been ashamed of himself as if there was a part of himself still in England watching the part of him here. And that's real bad — being ashamed. It gets you on the run. You've got to have a special kind of courage to accept what you are and not care what anybody says about it, not try to buy them off with money or make up to yourself for feeling ashamed by thinking how rich you are and how blokes bellycrawl to you. Most men ain't got that kind of courage. They're sheep. They belong to a mob. Well, maybe you've got it." He held James off at arm's length again and examined him doubtfully. "You've certainly got a lot of the old man in you. Yes, you must be the dead rind of what he was. But maybe you've got something from your ma too."

James scowled. "I'm not like him a bit. Anyway, I couldn't do the

things he's done.”

“What things?”

“Well, you know. Look at him. He must have done — well . . . terrible things.”

“He done what he had to so as to live,” Cash said. “You'd do the same.”

James was indignant. “That's rot. I'd never become like him. Never.”

Cash spread his hands. “Oh, yes you might. But I was saying — maybe you've got both kinds of courage. Maybe you've got his courage to do anything and maybe you've got something from your ma, something that pulled her through what she had to put up with when . . .” He gestured apologetically. “Say, something that a woman gets when she's been on the outer. Besides, she was half a gipsy, wasn't she? There's a lot more wolf than sheep in gipsies. She was a reckless one they reckon, Emma Surface was.”

“I — I — that's all a lie,” James exploded, blushing to the ears and glancing about nervously to see if anybody had heard what Cash said.

“Aw, it's nothing to be ashamed of,” Cash told him. “Your ma's a fine woman. You ought to be mighty glad if you take after her.”

James was not mighty glad. The suggestion outraged him so that he could not speak for the moment. With horror he thought of Mrs Bowen. What would she say if she heard that her prospective son-in-law had the qualities of a gipsy in him? What would Doug Peppiott say? What would everybody say? James shuddered inwardly and tried to put the hideous proposition aside, but it was a possibility he had never considered before and its novelty overwhelmed him. Good God, could he really have inherited something from his mother, something low and disgraceful which allied him with a tribe of pilferers and fortune-tellers?

The crowd stirred around them. James looked up and saw Shaftoe and Geoffrey and their friends going out. Shaftoe was singing, arm in arm with the squatter now hopelessly drunk. Good God, James thought, that's what makes Geoffrey hang around with touts like Shaftoe. It's the gipsy blood in him. Good God, and that's what makes Larry hang around with shearers.

Cash, oblivious to the train of thought he had started in James, completed the idea. “If you have the guts to want to make a break it's your ma you've got to thank for it, Jimmy. It's her give you what young Peppiott hasn't got, I bet — the courage to chuck up something solid for, well, for a tart say, or because you like the sound of a name like Cartagena, or because a good-looking ship is leaving port, or mostly because you know somewhere under your belt that you won't be a man if you don't.” He stretched his arms and took a deep breath. “Reckon I'll be getting a move on myself again soon. Only it's something I've never tried before, wearing these flash duds and giving ten-quid notes to barmaids.

When that's worn out I'll hop it. Saw a bit of a schooner down in Sydney. She set me thinking."

James stamped circles on the wet bar top with Cash's glass. "Who said anything about going to Cartagena?" he mumbled. "I'm not a tramp and vagabond."

"A man's a poor stick that hasn't got a bit of the tramp in him," Cash said, "like a woman who hasn't got a bit of the whore." Still unaware of the devastating effect his words had had on James, he slapped the boy's back cheerfully and pulled out a roll of notes. "Now how much dough do you want?"

"No, no, I don't want any."

"That's all right. I'll be around in the morning first thing. You'll need plenty if you're going off on your own. We'll talk about it." He stripped a note from the wad, called Queenie, and pushed it down the low neck of her dress. "So long, darling, I'll be seeing you. Till to-morrow, Jimmy." He made a straight line to the door, followed by the mutter of drunks he disturbed.

Queenie, watching him, sighed.

James's annoyance spurted again. "Arrogant beast. Thinks he's no end of a fellow when he's no better than a tramp. Probably worse." Yet in his heart he envied Cash's swaggering confidence that nothing in the world could harm, or thwart, or deny him. If only *he* could tell them to go to hell . . . Then he thought of Doug Peppiott becoming a wealthy and distinguished citizen, Harriet enjoying all his father's money, while he . . . "Good God, if it was true what Cash said I might go to the dogs like Larry and Geoffrey."

He went out into the streets and walked about, thinking: "If I go back to Sydney I'll be giving into him for ever. I'll lose Jennis. If I don't go I'll lose — something solid. Yes, it is solid. Cash is right there. See how Flanagan and Peppiott were this afternoon. 'You can't turn your back on money . . . It'll buy you anything,' Flanagan said. Yes, if I was rich nobody would dare to talk to me like Mrs Bowen did or like Cash."

But far down in James's heart a voice protested that nothing could be bought and much could be sold. It was a fading voice, its taunts, its battle-cries, its reckless urges suffocated by an old shame and fear which the day's events had sharpened afresh.

He arrived back at the hotel in the early hours, so weary that his mind accepted without more protest the assurance, "After all, if I do go to Sydney for another year, I'll still have time to fight it out. Jennis will wait. And, who knows, Flanagan *might* make it up with him. If he tries to stop me then — I'll show him!"

The hotel was in an uproar. The drunken squatter, nearly sober now, was clutching his trousers and waving his belt and shouting: "I've been robbed. I had three thousand pounds in my belt last night."

Geoffrey and Shaftoe and a crowd of guests in night-shirts were standing around asking questions. He did not remember anything, it seemed. He had slept with some woman . . .

Shaftoe shook his head waggishly. “A woman — aha! Was she worth three thousand?”

Everybody laughed and went back to bed, leaving the squatter to go on searching in his belt.

Geoffrey saw James and retreated hastily behind Shaftoe. He looked frightened in contrast to his perky self-assurance earlier in the night. So James thought, and himself became frightened. But he told himself firmly that Cash was making him imagine things. Ignoring a breezy greeting from Shaftoe he hurried past to his room.

“Does your mother know you're out?” Shaftoe called after him, and Geoffrey squeaked, but forlornly, “Does your mother know you're out?”

From Sydney James wrote a long letter to Harriet. “ . . . I *will* marry Jennie. He jolly well can't bully me. I'll show him. . . .”

Chapter Four: Wanted — A St George

HARRIET did not reply. She was angry with James and busy with the changes in her own life. Cabell had kept his promise and brought her to Brisbane, where conspiratorial conferences with lawyers and bankers and brokers kept him busy.

They lived in an old half-stone, half-timber house on the bank of the river at New Farm, with an army of servants though no one except Cash or Geoffrey ever entered the place, and Harriet was as much a prisoner as before under the vigilant eyes of Miss Montaulk and her father. Some ladies called and left their cards, under orders from their husbands no doubt, for every one was anxious to catch Cabell's eye with some project or other, but none of them saw Harriet except when her father paraded her in the streets and the Botanic Gardens of a late afternoon behind two high-stepping horses. So she remained as friendless as ever.

At first she did not mind, new sights and sounds bewildered and thrilled her so much. She was content to wander all day in the big garden, laid out half a century before by the convict servants of the military officer who built the house, discovering the incredible beauty of magnolias and crepe myrtle and English violets and the hyacinth which packed the river for miles after rain, to lie on the grassy bank and watch ships come in with sides rusty from long voyages, to drive in the streets and see the traffic, three story buildings, shop windows, crowds on the pavements, to admire from afar the men and women, more splendidly dressed than she could ever have imagined, driving and promenading in the cool of the afternoon.

The boom was at its peak. Everywhere new buildings, new houses, new streets, and the delighted bustle of prosperity. To Harriet, fresh from the sleepy life of the valley, the vitality of the busy little town was like a gust of fresh, cold wind. Crowds of immigrants arriving at the Depot, crowds fighting on the steps of the General Post Office when the English mail came in, crowds getting into a theatre, crowds on a bus going home at night, crowds in the Gardens on Sunday, crowds outside an auction room. . . . "Don't stare, child," Miss Montaulk was saying every minute they were out. And then the crush in the streets — exciting but terrifying. A dozen times she shut her eyes so as not to see somebody mangled under the spanking hoofs of bus horses. How could any one live in such a torrent of wheels — slow bullock drays, bright-painted advertising

vans heralding a concert or a new brand of bath soap, dog-carts bowling along as fast as the wind with drivers in kid gloves, a smart curricule with a footman in silk stockings and a coat of arms on the side. A lady leant out and bowed to her but Cabell whipped up his horses and dashed on.

“Who was that, Father?”

“A woman called Peppiott.”

“What does the coat of arms on the side mean?”

“Don't ask me. When her father bought a carriage years ago, the first time he went out in it he got up behind by force of habit.”

As they drove on up Queen Street men on the pavement raised their hats but Cabell paid no attention. “That's the Town Hall,” he said. “Holds three thousand people. When I came here gum-trees were growing there. And that's where I was sitting the day I saw Flanagan's wife waiting for her husband to be flogged. There were all convicts and soldiers here then — no place for nincompoops in billycock hats I can tell you.”

Harriet, watching the lady in the curricule as it drew up beside them again and passed, and the young man, very good-looking, who sat beside her, was not listening.

Cabell glanced round and grunted.

“Oh, were you speaking to me, Father?”

“Never mind,” he grumbled. “It's time we went home.”

“Oh, but it's early yet.”

“Now, Harriet, you mustn't contradict your father.”

Cabell turned the horses and they went home.

Harriet began to feel discontented again. The seethe and swirl of the place, crude, vital, intoxicating, which had amused her at first, now made her loneliness harder to bear. As the night came on she heard the whisper of gay doings — a band in the house across the river, a steamer decorated with Chinese lanterns going down to the Bay, a housemaid struggling with one of the grooms in the shadow of the stables. . . . Harriet looked enviously at the buxom servant girl, swinging confident hips, when she came to wait on the table at dinner-time, and was so rude to her that Cabell stared and asked her if she was not well? After dinner she wept a little in her room, then sent for the girl and gave her one of her new dresses. The girl looked startled, especially when Harriet threw her arms round her and kissed her.

For an hour she sat on the bed looking at her wardrobes stuffed with new clothes, silks and velvets which rustled excitingly to the touch. When she put one on and swayed its flounced skirt before the mirror her blood burned with eagerness to show herself off.

Miss Montaulk came in. “Why, Harriet, whatever are you doing?”

“Leave me alone, you old cat.”

Miss Montaulk smirked. “Vanity and bad-temper, they are both terrible sins, Harriet. You should struggle against them. Your father is waiting in

the drawing-room for you.”

“I'm not going down.”

“Ingratitude is even worse than vanity and bad-temper.”

Harriet went down. There was nowhere else to go. Through a long, dull evening she played the piano, now carelessly and without interest, now angrily, taking her feelings out on the keyboard till the flowers on the lid shed their petals and the candles spilled hot wax on to her hands; then, tired, she drifted into a melancholy fragment of Chopin and played it well because it suited her mood, played it over and over, while her father sat on the veranda and smoked and hatched his schemes, and Miss Montaulk's eyes glittered like the swift crochet-needle in her hand.

So it was every evening, unless Geoffrey came in to wheedle some money out of Cabell, who never seemed to notice that he was half-tight and either gave him a handful of money without counting it and told him to get to the devil, or clouted him and refused to give him a penny until he did some work. But Geoffrey knew that he only had to wheedle long enough and take enough clouts to get what he wanted. Sooner or later Cabell would get tired of clouting and growling and give him the money to get rid of him.

“He'll come to a bad end that boy,” Miss Montaulk said.

“Serve him right.”

Geoffrey brought news of the great world, a ball in the Exhibition Hall, a levee at Government House, a race-meeting, a polo gymkhana. . . .

He winked. “Aren't the chaps breaking their necks to meet you?”

“What chaps?”

“Oh, chaps. Doug Peppiott was asking me.”

“Is he tall, very brown, with a moustache.”

“A ginger moustache — yes, that's him. He was asking me questions about you.”

Harriet blushed. “He's very good-looking,” she said ingenuously.

“Watch your step, Sis, he's a heart-breaker.” He chucked her under the chin. “See you later.”

He waddled off importantly down the drive and out through the big iron gates. Oh, for somebody to scale those iron gates! It happened in books, anyway.

She was passing the time by trying on a new dress in her room one afternoon when she heard the gates open and the weary clop-clop of a cab horse come up the drive. Looking out she saw Cash get down and run up the front steps. He had just returned from the mine and called to see her father, who was out. Impulsively, after glancing at herself in the mirror and touching the little kiss curl over her ear, she hurried downstairs into the hall.

He was already there talking to the maid, who was giggling and red in the face. But Harriet had no time to notice this, for she arrived at the

bottom of the stairs in such haste that she stumbled, caught her foot in the hem of her dress and would have fallen if he had not caught her up, lifted her, and set her on her feet. "Upadaisie, girly. Want to break your neck?"

She was annoyed with herself. "I — I — what are you holding on to me for?" she said, trying to free her arm. "I've got two legs, haven't I?"

"I like that!" Cash said, laughing. "You fall fair in a man's arms, then blame him for having them there."

"I didn't fall," she said indignantly.

He glanced up the stairs. "Were you making a bolt from that old fire-eater?"

She put her nose in the air and hurried past him into the drawing-room, thinking: "There, you made a fine fool of yourself. Now he'll think you only ran down to show yourself off to him." She rushed at the piano and pummelled the keys till her ears were cool.

It was a beautiful afternoon. The bougainvillea was in flower along the fence, like a tremendous Persian carpet hung out to air. A breeze from the river distilled the oversweet smell of pine-apples ripening on a string along the veranda. She began to sing without thinking what she sang:

Alas, my love, you do me wrong
To cast me off discourteously.
And I have loved you so long,
Delighting in your company.

"Pretty," he shouted, "pretty."

She started round on the stool. He was leaning against the door, his arms folded and his hat on the back of his head.

"I didn't know you were listening," she said coldly, rising.

"Don't move. You make a pretty picture." Against the cascade of green passion-fruit vine falling across the veranda her pallor and white dress were a cool vision for a hot man. "You sing nice too. Your pa told me."

Harriet smiled.

"Ah well," he said, "listening to little girls sing about their sweethearts won't feed the pigs. I'm off. Tell your pa I called."

Harriet's ears burned again. "Little girl," she hissed at the piano, and pounded the keys till Miss Montaulk called down the stairs, "Please have a little consideration, Harriet. My poor head . . ."

Her fury passed. "I suppose I am a frumpy little girl really," she told herself. She returned to her room and studied her face. Yes, a skimpy, frumpy little girl. "And I'll never be anything else," she said aloud, flying into a passion again, tearing her dress off, and stamping its fresh organdie under her heel. "I'll just wither up like a passion-fruit and *he'll* keep me here, pretending I'm only a little girl and don't need a husband,

and that's all he wants." She threw herself on the bed and punched and bit the pillow and cried.

After this, the first time Cash had spoken more than ten words to her directly, he never came to see Cabell without looking in at the drawing-room to say hallo and tell her how pretty her dress was. But much as Harriet looked forward to the little break in her tedious life, Cash always seemed to rub her up the wrong way, so that she was tossing her head and flashing her eyes at him all the time he was with her — "like a match spluttering," he said. He enjoyed the sight and always departed laughing.

"Men must be awful fools," she told Miss Montaulk. "He thinks I'm a little girl."

"So you are, my dear, or you should be very glad men think so. You're safe as long as they look at you that way."

"Who wants to be safe?" Harriet said. "And I'm not a little girl. I'm as much a woman as — as Emma Bovary was."

"Goodness!"

"Yes, I am. I'm just like her. I've got the same feelings. I could do the same things. I could be terribly, *terribly* wicked."

Miss Montaulk's long upper lip came down over her buck teeth. "I should say you were! A girl who could understand what that book was about — and say so!"

At last a little incident happened to open Cash's very dull eyes. He arrived one day when Cabell was out and sat in the drawing-room to wait. He kept his hat on as usual and his fat, black cigar in the corner of his mouth. Soon the stagnant air was so heavy with smoke that Miss Montaulk had to go out on the veranda and choke it up.

"After that I reckon I'm as good as St George that smoked the dragon out and carried off the maid. What d'you say?"

"I don't believe there are any St Georges."

"You wait. You'll be carried off."

"I was only thinking of my brother James," Harriet said quickly. "He says he's in love with a girl and Papa is against it, and he's too frightened to run away and marry her."

"So you've been giving him advice too. It's easier to preach than to do."

"Men must be awful cowards then," Harriet said. "If I was a man and I loved a girl I wouldn't care what people wanted."

He considered her, trying to make up his mind how much she knew what she was talking about. Her candid eyes of a young girl, serene, icy, humourless, with the colour hard and sharp on immaculate whites like fresh paint, stared back at him. "Such things happen in fairy-tales," he said, smiling. "Not in life."

"If I was a man it would happen."

"Then it's a mercy to fathers that you're only a little girl."

She bridled. "I'm not a little girl. I'm a woman. Don't you think I

understand? Perhaps I understand better than you. If any man ever falls in love with me you'll see whether it only happens in fairy-tales."

Cash was silent and thoughtful. Her words and the passionate way she spoke them laid open the drama, only vaguely suspected before, between Cabell and his daughter — in fact, the whole family. "Poor devil," he thought, "he's brewing a shinnanikan for himself." Then, looking again at those untouched eyes, that girlish, slight figure with the almost transparent hands, and her face burning with an indignation which always reminded him of the ineffectual brief fury of a match, it was for her he felt sorry. "Don't want to go expecting too much," he said. "Damn hard place to get your own way in, the world. You want a hide like a rhinoceros."

Harriet tossed the world over her shoulder with a confident flick of her wrist. "I'm not afraid of it."

"No, that's the trouble. I reckon Jimmy wasn't afraid of it till the time came. Oh well, I suppose it depends on the man."

"Depends on the man!" she said contemptuously. "I'd wait till I died if I depended on a man. They shake in their shoes when he's about, the ninnies."

Cash laughed.

She noticed again how pleasant the laughter-wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were and how strong the hands, covered with little black hairs, lying on his knees, but she demanded angrily, "What are you laughing at?"

"You're such a thorough-going little spitfire I reckon you'd be equal to carrying off St George and dragon and all."

"You're making fun of me."

"Not at all. I . . ."

"Yes, you're making fun of me because you're a man and you want to think all women are just little girls. Like David's Dora. Oh, how I detest her — simpering little fool. Or else like the sticks in Sir Walter Scott's novels. And they're not. Or if they are I'm not. So there."

He chewed his cigar in silence again, slightly abashed. "How old are you, Miss Harriet?"

"Nineteen."

"Yes, yes, you're a grown-up woman all right," he said, apologetically and as though it had just dawned on him.

Harriet went very red, but conquered an impulse to turn her eyes away and hide her hands behind her. They had begun to misbehave in an unaccountable, idiotic way.

"I daresay your pa'll be sending you home to England soon now," Cash said.

Harriet did not answer. Her father and all his schemes and false promises seemed suddenly remote. She felt happy and mischievous.

“Would you miss coming here to laugh at me?”

“I'd miss seeing you right enough,” Cash said. “You bet I would.”

“But aren't you afraid I might run away with you, Mr St George?”

“If I was twenty years younger you wouldn't be game to ask that.”

“Oh, wouldn't I?” Her eyes shone at him through their long, brown lashes.

He patted her hand and rose. “Now you're laughing at *me*,” he said.

She stood up and they both laughed gaily.

Then he was laughing alone and she was forcing herself to smile while her eyes circled the floor. Before she knew what she was doing she was on her way up the stairs to her room. She threw herself on the bed and hid her face. “How shall I ever look at him again. Oh, I was terrible — bold.”

When she returned to the drawing-room Miss Montaulk was busily fanning his cigar smoke out of the air. “What were you talking about?” she demanded.

“Nothing,” Harriet said with guilty haste. “Oh, nothing at all.”

“That's untrue. You were talking about men and women. I heard.”

“And you were eavesdropping?”

“I was doing my duty. I shall speak to your father about him coming in here. He's the kind of man who knows bad women.”

“Oh!” Harriet's face stiffened. “That's a lie.”

“You little fool,” Miss Montaulk said, her eyes shining with the same virgin, happy brightness as Harriet's in the cracked mask of rouge and powder. “You've fallen in love with him.”

“Why, he's old enough to be my father,” Harriet said quickly.

“I'll see that your papa puts a stop to it, anyway.”

But there was no need for her to trouble. Harriet ended those visits herself.

The next afternoon was a Sunday. Cabell took them for a walk in the Botanic Gardens. They passed Cash escorting a lady, who clung to his arm with possessive affection. She was a big, red-haired woman dressed in purple silk with a purple ostrich feather trailing a yard behind her hat, and much jewellery. She waved to Cabell.

“Who was that with Mr Cash?” Miss Montaulk asked.

“Some lady friend.”

“Lady? A creature. He's a nice kind of gentleman to allow in the house with a young girl, I must say!”

Cabell gave Harriet a startled look. Her face was blank and guileless, a trifle pale. Alone with Miss Montaulk he said, “I'm surprised to hear you talking that way in front of a child like Harriet. Of course she doesn't understand, but . . .”

Her big teeth snapped hungrily at his ear. “Haven't you seen how she always dresses herself up when he comes?”

Cabell watched, but whenever Cash was about Harriet stayed in her room. When he came to dinner she had a headache and excused herself.

“I thought you liked Cash,” Cabell said.

“I think he's odious — vulgar,” Harriet replied indignantly.

Cabell was satisfied. Miss Montaulk reserved her opinion.

Then a new development in his tangled family affairs drove the matter from Cabell's mind.

Chapter Five: Larry at the Crossroads

THE manager at the Reach wrote begging Cabell to come back quickly. The shearers were giving trouble and all the wool would be ruined.

He was a decent young fellow named Bellamy, a wool-classer by trade, and Cabell had given him the job for his usual double-headed reason — because he remembered Bellamy's mother as a gay young girl in the early days of the valley before the bush had broken her spirit, and because he counted on Larry and Emma's old regard for the Bellamys to keep the peace at the Reach while he was away. But he was wrong. Between the lines of the letter it was easy to see that six months of fighting the passive resistance of Larry and Emma had broken Bellamy's nerve.

He closed the house up and hurried back to the station with Harriet and Miss Montaulk to find things even worse than he expected. The first big strike in Australia, a maritime strike, was just starting. He saw its insolent manifestos placarded on trees and fences all the way from Brisbane. As the coach was galloping out of Pyke's Crossing some shearers hooted him. He recognized Goggs.

Bellamy looked done up. "The washers've been here for five days. They won't do a hand's turn till they get another sixpence."

"Shear in the grease."

"The shearers won't sign on unless you pay the washers."

"What'd you do with them?"

"I tried to argue, but . . ."

"You milk-sop, what's the use arguing. Bang their heads together."

"There are forty heads all told," Bellamy said dryly.

"I'll soon fix them. This is Larry's doing."

"No, it's not Larry. It's more than that. It's something that's sprung up all over the country. They're forming a union. Organizers are going around everywhere. There's one in the valley now. He holds meetings. It's like a Methodist revival."

"Who is he?"

"A fellow named Coyle."

"Coyle, eh?" Cabell said, got his whip, and rode out to the camp where the washers and shearers had established themselves. They were derisive. He wasted no more words but hurried to Pyke's Crossing, combed the

pubs, hired every available horse, and at the end of ten days had a new gang of shearers at work. Then he sacked Bellamy and brought in Custard, the north countryman he had saved from being lynched at Larsen's Bakehouse, to be manager.

Still things did not go well. On the fourth day of the shearing, when Cabell was busy going over the books in the store, he heard shouts. The shearers had knocked off and were crowded around a man delivering a speech. Recognizing Coyle, Cabell got his gun, whistled up the kangaroo dogs, and set off to see what was afoot.

The men saw him coming with the gun and the dogs, and some of them made for the shed, calling "Look out, here's Rusty."

"What're you scared of," Coyle said. "A man with a gun against twenty of yous, against twenty thousand of yous? You're scared because you don't know how to stick together, as mates should; and that's what I'm here to tell you. Join the union, boys, and don't scab on your mates no more, and it won't be long before he's looking down the barrel of the gun, not you. As mates we stand, as scabs we fall — that's the ticket."

Cabell went up to the fence. "Coyle, come down before I pull you down."

"You know me and you know him," Coyle said. "Will you stand by and let a mate . . ."

But Cabell had him by the boot, and he came down on his back in the dust. He rose slowly, brushing his coat and looking at Cabell with his dead, cold, truncated look, like a sleep-walker or a blind man.

"You know what I told you last time if I saw you on my property again?"

"It's not your property. It's everybody's. You only stole the use of it."

Cabell called the dogs to heel. "See that gate?" He nodded to the front gate, a good quarter of a mile away. "I'll give you a minute and a half to get there before I let the dogs go." He pulled his watch out. "Get!"

Coyle picked up his swag and already running waved to the men, "I'll be back, mates." He had fifty yards to go when Cabell, true to his threat as Coyle knew he would be, sooted the dogs after him. They vanished into the long grass and appeared on the flat, their hunched backs red in the sun. Coyle was astride the gate as the dogs reached him and leapt snapping at his legs. He kept them off with his swag and fell away safe into the road.

Intimidated, the men returned to work, Cabell to the store.

Emma was waiting for him. He tried to pass her without speaking but she caught his sleeve. He was surprised, seeing her so close for the first time in a long while, to notice how she had aged. The skin which used to be moulded tightly to her jaw and cheek-bones now hung in spongy bags. Her shoulders sagged. It was as though some vital sinew had snapped, as though her face had been broken into little pieces and put

together again carelessly. He freed his arm but she followed him to the counter where his books lay open.

"I've never asked you for but one thing, Derek," she said, "and I've given many."

He said nothing.

"Now I want to ask you again — I'll go down on my knees if you like — to make Larry manager at the Reach if you must have a manager."

"You must be barmy."

"Perhaps I am. But think of all that's happened in these years. It's not much to ask."

"Holding a gun at my head again, eh?"

"No, no," Emma said quickly. "I'm not even asking it as a right. I'm only begging. You're too rich and powerful for me ever to hurt you now. But surely there's enough for every one — for Harriet and the rest. Be merciful."

"If I hadn't been merciful he'd be humping his drum."

"It was that Coyle. You know that."

"Coyle's his friend, isn't he?"

"Yes, but that's what I'm asking you. You can save him from them. Otherwise God knows what wickedness they'll lead him into. This strike and the union and all — it's gone to his head. But how can you blame him. What else have you given him to hope for?"

"He's made his own bed," Cabell muttered. "Let him lie on it."

"Oh, we've all done some wrong, haven't we? If you and I had to pay for what we've done we'd never be through."

He looked at her suspiciously again. "You are threatening."

"What would be the use? It's not your hurt, it's my own peace I'm after. Give Larry this chance and I'll die blessing you, Derek. You want to get something for Harriet you've never been able to get for yourself, don't you? It's the same for me. If Larry's set up I'll know that what we did that night wasn't such a sin. If he just drifts off with Coyle and ends up in jail what was the purpose of it?"

"A damn-fool question," he said, eyeing her shiftily.

"I was a damn fool not to ask it of myself at the time." Anger tightened her stooped shoulders and the lax lines in her face. "When I stood in the doorway, and the flames all around you, and M'Govern choking the life out of you, both doomed and blind as bats, I might have stopped to ask it then and been a sight richer now and nobody else the wiser. But," she sighed and stopped again, "I didn't. And if there's any justice you'll remember now. If you don't — oh, how can you expect better for yourself than you're giving me. It's the same life has us both in its hands, and if it lets you do the dirt on me it will let somebody else do the dirt on you too. Don't you see that?"

"Don't you get putting the hoodoo on me," Cabell mumbled, then roared, "I won't make him manager. So stop jawing. I've got work to do."

"I didn't think you would," Emma said at last, breaking a long silence through which his pen scratched furiously.

He watched her under the brim of his hat as she went back to the house, dragging in the dust her heavy greenhide boots which took a fantastic shape from the callouses on her feet. The sight gave him a queer feeling in the stomach. "That's the first time I've heard her speak like that in years," he thought, "the first time I've ever seen her without fight in her!" Then he realized, all at once, that the vital spark of Emma's life was going out.

He had seen death in many forms, strange and terrible, but its reality had never been so vivid as when he whispered to himself now, "*She must be dying.*" Emma dying! The thought that she whose energy for hate and hope had seemed inexhaustible, who had struggled against and beside him for forty years, would soon cease to be, made his hand drive the pen through the page before him. "Well, everybody's marked for it sooner or later," he told himself, but the queer feeling in the pit of his stomach persisted. Whether it was pity, remorse, or fear he felt would be difficult to say. His emotions were all mixed up and kept taking his mind away from the figures in the ledger.

At last he laid his pen down and went to the window. Before him spread the valley — *his* valley. The boundary-fence wobbling away through the tawny grass, sheep coming in to be shorn, returning to their paddocks, cattle dozing in the river, horses tail to tail under the trees, the noise of the shearing, men burning off across the flats, their smoke like monsters materializing from the weird forest of ringbarked gums, the rat-ta-tat of hammers preparing the drays for the wool trip, the thunder of a mob of draught-horses invisible in a cloud of dust coming up the valley, like a storm low down on the earth — yes, everywhere abundant fulfilment of his strength and desire.

He took a deep breath, moved by the only happiness, the retrospect of obstacles overcome. "To win — that's everything. That's living. Life's for the winners, not the losers. They kotow to me now, because I'm a winner. I've beat the bush. I've beat 'that mob' in Brisbane. Damn it, I'll live to a hundred." He returned to the counter and set to work energetically on his ledger once more.

But soon the pen went dead in his hand again, and for a long time he stared frowning at the page as he heard Emma's tired voice speaking the threat which of all threats frightened him most. ". . . if it lets you do the dirt on me it will let somebody else do the dirt on you too . . ."

"Who's done the dirt on her? I married her. I got her shot of Black Jem. I helped her brother."

Then he remembered with a chill of resurrected fear how that night he

lay in the yard with his head in her lap while the flames crackled through the house showering sparks, like vicious ants, upon them, and how, knowing what she had done for him, against her desire and interest, he had sworn to make it up. But what had he done?

“What does she expect me to do? Hand-feed him? *I* had to make *my* own way.” He said it aloud but, his confidence rapidly giving out, did not believe it. Not he, not his masterful will, but a hundred and one lucky chances were responsible for his success. Luck and Emma — yes, he owed them both his life.

He admitted that grudgingly with a resentful underthought, “If it was any other time but now . . . all this mining business coming ripe! The bitch!” Under his pity and remorse he cursed her, as though all her humility was just put on to prejudice fate against him.

Sambo and Larry came up the slope, Sambo holding forth. They passed the window without noticing him, the one so intent on listening, the other on expounding the unimaginable felicity of life in the Land of Cockaigne, known otherwise as Frogs' Hollow.

“ . . . never drink nothin' but booze outa bottles with gold paper round the top. And the tarts! Jeez, Larry. There was one there like a regular pitsher. Oughta seen her. Couldn't stand still a minute. Haw-haw, wasn't she a doer! And every bed in the house had a feather mattress! Then you oughta see the museum. Skeletons in glass cases and . . . ”

“All right,” Cabell thought, and deeper down he thought, “I won't let them get the better of me. Just wait till I've finished in Brisbane.”

He went across the yard to where Larry was preparing to chop some wood for Emma. “Here, you.”

Larry looked up and let the axe swing at his side.

“Your mother's been talking about you being thick with the scum down there.” Cabell jerked his head towards the shearers' hut. “She's worried.”

“They're not scum. They're men.”

“They're not the sort of men for anybody with my name to be mixed up with. That fellow Coyle — his father hanged and so will he.”

“ ‘They're men the same as I am. They're not convicts and that's what you can't get out of your head. You think you can treat them the same as you did in Moreton Bay. They're free men like you.’ ”

“Just the same you're too thick with them. I been thinking,” he paused but made himself go on, “one of these days I might make you manager.”

“I don't want to be manager,” Larry said like a shot.

“Oh? You don't, eh?”

“ ‘No. I'm not a boss. I'm a man, same as them. They're my mates. You can keep your job.’ ”

“Suits me down to the ground. I only offered for your mother's sake. She thought it might save you from where you belong.”

“For Mother's sake!” Larry spat. “A hell of a lot you'd do for Mother's

sake.”

Cabell put his fists in his pocket. “That settles it then. You go to hell your own way.”

But Emma, watching through the kitchen door, ran out into the yard. “Don't go, Derek. For God's sake.”

He paused on his way back to the store.

“He doesn't know what he's saying,” Emma cried. “He's a fool and they've twisted him round their fingers.” She took hold of Larry's arm and shook him. He did not resist but looked at her with an obstinate frown. “Can't you understand? He's offering to make a boss of you, a manager? What're you sulking for?”

“I heard him. I don't want any favours. I'm satisfied as I am.”

“Satisfied to be a lousy hand when you can be a gentleman! You're out of your mind. What do you think I've slaved for but this? But you're pig-headed. You don't mean it. You're angry because he thrashed you. But can't you understand — it's *me* you're hurting, not him.”

“I don't want to hurt you, Ma,” Larry mumbled. “Only I know better. And as for the thrashing,” he glared at Cabell, “he needn't crow about that. He'll get it in the neck. Before long there won't be any bosses here.”

Emma sneered. “What will there be then? Blackfellows and dingoes again?”

“There'll be a bushman's republic. Like Gurseey said.”

Cabell laughed.

“You'll laugh on the other side of your face,” Larry shouted. “You can't stop men joining the union. There'll be a hundred thousand bushmen with rifles. Laugh at that.”

“I heard that yarn in a convict settlement nearly fifty years ago,” Cabell said and laughed again.

Larry watched his father's back-thrown head and open, bitter mouth. Across the sunset stillness of the valley Cabell's laughter sounded challenging and contemptuous.

Suddenly it stopped. The last ray of the sun flickered on the bright head of the axe and flickered again as the axe fell with a clatter among the wood and Larry turned and strode across the yard.

He was already climbing the fence to the cowyard when Cabell, stumbling backwards, brought up against the wood-block. “You murdering bastard. I'll teach you.” He picked up a piece of wood and flung it at Larry's head. It struck him between the shoulder-blades and sent him sprawling on the air. He picked himself up and trudged off, shoulders slightly hunched, without a glance back.

Emma sat on the wood-block with her head in her hands and wailed gently, rocking from side to side.

Chapter Six: Social Lie

WHEN the shearing was over and the station quiet once more Cabell took Harriet back to Brisbane. Life changed for her again. The gates were opened and people came to the house at all hours. True, most of them were dull business men, but they did not seem dull to her. They made a fuss of her, and for the first time she knew what it was to be treated as a grown-up and charming young woman, for to Harriet even banal compliments sounded original. Gradually the wives and daughters of these lawyers and politicians and bankers and contractors began to insinuate themselves past the basilisk stare of Cabell, and Harriet found herself the centre of twittering tea-parties. She did not get along with the women quite so well. She was too excited about them, too eager, and too inexperienced in society. Perhaps she scared them. They retreated from her wild, gauche enthusiasms behind polite smiles which she took for signs of encouragement and affection until, led on to talk of herself with a too egocentric unreticence, even the polite smiles vanished and she found herself at bay before their downcast, or amused, or disapproving eyes. Then she lost her nerve and her balance, and defended herself with wilder and more gauche talk that was sometimes downright rude. She asserted the rights of women to run away from their fathers, emulate Emma Bovary, smoke cigars, ride bicycles, play tennis, earn their living and any other bizarre proposition which came into her mind and seemed likely to annoy them. But they were not annoyed. That was the most irritating part of it. They looked at each other and giggled or frowned, but at last they all cooed together. What a quaint girl she was! What a little blue-stocking! But of course she did not mean any of it. She was too nice. Oh yes she was. Too nice. She was on their visiting lists so of course she *must* be too nice to believe, or even to understand what she was talking about. A little half-witted maybe, but certainly quite nice. In vain, passionately, Harriet tried to draw closer to them; this passion it was which held them off. Away from the house they smirked, gossiped. What could you expect from a girl whose mother was a so-and-so! But they continued to call because their husbands made them. Cabell was now an important business man in Brisbane.

Peppiott had introduced him to the fascinating game of landbooming. The workers in the towns were prospering. They wanted houses and land — a stake in the country. Suburban property that was virgin bush

less than half a century ago and worth hardly a pound an acre, auctioned for a hundred pounds an acre and more now. You got an option over an estate and on the option you borrowed money and on the money you floated a company to buy the land. You divided the land and sold it on time payment and out of the proceeds, including future payments, declared a handsome dividend. The price of your shares went up and you sold out. Then you formed a land bank and lent the land company money to buy more land. That was the process. It captivated Cabell at once. With Peppiott, Samuelson his old lawyer, and Cash, he began a series of complex financial wanglings. Peppiott was well in with the Government, which lodged its borrowings from abroad with the Queensland Incorporated Bank. With Peppiott's help Cabell borrowed this money, which was supposed to be used for railways and other such developmental works, against his shares in Waterfall on a margin of seventy-five per cent of the shares' stock-exchange value. The nominal value of each share was one pound, and the mine had yet produced very little gold. Journalists came to the house to dine. They heard the inside story of Larsen's new works soon to be opened, of the marvellous assays and the inexhaustible abundance of the red stone which gave six ounces to the ton. This was all quite true, except that Larsen was disappointed with his works: two ounces was all he could get. But the articles about Waterfall, the Mountain of Gold, which appeared in the newspapers every day hinted at nothing of the sort. Waterfalls rose slowly but surely — six, eight, ten pounds. Cabell's liabilities rose too, but so did his wealth. He bought fabulously expensive real estate in the heart of the city. One block, for which he paid eight thousand at nine o'clock in the morning, he sold for ten thousand at four in the afternoon. After that he bought everything he could lay his hands on, in Sydney and Melbourne, and refused to sell. The excitement of the boom had got hold of him properly now.

Cash was a bit doubtful. "You better take a pull on yourself. You're getting in too deep."

"You're a fine one to talk."

"Yes, but I don't like this gambling in the dark."

"What's dark about it. The country's developing. That's all."

"The money's not coming out of the country. It's coming in. And what happens if the Government can't borrow and the bank can't lend."

"Only a bit longer and I'm finished," Cabell said. "I'll soon be ready to tackle Larsen and Ludmilla. Give me a few more months to sell this land and we'll bring Waterfalls down and I'll buy in."

"Haven't you got enough? You must be worth a million or more."

Cabell chuckled. "I'll be the richest man in the southern hemisphere. You'll see them crawl then. That slimy dog Peppiott — you wouldn't think he refused to do business with me once. I wasn't good enough. And

look at this.” He showed Cash a bundle of papers — mortgages over McFarlane's run. “Samuelson bought them up for me. A pretty stiff price, but worth it. I'll make them dance. And when Harriet goes to England! By God, I'd like to see their faces in Owerbury then.”

“I suppose it's some satisfaction.”

“Were you kicked out of your home by a lot of bloodsucking brothers and called a ‘voluntary jailbird’? Have you had dirt chucked at you in court?”

They formed the Northern Land Investment Bank and the Land Investment and Building Corporation to borrow money from the bank, and buy and sell land, and, according to a prospectus drawn up by Peppiott, “to enable the industrious and thrifty classes to participate in the distribution of real estate or secure participation in the large profits made by buying land in big quantities and selling same in moderate sized farms or allotments.”

Cabell took Harriet to the Corporation's first big sale. Thousands came in buses provided free by the Corporation. From marquees on the ground a free lunch was served and boundless free champagne. A band played “Advance Australia Fair” to open the proceedings, then Peppiott made a speech. “This is no mere sale of land for profit. Brother citizens of this great, free nation, it is a gesture of faith which we owe to our country and the prosperity of her future to take unto ourselves some portion of our precious native soil . . .”

Then the bidding commenced.

After the sale Peppiott gave a dinner at his house. It was a splendid affair, with footmen and “the nicest people,” as Mrs Peppiott promised Harriet, and much gold plate embossed with the scroll and leaping stag Harriet had seen on the curricule — the coat of arms of the Earls of Peppiott, to which “Albert is most intimately connected,” Mrs Peppiott explained. Champagne flowed again, and they toasted “This Great Land of Ours,” very lovingly, for it had been a highly successful sale. In replying to the toast as a member of the Government, Peppiott was seized by a vision of the country fifty years hence, with a population of a hundred million people, cities as big as New York and Chicago, hundreds of thousands of miles of railway developing its resources — a future full of successful land sales.

Hearty applause.

Dr Barnett said cantankerously, when the clapping died down, “Railways aren't development. That's only politicians' talk.” He was a little man with white hair, a burnt-out yellow face, and a temper gone sour in the tropics, where he cultivated sugar and conducted a political battle to have the coastal strip of Queensland turned into a separate state and allowed to become a stronghold of benignly autocratic gentlemen ruling over kanaka slaves.

They looked at him respectfully. He belonged to "one of the oldest families" (no convict blood), had been to Cambridge, and was separated from succession to the Viscounty of Durlake only by a bachelor suffering from chronic indigestion. "Development is not railways and it's not roads," he repeated in the voice of a man who is used to being listened to with respect. "It's not a big population either. The most civilized people in Europe have the smallest population and the fewest railways and the worst roads. Norway is a civilized country. This will be when people begin to live *in* it, not *on* it, like an army of occupation."

"You mean culture," Mrs Peppiott guessed. She was a big, toadlike woman with a pendulous, floppy toad gullet and a laborious toadlike way of breathing and a toadlike darting tongue and toadlike bulging eyes. "Spiritual things — music, poetry, the drama." She turned her eyes up under eyelids crusted with tiny warts, just like a toad's. "How one yearns for them among the Philistines. How one labours to make the people understand and appreciate. But will they ever, dear doctor? Everything's so coarse and vulgar. It's not like Italy, is it? So redolent of the past. The Caesars! The Borgias! The air is full of poetry and romance. But here — no past, no memories."

A long pause followed this apostrophe, a very awkward pause, while every one was thinking about the past — Mrs Peppiott's — and wondering if she knew as much as they about her father, who came out in chains.

"We've got the pioneers," Peppiott snapped at her.

"Ah, yes, the pioneers, the glorious pioneers!" It went round the table like a sigh of relief, and everybody looked at the two representatives of that already legendary band of brothers and looked away quickly again.

One of them, sitting between Harriet and Mrs Peppiott, was an old man named Purvis, whose father had settled on the land which had been sold that afternoon. He was fabulously rich in real estate, but if it had not been necessary to wheedle and placate him so that Peppiott's brother citizens should be enabled "to take unto themselves more portions of their native soil," he would not have been invited to dine here among nice people, for he smelt strongly of stables, ate with his fingers, and called crapulously for rum with his soup. He took no part in the conversation at the table, dividing his attention between shovelling food and gaping at the footmen's legs. Served with snipe, he protested, " 'Ere, lad, what's thisn? I don't eat sparrers."

"It's snipe, dear Mr Purvis," Mrs Peppiott explained. "My husband's cousin — the Earl, you know — sent the birds to us. Do taste them."

"Nothin' but the parson's nose ter taste," Purvis growled, but he put a snipe in his mouth and chewed it noisily, and he did swallow it, which was better than anybody expected from the look of disgust on his face.

This was all extremely distressing to Sir Alexander and Lady

Todhunter, for Sir Alexander, who was Mr Purvis's grandson, was one of the nicest of nice people, so nice that he could not stand living in Australia for more than six months at a time. The rest of the year he appeared, from hints he dropped, to spend shaking hands with the Prince of Wales, the Marquess of Queensbury, Lord Lonsdale, and other peers of the realm. Nobody believed him, but it was true.

The other glorious pioneer was Cabell, sitting near Peppiott in his shiny frock-coat and old-fashioned stiff shirt, and fumbling furtively among an unaccustomed variety of forks and glasses. How diminished he looked beside these people, Harriet noticed with surprise. Opposite him sat Doug Peppiott, his broad, handsome face with a cameolike profile radiating health and youthful self-confidence. To Harriet, comparing them, the young man seemed twice as big as her father, twice as strong, and twice as certain of his way through life. She saw the old man in a new light, in a situation he did not dominate. He looked lonely and rather pathetically out of it listening to these strangers' chatter about people and things he had lost all touch with, and several times she saw him blink at the table, the silver, the food, the footmen, as though he wondered if he was dreaming. Once, in talking to Sir Alexander Todhunter, he began to describe how the coach ran from Owerbury to Plymouth, but Sir Alexander waved loftily and said, "My dear fellow, there's been a railway there for the last twenty years." "Oh? Oh?" Cabell muttered, and after that had nothing to say, twiddled his thumbs in his lap between each course, and "Yes-ma'amed" Mrs Peppiott with strange meekness. When he upset the salt, Harriet saw him reach out to take a pinch and throw it over his shoulder, then pull his hand back and look around guiltily as if he expected someone to laugh. She was touched. It showed her how ill at ease he was, for she knew he would worry all night about that salt, so superstitious was he. "Poor Papa," she thought for the first time in her life, understanding, in this flash of sympathy, quite a lot of things about the old man which before had seemed so unreasonable — his unremitting hatred for "that mob in Brisbane," which had insulted him once, his arrogance, his rambling threats about "making them crawl." And they weren't crawling, Harriet saw, glancing round the table. When Dr Barnett spoke about the railways Cabell had stirred to say something, but young John Dennis interrupted him rudely and every one listened to Dennis and took no notice of Cabell at all. And that was what touched Harriet most deeply, because he was so sure that everybody in Brisbane was now at his feet begging forgiveness for what they had done to him. "Poor Father," she thought again. "He's silly. He shouldn't come to Brisbane. They're only making use of him and laughing behind his back." She had just intercepted a look of pained, fastidious distaste, quite involuntary, which Lady Todhunter cast towards his string tie and bone studs when Peppiott spoke of the pioneers. She glared at Lady Todhunter and Lady

Todhunter thought the little country girl was gazing at her with the awe she was used to from little country girls, and smiled condescendingly.

“Yes, the glorious pioneers,” Dr Barnett agreed. “They were gentlemen and lived like gentlemen.”

Nobody disputed it. They were all children of pioneers.

“But the confounded politicians changed all that by stopping transportation.” Dr Barnett, insensitive to a slight bristling at various parts of the table, sipped his wine, shot his cuffs, and prepared again to be listened to with respect. “It was a golden age,” he assured them. “A squatter was lord of the manor and the arbiter of his people's fate. His convict servants were like his peasants, on the whole better treated than peasants in Ireland. In time they would have learnt to live in the country, which would have grown slowly and graciously on its own resources without any help from the London Jews. But along come your damned Liberals and humanitarians and turn Jack the jailbird loose to be as good as his master, and the country's in the hands of the dregs of humanity, and you, with your confounded development, draw them all to Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne to nurture themselves in useless occupations and become a race of city-rats.” He took another sip of wine and commenced to develop a picture of Australia as it would have been if convicts were still transported to be the servants of squatters. A nation of aristocrats and landed gentry, like the Ireland of Charles Lever, he thought. It was his favourite topic. He could afford it to be.

For others present, however, the topic did not brighten a dinner-table. Peppiott made an effort to turn the conversation by proposing “Our Glorious Pioneers” and delivering a little speech about the debt they all owed to such men as “our dear friend Cabell” — he let fall a little drop of oil precisely on the top of Cabell's head — and “our dear old and highly respected neighbour, Joshua Purvis.”

Old Purvis had stopped feeding and was beginning to sit up and take notice. “Blamed hot in here,” he grumbled, took his coat off, hung it on the back of the chair, and sat down again. “That's better. What's that you're sayin' about me, Peppiott?”

“We were remarking upon the debt we owe to those, including yourself and our old friend Cabell, who opened up this great land of ours.”

Old Purvis finished his rum and smacked his lips. “Ah, them were the days. Them were the days, eh Cabell? Nothin' here but blacks, and a durn sight better neighbours than some white folks they were. Pity we shot 'em all off.”

“Shot them?” Mrs Peppiott said. “Oh, how dreadful. The poor defenceless creatures. And so interesting. You must come to a meeting of our Aborigines Protection League. You know they prove all about the missing link. So invaluable to science.”

“I don't know nothing about that,” Purvis said. “I know your old man

shot 'em the same as we all did.” He chuckled. “I mind the time he tied a gin up to a cart-wheel and . . .”

“Yes, yes,” Peppiott said, “Mrs Peppiott merely means that it's a pity the exigencies of the times compelled the white man to take such extreme measures against a people so unique.”

“Exigencies of the times, you call it? We called it shortage of wimmen. I mind the day . . .”

“Do have some more wine, Mr Purvis,” Mrs Peppiott put in.

“A drink. Well, I wouldn't spit in it.”

A servant began to fill his glass, but he snatched it away.

“ 'Ere, lad, none of that cat-lap for me. I want something to cut the phlegm. This here,” he nodded towards his grandson while avoiding the outraged Sir Alexander's bulging eye, “he nearly did me in with stuff like that. Something he brought home from France. Might be all right for a skinny Frenchman, no good for a man. Like most of the things he brought home with him.” This was taken to refer to Lady Todhunter, especially as it was underlined with obscure grunts about boots, chimneypots, and collars, a tyranny Lady Todhunter had imposed on the old man. “But I was sayin' . . .”

Sir Alexander cleared his throat and Mr Purvis kept his eye fixed on Mrs Peppiott, which was as far as he could remove it from the eye of Sir Alexander.

“I was sayin' I mind the day my old man pegged it. Went out to look for a cow and a tree fell on him. It was burnin' in the butt and it kept on burnin' and burnt him in two halves. Well, I was sayin' wimmen was short, and by gum we'd hardly got the two halves of the old bloke under the ground before the fellers start come ridin' in from fifty miles around, and inside a month the old girl was in harness again. Yes, in the family way once a year — that was the order in them days. Now a dandy young gal like you,” he told Harriet, “you'd bin a ma three times over by your age.”

“Mr Purvis! How can you!” All the ladies were shocked.

All except Harriet, who rather liked Mr Purvis's faded blue eyes. She smiled encouragingly. “Oh, I wish I'd been there.”

“Well, you'd've married a man. Not one of them sore-fingers you see about,” old Purvis said and chucked her under the chin. “By gum, I'd married you meself.”

Harriet laughed and old Purvis laughed and laughed so heartily that he disorientated himself and accidentally let his eye contact with his grandson's. And that was the end of old Purvis. He licked his lips, grumbled something to himself about “ 'igh society,” felt to see if his collar was on, and got under the table on the pretence of unlacing a tight boot.

Mrs Peppiott took advantage of the lull to move the ladies into the

drawing-room. When they were all settled to coffee on the veranda she piloted Harriet to a corner. "Oh, I do hope you weren't offended with Mr Purvis, darling. He's *so* coarse. But they had no advantages in those days. Nothing to elevate the spirit. I think only the spiritual things matter, don't you? The sweet strains of music, for example. How I love it. When I hear Douglas sing — oh, he has a divine voice! Now wouldn't it be lovely if you sang a duet together. Something really classical. One of those heavenly duets of Sir Arthur Sullivan. I'll speak to Douglas about it. But about Mr Purvis, darling, I must apologize. Of course you did your best . . ."

"There's nothing to apologize for," Harriet interrupted. "I liked Mr Purvis."

"Yes, yes, of course you were splendid. An extremely awkward moment for the poor Todhunters. Of course, Sir Alexander is a wonderful man — to think he has risen from that. But now, darling, I'm going to give you a *teeny weeny* word of advice. You mustn't encourage such talk. I hope you won't be offended at my saying so, darling, but I wonder you didn't blush. You took it so calmly — those awful words. But then I suppose you didn't know what they meant."

"What words? In the family way? Why, they're in Shakespeare."

"In Shakespeare? Oh, I'm sure they're not."

"Well, something like them. I can show you."

"They're certainly not in *our* copy of Shakespeare. And, anyway, they're not nice words, are they? When she hears such words a young lady must pretend she doesn't know what they mean. You know, darling, a lady has to be *so* careful. So *many* spiteful eyes." She glanced at the other ladies on the veranda. "Vipers," she whispered. "They'll spread it all over the place that you know more than a young girl should. And one day a nice young man will want to marry you and I'm sure — I hope you'll forgive an interfering old woman, dear, but when I look at you, poor, motherless little thing . . ."

"I've got a mother. What do you mean?" Harriet said surprised.

"Yes, yes, of course," Mrs Peppiott had repressed the fact that Harriet had a mother. "I mean here in Brisbane. You must be so lonely. Your father's such a busy man, isn't he?"

"I can look after myself. I'm not a child," Harriet said, touched on her tender spot.

Mrs Peppiott smiled wryly — Harriet was certainly making things very difficult — and changed the subject, or, rather, assaulted her object from a new angle.

"Douglas tells me that your brother, Geoffrey, is going into the bank."

"Yes, he had some trouble with a girl and Father had to buy her off, so he gave Geoffrey a terrible clout and made him go to work," Harriet said frankly.

Mrs Peppiott was very pleased to glean this information, though startled by Harriet's complete lack of decent family reticence. But she had given enough advice for the moment and decided to leave a lecture on family honour to the future. "And your brother James?" she asked sweetly.

"He's in Sydney."

"So providential he was brought to his senses, wasn't it, dear?" Mrs Peppiott simpered. "It would have been most unfortunate if he'd persisted and perhaps married into that dreadful Flanagan family."

"Who, Jennis Bowen, do you mean? But he will marry her. He's terribly in love with her."

"Your father would surely not allow it."

"What's it got to do with him?"

Mrs Peppiott's eyes widened with slow, toadlike astonishment. "You're not suggesting that they would — elope? Without your father's consent? Oh, what a scandal!"

"I *hope* they will," Harriet said. "I'm going to offer James all my jewellery to help him and if he doesn't I shall never, never speak to him again."

Mrs Peppiott croaked hoarsely with amusement. "*What* a romantic child you are, Harriet, my love."

"I'm not romantic and I'm not a child," Harriet said fiercely.

"Ah, Harriet," Mrs Peppiott said, coming nearer and lowering her voice again, "you *are* romantic. *Very* romantic. One *would* almost think that you were in love yourself."

"Perhaps I am."

Mrs Peppiott darted her little green tongue and watched closely, shifting a little, as a toad watches a suspicious movement in the grass. "Do tell me, sweet? Who is it? I'd be very interested and sympathetic."

Harriet clutched desperately for a name. "It *might* be Mr Cash."

"Mr Cash!" Mrs Peppiott let out a horrified croak. "Oh, that's impossible. A common man like that."

"What of it? My mother was a common woman — a convict. And so was . . ." Mrs Peppiott's comment on Cash had piqued her, and her tongue, which had not yet learnt its way in society, had nearly run too far.

Mrs Peppiott sprang from the sofa and landed in front of her with a damp, froggy flop. "I feel it my duty to tell your father of this. I'm sure he knows nothing about it."

Her unexpected anger startled Harriet. "Oh, no, you needn't. It's not true," she said quickly. "I was only pretending. I'm not in love with anybody. How could I be? I don't know anybody."

Mrs Peppiott dropped on to the sofa and patted her hand. "Forgive me, dear. You frightened me. You see, you're such a nice young girl, and I

wouldn't like to see a nice young girl have her reputation spoilt by . . . Yes, yes, I know. But you wait. You'll fall in love with a *nice* young man and have a *nice* wedding and it will all be *nice*. I'm sure it will."

Harriet grimaced. "I don't want a nice young man."

"Now that's not nice, Harriet," Mrs Peppiott rebuked her.

Niceness! The word, which she realized suddenly was always on the lips of Mrs Peppiott and the other women who called at her father's house, irritated her, and she decided, in revulsion against them, that she loathed niceness more than anything else. It was like an invincible armour, this niceness behind which they smirked and gossiped, and neither her eager frank advances nor the bolts of her rage could penetrate it. After she had somehow betrayed herself, as now she had done with Mrs Peppiott, they cooed over her with a triumphant, kindly niceness, as though she was really some sick or abnormal or pariah thing and the most charitable way to treat her was as a child, a foolish child. They made her feel ashamed, despite herself, and more obstinately angry.

"I'm not nice," she told Mrs Peppiott, "and I don't want to be."

Mrs Peppiott shook her head and her loose gullet flopped the opposite way. "You *are* very, very contrary, but I'm *sure* you're quite nice just the same."

"I'm not. I'm nasty. What you mean by nasty. I was born nasty. And I'm glad. My father's nasty. And my mother's nasty."

"Your father is really a very nice man when one gets to know him. He has extremely good connexions in England. His third cousin is Lord Felsie."

"He's nasty," Harriet insisted. "He has done nasty, terrible things."

"How can you use such words?" Mrs Peppiott said hastily. "It's not nice to bring up the past like that."

"It's there whether you bring it up or not," Harriet said. "Like a rich cake you can't digest," she added with gratuitous nastiness.

"It's not nice to talk about it. It doesn't concern us. The present is quite nice, quite different."

"The present isn't nice at all," Harriet snapped. "Look what my father and Mr Peppiott are doing — using money which doesn't belong to either of them. Father explained it to me. Is that nice?"

"Really, you do say some extraordinary things, Harriet. I'm sure your father and Mr Peppiott are doing no such thing."

"They are. You know they are. Everybody knows. Just as everybody knows our fathers or mothers or both were convicts and did nasty, *nasty* things. And that Sir Michael Flanagan married a convict's wife when she had had her husband flogged till he died. And that Jennis Bowen's father died through drinking too much. And that old Mr Curry was nearly hanged although his grandson went to Oxford. And that Sir Alexander Todhunter's grandfather eats with his fingers. And yet you all pretend

that we're nice and that everything is and always was nice and that nothing but nice things have ever happened. It's not true. It's a lie."

Mrs Peppiott quavered before the storm, but she compressed her lips to hide punishment, and when Harriet had finished returned, indefatigably smiling, to the fray. "There, there, my precious. You excite yourself. Just let me get my smelling salts. . . ."

Harriet sulked. Then she felt remorseful and tried to answer Mrs Peppiott's undaunted niceness with a pumped-up niceness of her own. But in her heart she hated Mrs Peppiott and her lying niceness. Obscurely she felt that it was a lie against a part of herself, her most passionate, most precious, most living self. It was a lie which had eaten into the hearts of Mrs Peppiott and her kind and sucked the blood out, so that they were animated now only by its lying formulas. She had seen the process at work in James. There had been a fine fire of recklessness and honesty in James and then it was gone. The dead, lying formulas she heard so often on the lips of Mrs Peppiott and her friends, which struck her forcibly because although Miss Montaulk used many of them they had seemed unreal in the isolated life of the valley, crept more and more frequently into James's letters. "One must avoid scandal," "One must not make a show of oneself," "One must remember one's duty to one's family — parents — society," and much more of the same sort, so unlike the James who was going to marry Jennis despite his father and make his own way in life, that Harriet began to fear for herself, for the blind, reckless, passionate desire to live, through which alone, she felt, she would have the strength to escape from her father's stubborn will. What, she asked herself, had happened to James? And studying the people who came to the house, contrasting old Mr Purvis and Sir Alexander Todhunter, Peppiott and what Cabell had told her about his father, she decided that it was a fear and a consuming shame of the past which made them hide behind this lie about niceness, the same fear she had seen in James and felt in herself. A horrible, lurking fear of the past was in them, not only of the brand of convictism but of the spirit of convictism and the wild recklessness of the old hands from which many savage deeds had come. They were afraid of that crude, reckless spirit their fathers had handed on to them and they tried to kill it in themselves and others. And when they couldn't kill it they pretended that it was not there, as when they pretended that she was a little mad, and that Cabell was really a nice man, and that nothing had really happened in the past which was not nice, and that all convicts had been sent out for stealing a loaf of bread. And having killed it or pretended that there had never been a savage reckless spirit in the country, and that everything had always been as nice as it was in England, and they themselves as nice as they would have been if their fathers had stayed in England instead of coming to fight for a hold on a new land, they got paunchy and withered, like Peppiott, and a

smug mask covered their faces. But what was behind the mask when you had killed this crude, reckless part of yourself that must be there, because your father and mother could not have come here and conquered the country without being or becoming crude and ruthless and strong? Why, nothing except the lie that they had been nice people and so you were the inheritors of niceness — that and a consuming fear and shame. When she lost her temper she had seen a beseeching look in Mrs Peppiott's eyes, as though she was crying out, "No, don't say it. Please don't say it." She had noticed the same look many times in their eyes when an old landtaker was in the room and insisted upon telling his dark, crude stories of the past. Comparing the landtakers with their children, Harriet could not help thinking that the wild, cruel, ruthless, reckless spirit of the old men was much finer than anything with which their sons had replaced it. Anyway, they had lived, and Harriet felt that if you made Mrs Peppiott's niceness your ideal you didn't live, couldn't live. You must turn against yourself. She was frightened of her father and she hated him, but he was really finer than James whatever he had done, because rather than kotow to *his* father he had gone out into the bush and carved a place for himself, whereas James was too weak or afraid. He would take his father's nasty money while coming to terms with the nice people who hated and despised Cabell. In her youthful ardour Harriet could not understand why the world should not be absolutely frank and honest and unashamed.

So after the dinner at Peppiott's she decided that she had had enough of nice people. She avoided the men who came to see her father, and was disgusted with herself for ever having felt that she could like such fat, dull dolts. To the ladies she was so rude that they soon stopped calling, except the more determined ones who had an axe to grind, like Mrs Peppiott. Her wide mouth went a little grey at the corners and took on a permanent pout. She slept badly, and dreamt badly, and day and night felt a dull ache in her breast. It was the pain of her pent-up energy, love, and desire, which were like a vine hungrily groping in a void for something to take hold on. Her body, thinner than ever, began to look like a vine, and in her hands, white and thin and restless, was the twisted agony of vine tendrils, and in her eyes a lurking succubus look which frightened the men on whom it rested.

It frightened Doug Peppiott the first time he was left alone with her — one day when he drove his father to the house and stayed in the drawing-room with Harriet while Peppiott and Cabell went to confer.

He sat opposite her on the sofa, looking down at his crossed legs, which bulged muscularly in their tight trousers, with an expression of sulky discontent on his face. His big eyelids hid his eyes, drawing between them a curtain through which she tried to peer. He could feel her eyes probing him, and under his disgust of her thin body and wide mouth and pale gaunt face, and his anger at having his life upset by his parents'

determination that he should marry her, he felt little stabs of fear. He sensed the hungry succubus in her and his manhood, which was not very manly but rather spoiled and softened by maternal pampering, was scared. Little shivers ran up and down his flesh as though he could feel the tendrils of her spirit groping over him for a place to fasten on. Summoning all the resources of his supercilious, masculine silence he tried to cover himself from her witchlike, probing eyes.

"You went to school with Jimmy, didn't you?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"He often talks about you."

Again a long silence, while he stared at his knees and burned with resentment. He thought how her father's money had interfered with his dreams of a good time in England, corrupting even his indulgent mother, and he turned his resentment against her. He would not be polite and talk, damn her. His indifference, his downcast eyes and silence fascinated Harriet. She mistook them for strength and deep masculine mystery.

"Do you work with your father?" she asked.

"No."

"You live in Brisbane?"

"Of course."

"Oh!" She was rebuffed. Her quick temper came up. "Why don't you talk? Have you got a toothache?" she attacked, in her usual blunt way.

Such direct methods shook him. He glanced at her. "No." And added morosely, "I don't want to talk, that's all."

"What did you come for?"

"My father brought me?"

"By the hand?"

He glared at her, colouring.

"I hope you won't come again, anyway."

He rose, very offended.

"Oh," Harriet said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. Please don't go."

He remained standing stiffly, a little foolish.

Impulsively she took his hand and pulled him back on to the sofa. "Please forgive me, Mr Peppiott. I didn't know I could be so rude. Of course you must come again. Please promise."

"No need to apologize," he grumbled, freeing his hand from her hot fingers.

"But you must forgive me. *Really* forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive."

"But you must say it. Do."

"Very well. If you insist. I forgive you."

"Thank you," Harriet said humbly, "but I'll never forgive myself. Now let us talk about something else. Where are you going to work? Jimmy's

going to the mine, you know. At least, Father wants him to. I suppose you'll learn law with your father."

He hesitated, then with startling violence, looking at her accusingly, said, "I'm going to England."

"How lovely."

"Yes, I am, and nobody's going to stop me."

She studied his face, with the clipped, red, military moustaches, which didn't seem quite to belong. The face, the soft chin, and soft, spoilt mouth didn't quite come up to their fierceness. But Harriet, mistaking a sulky swelling of the lips for resolution, thought it was the strongest face she had ever seen. "I think I understand. Your father doesn't want you to go."

"Yes," he said. "But how did you know?"

"Oh, I think all old people must be alike. They want to rule. It's the same with my father and James."

"Anyway," he repeated, as if delivering her an ultimatum, "I'm going."

"That's right," she said eagerly. "You go. You must go. Don't do what James is doing — keep putting it off until it may be too late."

The study door opened. They looked at each other.

"Have you got the money to go?" she whispered.

"Money? No — but . . ."

"You'll have to go as a sailor then? How exciting!"

"A sailor? Me? Don't be silly."

"Why not? You want to go to England, don't you? You haven't got the money."

Her words summed up all the futility of his little rebellion. He had no money.

Peppiott and Cabell were coming down the hall.

Harriet pressed his hand. "But come again, won't you, and tell me all?"

He felt gooseflesh pains spread over his hand. "Yes," he said sourly, "I'll come again."

Chapter Seven: Succubus

PEPPIOTT and Cabell were very thick now and Peppiott dropped in three and four times every day. As Mrs Peppiott had spied out the land he always brought Doug in the afternoon when Miss Montaulk was upstairs taking her nap.

But Cabell was not blind. He had watched Harriet so closely for so long that he was aware at once of a great change in her. She had become curiously still, concentrated, like a cat at the first faint nibble of a mouse in the moulding. The look of discontent had gone from her face which seemed to alter its very form, so that one became aware of features one had not noticed before — the deep cavities of her eyes, the ripe sensuousness of her mouth. Her body was less angular, more supple, but clenched, sprung. All her restless energy had disappeared. She lounged in the drawing-room, unmoving for hours, like a cat waiting with awful, confident patience. So, though she no longer spent the day rushing from piano to bookcase, to garden, and back to the piano, irritable with unconsumed energy, she seemed more fiercely energized than before. Her eyes were brittle and pointed with light, as if all her strength were concentrated there in a hypnotic willing. Of what? Cabell wondered.

At first the change pleased him. She submitted when he caressed her, listened when he spoke. Then he realized that this was because she thought of something else all the time, and that when she looked at him she did not see him, saw nothing. He had noticed Doug Peppiott's visits, which he had to put up with because he could not get along without Peppiott's help, but it never occurred to him that she might have fallen in love — with all the naïve ardour of her inexperience and a hungry desire to spend affection for which she had never had any object. At least, he refused to admit the possibility.

He needed much less to make him jealous: the mere idea that she was friendly with a stranger, another man, was enough for that. She hadn't got two words to say to her father, yet she seemed to chatter away for hours to that young whelp. What about? He tried to question her but her eyes filled with a secretive look he did not like at all and she answered evasively. So one afternoon, instead of leaving the study with Peppiott, he made an excuse to slip out alone and tiptoed down the passage. The house was silent, except for Miss Montaulk's snoring and the chitter of birds in the garden. But beyond this noise and this silence a deeper,

vibrant silence flowed from the drawing-room, the nervous silence of an animal sprung in patient watching and waiting. The room might have been empty for all the sound that came from it, but he knew it was not empty, as a man, entering a dark room, sometimes knows that a cat is waiting and watching there, even before he sees its eyes, glowing with still, brittle fire in the blackness, blind to everything except their own invisible desire, eyes no longer but organs of a pitiless, mesmeric will which stagnates the air and holds walls and furniture in a trance of cruel, watchful waiting.

He paused in the doorway with one hand on the door-jamb, fixed by a strange scene. They were sitting on the sofa, Peppiott at one extreme end, Harriet at the other. Peppiott sat erect and stiff with his arms folded, gazing away from her through the open doors to the garden. He looked as though he had just been offended in a quarrel and was refusing to be coaxed out of his rage. A heavy frown creased his forehead and drew his thin, red brows together. Harriet was looking at him. She lay back in the cushions, her body paralysed, as though every atom of strength had gone from it, sucked into her eyes. Her face was pale and her hands, palm upwards in her lap, were white and boneless like the hands of a person in a faint. But in her eyes was the condensed fire of her being. Under their brows, black as jet against her bloodless face, they seemed to give forth palpable heat. Though Cabell was almost in the line of her vision she did not stir, absorbed in her concentrated gazing. There was nothing tender in her gaze. It was domineering and unmerciful. It astounded Cabell, revealing in his petulant child a woman of unsuspected power. Fleeting, her stillness, her deep-set eyes, and in those eyes an enigmatic expression of resolve, almost of cunning, reminded him of Emma.

"Here, what's wrong with you, girl?" he demanded.

Peppiott leapt as though a gun had gone off in his ear, but seeing Cabell a look of relief wiped the frown from his face and he smiled. "Oh, sir, you startled me."

But Cabell was watching Harriet, who turned without a flicker of change in her expression. "Are you sick?" He went over and shook her.

"Of course not," she said quietly. "Why?"

"Look as if you'd just seen a ghost."

She shrugged impatiently. "I was only thinking."

Cabell turned and looked at Doug. "Waiting for your father?" he snapped.

"Yes, sir. Yes."

"He'll be busy for an hour. We'll drive him home. You needn't stay."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Thank you," Doug said with puzzling alacrity, then positively darted from the room without a glance at Harriet. There was something absurdly mouselike in the way he scampered out.

Cabell went on to the veranda and watched him drive away. He looked

potent, handsome, driving the two grey stallions, moving in the aura of their high-stepping pride.

He came back into the room. "There's something funny going on here. What is it?"

"Funny?" The glow had gone from her eyes, but they were still intent, with a secret thought concealed in their depths and the ruckle between her heavy eyebrows. Again, he saw the likeness to her mother, who also had guarded a ruinous secret behind her eyes.

"Miss Montaulk ought to be here when people come," he grumbled. "It's not proper."

She did not reply. She seemed to purr over her secret thought, half-asleep.

She had never been more widely awake, more tensely alert in every groping tendril of her vinelike spirit. Indeed, she seemed only now to have awakened from a long coma in which she had dreamt of her father and his schemes. She had believed that she was somehow doomed to be his prisoner for ever, that nothing in the world was strong enough to defeat his obstinate will, but as she compared him with Doug Peppiott she saw that he was not like an eagle at all really, that he was just a weak, cantankerous old man. For Peppiott was young and she was young — young and resolute and strong. Oh, she could do anything if only — if only Doug would love her and help her. And he *would* love her! Yes, she would *make* him love her.

So she watched him anxiously for a sign, but he gave none. Her anxious, shameless watching seared him. What kind of a girl was this? A decent, modest girl, a nice girl, wouldn't look at a man in that hungry way. What you heard about her must be true — that she knew a bit too much. So he kept as far off as he could, and in his remoteness she thought there was some hard, mysterious masculine strength when there was nothing but plain funk — funk of what people would say if he married a girl like that, and, deeper down, a worse funk of he knew not what, a funk of being swallowed up. It was fantastic. He didn't try to analyse it. But there it was. He wished, if his mother was determined to marry him, she would pick on somebody else — Lady Todhunter's sister, for example, a real lady, or Jennis Bowen. But this one — ugh!

His neck bulging in its tight collar, his mouth cut in a full, fleshy, sensual bow, his eyes half-covered superciliously in their heavy lids, his brown, athletic hands — these fascinated her as the attributes of a mysterious, male power. Exigently, shamelessly, she pried into the mystery.

"What are you thinking of now?"

"I wasn't thinking of anything."

"But you must be thinking of something." And hastily, as he frowned, she added, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm always bothering you."

He was most uncomfortable when she humbled herself like that suddenly, a subtle snare to put him in the wrong and force him to reassure her. The cunning devil! He refused to answer. So they sat in silence again with the length of the sofa between them, and he determined, if he was to marry her, to give her nothing, not even a kind word. And all the time he could feel her eyes, active, witchlike, and the feeling was intolerable. He had to look around to see what she was doing, as though he expected to catch her making passes over him. But she was only watching him, waiting for a sign, and when she caught his glance she thought it was a sign of relenting and began again.

"Why didn't you come yesterday?"

"My father didn't require me."

"What did you do?"

"Various things. I don't remember."

"Who did you speak to?"

"A lot of people. What does it matter?"

"But *who*? I want to know everything about — " she hesitated, "everything."

"Well, I told you once — I don't remember." This domineering curiosity, this patient, shameless prying angered, then bewildered him. What would she say next? What was she up to? What did she want? He knew only two kinds of women, ladies and whores. He preferred whores because a man could get his fun out of a whore without being bound to give anything of himself except a little money. But a woman like this one, as shameless and passionate ("hot" was his word) as a whore, as possessive as the kind of girl who had a right to expect you to marry her, he had never known. He resented the helplessly passive role he had to play. Against a whore you could assert yourself by paying up and clearing out. A decent girl never put a man in a corner like this: she just sat and waited to be asked, strictly observing all the formulas and conventions which nice girls knew. He would have liked to assert himself by walking out of the house, since she apparently did not know the formulas, or anyway did not pay the respect to them that any girl good enough to be his wife would pay, but where could he go without throwing up all he valued. He kept saying to himself, "I won't marry her. I'll get a jackerooing job. I'll go to England and become a professional cricketer," but he sat there and submitted resentfully to her exigent questioning.

"Did you call on anybody?"

"I suppose I did."

"Who? Tell me about them."

"I went to see a horse."

"Was it good?"

"Good enough."

“Who owns it?”

“Jack Bowen.”

“Oh, isn't that Jennis Bowen's brother?”

“Yes.”

“Did you see her?”

“Of course.”

“She must be beautiful. Is she?”

“They say so.”

“But do *you* think she's beautiful? Do you?”

“Yes, I do,” he said spitefully.

“Oh.” Harriet's voice was small. “Oh, I wish I was beautiful.”

He said nothing, enjoying the long, awkward silence.

When he glanced round cautiously again her eyes were damp. He looked away quickly.

“I know I'm not beautiful,” she said humbly, “but am I ugly? Very, very ugly? As ugly as Miss Montaulk?”

“I've never noticed her.”

“I wish I was so beautiful that somebody would fall in love with me as James fell in love with Jennis.”

“You read too many novels,” Doug said sententiously, repeating what his mother said.

“But don't you believe in love?”

He shrugged.

“I believe in it,” Harriet said raptly, and he could feel her rapture, like the hot waves of perfume that flowed in from the garden. “If a man loved me I'd do anything at all for him. I'd go anywhere with him. Have you read *Manon Lescaut*? That's the way I'd be. Oh, you couldn't ask too much of me if you loved me — I mean one couldn't.”

He could not listen to this without being moved. When he thought about having her as a wife and all his friends saying God knows what about her this wild talk made him feel as though he was being suffocated, but when he forgot that for a moment little wires began to tighten and vibrate in the pit of his stomach. “Say I didn't have to marry her after all.” He turned around. Their knees touched and a sharp barb of fire ran up his thighs. She lay among the cushions, limp, her eyes dilated, cheeks flushed, lips damply apart. He saw the hard nipples of her breasts take shape through the thin voile of her dress. “If she was just a tart!”

Harriet's heart was beating against her throat. The way his face had suddenly relaxed frightened her, but made her happy too. Perhaps it was the sign she had been waiting for!

But he turned away abruptly, wiped his face on his handkerchief, folded his arms, and stared out at the garden.

Then Cabell came in and Doug went for his life. “For his life,” that was just how he thought of it, too.

Peppiott arrived home pleased with himself. Things were going well. Cabell had come back from the drawing-room looking worried. Peppiott understood. "He wants to tell me not to bring Doug, but he's afraid to offend me. He can't afford it." But he said to Doug, "You be careful what you're doing there. We mustn't make any mistakes."

"I'm not doing anything," Doug said. His face was puffed up and red with anger. After this afternoon he felt desperate.

Peppiott winked across the dinner-table. "Tell that to the marines, my boy. He must nearly have caught you red-handed."

"I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole," Doug flared.

"Douglas!" Mrs Peppiott rolled her green toad eyes. "How can you say such things about a girl who's going to be your wife — and the mother of your children."

"She's not going to be my wife. I wouldn't be seen with her in . . ." He nearly said Frogs' Hollow but he was supposed to be innocent of Frogs' Hollow and all its works, so he substituted, "the street."

The thin glaze of amiability dried off Peppiott's face. "And pray, sir, who says she will not be your wife?"

"I do."

Peppiott fingered his rat-skin whiskers. "In that case, you will explain perhaps how you propose to earn a living when you leave this house, which I shall trouble you to do as soon as I am convinced that you mean what you say."

"Of course he doesn't mean it," Mrs Peppiott intervened between them hastily. "He couldn't mean it, could you Douglas? All this Papa is doing for Cabell is for you really, your future."

"But she's impossible, Mother. You don't know her."

"A little undisciplined, perhaps," Mrs Peppiott conceded, nodded and smiled, "but we can see to that later. The poor child needs a firm hand."

"She's — she's — " he gulped the word two or three times before he spat it out at them, "she's hot — hot as mustard."

"Goodness gracious, Douglas, what *are* you saying!"

"She's not a lady. That's what I mean."

"But, Douglas, what do you know about such vulgar things? Surely . . .
,,

He cringed behind the soup tureen. "No, of course not. Only she's not like other girls. She doesn't seem right somehow."

"Fiddlesticks," Peppiott snorted. "She's spoilt. Your mama will soon instruct her."

"Besides," his mama said, stroking his hand, "do you think we would ever permit you to bring anybody into the Peppiott family who was not quite, quite proper? Her father is most intimately connected with the Felsies and her uncle was a bishop in England."

"What about her mother?"

“What about her mother?” Peppiott snapped. “Her father made three thousand pounds on the stock exchange to-day.”

Mrs Peppiott's eyes bubbled out from under their scaly lids. “Why, Douglas, you'll be a millionaire. You'll be able to do whatever you like.”

“Will I?” Doug muttered. “You don't know what she's like. The image of her grasping old man.”

“But I know what my dear Douglas is like,” Mrs Peppiott croaked, “and the girl who is good enough to be his wife couldn't possibly be a mercenary girl. Nothing so vulgar and sordid could interest a Peppiott woman!”

Chapter Eight: Lady Or — ?

THE next time Doug came Miss Montaulk was sitting in his place on the sofa, and there she continued to sit, her inflexible face between them, while watching him with a knowing, almost skittish eye. Twice she chuckled aloud and shook her frowsy head over her sewing.

Doug was on pins and needles. The blatant immodesty of these two women shocked him, the way they showed what was in their minds, Harriet her wish to be alone with him, Miss Montaulk that she knew and more.

Engrossed in their battle they took hardly any notice of him, and after a few inane words about the weather he rose to leave.

Harriet rose too and went to the door with him.

“Now, Harriet, where are you going?” Miss Montaulk put her needle aside and waddled after them.

But Harriet clutched Doug's arm so hard that he winced, and hustled him into the passage. “Here, quick,” she whispered and pressed something into his hand, then scampered up the stairs as Miss Montaulk appeared in the door.

An arch smile, implicating him in some evil conspiracy, brought wrinkles up from under the powder and rouge which gave her face its air of disillusioned and unwearying lust.

He shuddered and fled, so upset by it all that he was in the trap and trotting down the drive before he remembered the hard little ball of paper in his hand. He opened it and read, in Harriet's thin writing.

Don't come to the house any more. Father has set this woman to watch us. It is terrible. I'll go out of my mind if I have to put up with his spying much longer. If you climb the fence at the bottom of the garden where the camphor-laurels are you'll find me any afternoon at three. They won't think of looking for us there.

A big H was scrawled across the bottom of the page.

He had to read the note twice before he understood, then he crumpled it into his pocket and whipped the horses, so that he came out of the drive into the road on one wheel, as though in flight.

She was actually asking him to meet her in secret — a girl who was supposed to be decent enough for his wife. “By jove, she *is* hot!” At once he thought of all his friends, the men in his club, the racing men, the polo men, the squatters — the salt of his little world, his aspiring little world,

where scandal ran like fire in the wind. "Why, that lie about Grandmother might come true." His personal honour bridled, as though she was already his wife and had already caused him some disgrace. He pulled the horses into a trot and brought the note out of his pocket again. Yes, it was clear enough: she must be barmy or a slut. Anyway, there was this comfort in it, he told himself on second thoughts, her note would settle the wretched business. Even his mother would see what kind of a girl she was now — and perhaps he wasn't even the first!

That idea had a queer effect upon him. Instead of making him more angry it sent a wave of hot blood to his temple and started the little wires vibrating in his stomach again. He saw Harriet lying in the sofa cushions, running up the stairs with her dress above her slim calves, felt her fingers burning on his wrist. By jove, suppose he didn't have to marry her. What about an assignation under the laurels then?

He reined the horses and looked along the road. It was empty. He fingered his moustache, grinned, shook his head, and finally drove back past the iron gates. There were the camphor-laurels, close to the fence at the bottom of the lane dividing the garden from a banana plantation. He glanced about. You could leave a horse over there and always reach it quickly in case . . . A bit of a risk for him, but still . . . what a go for a man! "And why shouldn't I? There've been others. Just think what everybody says about her — the way she talked to old Purvis. She knows a thing or two." Ah, but what if he had to marry her after all, after that, when perhaps he'd found out he wasn't the only one? No, no, his mother would get him out of it as she had always got him out. There'd be no more talk of marriage when she knew — she was so pure.

For three days Harriet waited under the camphor-laurels, so still in her concentration of willing and waiting that the little green-eyes and red-heads fluttered around her as though she was stone, to flee in a sudden throb of wings when at last her patience gave out and she crumpled into the white spread of her skirts and wept bitter tears. As the sun was going down across the river she returned to the house, with the resignation of a sufferer facing an inevitable, futile pain, to count the hours of yet another night.

On the fourth day he was already there when she arrived, half-hidden behind the hedge of bougainvillea, like a rabbit ready to dash to earth at the first alarm, and skulking into himself with bad conscience.

She stopped, seeing him, and went pale.

"Look here, I don't like this," he began, indignant out of a vanity wounded by the humiliation of climbing back fences and having to wait half an hour with his heart leaping up his throat at every crackle among the trees. "It's not right. If anybody saw me . . ."

She had to struggle with an unexpected shyness, which made her legs wobble and her mouth go stiff, as in a cold wind. All she could do was

utter an inarticulate sound of joy, a cry of relief after all her hours of waiting that sounded not joyful at all but rather sad. It startled a flight of birds out of the nearest tree and seemed, to Doug, to shriek through the sleepy afternoon.

"I say, a bit softer, can't you?" He paused on his way from the hedge to the trees, where the shadow lay like a black wool carpet on the lawn, reluctant to leave his rabbit hole altogether. "Yelling like that — you'll have the whole pack of them down on me in a minute."

She glanced over her shoulders. "There's no one. She's gone to sleep in the drawing-room."

"Where's your father?"

"He's not home."

"Huh." He got himself, with a quick creeping movement, into the cover of a tree, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead. "I tell you this is a devil of a risk for me. What's the idea?" For the moment he had forgotten what his idea was.

She did not reply. She turned her head away from him and gazed down at the rusted clover flowers trampled by some fury. That she was the fury, this shy slip of a girl, was inconceivable. Even to her it was inconceivable because all pain, the merest possibility of pain and anger in the world, seemed inconceivable now that by coming he had given her the sign for which she had waited so long. At last she could speak and let out the love that for years she had shackled down and starved in her heart. But for the moment she was content not to speak, even to know nothing of her joy in the lifting of a shadow from her life, as a man is content to sit down within sight of the track he has searched for through frantic hours and to be free a while of any emotion, even thankfulness.

When she did answer him, saying in a low voice, "I wanted to see you alone," it was without knowing that she had spoken. Her eyes were intent on the swift flight of the little birds, which she seemed to be seeing for the first time, and she thought to herself how pretty they were, how pretty their thin, quick little legs and clean white beaks, how fair and good the whole world. Her voice went on speaking, with ventriloquial remoteness, and she listened to it with surprise. "I waited and waited. I thought you'd never come."

"I was too busy."

"I counted a million million seconds," Harriet said, "and all of them years." She sighed, and to her the whole garden seemed to sigh in sympathy, a long suspiration of leaves and flowers in a gust of breeze from the river which saturated the air with scent of honeysuckle. With the egotism of the happy lover she saw the world remade to be the perfect mirror of her mood. Never, never again would there be storms or night or wild winds — only, for ever and ever, this serene afternoon enclosed in the misty-blue summer sky, a wall of luminous flowers and

leaves, and a river flickering glassy nipples of sunlight. "Of course, I knew you'd come."

"If I'd had any sense . . ." He craned his neck round the tree to find out how far they were from the house.

"Yes, I was sure," Harriet said.

"How were you sure?" he said. She was too sure, too damned sure. Again he had that fantastic fear of being swallowed up by something in her eyes. "She's a bloodsucker like her old man," one of his friends had said. Yes, by jove, that's just what she was. He wasn't given to flights of superstitious fancy, but he felt uneasy watching her take it all so calmly, so assuredly, and saying, with a secretive little smile, "Oh, I knew. You always know when you're in love. It wasn't doubting you made the time so long but just because you weren't here. Didn't I kiss the ground where you're standing now — because I knew you'd stand on there soon. I *knew*."

He pumped up an awkward gallantry. "You needn't have wasted them on the ground." But the mood left him at once. The enormity of his danger here in old Cabell's garden was beginning to dawn on him, and the wires vibrated no more in his belly. This sort of thing was a darn sight safer in Frogs' Hollow. Still, he could not quite bring himself to make a bolt for it, scrambling over that fence like a fool in front of her. Besides, a man would kick himself after: a girl didn't throw herself at your head like this every day of the week. He moved away irresolutely and picked up his hat, wiped a patch of dust off the nap on his sleeve.

When he looked around she was standing beside him, smiling up into his face with an expression of happy surrender. She put her hands on his shoulders and drew herself close till he could smell the sun heat in her dress and feel her quick breath, coming from half-open lips, on his cheek.

"There," she said, vexed. "I knew I wouldn't be able to reach you even on tiptoes."

He averted his face in a youthful, gawky shame of being so intimately handled by a girl, but she slipped her hands round his neck, laced her fingers, lifted herself off the ground, and kissed him. Her lips were as hard and naive as a child's. For a moment she pressed her cheek against his, then lowered herself and knelt at his feet with her breast against his knees.

"I say!" he protested, and grabbed at his tie, which she had knocked skew-whiff on its column of starched linen. "Get up, can't you. Someone might come."

"Let them. You're not frightened, are you?"

"Not exactly — no."

"You're not even frightened of *him*?"

"Your father? No — but all the same . . ."

“Oh, how can I ever be grateful enough. If only I was more beautiful.”

“Grateful for what?” he asked nervously.

“For things I could never count up. Because of you just existing. And because you've saved me, yes *saved* me.”

He did not understand this at all. For that reason it scared him more — but particularly because it sounded mad and exaggerated. He felt as though he was sober and sensible in the company of a wild drunk who had taken the reins from him and flogged the horses towards a precipice while assuring him that the air would support them. He did not pause to analyse his emotions so precisely. They summed themselves up for him as a doubt, once more, of his ability to get out with his life if he let this girl, whom neither shame nor propriety could restrain, drag him down into the vortex behind her eyes. He could feel hot waves of emotion throbbing into his thighs where her breasts crushed themselves against him, stirring him deep under the skin, deep under the layers of his mind where he could enjoy life and master it, enjoy her and master her as he had intended, by giving no more and going no farther than any common sensible fellow would.

“Let me go,” he said in a terrified voice, so pale that his fierce red whiskers looked more than ever idiotically stuck on.

“I've got to go. It's late.”

She obeyed and smiled.

He almost sprang away, but stopped. Her smile held him, the humility and obedience of it, lured and scared him. “She'd be up to anything. That's a fact.” And yet . . . Why so ready to give in so suddenly? His slow brain sensed a trap. Still he could not tear himself away. “She knows a thing or two. By jove, a chance of a lifetime.”

Fumbling his watch-chain with one hand, the loose change in his pocket with the other, he watched her, a foot advanced towards the hedge to plunge him head first into covert if she moved.

She did not move. Stretched out on the grass with her head in her hands she gazed into the trees. Her dress, caught tightly around her legs, exposed her little slippers of blue satin, her ankles, a few inches of open-work stockings, and the firm line of her thighs and hips. Her breasts threw themselves upwards triumphantly, printing each tiny shudder of her breath upon the thin bodice. Her long hair, which she wore loosely on her neck, had come unfastened in her struggles and lay in ropes across her throat and bare arms. Threads of gold fire ran through it, radiant, shifting, impalpable, as though it was a mass of antennae she had put out to suck the vitality and warmth from the air. So too seemed her staring eyes — not observing, but drinking in from the sky the essence of its light.

He perceived again how deceptive the slender frailty of her body and bloodless skin were. There was about her, just then, an awful receptivity

which made her like an image of the earth itself, the passive, secretive earth which swallows all things and thirsts for more. She did not move, yet every fibre of her flesh seemed to quiver and pulsate like a live ember. Perhaps it was an illusion caused by the dapple of light reflected from the river across her face and arms or by the fit of the shivers which passed through him.

But she was alluring and he was very young and very susceptible. He wanted to run, but his knees gave way and seated him on the grass beside her.

“Saved you? What are you getting at? I haven't done anything except come here — as *you* said.”

She turned on her side and rested her head in her crooked arm. “Do you ever read poetry?”

“Hardly!”

“Do you know a poem, I don't remember who wrote it, that says:

Western wind when wilt thou blow,
The small rain down can rain?
Christ, if my love were in my arms
And I in my bed again!

Do you?”

“No.”

“You've never been lonely, have you? You've never lain in bed at night and thought that there wasn't a single person in the world who loved you or you loved? That's what I was like till now.”

“I thought your father never thought of anything else, James said so.”

“Him! You don't know him. It's not me he loves. It's something else. It's something the sight of me helps him to remember or forget. I don't know which. But I know he'd do anything, even keep me locked up like a prisoner for the rest of my life, if it pleased him. It wouldn't matter if it pleased me. He'll never send me to England. He'll never send Miss Montaulk away. I was giving up hope when you came.”

“Me!”

Harriet put her hand on his. “Yes, you. I'd read about people in love — terribly in love. Tristram and Iseult, Troilus and Cressida, Romeo and Juliet, Emma Bovary. I thought about it and thought about it and nearly went off my head thinking about it. Because I could never imagine it happening to me — up there in the bush with nobody but a lot of barmy hatters and old men. And even they went for their lives when they saw me coming.” She laughed. “You should have seen them. It wasn't very flattering. I began to think I was the original ugly duckling. But I suppose if I'd been as beautiful as Venus they wouldn't have let me get within shouting distance — they're all so frightened of him.”

She explored his arm under the cuffs. "You're so strong. Brave too. Like a knight — like Ingelarius who fought and killed Gontra for the honour of the Lady of Gastinois."

"Never heard of him," he growled. That little extravagance cooled him down again. By jove, if her brother Geoffrey heard her say something like that it'd be all over the town in five minutes. By jove, a man'd be laughed out of the place.

"Yes, it's in Brantôme. When I read it I wished I could find an Ingelarius. I knew there was one somewhere, but how was I to find you. I never saw a soul. So I made him bring me to Brisbane. He didn't want to. If he'd thought of it he would have built a tower and a keep. But that was hardly necessary with a hundred and fifty thousand acres of paddock and scrub around me. He could have kept me there till I dried up like Montaulk. I was desperate, I tell you." Her mouth flattened on her teeth. "I could have killed him."

He looked shocked.

Harriet laughed gaily. "Oh, don't worry. He's very much alive. He'd like to eat you — if he dared. But he doesn't. Didn't you see the other day when he came into the room? He wanted to say something, but he was frightened of you. He must be."

"You haven't been telling him anything?"

"Don't be silly. As if he didn't know everything without me telling him. I can tell from the way he looked. He only had to see me looking at you — it must have been plain enough."

"What're you getting at? What was plain?"

She was surprised. "Why, that I'd found my Ingelarius." She smiled. "I knew from the first moment I saw you that I needn't look any farther. I was like that poem of Tennyson:

My whole soul waiting silently,
All naked in the sultry sky,
Droops blinded with his shining eye:
I will possess him or will die.

She repeated the last line to herself with a slow, and to Doug's ear, deadly emphasis, "*I will possess him or will die*. Yes, that's what I was like. How I waited and waited — for a sign. I'd say you were cruel only now that you've given it I can't remember how terrible it was."

"Gave you what? What sign?"

"You came here. Wasn't that a sign?" she said, surprised again. "A sign of courage for one thing. I'd have waited till I was an old maid before anybody else had the courage to stand up against him. Not only against him — against all the rest of them. They're afraid of their own shadows. You wouldn't catch them climbing a fence to see a girl they loved, even

if she had a different kind of father from mine. They'd rather go without love — if it wasn't the nicest kind of love, as in a coloured picture.”

“There's nothing really improper about it — just sitting here,” he said quickly, to excuse himself to that world which her words brought to mind with such dreadful clarity.

“Oh, what if there is? I'd rather be the worst woman in the world than like . . .” She frowned and considered a moment. “Your mother wants me to marry you, doesn't she?”

“Eh? I — really I don't . . .”

“Oh, yes, she does. Your father too. But of course it's impossible. That is, the way they want it. He'd never, never consent. And anyway, I wouldn't. If it was anything arranged by them — why,” She looked at him searchingly as a doubt began to intrude upon her self-centred and fantastic preconceptions, “why I'd suspect even you at once.”

“You mean . . .” He sat bolt upright. “He wouldn't let you marry me? No matter what my father did for him?”

“He hates your father.”

“And you? What about you?”

She looked at the tall stems of shivery-grass which trembled in unfelt currents of air, plucked one, and held it up. “I feel like that sometimes. I'm frightened. Even now I'm frightened all at once, even with you.” She searched his face again, peering into every feature. “If I could only be absolutely sure . . .”

“Sure of what?”

“That you wanted me. Do you? Oh, I know you came. But now I'm frightened again. How *can* you want me — ugly me? Do you?”

It was his cue. He braced himself, then caught her eye and weakened. “Well — er — yes. . . .”

“Ah!” She bent and kissed his hand. “Then we can do anything. I'll think of a way.” She smiled, a trifle grimly. “And won't your nice mother be upset and all her nice friends. I'd love to see their faces when . . .”

He freed his hand and stood up. “I'm really — I've got to go. . . .” He was not sure what he was saying but he was sure that she was mad and that his life, his future, his good name depended on the speed with which he got over the fence and to his horse and far away. “Thank God I didn't touch her. She can't hold anything over me.”

“Yes,” she said, “you'd better go.” She turned to the house, listening. “I think I can hear someone.”

He dashed into cover behind the tree and peered out. “Jesus, it's your father and Geoffrey. Will they come here?”

But they went into the house and a door slammed on the uproar of voices, Geoffrey's thinly whining, Cabell's threatening.

He looked round for his hat, but Miss Montaulk calling, “Harriet! Harriet! Your papa wants you,” sent him hatless into the bougainvillea.

Harriet ran after him. "Don't come here again," she said, "or to the house either. They mustn't suspect. I'll find a way."

He was gone, ripping his cuff on a loose paling, swishing in the long grass of the lane.

Harriet detached from the fence a small piece of thread torn from his sleeve, kissed it, put it away in her bodice, and softly singing to herself, but with a ruckle of thought between her eyebrows, returned to the house.

Chapter Nine: A Noble Brother

MISS Montaulk was coming across the lawn to look for her.

“So there you are. Your papa wants you in the library at once. He's very upset.” She paused and eyed the flush on Harriet's cheeks and the disorder of her hair. “Whatever have you been doing, girl?”

Harriet passed without speaking and went into the house.

Miss Montaulk followed, but at the veranda she changed her mind and waddled back to the garden, peeping under bushes and sniffing noisily through her splayed nostrils of a moral bulldog.

Geoffrey was lurking in the passage near Cabell's door. Dazed by sunlight Harriet stumbled into him before she saw the smudge of his pasty face.

He grabbed her arm. “Harriet, where the Dickens were you? I've searched the bally house. The old man's got a maggot — yelling for you like Mary's little lamb. Done in some dough by the looks of it. The old muck worm — serves him right!”

Harriet went on up the stairs, but Geoffrey ran ahead and blocked her way. “Just a minute, old girl. I'm in a hole. I wouldn't ask you, only the old man's clean off his nut. I thought he was going to fetch me a crack a minute ago. All I want — you can soft sawder him out of a million if you want, and I've got to have a hundred before to-morrow afternoon.”

“Ask him yourself.”

“Aw, you know what he's like. Expects me to live on the smell of an oil rag lately. Fact is, I've had a run of stinking luck. It might be awkward at the bank. Go on, Sis, he's corn in Egypt to you. Work the oracle for an old pal.” He winked long and slyly so that for some seconds only one little black aperture of an eye remained in the white slab of his face, as featureless as a bladder of lard. “By the way, I know somebody who's dead nuts on you.”

She started. “Who? What do you know?”

He winked again. “Wouldn't *you* like to know. A real, live Lochinvar. Ha ha. Saw him nearly dong a bloke in Queenie's the other night for saying something about you.”

Harriet's face lighted. “You mean he hit somebody? For me?”

“He didn't have to. He just took a look at the bloke and made him say, ‘Miss Cabell's the only real and proper lady in this town and I'm not a fit dog to lick her boots.’ The bloke didn't make any bones about it. Cash

looked nasty.”

“Cash!” Harriet said, disappointed.

“There you are. I told you, Sis. I could've made you promise to put the bleeders in the old man first. Aw, Sis . . .”

The opening of the library door cut him short. He drew away out of sight as Cabell looked up and said, ‘Ah, there you are, dear. Come down. I want to talk to you.’

He waited at the door and shut it behind her. His hair was tangled, his face grey. On the floor lay his coat with the sleeves inside out and his collar where he had ripped it off and thrown it down. He put his arm round her waist and pushed her across the room, littered with papers from drawers torn out of his desk and piled higgledy-piggledy against the wall.

Harriet sat down under the window and he sat down beside her. He looked at her for a while, gravely, then said: “You love your father, don't you, Harriet?”

She kept her eyes on the floor. One glance had been enough to tell her that some trouble had descended on him out of the blue, and that he was about to attack her with one of his violent appeals for love and sympathy which were like a tidal wave of a greedy sea in which she was doomed to perish if she did not fight. For an instant she was shocked by the haggard lines — deeper than the scar — which had appeared all at once on his face, but she screwed her pity back and tried to evoke from the involuted rose of the carpet a picture of Doug Peppiott lying beside her on the grass less than fifteen minutes ago. Against her flesh she imagined she could feel the wisp of thread he had left behind, a token of his love and daring to which she clung with one fist doubled on her breast.

“You love your father, don't you, Harriet?” he repeated, and went on quickly, “Why do I ask? I know you do. Hate begets hate. Love begets love. I've hated men all my life in this plague spot and you're the only one I've ever loved.” He fingered the string of black tie which had remained about his neck when he tore the collar from under it, rose, and walked the length of the carpet with his hands behind his back. “Harriet, say I was to tell you I'd lost a pile of money, that most likely I'd lost everything — what would you do?”

She glanced up and looked away at once from his bare throat, thin and scraggy with age.

“Would you want to leave me?”

The injustice, the cunning of the question, made her frown. “Have you lost money?”

“Maybe I have. But say I was to lose everything — the valley and all — but nobody knew about it yet, so there was time for you to be hooked up with one of these nincompoops like Peppiott before it all came properly to light. That's what's in their minds, I don't doubt. And

they've got money. They could give you everything I've given you. Would you?"

"For money?" Harriet said scornfully. "No."

"Ah, I knew it." He stopped and laid his hand on her head. "I knew I could trust you."

"But isn't there anything except money?" she said. "I wouldn't marry for money, but if I loved . . ."

"Yes — love. Precious little of it I've had these many years, and now it's likely to be all I have left because," He sat down and took her hand, "by this time next week I mayn't have a red cent in the world."

"But that can't be. The mine?"

"Yes, yes, It's possible. Something happened. There's been a collapse in the Argentine and Baring's went bust. . . ." He explained it to her briefly, how the apparently inexhaustible springs of money flowing in from abroad had suddenly dried up and how, vaguely understanding the tentative thing their booming land and share values were resting on, people were stupefied for a moment, then panic-stricken and began to sell, sell, sell. Shares tumbled, Waterfall with the rest. At first Cabell did not see the trap he was caught in. He refused to part with his Waterfalls. He believed in their value. Nothing could shake his conviction. It was only a small panic. Everything would be right. At any moment Larsen would find out the solution needed in the vats to extract unheard of quantities of gold and Waterfalls would be worth fifteen — twenty pounds each. Meanwhile, Waterfalls went down and down. When they reached five pounds the bank called for more margin for his loans, which amounted to nearly five hundred thousand pounds, and at the same time cut the margin they were allowing him from seventy-five to fifty per cent. His Waterfalls were worth six hundred and seventy-five thousand and the bank held also a mortgage for fifty thousand over the Reach, which gave them security for twenty thousand less than his loans. He tried to sell some of the land he had bought in the city and in Melbourne and Sydney, but everybody else seemed to have land for sale. He offered a block for which he had paid fifty thousand pounds a month ago and refused sixty-five thousand last week. Even at a quarter of that it was not saleable now. At boom values his assets in land were worth three hundred thousand pounds, his shares and debentures of the Land Investment Company and its bank one hundred and fifty thousand. The bank accepted these deeds and shares, devalued sixty per cent, as collateral for his loans, along with the Waterfall shares, which were still falling. When the shares were four pounds the bank called him to a grave conference. He must reduce his loans by half. His land was unsaleable, his land shares were unsaleable and meanwhile the bank had devalued both another twenty per cent, the Reach was mortgaged to the hilt, he had borrowed everything Cash had to lend and called in every loan he

had made. There was nothing left for it except to sell. He put ninety thousand of his precious Waterfalls on the market and got barely three hundred thousand. That had happened to-day. If Waterfalls slumped below three pounds he was done for.

His meek resignation to a blow which had come so suddenly that even yet, though he talked of it, he could hardly believe it, deserted him. "Done for. Yes, it is impossible. If there's a God in heaven. To lose a lifetime's work in a few hours! At least," he added quietly, letting his hands hang limp between his knees, "it sounds impossible. But it's not. It's life — which only gives so as to take away, only jockeys you up with hopes so as to disappoint you, makes you proud so it can make you eat dirt after, sends you to live on a mountain of gold so you'll see others fattening on it when you've worked your hands to the bone opening the way for them. That's the lousy thing life is. But you'll know nothing about it. I'll save enough for that. If need be I'd shut you up in a convent."

"You wouldn't," Harriet said. "You didn't shut yourself up. You must have found something worth living for. I'm going to find it too."

"You can't find shadows. That's all there is."

"Love's not a shadow," she said and pressed her hand hard into her breast.

"That's true. Pain's real enough."

"Love I said. Love is not pain — it's joy."

"In books," he said, "not in life. I loved my mother and my sister, and the gorse on the hills at Home in the springtime, and a girl — something like you she was." He spread his hands. "A lot of joy that was to me when the time came to leave them and the years went past — five, ten, fifteen, twenty — and I knew I'd never set eyes on them again. And loving my daughter's a pretty bitter pill when I think she might be left without a penny in the world." He paced the carpet again. "The plans I had for you! D'you think there's much joy watching them go by the board? To have had you married to an English gentleman — that would have shown these upstarts a thing or two, that would have been a real joy!"

"Joy for you," Harriet said. "What about me?"

"For you too."

"Because it cleaned off some old score that never had anything to do with me, must it be my joy? Must I fall in love with somebody because it serves some end for you? No, Father, love's not like that. I might fall in love on my own account. What then? Suppose it was somebody you didn't like?"

"You're angry," he said, surprised. "Did I say something?"

"You're so unjust," Harriet said. "You make me out odious and selfish if I don't want to pay with my life for all you've suffered in the past. You

treat me as if I was a sheep you'd bred for a purpose — your purpose. Oh, I know it doesn't sound very clear but that's how I feel.”

He laughed. “It sounds very foolish.”

“It isn't foolish. If I was to tell you I wanted to marry somebody now, somebody whose father you hated, you'd try to stop me even if it broke my heart. And if I ran away with him you'd curse me, wouldn't you, as if I'd done something monstrous when really it would be all your own doing. I . . .”

“What're you harping on love for all the time?” he asked irritably. “You haven't gone and . . .”

She tried to meet his eye but couldn't.

“Oho! So you have, eh?” Another man might have entered the room and spoken. The haggard lines had vanished from his face, as though they had been drawn there in grease paint. The blood glowed up again under his scar. His head tipped alertly back and sideways, and the bag of dry skin tightened away under his jaw.

Harriet wanted to speak out the truth, but his feet, crossing the carpet in four tremendous strides, frightened her. “No, no. I only meant James. You wouldn't let him marry Jennis Bowen.”

“That Irish spawn. I should think not. So that's what's biting you, is it?” He grunted with relief and again tried to free his throat of the limp, string tie, but succeeded only in tightening it. “Calf love. You fill your heads with a lot of poppycock out of books.” He went to the window, threw it open, and took a deep breath.

The rustle of leaves in the garden, the croaking of frogs along the river, the piping and flutter of birds settling for the night became audible, and the stagnant air of the room stirred against their faces. “Playing at life,” he said. “Well, I'll keep you playing as long as I can.”

The gleam of sunset faded slowly from the windows and the dark face of the furniture. Harriet pressed closer to her breasts the burning thread from which she took courage and resolution again.

Footsteps sounded on the veranda. Miss Montaulk. Her brisk rat-ta-tat on the door roused them from deep thought.

Without waiting to be invited she came in, breathless, with a flurry of starched petticoats, which at once suffocated the fresh evening smells with the stuffy smell of dead flowers. In the middle of the room she stopped, one hand behind her back, her eyes, on which the last reflection of the red sky glittered, turning from Cabell to Harriet and back to Cabell. Against the dusk her face had a phosphorescent glow, as though illuminated from within by her malice, which conquered, in the flicker of a smile at Harriet, even her wish to look portentous.

Harriet jumped up, clairvoyantly forewarned.

“Stay where you are, you wicked girl,” Miss Montaulk said solemnly. “Your sins have found you out.”

Harriet reached to support herself and took hold of the whatnot at the head of the sofa, a flimsy affair of bamboo loaded with Douulton bowls, Chelsea figures, and Satsuma teaset. A faint musical rattle of delicate china moved the silence.

"What's wrong?" Cabell said. "You're shaking."

Miss Montaulk grinned, savouring her power to prolong pain, then whipped her hand from behind her back and presented to them, at arm's length, a grey sphere of something, unidentifiable in the dusk till Cabell had peered at it a second or two.

"A hat?" he said. "What about it?"

"A *man's* hat!" Miss Montaulk said with appalled emphasis. "I found it in the garden. Ask her. Perhaps she can explain how it got there."

Harriet said nothing. At first glimpse of the hat the tinkling of china ceased and her face set against them.

It was Cabell who brushed the proffered exhibit aside. "I suppose it belongs to the gardener."

"Gardeners don't usually wear hats with satin linings." Miss Montaulk pushed it into his hand. "Look."

In the faded light he examined it — a fragment of a personality forlorn in dismemberment yet somehow audacious in its persisting odour of expensive pomade reeking through Miss Montaulk's stale smell and his own dry frowst of an old man. In his gnarled hands its rakish contours were undeniably revealed as a dashing mode, an element of youthful and self-conscious arrogance.

"Whose is it?"

Miss Montaulk hunched her shoulders. "I found it under the laurels. Harriet was there. To-day and yesterday — every day this week till sunset. The grass had been trampled flat. It's been *lain* on," she whispered.

"You don't mean that somebody's been in?"

"Yes, they climbed the fence and met her under the laurels." Miss Montaulk folded her hands across her stomach, her upper lip across the lower, and nodded. "The gardener was working in the plantation. He saw a man run out of the lane half an hour ago — *without* a hat."

"Harriet, is that true?" Cabell said softly.

She looked at them haughtily and answered nothing.

"I'm asking you is it true?" he thundered. "Eh? So it is. You've been meeting some hooligan, have you? It wasn't James biting you after all, eh? Answer me, damn you."

But the white irradiance of her dress sank away from him under the rising darkness, leaving her as elusive and unassailable as a ghost.

"Don't stand there. Light the lamp," he shouted at Miss Montaulk. "I'll get to the bottom of this."

He threw the hat on to the sofa and lit a match himself. The lamp

guttered under its canopy of frosted glass but its light helped only to confound him. He blinked helplessly at his table, on which the litter of papers recalled the tangle of his affairs demanding an urgent and single-minded attention, at Harriet whose face, still shadowed, seemed proof against all light, against any appeal, strategy, or force he could use. As the only thing in the room amenable to his will, he turned on Miss Montaulk. "You get to hell out of here, you simpering old scarecrow," he yelled, and assisted her departure with a shove which spreadeagled her on the door. She pulled it open and fled into the passage, where she stumbled, squealing, over something.

Cabell returned to Harriet. "Now the truth. Who owns that hat?"

It hung over the arm of the sofa, rakishly across the pricked ear of a grinning, bearded satyr embossed on the wood with ironic little eyes of mother-of-pearl.

"I know nothing about it," Harriet said coolly.

"You know nothing — nothing," he mimicked furiously. "Well what were you doing in the garden? Explain me that." He shook two fists in her face, and for want of anything better laid them on his own throat, tearing at the bedraggled tie until the veins swelled up blue and knotted under his ear. It snapped suddenly and his fist swept down within an inch of her face, but she did not move.

"You didn't forbid me to use the garden," she said.

"I didn't forbid you anything, confound it," he said. "Anybody'd think I kept a whip up my sleeve. But a man — some blackguard he must be, sneaking over back fences like that. By God I'll break his legs."

"I know nothing about any man," she repeated in a dead voice, which seemed to come through layers of defunct space he could no more hope to penetrate than the space around the moon.

As though he feared she would elude him where she stood, melt from his anger and his longing into the black darkness which lapped against the circle of the lamp, he took her face firmly between his two hands and drew her into the light. For a long while he studied her, turning her head from side to side to drive away the shadows lurking in the sockets of her eyes and concealing the two fixed, glimmering points of her pupils, in the depths of which, as in the hazy depths of the sea, moved shapes that could never be driven or coaxed out into the light of the day. "Ach, you slut," he said, and pushed her from him. "The dead spit of your mother. Sly as a dingo."

She staggered, clutched the whatnot, and fell in a deafening crash of egg-shell china.

She was on her feet at once.

In silence they stared at the debris of a laborious collection, as if amazed at the variety of useless objects which had been hidden away in the shelves — cups and saucers, willow pattern plates, toby jugs, bowls

depicting hunting scenes and merry English Christmases, crackleware teapots, plaited glass amulets from the islands, lumps of coral, pieces of jade, Chinese house gods, crystal goblets, etched decanters, storks and barnyard fowls blown in wafer glass. Somewhere in a far corner of the room a piece of crockery gyrated madly, faster and faster, settling at last with a musical ring on the polished boards. The sound had the pathetic finality of a fragile thing fighting a hopeless battle against a blind, brute force, a blind, brute fate.

The opening of the door roused them. Geoffrey was looking in. The expression of innocent preoccupation on his face, disclaiming any knowledge of unusual goings-on in a room from which voices and the sounds of violence had just emerged to echo round the garden and scare the birds off their perches, was an assurance of deceit. But Cabell was in no mood to speculate on the motives of a son whose reality he had always been able to bribe away with a handful of small change.

"What d'you want? Get out of here."

"I want my hat," Geoffrey said mildly.

"Your what?"

"Hat," Geoffrey repeated, his eyes searching the room with an astounding uninterest in the disorder, and lighting at last on the wretched thing, aslant across the mocking, satyr face. "Ah, there it is. Could've sworn I saw her lugging it in here." He swaggered across the room and picked it up, apt pupil of a man who lived on his wits and hide.

"That's not your hat," Cabell said.

"What?" Geoffrey was amazed. He examined the lining. "Yes, it is. Brewster and Co., High Holborn, London. Look. Of course it's mine." He put it on. Jauntily it sloped towards his left ear, capping perfectly the tight trousers, loud waistcoat, patent-leather shoes, and the flower in his buttonhole — the finishing touch to a gay, knowing, smart young dog.

"What's it doing in the garden then? You came in with me."

"A man puts his hat down for a minute and that old tabby runs off with it," Geoffrey said indignantly. "I was looking for Harriet. *You* wanted her. I thought she might be over in the plantation, so I hopped the fence and went up the lane. When I came back there was Montaulk scooting up the garden with my cady, the old battle-axe. Why, what's the matter?" He affected surprise, then injury. "A man tries to help and all a man gets is . . ." Mumbling he shuffled crabwise from the room and slammed the door.

"Hmn." Cabell closed his mouth with the back of his hand, then picked up the whatnot and began piling bowls and saucers into its shelves. "Made a bit of a mess here," he growled. "All this stuff — no damned use either."

Harriet moved towards the door.

"Here, wait a minute. No good going off in a huff. I'm sorry. My

tongue ran away with me again.” He straightened his back and gestured towards the table. “Got plenty to worry about. You might try and have a bit of understanding. At my age a blow like that knocks you off your feet.”

Harriet fled from the sight of his rumpled aged figure groping blindly among the broken china and from the sense of her own wrong against him.

But he reached the door first. “Don't be impatient with your father, dear. I'll make it up to you. I'll buy you something.”

“I don't want anything. Let me go please, Father.” She felt that if she had to stay there any longer looking at him she would break down and confess, and that would be the end of everything.

“Well, perhaps you'd like to go to the Governor's ball, eh? Peppiott said something. I said I'd think about it. They'll all be there, all ‘that mob.’ Yes, it's about time you showed yourself off somewhere. It's true I'm a selfish old man. But before you go, Harriet” — he turned her round — “you forgive me, don't you?”

“Oh, yes, yes. My head aches. Please let me go.”

She sped down the passage and up the stairs. Through the banisters she caught a glimpse of his face uplifted, his scraggy neck, his hands hanging at his sides. She threw herself on her bed and wept. “Oh, if only Doug would come now and carry me a long, long way away without any argument or questions — cut all these threads . . .” Then she became still, sniffing a little, thinking. “But how? They might kill each other.” She lay there for half an hour turning wild plans over in her head.

She was washing tear marks off her face when Geoffrey knocked and slid through the half-open door with a blackmailer's furtive but relentless determination.

He listened with one ear against the panel to the buzz of voices downstairs. “They're safe. He's blowing the tripe out of her. Wouldn't do for them to see us laying our heads together, y'know.” He seated himself on the bed and thumbed the arm-holes of his waistcoat. “Pretty smart, eh? Left the old box of tricks standing, what?”

“I suppose you were listening at the keyhole,” Harriet said contemptuously.

“When I see a wench in trouble I stick at nothing, especially when she's a man's sister and caught red-handed you might say.”

“I wasn't caught at anything. It was all a misunderstanding.”

Geoffrey winked. “Of course. And two and two make five and pigs fly. But let us talk about something more interesting. My hundred quid — did you ask him?”

“No, I didn't.”

“No?” Geoffrey was incredulous. “Well that's cold gruel for you. But you will? Now you've got him on toast? I need your help, Sis, y'know,

just as much as you need mine."

"Yes, I do need your help," Harriet said, "I will get your money. But you must do something. You must sell my jewels for me?"

"Sell your jewels? What for?"

"It's the only way you'll get your money. I won't ask Father for a penny."

"But he's lousy with it."

"Never mind. Will you do it?"

"I'll want fifty extra."

"Very well, but I've got to have the money before the Governor's ball."

"I'll see a bloke about it to-morrow," Geoffrey promised. "Anything to oblige a bloke's sister."

Chapter Ten: A Sad Tale

THEY went to the ball. Harriet was dazzled. The light blazing down from chandeliers upon the jewels and dresses of the women, the elegant, low-cut white waistcoats and white ties of the men, the music, the excited chatter, the Chinese lanterns in the garden — in all her fancies of brilliant life she had never imagined anything like it. For a moment it frightened out of her head the plans she had hung upon this night.

It was the social event of the year. To that select few it brought together — squatters from the west, planters from the north, leading lights of law and medicine who passed for learned men in the antipodes, wealthy merchants, and especially their wives and daughters — it was, more than a social event, the fulfilment of an aspiration, an ideal. The representative of Her Majesty, upon whose head lay the halo of a very trying demi-godliness, received them as his own kind on terms of perfect, if strenuous, equality. To those who suffered obscure heartburnings about the past the touch of His Excellency's fingers had the soothing force of an episcopal laying on of hands. To those whose imported ormolu cabinet concealed the skeleton of an old landtaker who had amassed property but never learnt to write his name, the stairs up which they climbed towards his Excellency, waiting with tactfully familiar smile at the top, were the last difficult ascent from purgatory. In those like Cabell, who were deeply weathered by a raw life but nevertheless had kept intact some inner, imaginative tie with the Old Country, it awakened bitter-sweet memories of a lost world.

“Where're your jewels?” he demanded after a glance round the room, where many heads turned to stare at the extraordinary picture they made in the doorway — his grey face with the purple scar and the eye-patch of rough leather, lowering eyebrows and peppered beard, Harriet pale and nervous in white tulle with a pink tunic, pink slippers, a single pink rose in her hair, and a band of black velvet round her throat emphasizing the heavy blackness of her eyebrows and the deep, black setting of her eyes.

“I didn't want to wear them,” she said quickly.

“What d'you think I bought them for? All these ninnies eyeing you off.”

But before he could say more Peppiott bustled across the parquetry and welcomed them. “How auspicious. We were just talking about you. His Excellency is all agog.”

“Talk of the devil, eh?” Cabell said, out of feelings painfully mixed, pleasure in the spectacle of the ball and people watching him with sidelong, respectful eyes — one of his fancies come true — and the worried thought that in two days' time, to-morrow perhaps, he might be bankrupt.

“Devil! No, angel,” Peppiott said fatuously, touching Harriet's hand with the rat's hair of his moustache. “A veritable angel!”

Cabell snorted and gave Harriet his arm, and they followed Peppiott across the floor to where Lord Alford was standing among a number of ladies and gentlemen looking on at the dance and lankly, wearily attending to a plump little woman whose widow's weeds were decorated like a Christmas-tree with chains, cameos, brooches, gold bows, and lockets. Mrs Bowen, he recognized. Seeing him she ceased talking and her face took on an expression of injury and scorn.

Peppiott presented them. “His Excellency was acquainted with your brother, the Colonel.” He cringed between them and talked for all to hear. In view of an event which he hoped was maturing to a happy conclusion he was anxious, with everybody here who mattered, to bring to light certain creditable facts about the high connexions of this man who looked so sinister and had such a disreputable record. “Isn't that so, Excellency?” he prompted when Alford, not responding, continued to stare at Cabell with a look of doubt, while pensively stroking the silky, brown dragoon whiskers which hung, like unravelled ropes' ends, over his chin. Clearly that old eager face had taken the wind out of his sails. Under his scrutiny it became even more barbarously unlike what he had expected in a brother of the foppish Colonel Victor Cabell, of the Hussars. Just so Cabell read his face, and nervously rubbed his hands together, shrinking slightly from his tall, stiff erectness as if he wished to withdraw into the shell of his starched shirt. He glanced quickly, furtively, to right and left, saw Mrs Bowen again and behind her Flanagan, with the cross of his knighthood dangling from his collar, wondered how many more were here who remembered back twenty-six years and what they'd been saying about him. Yes, there was Dennis's grandson, peering haughtily across a flat, Irish nose. “You can't alter the brand of five centuries in the bog with five years at Harrow, you puppy.” And as it came back to him how they had had him down then, he thought again how they would have him down to-morrow unless this damnable share business righted itself. That put him on his mettle again. He straightened his back, bowed, and turned to go.

Alford came out of his trance. “Of course. Of course. The old Colonel. Devil of a fellow. I knew him.”

“Devil of a fool,” Cabell shot back.

The awkward silence put on him the onus of justifying this rude retort.

“Fell off a horse and broke his neck,” he said, as if defining an ultimate

human degradation.

Alford succeeded at last in twisting his whiskers to a point. For a moment they elevated themselves gracefully, then exploded apart, tickling his nostrils and causing him to vent a prodigious damp sneeze.

It was the great preoccupation of his life to make those grand moustaches stand up in martial points, but he never did quite succeed. While engaged in momentous public business, such as turning the sod of a new railway, laying a foundation-stone, opening Parliament, or presiding over the Executive Council, he would suspend proceedings to make a last, desperate assault on them, holding his breath as, with sad cockeyes, he watched them come slowly apart. A baffling figure of a man this spindle-backed aristocrat upon whom his guests looked with mingled contempt and abject reverence. He was known to wear stays and pass the time playing the piano with one finger, embroidering tea-cosies, and reading the sermons of Dr Spurgeon. He was known also to have got himself into hot water with the Queen for leading a harum-scarum night ride of her guardsmen across Kent, breaking the legs of six horses and the necks of two men, and, when shipped off to the Sudan, to have caused a mob of dervishes to abandon stores, arms, and horses by creeping into their camp at night and singing "God Save the Queen" in his high, cracked voice. He performed his official duties with the utmost punctilio, but frequently went straight from a church service or a meeting of the Council to an illegal prize fight on the river-bank at South Brisbane. In conversation he had no mean between talking like an imbecile and talking like an official document, but on rare occasions he did stutter out a sensible observation and at once got very red and tried to hide himself by spreading his whiskers over his face.

After the sneeze he looked shaken, defeated. He blew his nose and sighed. "He had a packet of fun while it lasted, the old dog," he said.

"A fool and his fun are soon parted," Cabell said severely, "and his family left to foot the bill."

"Demmit, you don't expect us all to leave England, home, and beauty and become pioneers, do you?"

There was a titter, slightly disapproving, but indulgent since the remark seemed to be at Cabell's expense rather than colonials in general.

"Demned hard life," Alford complained. "Demned heroic, of course."

Cabell bowed again. "In its unspectacular way, your Excellency. There were no tigers, as I remember your father," he nodded to Peppiott, "telling me some forty-five years ago when I was a limejuicer and Sir Michael Flanagan here was . . ." the company, horrified at a threat in his eye, held its breath, ". . . a mere young, ambitious man."

Lord Alford put his eyeglass in and turned on his style of an official pronunciamiento, "Let me assure you, sir, Her Majesty is as fully cognizant of the difficulties and heroism of her early colonists in this

state as of those which history will record in any part of her Empire . . .”

“It shows the greatest generosity to have kicked us out in our youth and to hail us as heroes in our old age, my lord,” Cabell said when the applause died down. “I am told the sun never sets on Her Majesty's Empire. When it is setting on one of those heroes you mention it must be something to know that he gave his hot blood to achieve the ideal of some gentleman in Whitehall. A perpetually youthful empire confided for safe-keeping to such gallant fellows as my brother! He would not begrudge them their medals and pensions.”

Peppiott remained cringing between them with a frozen gesture of dismay, waiting for the roof to fall in. But Alford applauded enthusiastically. “A demned fine sentiment, sir.” They looked doubtfully at his face, but it was opaque — with stupidity or diplomacy. You could never tell which.

“Hear! Hear!” Flanagan gasped suddenly, richly from the bottom of his morass.

Cabell gave him a baleful stare. In the politician's blue eyes, like two little bits of glass dropped into a basin of soft pudding mixture, there was a malign twinkle which he knew well. Or at least he told himself there was, thinking, “If I fall that dingo will be the first on top of me.”

“Yes, there's surely some truth in the saying that we left our country for our country's good,” he said. “Sir Michael will vouch for it.”

Mrs Bowen's chains rattled.

“Yes, indeed, ma'am,” Cabell said brutally, “and you'd have thought so yourself, too, if you had seen us then — the morning I first set eyes on your mother. She was a Mrs Duffy at the time. You remember the day, Flanagan? Not a stone's throw from here. She was sitting on a horse calmly watching the flogger taking the skin off some ruffian's back. Remarkable how even a woman became hardened to sights that would have made you swoon, ma'am. Some servant of hers she'd brought in strapped to her stirrup-iron. His name I don't remember. Ah, yes.” He smiled at her with the bitter sneer in the corner of his mouth, where the scar dragged it up. “We were on our way to a grog shop kept by an old lag. What was his name again?” He looked the group over and settled his eye on young Dennis, bulging crimson out of his collar and looking fit for murder. “Dennis. Patrick Dennis. Yes. I remember you remarking that the lady had ten thousand sheep, Flanagan — and was a woman at that!”

His voice, loud and jeering, rose clearly above the music and the patter of the dancers' slippers, and ceased in murmur of deprecating “hem-hems.”

Lord Alford smiled naively round the semicircle of glum or startled faces. That smile was malignant if it was not inane.

Mrs Bowen's kindly eyes shone in tears of vexation. “You give Lord

Alford a very false, coarse impression of our country," she said in a husky voice.

They looked at her and half-smiled, but drew together with a subdued protest as Cabell said, "You've got a short memory, ma'am, if you think it was always as gentlemanlike as this." He nodded at the dancers. "There's a few there whose fathers and grandfathers could have told a coarser tale than mine."

By a slight movement they left him standing at bay before them, an outlandish figure with a slip of a girl at his side. Harriet, feeling their hostility, drew closer and slipped her hand under his arm again. She knew what was biting him, what fear of imminent failure and shame, what freshened pang of the past's futile guilt and disgust. Never before had she understood so well how lonely he was with his memories and irreconcilable heart, torn by impossible longings, by foolish pride, by hatred of the man life had made him and arrogant satisfaction in the brutalities of that crude fellow. Understanding, she felt ashamed of herself. For it was her deceitfulness which brought him here among old enemies, when he was least in the mood to face them, so that she might kill the last hope he had. He seemed pathetically gullible to her then, an ineffectual, a pitiable old man. She felt angry with him for being so, as though he did it on purpose to make her feel sorry for what she was about to do. "Father!" she whispered, "Don't! Please!" and looked around at the dancers in the hope of finding someone to come and take him off her hands. She had seen Cash as they entered, leading a lady out on to the floor, and now he passed, waltzing like a bear — an unfamiliar Cash, in evening clothes like a performing bulldog dressed up in velveteen pants. He read the anxious look in her eye, and the next time round led his partner up to the group. It was Miss Ludmilla — could not very well have been anybody worse in Cabell's present frame of mind. "The bitch who stole my mine." He saw her and sent her a sour greeting.

Dr Barnett was expostulating with him. "We weren't all jail litter, you know, sir. There were some gentlemen who tried to keep the torch burning. Up on the Downs my father used to ride a hundred miles two or three times a year to drink sherry and sing the Gaudeamus with friends who could turn a Latin rhyme as easily as they could turn a steer."

"Or flog a convict servant," Cabell said dryly. "Or order him to be flogged if they didn't care to dirty their own gentlemanly, white hands. It's not what men were but what they became, Dr Barnett, with all due respect to your father."

"My father, and many another like him remained an English gentleman to his dying day," Dr Barnett replied in his thin, cultivated voice. "He was such a stickler for tradition he'd put a frock-coat and stock on every night for dinner, even if he had to take them off afterwards to fight a bushfire. You might almost say he was more English than the English."

Lord Alford unexpectedly applauded. "More English than the English! Demned fine sentiment. True too. Chap feels like a low cockney among you sometimes. Such ladylike ladies and such devilish gentlemanly fellows — hang it, you're paragons." The vacuous amiability of his weak, green eyes, twinkling under hairless brows, acquitted him of any irony.

They laughed at him to relieve a tense situation.

"There were frock-coats and stocks enough," Cabell mumbled. "A man might go mad, like Brummell, and wear a cravat in the back streets of Caen to convince himself that he was still cutting a figure. I've heard he did. My father knew him well."

"Mr Cabell, sir," Dr Barnett said severely, "are you speaking with a *double entente*?"

"Oh, I didn't know your father," Cabell said. "He was no doubt as good as his velvet stock. I'm thinking of other men. 'For example,' he glanced at Ludmilla, "there was a colonel . . . Well, a man of consequence. He came out under some cloud and went into the bush. Built himself a Tudor mansion out of slabs and bark and mud, and soon believed he was still in England. I suppose he had to believe it had never happened — whatever it was that brought him out. Anyway, there he was, a stickler for tradition with his frock-coat and his cravat and a lot of other fandangles beside, a hundred miles from nowhere, and his two girls (they had the proper roses in their cheeks when they came), and his wife, a fine woman, pining for the sound of a human voice. But he wouldn't have a man on the place. Nothing less than a duke was good enough to marry them he thought, and there were damnably few dukes in the Never-Never. It was pretty terrible to watch that old fool pretending he was in his deer park at home, that nothing had changed, no bridges been burnt, and he might be called any minute to hop in his carriage and go up to kiss the Queen's hand. And all the time the three women playing up to him, stiff as boards, but losing the roses bit by bit and never hearing anything but his barmy rant or seeing a soul but wild blacks."

"Poor girls!" Mrs Bowen murmured impulsively. "What a sad tale!" Then realizing who told it she sniffed scornfully.

"A most sad tale," Ludmilla said in a mocking voice.

Cabell bowed and she made him an old-fashioned curtsy in reply. "Why don't you finish it?" she said. "It surely didn't end there with the ladies sitting up stiff and withering slowly away."

"No, it didn't. That's true."

"Well, what became of them, pray?"

"Yes, confound it, you can't leave the ladies sitting up," Alford said, in high fettle again at getting one side of his moustache twisted.

"The first," Cabell said, with a glance at Ludmilla's sunbitten face, "she married when the old fellow blew his brains out and the mother, fine lady, died of a broken heart. The other . . ."

“Well?” Ludmilla prompted.

“Well, she was a pretty, soft bit of a girl and she turned into a regular, tight-fisted old maid. Might have made some man a good wife, too. If you'd known her then and saw her to-day you'd understand how much wearing a stock every night at dinner means after a few years in this country. It doesn't mean more than stage scenery or the bit of hair a man hangs on to in mind of the sweetheart he's lost.”

“Oh, la, Mr Cabell,” Ludmilla laughed “you're an indifferent bad storyteller. You leave out all the other characters.”

“There were few others in that place.”

“Aye, but those few wicked and greedy enough, I warrant, to excuse even a pretty, soft bit of a girl becoming tight-fisted in defence of her own.”

Cabell shrugged, grunted.

Mrs Peppiott smirked into the long pause, wagging a roguish forefinger at Cabell, in an effort to make peace. “You're too downright hard on us, Mr Cabell. Mr Trollope was kinder. He praised us most lavish, and he'd just come from the Old Country with a fresh eye. The scenery, he said, was more romantic than he'd visited, even on the Rhine. Have you read him?”

“I fear not, ma'am,” Cabell said in a tired voice. The fight was gone out of him. His face looked pinched and grey.

Lord Alford put the finishing touch to his whiskers and stared at the company with smug satisfaction. “Demned useful country for writers,” he said. “When they don't know what to do with a character they ship him off to Australia. The country must be full of Micawbers and Lady Masons if these scribbling johnnies . . .” He broke off and snatched his eyes away to stare down his nose while his whiskers writhed and fell heavily across his chin. His face stretched, his mouth opened, and he sneezed three times.

Discreetly they averted their eyes while he blew his nose.

The dance was ending. People crowded past towards the veranda where one could catch a breath of cool air. The group around Alford gratefully seized an excuse to break up.

Cabell bowed to the Governor and turned to go, but Ludmilla caught his arm. “A moment,” she said quickly. “I wanted to see you.”

He turned back.

“No, not here. Give me your arm and take me where I can breathe.”

He looked round for Harriet but Cash had come up to talk with her. The crowd, pushing towards the door, swept them away.

“I have a story to tell, too,” Ludmilla was saying. “Even more curious than yours about the soft, pretty girl. It concerns a man who was a millionaire yesterday and to-morrow — a bankrupt, perhaps?”

“Eh?”

“You're interested? Find me a quiet place and I'll tell you.”

Chapter Eleven: A Puzzle for Cash

CASH pushed a shoulder between Mrs Peppiott and Harriet, and steered Harriet away with a firm hand.

She protested, looking back for her father, but he made a bee-line through the crush, half-dragging her behind. Out on the veranda he found an unoccupied lounge and bumped her on to it.

"Oh, Mr Cash!" she said, rubbing a red thumb-print on her white arm.

"Can't rescue a wench from a dragon without leaving a bit of a bruise," he replied irritably.

It was unusual for Cash to be in a bad temper. Harriet looked at him curiously. His big, brown face was gloomy and reproachful. It annoyed her more. "Well, I'm not one of your — creatures."

"My creatures?"

"Whatever her name is. That red-headed person."

"Oh," he said. "Of course." He snapped his fingers as though a riddle had been solved for him, brightened, then gloomed again at her thoughtfully. "No, you're not a Queenie. You're a lady — that is, a blamed puzzle."

She tossed her head. "I thought nothing was a puzzle to you?"

"I thought so myself. I suppose I'd never met a real, live lady before."

"I'm sorry I can't return the compliment."

His red mouth, dead in the crevice of his beard, turned its corners down and he nodded slowly on a just retort. "I guess you're right there, Miss Harriet. I wasn't born and bred in a long coat."

Laughter and the chit-chat of happy people attracted their attention to young Sylvester Dennis, holding forth in a drawling voice to a group of "dear young ladies." He was telling them an entertaining story about his return from school in England to one of his father's stations. Of course it was too bally ridiculous, but he couldn't tell a sheep from a goat. And what a bally row there'd been when he took down a photograph of some odd creature to hang up a print of his favourite Rossetti and it turned out to be the old governor's prize pet stud ram. He had "sustained existence in the wilds" for several weeks before he fled. "My dears, another week of it and I'd have been maimed for life, stretching my mouth to drink out of those cups, thick as the side of an ironclad, you know."

"No, I haven't got any of that blood in me," Cash said. He walked to the railings and spat viciously into the garden, where the bobbing

Chinese lanterns threw a soft, ruby light on flowers and promenading couples.

Harriet speculated on the silhouette of his shoulders, so staunchly, comfortingly broad. "Oh, don't let us quarrel, Mr Cash. Perhaps I'm not as much of a lady as you think."

"Oh yes, you are," he said anxiously, turning. "You were bred up with a thin skin. It's meant for the drawing-room and don't stand up to kicks. What wouldn't bruise a, say, Queenie, would kill you. Like it killed your old man in a way. He was a gentleman, a thin-skinned toff." He bent over her. "Oh, don't make any mistake about that, Miss Harriet. Fire burns soft hands worst and the mud sticks harder to them."

Harriet tried to laugh him away. "You've got a high opinion of my skin and a mighty low one of my discretion, Mr Cash."

He straightened, scowling. "I think you're a young fool. You know nothing outside of books. You'll land yourself in a pretty mess."

"I don't understand you," Harriet said faintly. "Indeed, I don't."

"You don't, eh? Well, where are your jewels?"

She clapped her hand to her throat. "I — I — why, what is that to you? My jewels are at home."

"Not stolen?" he said, as if he wished they were.

"Certainly not."

"They were there when you came out? You saw them? Eh?"

Harriet's eyes shifted, then she recovered and stared back. "Yes, they were."

He looked hard into those cold, clear, untouched eyes and sighed. "Well, well. I guess you got the bit between your teeth. I don't see how I could turn you without making you hate me more."

Harriet rose with a thin pretence of righteous indignation. "I don't understand you at all. You're saying such horrible things. I'll tell my father."

Cash waved impatiently. "Sit down. Enough of this roundabout talk. I'm no hand at it. Fact is, young Geoffrey told me about the hat and your bust-up with the old man and . . ."

Harriet held up her hand. "Oh, don't please!" She looked about nervously.

The group around Sylvester Dennis had grown. Dr Barnett, waving his hands, discoursed. The Romans had left their blood in Britain. We were lineal descendants of that race of adventurous, colonizing Caesars. Our mission came straight down from Romulus and Remus. Consider the thin-jewelled, high-beaked Australian face — pure Roman patrician. "And now all the Romans have left England to settle the hardest countries on the earth. So England's decline has begun. Tomorrow the Empire will rule . . ." His exasperated falsetto, earnestly exculpating some unmentioned sin, dominated them. Flanagan, attentive behind a big

cigar sunk in his fat, Mrs Peppiott moving her stays with the steady, breathless pant of a toad, murmured applause.

Mrs Bowen, always in a bustling flurry even when standing still, clapped her hands. "Just what I've always thought, but never in such beautiful words, Dr Barnett. Only I didn't think it was the Romans. I thought it must be the blood of the Irish kings." She put it to Lord Alford.

"Demned difficult question. Have to admit my family history bit vague before Indian Nabobs. Never heard a Roman Emperor mentioned . . ."

"I spoke only in a general, racial sense," Dr Barnett said testily.

Cash smiled. "Somebody's got the doctor's goat to-night. Your father, eh? I heard him shouting."

"Oh, he's terrible to-night," Harriet said. "He makes them hate him, then he wants all your sympathy."

"Poor devil! If he's a bit worse than usual there's a reason. You know, don't you?"

"Yes, he told me something — about the mine and all that. Oh, but Mr Cash, who is to blame? Not I? I have never asked to be made the richest girl in Australia, or sent to England, or married to a duke — and all the rest of it. Is it my fault he's ruined himself trying to get too much? Is it fair?"

Cash watched her slyly. "Ask yourself, Miss Harriet." He prodded his chest. "Everybody knows what's fair and what isn't in here."

"It's not fair. It's cruel, odious tyranny!"

"But just say you went and left him. You told me once you would if you ever fell in love with a man he wouldn't have. It might be the last straw just now. It might kill him. It'd be a bit of a problem then to say what was fair and what wasn't. You'd be asking yourself that question to the end of your days."

"And if I stayed? And he was poor and old? He would live for years and years and years. What would become of me? Haven't I any rights too?"

"As I see it," Cash said, gently, cunningly persuasive, "a lady or a gentleman is one who has the rights and doesn't press them too hard."

"One who gives for others to take?" She glanced up and caught the sly look in his eyes, bared for a moment of their mica shields. There was eagerness and fear in them, too. "Oh, Mr Cash," she said, "I don't think you speak for my father at all . . ." She stopped, confused. "I mean — why do you say these things when it's nothing to you. You would leave him to-morrow without a second thought. You know you would. You told me."

Cash plucked at his beard. "That's true, Harriet. I'm a fraud. I'd leave him — if I could. I've been thinking of a change of scenery for a long time, but — damn it — damn it . . ."

The music was beginning again. The group at the other end of the veranda drifted back to the ballroom, Dr Barnett still prattling. Wentworth had had the idea of founding an Australian peerage. It would be a bulwark against the menace of these democratic elements and a safeguard to British traditions in a far-flung outpost. The idea had their unanimous approval.

“The Marquis of Indooroopilly!” Alford said. “A demned resonant title.”

Harriet was on her feet. “You'll betray me. You'll tell Father.”

“I won't betray you,” Cash said. “I won't have to. He will.” He nodded towards the door. Doug Peppiott was standing there beside his father. He looked sulky.

Mrs Peppiott, left by the exodus, came swiftly between them. “Now, now, Harriet, my love. This is a nice way to enjoy your first ball. Come. Let the world see your pretty face.”

Harriet hung back. Oh, what if she was wrong about him after all. What if he laughed at her and told everybody, so that they all laughed — all these fine, nice ladies and gentlemen! She looked around at Cash.

But Mrs Peppiott had a firm grip on her this time.

Cash, leaning against the railings, put a cigar in his mouth and watched Doug Peppiott lead her out to dance. After a while he spat a chewed, sodden rag of tobacco leaf into the garden.

Chapter Twelve: Sad Tale Continued

LUDMILLA led Cabell out into the garden and across the lawn to a seat away from the lanterns and the crowd.

He showed signs of bluster but she cut him short. "Sit down, Derek Cabell. I've a long story to tell."

He sat down tentatively on the edge of the hard rustic seat, the stiff line of his back and the white front of his shirt etched against the glow from the lanterns.

"Shall I commence from the beginning?"

He did not encourage her.

"Well, suppose we start in 1851, when an English gentleman and his wife and two daughters — 'pretty, soft bits of girls, with the proper roses in their cheeks' — set out from Brisbane with two bullock-wagonloads of goods for the Never-Never." Her voice dropped the lilt of badinage. "After ten weeks of hell they arrived in a valley where others had already settled. One of them was a young Englishman from a good family. At least he had been an Englishman but he had changed . . ."

"You damn soon changed yourself."

"We'll come to that. You had your say, let me have mine."

"A damned long rigmarole. What's the point?"

"There's a point, all right. You'll feel it," Ludmilla said with a throaty laugh, like a man's.

Upon the veranda between the colonnades a burly figure leant out and spat on to the lawn. Cash. "Get it over then. I can't leave Harriet."

"Now there's a pretty, soft bit of a girl," Ludmilla said. "How tragic if *she* were left to shift for herself in a hard world."

"She won't be."

"Don't be so sure. We're a spiteful lot. Take that young Englishman. He was full to the back teeth with spite. Because the world had humiliated him and given him some hard knocks he wanted to make it hard for others. He wanted to throw mud on the honour of that fine old English gentleman and see him brought down — so that his own smarting pride would be satisfied. He used to go and taunt his neighbour till the old man was driven to some ridiculous act, and then he went home laughing up his sleeve. Oh, I understand how that young Englishman felt," she whispered. "I came to feel the same way myself."

Cabell's mouth made a black gap in the grey blur of his face.

"Ludmilla! You're stone crazy," he said at last. "No such thing happened. I respected your father, but he was mad — mad as a hatter."

"Who sent him mad? You — with your taunts and gibes, telling him that the country would break and swallow him and he'd never see England again."

"I was trying to knock some sense into him. He was living in a fool's dream. I saw how things were going with you."

"You did it because you hated him — for his pride and for showing his contempt when you sent your convict wife's brother to ask, insulting brute, that I should marry him. A Southampton water-rat who turned round and married a Chinaman's woman! Deny you weren't mad with spite when you heard Father had whipped him out of the house. You can't."

"Ludmilla!" Cabell protested, not so much against the untruth of what she said as against the spite it laid open in her own heart. "You've let things go bad in your mind."

"What things?" She caught his hand and pressed it. "Go on, say them."

"You know what things."

"I know what lies, what filthy lies. About my father stealing regimental funds and about Aurelia. Your inventions."

Cabell sighed.

"It *was* a lie. Admit it. Admit it was a lie — about Aurelia."

"That's something only three living people know. You and Aurelia and me. I've never put it in words."

"That's another lie. You told everybody."

"I swear I never told a soul."

"What about Farrar? He was going to marry Aurelia and you told him that lie and he cleared out. You can't deny that."

Cabell stirred. "His name wasn't Farrar. It was M'Govern. He was a blackguard. I wonder you didn't guess it. You ought to be damned glad he — cleared out."

"He was at your place for weeks. He sent insulting messages. Oh, don't pretend you didn't put him up to it."

"I told him nothing," Cabell said, with anger suppressed. "And anyway he's dead and all that business is dead with him."

"It's not dead while you and your spite could resurrect it. You'll never forget that my father signed an affidavit against you when Flanagan and McFarlane took your land. Well, I've got spite too, Derek Cabell, as nasty and vengeful as your own."

"Come to the point, damn it, Ludmilla."

She laughed again. "That's the point, Derek. Just that."

Cabell glanced up at the house. Cash was waving a fist, arguing, but only the thin, falsetto voice of Dr Barnett, wordless and annoyed, reached them. Cabell's shoulders stooped against the light. "You mean

you've lived to crow, eh? I suppose Cash told you."

"I mean I could crow." She clucked her tongue. "There's no better moment for rubbing the gall in than when a man's down. *You* know that."

The music struck up again. The couples crunched back to the house along the gravel paths, leaving the butts of cigars in the dark shadows of the trees.

Cabell jumped off the seat. "Enough of your bitchery, Ludmilla. Out with it — what d'you want?"

She plucked at the tails of his coat. "Sit down, sit down, man, and stop your eternal bellowing. I didn't come here to torment you but to make friends."

He sat down, starched again, unconvinced.

"Why not?" Ludmilla said. "We've both got more to gain from sticking together than from falling out and that's the arrangement which makes the best friends. And besides, well, I like you in spite of everything. Because you're my own kind, I suppose. We've got a lot in common, if it's only regrets."

"That's a fact," he murmured. "I've always been sorry for you."

"It wouldn't have stopped you from trying to make mincemeat of me. Oh, don't bother to conceal it. I knew you had designs on the mine."

"My God, Ludmilla, I came here first and opened the place up."

"You're a pig-headed old fool," Ludmilla said, touching his hand, "but I understand what you mean. Oh, only too well. A stroke of luck which comes twenty years too late is a bitter pill — worse than no luck at all."

"It's not for myself. I've lost the taste for what money buys. Up there," he nodded towards the house, "I'm all at sea. They wouldn't believe it if you told them I came from a good family. Alford didn't." He was lost in thought for a minute or two, fingering his scar. "But there's Harriet . . ."

"And what about James?"

"James?" he said, as if he had to recall that James was his son. "Oh, he's in Sydney learning to be an engineer."

"He's a steady lad. I had a good look at him the last time he was home."

"He's a pup. Like the rest of them — thinks we should've opened the country with kid gloves on."

"Oh, let them bury the past," Ludmilla said. "Maybe it's more painful to them than to us even."

"If they can," Cabell said grimly.

"They can. They will. They must. They can't live in spite and hatred and regret as we've done. And that's what I brought you out here to talk about. I've got a niece, Aurelia's daughter. She's just coming back from a finishing school in England. It's time she had a husband. Why shouldn't she marry James?"

"Aurelia's daughter!"

"Isn't he Cabell's son?" But she calmed herself. "Now you listen to me. He *shall* marry Julia. Next year. Then he'll go to work at the mine and learn how to control what will come to him and Julia when we're gone. I'll see you through the mess you've got yourself into. Larsen will retire. He's getting too old and, anyway, he's not got the head for the business it's become — too simple and honest. You'll be chairman of the company as you wanted. And I — I'll take a rest. I'm over fifty now. There are troubles ahead. Sooner or later the boom will burst properly. The unions will be troublesome. I'm sick and tired of it. I'd like to go and see the Old Country while I've time." Her voice was a little faded all at once. "I'm not holding any gun at your head, Derek. Say yes and you'll take a load off my shoulders. They were never expected to carry such loads, you know."

Cabell did not answer at once. She saw his grey face turn and peer at her.

She smiled. "Suspicious old Rusty Guts. You can't believe I haven't got something up my sleeve."

"It all sounds mighty fine, but dash it all, woman, a minute ago . . ."

"If it needs explaining," Ludmilla said, "then first of all I'd rather have the devil I know than the devil I don't, and you've got a head for business. Everybody says that. That's one thing. Then there's the bad old past. Only one man can help Julia to bury that — you. If she marries James I can trust you to bury it deep. See, I'm frank, aren't I? And the third thing is I like you, because we both got something from life we didn't bargain for. Has it ever struck you," she said, mocking again, "that we might have met and married each other if we'd stayed in England. Or even here, if you hadn't already . . ."

"That's true enough, too."

The garden, festive but deserted, looked forlorn with the stars and the darkness taunting its flimsy lanterns. Under the music the drumming of frogs in the black lily-pond was harsh and lonely.

Ludmilla sighed. "Well, it's no good bemoaning. Let us finish this off and see how Harriet's enjoying herself. Is it yes or no?"

"When d'you want me to tell James?"

"As soon as you like."

"I'll send for him at once."

"Perhaps they could go to Europe for their honeymoon," Ludmilla said. "James wouldn't refuse that."

"He won't refuse."

They returned to the house arm in arm.

Ludmilla looked up at the stars. Their tremulous summer light blurred the hard angles of her face. "The Southern Cross," she said sentimentally. "He's seen some wicked things. May what we've done tonight wipe some of them out!"

“Amen!” Cabell said piously, but he was thinking of other things. His step had a spring in it and his lips the shadow of a friendly, forgiving smile as he re-entered the ballroom.

Chapter Thirteen: Diversion at a Vice-Regal Ball

HOLDING herself close to Doug with her vinelike arms, Harriet cried excitedly through the music, "I've found a way. You won't laugh at me, will you?"

On the contrary. "Don't hang on like that. They're all looking at you," he said.

It was true. In the corners the wallflowers and dowagers were whispering behind their fans. There she was — Cabell's daughter, that one dancing with young Mr Peppiott. Haven't you heard? The Peppiotts are breaking their necks to make a match of it. Of course he's got money, the old miser. Mrs Peppiott tries to make out he's related to a peer, but you only need to see him. Such a bushwhacker — and such coarse language. The way he was talking to dear Lord Alford just now! Well, he married a convict woman, you know, and they say Black Jem the bushranger was some relation.

"He started off with a handful of sheep he stole," Mrs Bowen said shrilly. "He nearly went to jail. And now they put on airs."

"*Dummodo sit dives Barbarus ipse placet*," Sylvester Dennis remarked cynically.

Through the clairvoyance of his fellowship with them Doug divined accurately what they were saying. He reddened and sweated. "Don't look at me like that."

"What's the matter?" Harriet hung on to him more tightly and looked at him more distractedly than ever. "Why are you angry?"

"People. You're not in the backblocks." He pushed her away again.

People! Harriet looked quickly around at the fine, nice, depreciative ladies and gentlemen whose sneers could stand even her father at bay. Their glittering array in jewels and fashionable clothes, their easy, confident voices, the solidarity expressed in the smiles and nods they exchanged, and their cold, critical eyes made Harriet think, "Perhaps I am only countrified and silly after all." She demanded reassurance. "You do love me, don't you, Doug?"

He whirled her across the floor till she was breathless and the floor and the faces lurched giddily in her eyes. She steadied against him, dropping her dress to take hold of the lapel of his coat.

"Let go," he snapped. "Leggo. Leggo." His heavy lips curled back from his teeth and his spoilt, good-looking face ruckled up as though he

was going to cry. It was an unobtrusive struggle as he prised her fingers off and pushed her to the length of his long arms, but it seemed to him that all the ladies around the wall simpered and whispered more animatedly and even the footmen in plush breeks raised their eyebrows.

He was in a wretched state of nerves when the music did at last paused to rest the dancers, stranding him, by malicious chance, near Mrs Bowen and her friends. They chattered among themselves. Doug tried to look dignified and unaware as he walked Harriet from the floor, but his nerve went and he scampered the last few steps to an empty alcove.

"What's the matter?" Harriet said. "You seem so . . ."

He turned on her. "They're talking about you."

"Oh, don't worry about them. It's because Father upset them to-night. They're jealous of him too."

"The swine. Doesn't he know how to behave? It's me his rotten tongue injures. Me!"

"How?"

"Never mind."

Harriet shook her head sadly. "Don't say hard things, please. He doesn't concern us."

Spoilt anger contracted his face again. "Doesn't he? My father spends his life toadying to him."

"Yes, yes, I know. They poison everything with their greed. Even love — if you let them." She went up close to him. "But that doesn't matter to us. Let them scheme and let all the rest say what they like . . ." She broke off to look through the arch of the alcove at the dancers clustered in little immaculate groups, fanning themselves and waiting for the music to start again. "Oh, I know — they're hateful, terrible," and impulsively she said, "Take me away, Doug. Please. A long way away."

"Take you where?"

"Anywhere. I don't care."

His eyes focused sharply.

"I told you I'd find a way. I have. I sold my jewels."

He took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face, watching her over his hand. "What on earth for?"

"You had no money. You told me once. So I sold them for two thousand pounds. Here" — she put her hand into her bodice and pulled out a wad of bank notes and offered them — "you take it. Now we can go away — to England if you want."

He looked at the notes and looked at her and lowered his handkerchief from his flaccid mouth. "You *must* be off your head," he said with dispassionate conviction. "You want to run away?"

"Yes, yes. Here, take it."

He took the wad and examined it.

"There, nothing matters now. We can go. I've planned it all out. I've

packed my bag. We can slip out through the garden after this dance and get a hansom and get my clothes. Then we can get your clothes. The boat for Sydney sails at midnight. They'll never catch us."

His face, heavy with the stupidity of the thoroughly ordinary man, which she had mistaken for the visor of some profound masculine assurance and power, began to twitch like the hide of a horse tormented with flies. "So that's what you were hinting at. You want to run away with me because you think your old man won't let us marry." His conceit got the better of him. He threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh!" The whole cast of Harriet's uplifted, hysterical face changed. Her mouth tightened, her cheeks flattened, and her eyes retreated into dark shadows. Her little trick of dropping her head when alarmed caused this change, which made visible her spirit coiling away from him in secret, intent hostility. "Don't laugh at me, Doug. Don't you dare."

He stopped laughing and shuffled back a pace. "Good Lord," he said, seeing the matter in another light, "you worked all this out yourself." It was a fresh proof of her shameless, reckless wilfulness — or her madness. Then dimly he began to understand that he had nothing to be conceited about, that all this was not done for love of him, that he just happened to be the first man who came along and she had seized him and used him for her own purposes. Her white, tight face and hidden eyes, concealing God knew what else, scared him again. "Now don't be silly, Harriet. Don't start making a scene. I only laughed because . . ."

"I told you I'd find a way. It's the only way. If we don't go now I don't know what will happen to me."

The music started up and the dancers moved off, stirring eddies in the torpid, perfumed air. He took her arm. "Come and dance. We'll talk about it after."

"No, no, Doug. There's no time. If Father gets hold of me he won't let me out of his sight again all night. Besides — Mr Cash might tell him."

"Tell him what?"

"That we're going to run away."

"You didn't tell Cash that?"

"No, but he knows. Geoffrey must have told him. You see, Geoffrey sold the jewels for me and he must have guessed."

Doug gripped her arm. "You little . . . You've told everybody. You're trying to blackmail me."

"Oh, no, Doug. I didn't."

"You knew Geoffrey would."

Harriet's eyes sank back into their shadows. "What if he does? We'll be gone."

"Haven't you any shame? God Almighty, think of people. What'll they be saying? And I've got to marry you."

Harriet said nothing.

He groaned. "You've ruined my life. They'll never stop talking."

"But we won't be here," she insisted doggedly. "We'll start a new life." Her mouth was wry and quivering. "Don't you see? It's the only way for us. If you won't — I'll go and throw myself in the river."

"Ah, you bitch. You spiteful bitch. I believe you would. Just to make them talk and talk and talk."

She shook her head. "Oh, Doug, how can you say that? Don't you love me any more?"

"Love you? Jesus! Love you? Of course I don't. Get it into your thick head. I don't give a damn for you. I would've been in England now if it wasn't for you and your father's dirty money. Oh, I'll marry you. Don't worry. You won't need to run away for that. Next time your father wants a favour they'll fix it up between them, and I'll be the mug. But don't think you'll be on a bed of roses. Just wait. I'll teach you better ways, you — you whore." In the climax of his fury he lifted his fist and threw the wad of notes at her face. It struck her cheek and ricocheted off, through the arch, into the ballroom.

The dance had ended and the floor was empty now. The notes, tied with a red ribbon, lay there, presenting to the world evidence of a bizarre drama proceeding in the alcove. A hush in the chatter on the other side of the arch told them that the world had observed and was amazed.

Sobered, horrified, Doug took a step towards the room to retrieve the packet but turned back as Harriet burst into tears. "N-n-n-no," he stuttered, and clapped a hand over her mouth. "Don't make a scene. Shhhh! What's the matter? I didn't mean it. For Christ's sake. Look at me, I do love you. Yes, anything you like. Only stop that row. . . ."

But the tears flowed irresistibly, dry, racking, and noisy.

"Oh, you — you — " He shook her, giving her grief a ridiculous sound of strangulation.

"Oh, pardon me." A sweet voice in the doorway spun him on his heel. It was Mrs Bowen, proffering the bundle of notes. "Am I intruding? I think this belongs to you? No?"

Faces, malevolent in their astonishment and inquisitiveness, gloated over her shoulder. Doug, wiping his tear-wet hand on the leg of his trousers, glared for a moment before his reflexes got to work and plunged him feebly out of the alcove, out of the ballroom, with the vague, comforting thought that, somewhere near, the dark river waited to swallow his dishonour and absolve him from the ordeal of ever meeting those eyes again. On the steps he passed Cabell, whose stern gaze, following his flight, sent him on more precipitately than ever.

Harriet ran after him, but at the arch she stopped, confronted by a bright, hard, simpering world she had forgotten. She glanced around the circle of faces, half-averted, noting here an open mouth, there a grin, here a stare of mystification. Bedraggled with grief she slunk back into the

half-light of the alcove. At once they turned their backs and the chatter started, with artificial gusto, again.

A hand on her arm made Harriet turn a defiant face streaked with tears. Mrs Bowen was at her elbow. She was holding the notes between thumb and forefinger. Her eyes pried at Harriet, seeming to say, "I can see you're in some awful disgrace, young lady. Be sure I'll find out what it is."

"Dear Miss Cabell," she began in her fussy, shrill voice, but before she got another word out a hand, sweeping up from Harriet's skirt, slapped her smartly across the face.

Mrs Bowen gave a startled yelp and dropped the notes. The chatter ceased and the gaping, mystified, derisive, and scandalized looks of the guests turned on them again.

Incredulously Harriet watched the white print of her hand emerge from the burning red of Mrs Bowen's cheek. Then the cheek turned white and the mark of the hand rose in livid red.

Harriet began to moan gently like a child, glancing right and left across the room. Her father had just come in with Ludmilla. He was smiling. She stepped back and blundered into Sylvester Dennis. He shuffled quickly out of the way and looked at her over the shoulder of Dr Barnett, who was talking in a determinedly loud voice about nobody knew what.

People craned their necks to discover the origin of that unmistakable clap of hand against face.

Harriet stumbled forward a few paces, then she saw Cash hurrying down the room, covered her face with her hands, and ran blindly into his arms.

Chapter Fourteen: Pariah

NEEDLESS to say, Dough did not drown himself, but he sincerely wished he had when Cabell arrived at the Peppiott house next morning and demanded his body for a public flaying. The sound of Cabell's riding-whip lashing the French polish off the table in Peppiott's library astounded the neighbours for an hour. "I'll have no truck with you any longer," Cabell shouted as he went, "and I'll put you out of business if it's the last thing I do."

Now Mrs Peppiott's tongue got to work. It seemed that the rumours about a match-making were too, too ridiculous for words. A Peppiott marry one of that brood! The truth of the matter, though it went against her grain to say such things of any women, was that "that girl" — well, you know what her mother was! She had just flung herself at Douglas's head, the poor boy. Wrote him letters trying to make assignations with him and he, like any honourable man, tried to draw a decent veil. And the well-thumbed note was handed round and gloated over till it fell to pieces. Doug emerged as an accredited moral martyr. Nevertheless he soon vanished to a station in the torrid west to work out his destiny as a jackeroo.

There was a second faction in this whispering, recruited not from the friends of Cabell which would have made a very thin, red line, but from those who felt that Mrs Peppiott was extracting too much lustre from the affair. The leader was Mrs Bowen who hated Mrs Peppiott so much that she forgave Harriet for slapping her face and, through some queer mental process, even came to believe that no such thing had happened. "It's all that gossiping woman's invention. Of course she has to try to cover up her young profligate's tracks. Well, we all know what *his* grandmother was. Highest moral principles! What about the time the housekeeper grabbed the tails of his coat and pulled it off his back when he was scrambling over the fence!"

This certainly helped to keep the smugness of the Peppiotts in bounds but did not do much for poor Harriet's reputation.

James arrived back in the middle of the bother.

Cabell took careful stock of him for the first time — his long face with premature wrinkles of worry round the mouth, his nervous eyes which never returned his father's gaze for long, his sensitive mouth with the heavy, sensual lower lip of the Cabells, white hands, and unobtrusively

dandified clothes, and though annoyed at what he saw, muttering, "You look like a new-chum," he thought to himself, "A stuck-up young prig. Doesn't want to dirty his hands with work. He'll give no trouble."

More kindly than he had ever spoken to James before, he said, "You've done well at the University. I'm pleased with you. Now I want you to do something for me."

James looked at him doubtfully. He had obeyed his father's telegram, ordering him to return, with severe misgivings. "He's not going to boss me about. I won't stand for it." But somehow, having lost the battle once put James at an awful disadvantage. What was the use fighting with him? He was sure to win.

"I want you to marry Miss Ludmilla's niece." He waved James silent. "Aurelia Considine's daughter, she is, and a good-looking girl. She's just come back from England a topnotch lady. Ludmilla and her sister are people of consequence. Not like this ragtag and bobtail plutocracy. Your own kind."

"But Miss Ludmilla . . .?"

"Yes, yes, she wants it too. Had her eye on you a long time and thinks you're a good stamp of a lad. So she should. You're a Cabell, aren't you? The dead spit of one."

James blushed. It was the first time he had heard his father speak to him as a son he was pleased to have. If Cabell had applied all his cunning to the problem he could not have dealt a more deadly blow to the heart of James's rebellion, which had begun to build its fantasies of grievances years ago when James was a boy playing truant from school and missing meals with the half-conscious purpose of provoking some notice, even unfavourable notice, from an indifferent father. As he grew older and saw Harriet being spoiled and himself used to spoil her, these fantasies developed into elaborate dreams of selfassertion and revenge. Sometimes he saw himself as a great politician like Flanagan, sitting at his table in the ministry listening to a plea from his father, as Cabell had often pictured the scene between himself and Flanagan when Flanagan took his land away, and harshly refusing to do what his father wanted, heaping on him bitter reproaches for all the wrongs he had done his son. At other times he came home rich and powerful and found his father old and poor and with noble magnanimity forgave him everything and lifted him up and comforted him.

As James looked at his father now he almost felt as though one of those fantasies had come true. Cabell was sitting at his table in the study with his head in his hands. The pouches were heavy under his eyes and the arms sticking out of his shirt-cuffs looked withered and weak. He seemed crushed. A lot of grey hairs had come out in his beard and his shaggy eyebrows since last James saw him.

His unexpected warmth released a strange swell of emotion in James's

throat. For a moment he could not speak.

Cabell roused himself. "The fact of the matter is, Ludmilla's getting on. She wants us to take over her interest in the mine and look after it."

If he had said "me" instead of "us" James might have been offended and the delicate woof of their relations set spinning in another pattern, but again the subtle, if unconscious, cunning of Cabell, in talking as if they were men and partners together, disarmed him.

"As far as that goes, I'm getting on myself," Cabell said with a sigh.

"Oh no, sir. You're good for another twenty years."

"Eh? You think so? Don't notice any grey hairs?" Cabell was pleased.

"No, sir," James lied.

A troubled expression crossed Cabell's face. "Time tells, lad. There's your mother — a brave woman, but she's breaking up. Nobody can stand the kicks for ever. Your brother Larry's playing the devil. And young Geoffrey's going to the dogs with racehorses and drink. And now your sister . . ." He sighed again. "God knows, James, I hardly expect that one of you won't want to betray and pester me."

"I'll do my best, sir," James said, moved deeply now by his father's confidences, which singled him out from a family of broken reeds to help carry heavy burdens.

Cabell rose stiffly, his old joints creaking, and enveloped James in his sour fust. "That's a good lad," he said, wringing James's hand. "We'll fix things to suit everybody. If you marry Julia Considine I'll tell you what I'll do — I'll send you for a trip round the world. Stay away as long as you like. I won't be asking you to put your nose to the grindstone right off. Go and enjoy yourself. I'll be here to keep an eye on things a few years yet."

Noble Father! James felt a different man when he came out of the study — as indeed he was. And yet — there was Jennis Bowen. James loved Jennis, though not perhaps with the same impetuosity as before he had that conversation with Cash. Cash had dropped a little drop of poison into James's sensitive mind. He told James that he had inherited some wild and reckless quality from his gipsy mother, that he was as his father must have been before he became what he was — a violent old man with a battered face who had done things James was ashamed of. James laughed at the idea now, but it kept popping out in his mind at all sorts of odd moments, as he was dozing off to sleep, or reading a book, or in the middle of a conversation, so that he was always worriedly asking himself, "Can it be true? Could I do those things? Could I disgrace myself as he has done?" and though he always answered, "No, of course not," he began to develop an exaggerated fear of his own potentialities for evil and a potent sense of guilt every time he detected in himself, as he often did, emotions which the nice kind of people, who were unlike his father or his mother, did not seem to have. One of these emotions was

his desire for Jennis, which filled his brain with memories of her soft, full breast, and soft, white neck, and her soft, acquiescent hand lying in his. These thoughts, and the struggle he put up against them, and the fear and guilt they filled him with, accounted for the new hard lines of worry and repression around his mouth. He tried to smother his feelings, which he thought must be abnormal, and did succeed up to a point, for he had strength like his father and turned this strength in upon himself; but he still loved Jennis and wanted to marry her, more than ever because he felt guilty about his feeling, for nice people seemed to believe that marriage made such feelings right. How he was going to marry her James did not know, for that brought up again the problem of going out into the bush to make a fortune for himself, so James had just gone on hoping for a reconciliation between Cabell and Flanagan; but no reconciliation had happened, and now his father wanted him to marry Julia Considine. James began to feel resentful and rebellious again. The old man had been very decent about it, but dash it all, why should he marry a girl he'd never seen? And what for? To please Ludmilla and let his father get control of the mine, because that was all it amounted to. And James admitted doubt about his father's sudden friendliness. "In the end Harriet will get everything just the same."

He wandered into the drawing-room. Miss Montaulk was there alone.

"Where's Harriet?"

"She's locked up in her room."

"Locked up? Why?"

Miss Montaulk's wide, virgin eyes went up in pious, virgin horror. "She disgraced herself."

"What d'you mean?"

"She tried to run away with a man."

"What? What man?"

Miss Montaulk told him with lavish, loving detail. The assignation in the garden — the letter — the hat — the scene at Government House — the scandal.

"I always said she was bad," Miss Montaulk confided. "She gets it from your mother. Your brother Geoffrey's the same. And your brother Larry — just like your mother's cousin who was a bushranger, everybody says. And you — you had some scandal with a girl, too, didn't you?"

James shut himself up to think about the awful calamity. First he thought of what Miss Montaulk had said, confirming all his worst fears. Yes, there must be something in them, something bad, inherited from his mother and from his father who had been corrupted by life in the early days. This proof of it was so sensational that James turned with disgust against his own passionate, illicit feelings. He must kill this corruption in himself. He must. He must.

Then he thought about the scandal and how everybody would be

whispering, simpering, pointing fingers, and in a rush of grateful feeling for a pitfall narrowly avoided, he realized that it might have been about him they were whispering if he had run away with Jennis. But this was nearly as bad — his own sister, writing letters, making assignations! Would he ever live it down!

Then, as he paced his room, another thought came to him. Of course, this was what Father meant when he spoke about Harriet letting him down. Of course. And that was why he looked so old and tired. And that was why he was so changed towards James. It wasn't a trick. He meant it. He was turning to James for sympathy. James's heart swelled again. Poor old devil! He'd built so much on Harriet and she'd failed him. She'd failed them both, the little beast! Very soon this great discovery that his father had turned away from Harriet to him made James forget that but for the grace of God he might have been the one in trouble, and filled him with a mighty moral indignation.

He went to Harriet's room and knocked urgently on the door.

"Who's that?" her hostile voice answered. "Go away. I don't want to see anybody."

"It's me — James. Don't be a fool. Open the door."

"I don't want to speak to you."

"I can understand that," he hissed through the panel.

The door flung back and Harriet confronted him with her jaw out and her eyes blazing. "What d'you want? I'm not frightened. Say what you like."

The maid sweeping the passage moved her broom energetically in one spot and looked out of the corner of her eyes. "Don't scream," James said and skipped into the room, but as soon as the door was shut he raised his voice. "What's all this about you and Doug Peppiott?"

"Mind your own business."

"It is my business. I'm your brother."

Harriet's face was bony and ugly with defiance. "I don't have to account to you. I don't have to account to anybody. Leave me alone."

"You've disgraced us," he said, and added grandly, "You've broken father's heart."

She laughed. "What's that to you? You were going to marry Jennis Bowen against Father's will, only you hadn't the courage."

"There's such a thing as duty. I hadn't considered that."

"Well, I considered everything. I always told you what I'd do if I fell in love and Father tried to stop me. I sold my jewels and I was going to run away with Doug if you want to know. There, I don't care who knows."

"It's a good job he had a shred of decency," James said, then thinking of the stories he demanded, "Is it true you wrote him a letter making an assignation?"

Harriet reddened. "How did you know that?"

“Everybody knows. He gave it to his mother and she's showing it all over the town.”

“Oh, he couldn't have done that?” Harriet said, and the colour ebbed from her face again. Some foolish hope against hope this destroyed, some last obstinate illusion, leaving her nothing behind which to hide from the jeering face of the world. She put her hand on her breasts where she still kept the shred of cloth Doug had left on the fence. “Oh, no, he couldn't.”

“Of course he did. You behaved like a common tart. He had to save his face. So they've made your name mud.” The defiance flagged in her eyes, which filled with tears, and his own strength and vindictiveness grew, fed by his eloquent picture of her disgrace and her weeping confession of it. “They're talking about you in bars, I don't doubt. The servants are talking about you. And probably the women in Frogs' Hollow.”

“I don't care,” she said brokenly.

“They're saying the filthiest things. God knows how true they are. You'll never be able to hold your head up again, anyway.”

“I don't care,” she repeated over and over miserably. “I don't care.”

“I don't suppose you do, you selfish little beast. You don't care what *we* have to put up with. You don't care about Father. You've taken ten years off his life. You might have remembered how he spoilt you. You might have had the decency to remember that he's surrounded by enemies who only wait for an opportunity to invent new slanders against him. You didn't think what he'd feel going about town with people pointing fingers at his back. You let him down. That's what you did. Let him down!”

“I don't know what you're saying, Jimmy,” Harriet protested, “but I didn't do anything wicked.”

“Pleased to hear it,” James said, “but nobody else will believe it.”

Harriet leant against the wall and wept through her fingers, bowed before James's wrath. Her self-respect crumbled to pieces. “Oh, I must be wicked. I must be. I must be,” she wailed, trying to coax some sign of pity and forgiveness with her grief.

But James turned his back. “I leave that to your conscience.” He opened the door, and after an anxious glance up and down the passage, strode out.

Harriet wept all day and all night, not in her tempestuous way but with a miserable, prideless ooze of tears, while over her swept ghoulis memories of her abasement, revived by James. All the convictions she had stood by so staunchly went with her self-respect. She grovelled in her unworthiness, lacerated herself with Miss Montaulk's old tirades about the vileness of men and women. Even the girls in Frogs' Hollow looked down on her, James said. She was lower than Queenie even. “I must be putrid, filthy,” she told herself, turning her passion in on herself

now as James, also frustrated, had turned his strength.

On the second day after James's interview, when the maid carried down another untouched tray of food, Cabell was frightened out of his resolve to be offended till Harriet chose to come and ask forgiveness for "betraying his confidence," as he had put it to her during the stormy scene after the ball. He hurried to her room and demanded, with threats and entreaties, that she should open the door, but the only answer he got was the sound of her weeping. Finally he sent for an axe and battered the door in.

Harriet was sitting up in bed with her legs doubled under her, hair down, dress torn, one stocking concertinaed round her ankle, staring vacantly out of hollow, ringed eyes from which all colour had faded. The lustre had gone from her hair, her skin was yellow. Her tears had dried up and a harsh sob, like a hiccup, shook her every few seconds. She took no notice of her father till he sat down on the bed and said, "I was a mongrel talking like that. Come and be like you were before." Then she lowered her head and the tears flowed in an unquenchable drip-drip-drip on her folded hands.

He sent for a doctor, who said diplomatically, "I don't know what's the matter. She's had a nervous shock. Get her away from town and when she's well send her on a long trip where she'll see something new. A little port wine and iron will help."

"I'll take her back to the valley and send her home to England next year," Cabell said, and urged on by the doctor's serious, "You couldn't do better, except find her a husband. Women are — er — flesh and blood, too, you know," he sat down and wrote a letter to his sister in Owerbury, breaking nearly thirty years' silence. He asked whether she would take Harriet in at Owerbury and see she was "piloted where she might find some young fellow with a bit of gumption and gentlemanliness about him, if the two go together . . ."

Miss Montaulk was packing. They were due to leave in a few hours. Harriet nerved herself to go downstairs for a last walk in the garden. As she entered the drawing-room, where the maids had already put dust-covers on the furniture, reminders of her shame rushed at her. She shut her eyes and hurried towards the veranda.

She was stumbling blindly across the disordered floor with one hand stretched out when she heard a footstep. She halted and a rough hand closed over hers and pressed it. She opened her eyes. Cash was standing before her.

"Having a game of blind-man's-buff?" he said with a strenuous effort at a chuckle, then looked almost hang-dog. "I was waiting for your father. If I'm in the way I'll push off. I . . ." He licked his lips till they shone with spittle.

Harriet stood off and stared at the floor, not wishing to speak but

unable to run away.

"Here, I brought this." Cash pushed a parcel into her hands. "Your jewels. I thought your pa might be asking to see them. It was me advanced Geoffrey the money. I thought he might have stolen them and I didn't want to see you lose them and him get into hot water. I misjudged him for once."

"You mean you misjudged me."

"No, no, Miss Harriet."

"You despise *me* now. You didn't think I could be so low, so mean. Oh, yes, you said it the other night. You said I was doing something mean to Father."

"Me despise you. God's truth, Miss Harriet, how could I look down on any one. I've been as low as a snake's belly in my time."

But Harriet's mind was made up. They all despised her, even Cash. From Mrs Peppiott to Cash, she thought, putting Cash at that base extreme as she recalled Mrs Peppiott's horror when once, in a pique, she had said that she might be in love with a man and that man Cash. And remembering how she had run to him after the fiasco of the ball she stamped and cried, "You helped me to make a show of myself the other night. You let me throw my arms around you. I suppose they thought I was one of your Queenies."

But Cash, who certainly knew nothing about "thoroughbred ladies," tried to comfort her by saying heartily, "To hell with the whole dingo pack of them. Who cares what a Government House push thinks — it makes no difference to me," and stood staring, sadly puzzled, up the stairs long after she had fled back to her room.

Part IV: Shearers' War

Chapter One: Trouble in the Air

ONE evening Coyle and Larry were talking at the gate. "Still working for your old man, Larry?" Coyle said with his thin smile. "He thrashes you like a dog and you still graft to fill his pockets."

"It's my ma," Larry said morosely.

"And because of your ma you'll help skin your mates. Or what you call your mates."

"They are my mates."

"Garn. Wait till the strike and he brings in scabs. Where'll you be? With your mates or with the scabs because your ma wants you to be?"

Larry rubbed his big, cross-grained hands on the top bar of the gate.

"You'll be with the scabs and the kanakas and Chows."

"What Chows?"

"Think too high of your old man for that, eh? Well, what does the new agreement say? Labour's got to be free. That means no union labour need apply. No jobs for those you call your mates, for Berry and Goggs and Wagner. Let them starve. That's the idea. The free labour he wants is the free labour he had in the convict days — labour you don't pay for." His quiet voice was almost caressing. "But he won't get that far, don't worry. Something will happen to him soon."

Larry looked into the blue, dazed eyes. "What?"

Coyle winked. "Something fatal. To him and all his gang of land-jobbers and log-rollers."

Larry shivered. Coyle's lost gaze, the gentleness of his voice, so reasonably emphatic of an irrevocable dedication to hate, brought gooseflesh out on Larry's back. Against his will he smiled. He felt himself sinking into an agreeable hypnosis which yielded him up to a mind that found words to express the deep, unspoken desires of his own blood. "How?" he half-whispered, as though there were other ears than the ears of Coyle's horse, grazing along the fence, to hear them.

"If I told you there'd be no going back?"

"I'm not a scab."

"Listen, then." Coyle began to roll a cigarette. "There's only one way. New agreements and sending men to parliament — that's no use while your old man lives. He can give us bread and take it away. He can bring in enough immigrants to have us working for rations, like the old lags, and if we kick he can bring in coolies by the million from China and

India. And he will. Wait till the boom busts and it's harder to make profits. It'll be the triangle and redcoats again, if he has his way. And is that the bushman's way? No. But it's his way, because he's a different blood and flesh from us. Look at your brothers and sister — and you. Can't you see a difference. Flash duds and carriages and umbrellas to keep their complexions from getting spoiled — that's not us, that's not Australia. That's England.” He gestured at the landscape, baked white by the early summer heat, which shimmered on roofs and trees and the backs of the cattle. “Where do satin shoes and silk dresses fit in here?”

Larry repeated the words which the fanatical oratory of old Gurseay had fixed in his mind, “There are only two kinds — men and bosses.”

“That's right. Two ways — the English way and our way. Our way is the Australian way and they'll never learn it because they've got English skins and English eyes and the sun hurts them and the bush scares them. They hate it and so they'll do any dirt on it and on us who belong to it. They want England and a soft life and art and all that bullsh, and it's us who pay for it.”

His matter-of-fact voice swayed Larry more than any flight of rhetoric could have done. He felt, as he always felt when Coyle spoke to him, as though a great light had broken on his darkness, dissolving the doubts with which his mother's nagging and beseeching confused him. Impatiently, twisting his beard, he waited for Coyle to come to the point.

“That's England, see? Aristocrats, and a soft life, and blokes in kid shoes, and paying ten thousand pounds for an oil painting like a chap named Todhunter in Brisbane did the other day. And this is Australia — the bush, and graft, and your mates, and a man proving what he is by what he can do, not by who his grandfather was or how much he's got in his roll, and the wind off open, empty spaces that scares them behind their painted pictures of England. The two don't mix, see? One battens on the other. And that's why we've got to get rid of all that flesh and blood like your old man.”

“How?” Larry said, hardly aware that he spoke.

“Ever heard tell of a man named Stelkski, Rudolph Stelkski? There was a bloke, Gross, in Pennsylvania, a steel boss. His hands lived worse than rats. A couple of years ago Stelkski walked into his office and shot him. Ever heard of anarchists and the bombs they threw in Chicago? That's how. By the extremest means.”

“Did it change much when this joker was shot?”

“No, not much yet. They ain't followed it up yet. But it'll be different here. We've got ten thousand loyal bush-men, all sharp-shooters. We'll have twenty thousand quids' worth of ammunition planted along the central railway. When it's time we'll strike and grab the railway and take over the telegraph and stop news getting out, go to Rockhampton and declare a commune in Central Queensland. When the unionists outside

hear they'll chuck in their bundle and that'll be the end of the silken bonds of empire and Lord Muckstein's steady five per cent."

"Say they don't chuck in their bundle."

"They'll come and shoot us down like rabbits. Scared, are you?"

"I ain't scared." Larry bit his nails. "When will it be?"

"I'll be around seeing you," Coyle promised . . .

When Larry went back to the yard Emma put her head out of the kitchen doorway and demanded, "What were you doing with Coyle?"

"Talking. What d'you think?"

"Talking about what?"

"Talking."

"He'll talk your head into the cheat," Emma shrieked after him as he clumped away.

A month later Cabell came home with Harriet and James and found Emma wailing. Larry had cleared out.

"Where to?"

Emma did not know. He had gone off with Coyle two days before. "It's all because of the union and the books Coyle gave Larry to read, where it says that if the men turned round and murdered the bosses it would be the best for everybody."

"Don't worry. He'll get tired of humping a bluey and come back," Cabell said.

"Yes, he'll come back, the fool."

"What d'you mean?"

"Have you forgotten the afternoon at the wood-block?"

Cabell remembered Larry's face behind the swinging axe and understood why Emma kept wailing, "I'd rather he died than came back."

He scoured the run, feeling an uneasy need to know where Larry was. Nobody had seen him.

"He's got bad blood in him, bad Surface blood," Emma kept wailing. "He'll get in trouble."

Cabell took his gun down and cleaned it.

They were jumpy times. People said that the boom was over, that what had happened in the Argentine would happen here. There would be unemployment, misery, and revolution. The unions had been building up fighting funds for fifteen prosperous years. Their newspapers said that the new shearing agreement was the squatters' effort to make up for losses in the recent panic — the thin edge of the bosses' wedge. It was time for a showdown.

Chapter Two: Fight for a Country

CABELL had been back at the Reach a month when the papers from Brisbane announced:

SHEARERS DECLARE WAR
UNIONISTS REPUDIATE NEW AGREEMENT
ARMED CAMP OF 1000 MEN AT BARCALDINE
GRAVE THREATS TO LIFE AND PROPERTY

A week later a posse of union shearers rode into the valley and pitched camp at the gates of the Reach. There were thirty or forty of them, all with rifles. They were on the government reserve so Cabell could not interfere with them. Custard went down to see what they were up to and discovered that Larry and Coyle were there, as well as Berry and Wagner and Goggs and Paddy Doolan, and a number of men who had been coming to the valley on and off for years.

Cabell was now almost ready for the shearing and waited only for men. But they did not offer themselves. Horsemen from the camp picketed the roads and herded in everybody who looked like a shearer or a shedhand on the way to work. Many of these had no union tickets but the unionists threatened to duck them in the river so they stayed in camp. At the end of a week two hundred tents were pitched along the road. Dugald McFarlane came over and threatened to have the law on Coyle if he stopped men shearing his sheep, but they hooted him and pelted him with cowdung and he rode away again. The manager from Narrow Gut did no better.

"They'll starve and manure the roadside before I ask them to work for me," Cabell said and sent Custard to the telegraph station at Pyke's Crossing with a message telling his agent in Brisbane to get fifty non-union men from New South Wales for the shearing at the Reach and Ningpo.

But next morning Sambo came in to say that some men wanted to talk to him at the gate. He went down and found Berry leading a small deputation.

"We're moderate men," Berry said. "We don't want to make trouble if you'll meet us half-way."

"Are you in the union?"

"Yes."

"You can go to blazes then."

"We're only asking a decent thing."

"Leave the scum you're with and I'll talk to you."

"A man can't leave his mates."

"Then rot."

"Have a care," Berry said. "You'll drive peaceable men desperate. You've made an enemy of your own son."

Cabell glanced across the road where a bigger group was standing around Coyle watching the deputation. He had already seen Larry's clumsy figure rising above the crowd and felt, without meeting them, his son's eyes fixed on his face with the sharp, malicious gaze of a man looking for somewhere to aim a blow. They brought back the feeling of uneasiness and he turned away as he muttered, "From this on he's no son of mine. I hope he gets what he deserves."

The men jeered. "Save your breath, Berry," Goggs shouted. "He's that stingy he'd skin a crow for its hide and boil it down for dripping."

They laughed. They were enjoying the strike as a break in their wandering life. The beautiful summer day, their comradeship in a common cause, their easy success in holding up the shearing put them in a good mood — all except Coyle, who watched them with his soft, vicious eyes, saying nothing.

Cabell spat in the dust to end the talk, but Berry caught his sleeve. "We only want to live and let live," he said.

"Who's stopping you?"

"It's not living when you can raddle a man's sheep and sack him on the spot and he can't leave without losing his money. That's not what we're in Australia for."

"What about magny charter," Goggs said, pushing out his lop-sided face. "That's the law for every British subject. Your agreement's ultra wirey."

Cabell freed his arm. "You're a rabble. You want something for nothing. If you had the guts you could be as well off as me."

They laughed again incredulously.

"I'll tell ye what," Paddy Doolan shouted, wagging a black forefinger. "Nobody ought to have no more than a pound a week each, and that's how it's goin' to be for every son-of-a-gun after the strike."

"Hear! Hear! That's right. Everybody ought to have a pound a week and no more."

"Oho," Cabell said, "and who's to pay the pound a week?"

They looked at Doolan, who looked anxiously at Coyle, who shrugged contemptuously and turned away. Doolan scratched his head. "I suppose ye pay yerself, don't ye?"

At this inadequate reply their simple faces clouded.

Cabell sniffed. "Where's your brains? You'll let these spielers from the

union pull your legs right off. D'you think I got what I got sitting on my backside on the side of the road? No, I worked from sunrise to dark and half the night as well. I drove my wool to Brisbane on my lonesome when there wasn't any road to follow. I fought blackfellows. Bushfires nearly burnt me out. The dingoes killed my sheep. I nearly went off my nut with the loneliness. Other men tried to rob me. I forgot the taste of any kind of tucker except salt horse, or the feel of good linen on my back. And in time I got rich. You talk about *your* country. Isn't it *my* country too? Didn't I carve my home in it?"

They were silent when his passionate voice ceased.

Berry nodded. "Give us a fair thing and we'll start in shearing at once."

"Ay," Doolan said, his eyes moist, "it's a great pioneer ye've been. I'll say that. And many's the fine leg of mutton yer missus has slipped in my swag. I'll say that too, bless ye."

"Well then." Cabell could see that some of the men were beginning to waver — Doolan, weak and sentimental, Wagner, a big easy-going fellow who looked round to see what the others were doing, Berry, who was anxious to find a peaceful way out, and most of the men who were not unionists. They separated themselves from the group round Coyle and moved across to the gate. Cabell lifted the latch and threw it open.

But Coyle turned snarling, "Scabs, are you? He soft-soaps you for five minutes and you go crawling off to sign his dirty agreement." He shut the gate and sprang on to the post.

The word "scab" sent them back into the mob, but when he spoke again it was in his usual soft, dead monotone like a voice chanting. "You soon forget what you're fighting for. Not against raddling, as Berry says. Not for a few more bob a week. It's for the right to live in your own country. That's what. He wants freedom of contract — freedom to employ scabs from Italy and Germany and England and India and China. His country he calls it. It never was his country. England's his that's where he's always aimed to end up when he'd sucked the marrow out of this."

"That's right," Goggs said. "Look how he's bred up his son in stiff cuffs a yard long. Not much Australian about him. Nor his daughter neither."

Coyle looked at Cabell with his thin, vicious, sardonic wraith of a smile. "You ought to get a putty medal, loving Australia like you do. But don't make any mistake, mates. If we went with fire-sticks from Port Phillip to the Gulf and left the whole country in mourning we couldn't do it as much dirt as him and his squattocracy. Look at history. Was it workers who divided Poland? Was it workers who sold seats in the House of Commons? Was it Labour who drove your fathers and grandfathers out of Ireland and England and Scotland? Mates, you've got the blood of posterity in your hands now, and if you lose your nerve you'll be cursed till Kingdom Come. Do you want to see your women

working in the paddocks like some of you seen in England? Do you want to see your kids stunted in mind and body like they are in the Black Country you've heard about? Well, get rid of him if you don't — him and his aristocratic guts that thinks everything he does to us is right.”

The crowd murmured. Their good humour was gone now. He spoke to ancient grudges buried deep in the hearts of these sons of old lags, old chartists from England, old socialists from Germany, communists from France, carbonari from Italy, and refugees from the ugly hopelessness of industrial towns and starving villages. Their faces, powdered grey with the dust, turned towards Cabell.

He shouted against the palpable vibrations of their hostility, “He twists your tail and down you go. You'd believe him if he told you I put dingo poison in the legs of mutton I gave you, eh Doolan?”

“Sure, boss, you filled my tucker-bag more than once. I'll say that for ye . . .”

“A lousy leg of mutton!” Coyle said. “D'you know what Pope Gregory said? ‘Let them know that the earth from which they sprung belongs to all men in common and therefore the fruits she brings forth must belong to all.’ That's the words of the Pope.”

“Well, if the Pope said that,” Doolan said helplessly, “well, you wouldn't be asking a man to go against his religion, boss?”

“You better try and get it,” Cabell said laughing.

“That's all right you laughing,” Coyle said. “You'll sing a different tune when we come in six weeks' time and your sheep still unshorn.”

Cabell turned back to the house. “Next time you come you better bring a few shutters with you,” he sang out over his shoulder.

“What? Will you shoot?” Doolan asked nervously.

“My oath I'll shoot.”

Coyle nodded, satisfied. “There you are,” he said, with his eyes on Larry. “That's the kind of man you're up against. Now will you believe me a bullet's the only thing he understands?”

Larry watched his father's stiff back march up the slope to the homestead. On the veranda stood his mother with one hand shading her eyes against the sun — looking for him in the crowd, he knew. He raised his hand to wave but put it back in the pocket of his moleskins. What was the use? For the first time he realized that his old life in the valley, among the horses and cattle he knew and understood better than men, was finished for good, and he felt sad and savage. “A bullet's too good for him,” he thought, but as he looked at that back he felt doubtful and more savage, more sad.

Chapter Three: Utopists and Others

"MURDER'S murder," Berry said, breaking the tranced silence.

They looked at him with surprise and hostility.

"You shut your gob," Goggs said. "It was you went bumming to Cabell."

But his broad red face which they knew so well was unimpeachable. "I'll stay here till we eat grass, but I won't do murder."

His voice had broken the spell Coyle put on them. The compact, grey anonymity of their uptilted faces changed into a dozen contradictory expressions of doubt, scorn, disapproval, despair, fear, and amusement, re-establishing their normal character of bushmen sardonic and aloof from leadership in an independence forged by a land whose unpredictable moods a man must generally face alone.

"It's not murder when you kill a mad dog," Coyle said, lifting his voice, as he felt them slipping away.

"They mightn't call it murder either on my slab," Wagner said.

"Why should it be *your* slab?"

"Why shouldn't it?" Wagner drawled down from six inches above the tallest head. "Even a bloody counter-jumping Saturday-afternoon militiaman couldn't miss me. Jesus, if I been saving myself up from dying of thirst and being overtook by bushfires to be stiffened by one of them city blokes it'd be hard."

"There isn't a handful of traps or militiamen within a hundred miles," Coyle said. "Before they could come we'd smash the railway and saw through the bridges and pull the telegraph down."

"No, no," Berry interjected. "That's mad talk. Violence ain't called for."

"Ain't it? And what when he begins marching in scabs?"

"There's constitutional means if the strike fails," Berry said, evasively.

"Perhaps we could send a deputation to the politicians the squatters elect, d'you mean?"

"No, we could work to send men of our own kind. If we had a few shearers in parliament . . ."

"Ifs won't feed your mates' wives nor pay the instalment money on your farm at the end of the season if he wins."

Berry hung his head.

The men began to argue. "What I reckon, there's enough gold and silver in the blessed place to give every one a pound a week for his life,"

said Paddy Doolan, who had been thinking this seductive proposition over again and had seen through all the flaws at last. "I once heard a bloke say there was millions in Waterfall alone."

"How y'going to get your divvy if it's in Waterfall?" Wagner wanted to know.

"Eh? Suppose ye dig it out for yeself. No, no, that ain't right." He fell back into deep thought.

"I agree with Berry," said a wizened old man with china-clear eyes and a dribble of uneven beard stiff and stained with tobacco juice, like a dirty stalagmite. "Evolution's the best way to justice, not revolution."

Coyle snorted. "If it took the monkey a couple of million years to become a man how long d'you think it'll take Rusty?"

"You don't understand the human heart, Coyle," the old man said quickly, stuttering and jumbling all his words together nervously in his anxiety to make himself clear, before the sardonic disbelief which came into their eyes when they looked at him found words to jeer him down. "Look at me. I was more evil than he has ever been. I was a bully and a swaggerer. I debased men and women . . ."

"Arf yer luck with the women, Budge," Goggs said.

Budge waited till their laughter died, slipping his high, fine voice in under it like a knife which cut the guffaws from their lips and left the sound to wander bodiless across the echoing bush. "Yes, it was so. I was an officer, like my father and my grandfather before me. I was brought up to be a braggart and a violent bully. I spent money like water and never asked where it came from or cared about the souls who were brutalized in keeping my pockets full. But a day of reckoning came. I killed a man in cold blood, a good honest man. I insulted him and forced him to fight a duel with me and I shot him dead."

"They oughta hanged you," Goggs said indignantly. "That was straight-out murder."

"Yes, my friend, but I had powerful relations. They got me out of the country and hushed it all up. After a year or two I could have gone back, but I had changed. I don't know what happened, but I saw all at once how stupid my life had been and the lives of all my kind, how stupid and cruel. I only wanted to escape from everything that reminded me of it. So I came here to a new country to work with my hands and perhaps build up something better."

"You oughta joined the Salvation Army," Coyle said.

"But it's possible, don't you see?" Budge said, turning his face around the circle of their aloof and bantering disregard like a weak candle-flame licking at a stone wall. "Men can change suddenly. The world can change."

"Even dingoes?"

"Yes, you should read Fourier. Even tigers can change. Man lived in a

Golden Age once. If they could change to being evil and unhappy why shouldn't they change to being decent and happy? Everybody wants to be decent and happy, but they don't know how. Even before the duel I was often disgusted with myself. But it seemed impossible that anything should change. 'I didn't make myself,' I used to say. 'It was ordained from the beginning.' But I was wrong. I did change."

"And somebody stepped into your shoes and went on lining their pockets from the sweat of the poor bastards in your old man's mines, and the world went on as before."

"Only because they hadn't learnt to understand as I'd learnt. They must be shown. This is a new, fresh soil where you can build up something because everybody isn't discouraged by seeing the castles and jails and battlefields which tell them how old evil is in the world. Look." He picked up a handful of the road dust. "When I cut myself I rub this dirt on the cut and it heals it, because it is clean dirt, not like the dirt in the Old World, full of disease and evil, which kills you when it gets in a wound. Here there is none of man's filth in the soil. The Garden of Eden and the reign of love on earth would grow here again if we wished it."

"Hear! Hear!" Berry said.

"You don't build anything with love," Coyle said, "you only build with hate. When you hate, that is, till you feel as if you'd swallowed a coupla black snakes — that's when you want to build. You ought to be wearing a back-to-front collar — that's your line, Budge."

The noisy argument broke out again. "If you want to know what I'd do . . ." "What that bloke Winwood Reade reckons . . ." "Tom Paine says . . ." and they straggled back to camp banging red fists into their soft shearers' palms, bellowing sarcastically at each other's plan for salving the pains of the world, and, with the assistance of strange geometrical designs drawn in the dust to assist the agonizing process of exposition, putting forth counter schemes and philosophies evolved from the works of Darwin and Spencer, Paine, Bellamy, and Mill which they had read by the light of camp-fires and slush lamps and pondered over in the long, day-dreaming hours of lonely wandering.

Larry would have liked to have a say, but he was too shy and could only nod, even when he did not agree. He was deeply impressed by what Budge had said. He did not know why, but the theory that everything could be made to work out happily without any fighting appealed to him strongly just now, as he began to realize what an irrevocable leap he had taken. Coyle caught his arm and beckoned him away. Turning from Budge to Coyle Larry felt his heart sink, as though the blue, dimmed eyes, like a drunk's eyes in their truncated gazing upon a void, reminded him of some unpleasant thing he had forgotten he must do.

"Don't waste time listening to them," Coyle said. "They're all talk."

"They reckon it will be settled without any shooting," Larry said

anxiously. "D'you reckon?"

"That's what *they* think."

Larry looked at him questioningly. He did not answer, but led the way through the camp, in the designless muddle of its tents, brush shelters, and bark lean-tos revealing once more the bushman's undisciplinable anarchism. Outside each tent was a neat pile of the shearers' goods, saddle and bridle, folded blue blanket, billy, tin plate, pannikin, knife, and a few books. In the middle of the camp they had built a big cairn of red rocks to support a gum sapling from which fluttered a red flag with the Southern Cross in white stars. In the shade of the cairn Goggs and some of his mates were settling down to play away their strike pay at euchre.

Larry and Coyle saddled up to go out and relieve the picket. When they were away from the camp Coyle took a letter from his pocket and handed it to Larry. It was from the Central Strike Committee, addressed to the Committee of the Queensland Shearers' Union Strike Camp at Cabell's Reach, per Jerry Coyle, Organizer, and read:

COMRADES,

You will not be surprised to hear that the squatters are engaging scabs from the sweepings of Bourke Street and the various well-known resorts of thugs, touts, bludgers, and larrikins in Sydney to come and break your strike. The first batch is due in Brisbane within a couple of weeks, and part of it will be sent to your district. The squatters hired bullies, the police, will escort them from the railhead with orders to get them to work, dead or alive — meaning you, comrades. We need not teach you your duty to your thousands of union mates whose fight will be jeopardized if these scabs get through . . .

"Have you told them?" Larry asked.

"What d'you take me for? The camp'd be half-empty now and your old man's shearing in full blast. They'll find out soon enough — and then you see whether there'll be any shooting."

Chapter Four: End of Waiting

THE men stayed in a good holiday mood for another four weeks. They spent the time gambling away their strike pay, getting drunk, arguing about the form and quality of their Utopia, picketing the roads, and assuring each other, "We got the sod beat." Coyle did not interfere.

These were the last hot lazy days of the dry season when the clear air makes visible the hard edges of things from miles away, giving men a fictitious belief in the world's unduplicity, their power to see and foresee. Even moonless nights were lighted by the blue, summer starshine. To imagine a break in the procession of perfect days was impossible under their spell. Optimism was as irresistible as sleep. Languor took away their bitterness. "Rusty'll come round in a day or two," they said. "The seed's getting in his wool bad."

But Larry knew better than they the obstinacy of his father, that each day brought them nearer not to peaceful victory but to a fight. He had Coyle's assurance for that, too. "Just wait," Coyle said, "till the scabs come."

The long empty days had sapped Larry's courage. Coyle's promise of a short, sharp, irresistible rising had swept him off his feet, but now that he had to wait he began brooding over his mother's warning, "It won't be him licks his wounds. He's dealt with harder men than you." So when Coyle talked to him about the fight that was to come he found himself wishing that it would never come and that it would come quickly. Fear swelled his hatred, and hatred, inspiring long reveries of violence which always petered out in some memory of his father triumphing, fermented his fear. The men left him alone. He was moody and savage, given to bursts of bad temper and sudden pig-headed recklessness.

One night he startled everybody by raiding the homestead vegetable garden under the window of Cabell's room. Hugging an armful of carrots and worm-eaten cabbages he crouched under the flame-tree and stared through the window into the lighted room where his father sat at his table writing. "A man could put a blue pill right through his head from here." The beat of his heart thundered on the quiet night.

Suddenly Cabell raised his head and looked straight into Larry's eyes, slipped his hand under the papers on the table, and drew out a revolver. Larry stopped breathing as he watched his father rise, cock the revolver, and walk quickly to the window. For several minutes then they were

within an arm's length of each other as Cabell, leaning out, sniffed suspiciously and turned his head from side to side, searching the darkness. Larry felt in his hand the long butcher's knife he had brought to cut the cabbages. "A man could cut his head off." He worked his hand free and braced himself against the wall. As though offering his throat to the knife, tempting Larry to some fatal foolishness, Cabell leant farther out. But Larry began to shiver. He saw the light on the barrel of the gun as it turned slowly with Cabell's eye, and before he knew what he was doing he was thrashing wildly through the garden and down the slope. A shot and a shout followed him, which started the dogs and brought the shearers from their blankets to the fireside, where they were crowding nervously when Larry ran in with the cabbages.

Berry was angry. "Wonder he didn't plug you, you fool."

His reaction from that mad enterprise was to saddle his horse as soon as the camp was asleep and ride off towards Pyke's Crossing. "A man needn't see any of them again." A hundred yards from the camp he looked back at the fitful light of the fire on tents and sleeping men. It seemed to him that the vast hall of the night was uninhabited except for these few men and untroubled except for their sorrows, that if he was to ride out of the valley he would leave all worry and danger behind. Already his heart was lighter. He sank his spurs and cantered towards the hills, but as the road began to climb that rampart behind which he had lived for forty years, his chin fell, the reins loosened, and the horse dawdled. What would his mates say? They'd think he was funky. "I'm not funky." He repeated it over and over, but rode on. As the dawn was breaking he crossed the last spur of the range, whence he could see the valley on one side and on the other the white, winding road which lost itself in mysterious blue distance — the world outside the valley. Pieced together from the gaudy anecdotes of Sambo and other travellers this world presented itself to his imagination as a tableau of bold, urgent women, dishonest men, and hostile city folk expert in laying traps for the bushmen — inviting but forbiddingly immense as he saw it now in the cold light of the morning beside the compact, familiar landscape of the valley. *His* valley. "Yes, by rights it should belong to me, but he's cheating me out of it — me and Ma." His horse turned back towards the Reach and whinnied for home, and feeling no pull on the bit began to descend the hills.

Coyle grinned when he rode in. "So you tried to run?"

"Who said?"

"Oh, yes, you did. But you couldn't, could you?"

"I ain't funky," Larry flared, "if that's what you mean."

"Ain't you?"

Larry took him by the shoulder and shook him till he had shaken some of the exasperation out of himself, then went and sulked alone down by

the horselines. In the afternoon he disappeared again and returned at sunset with half a dozen of Cabell's prime fat wethers for the cook.

Berry gloomed over this latest recklessness. "That's not right, Larry, pinching sheep in daylight. It's suicide, that's what it is."

And seeing the frightened looks on their faces Larry was frightened again, too. So he passed those weeks between terror and impatience, between looking for danger and dreaming frightened nightmares of his father, between longing to serve his mates with some sacrificial deed and loathing them for having brought their struggle into his peaceful life.

Then the atmosphere of the camp changed. "What's it matter to him if he loses his wool?" they said. "He's got plenty to fall back on." The short season when they earned most of their money was more than half gone. The weak ones began to waver and talk about their wives and kids and their selections on which payments would soon be due. The strong determined ones said nothing but eyed the sky twitching with the reflection of distant lightning. The rains were coming.

Budge tried to inspire them. "We can't lose, mates, unless men turn round and go back to monkeys. What we stand for is right and justice and a better world, and life has been moving towards that for a long time."

"Meaning," Coyle said, "that in two thousand years you'll be looked on as they look on the Christian martyrs now."

"We are martyrs. If we leave our bones at the gate it's we who win."

"I know a better lay."

They looked at him.

"To leave *his* bones."

"No, no," Berry said. "We're honest men. Right is might, as Budge said."

His obstinate conviction of it roused them. They cheered. But Coyle's moment was ripe. He held up his hand. "Before you break into hymns led by Brother Budge, I got a telegram from Brisbane here." He read it while they clustered round him in an anxious mob with the flag stretched out above them on the wind that was daily bringing the rains nearer. "Seventy scabs leaving for Cabell Reach with police escort. Expect them early next week."

"That's *now* — to-day or to-morrow," Coyle said. "By this time next week he'll be shearing unless . . ."

Budge's voice, protesting the invincibility of a just cause, was drowned in their gabble. He continued to shriek and wave his arms till Goggs took hold of him and knocked him down. The mob closed blindly over him and drew nearer to Coyle.

"It's no use pulling the wool over your eyes, mates," Coyle said. "The strike's up the spout. While you've been sitting on your behinds listening to Berry and Budge the squatters' banks have been buying scabs by the

shipload from Sydney and Melbourne — city thugs who will soon drive you bushmen out of your own country. Now they're calling up the militia and sending Gatling guns to turn on you. You wouldn't listen to me before. Will you wait till it's too late?"

"We'll lynch the cows."

The spirit of the camp changed again. The prospect of a fight with police and strike-breakers refreshed their dying resolve. Even Berry said, "No city scab will take the bread out of my kid's mouth while I got two fists."

"Fists?" Coyle said. "Haven't you got a rifle?"

But here another interminable argument began. Some were for ambushing the scabs in the hills and shooting them down or stringing them up to the nearest trees. They were the real footloose bushmen, half-savage nomads like Goggs and Coyle, children of old lags born in little outstation or bush slum and turned adrift to fight a traditional enemy as cattle-duffers or bushrangers or unionists. Others thought the scabs should be kidnapped and brought to camp and restrained from working and reasoned with. They were a new kind of bushman, like Berry and Budge, who had families and selections and less hate than Coyle and Goggs. On their argument that night turned the future of a movement, perhaps the future of a nation.

Larry, sitting apart at the camp-fire, listened, frowning as his slow brain tried to cope with their talk. In all his life he had not heard so much talk as in these past five weeks — philosophy, economics, tales of injustice, schemes for reforming the world, the guttersnipe rage of Goggs against "them bloody toffs your sister and brothers," Budge's semi-mystical maunderings about the soil and how the sword should not sleep in a man's hand until he had rebuilt Jerusalem, Coyle's ironic confidences which tangled him deeper and deeper in an undefined, perilous, but agreeable conspiracy. All this confused and at times exalted him, made him feel that whatever he did in the cause of these men would be right and promised, in some vague way, a fulfilment of the hollow pain of frustration which had tormented him since long ago when he learnt the impotence of his anger against his father's hard will and hard fists.

To-night their talk, wilder than usual because of the coming fight, made his blood burn, and the firelight flickering on his face was like a flame within him.

"What about you?" Coyle said.

"I'll fight. By Jesus, yes."

"Everything depends on you," Coyle said.

"Me?"

"On you and me and half a dozen. Because none of the selectors will fight. But if we fight and something serious happens everybody's in it and they'll have to fight for their lives, and that'll light a brand that will

set the whole country on fire, because every unionist on strike is waiting and none of them is game to start. They want somebody like Stelkski to show them that their tyrants ain't invulnerable, like he did by murdering the biggest and strongest tyrant of the lot. And who's the biggest and strongest tyrant here, eh? Your old man."

The light sprang into Larry's eyes as he raised his head, then his head dropped and his eyes were dull.

"What of it?" Coyle said. "You ain't put off by a word? Murder and fire's the way of revolution. Robespierre and Marat didn't get rid of tyrants by twiddling their thumbs. Once we start we'll go through the country like fire in dry thistle, and there won't be any left to call it murder and arson." For an instant the light glowed in his own dead, dim, unfocused eyes, like a mysterious will-o'-the-wisp in the windows of a house over which the shadow of some mad deed has fallen, confirming people's fear that evil and hatred do not die. "We got a lot to be conscience stricken about, ain't we? A hell of a tender-hearted bloke your old man was when he had life and death power over people like my old man — and your ma." He spoke with a harsh and exigent impetuosity as though not he, whose voice was always gentle, was speaking but some imprisoned tenant of his heart who fought to get free. The muscles of his guarded face relaxed and his jaw came loose, giving him the flaccidly imbecile expression of a drunk which, since he had no liquor in, was very unpleasant to see. "It's all lawful in a revolution. Let these smarmy women in silk dresses like your sister get a taste of what your old woman had when she was hired out to drunken squatters." He grinned into the fire, shuddered, then wiped his hand roughly across his face. When he spoke again it was with his usual quietness, his eyes gone dead. "Anyway, who said it was murder — it's self-defence. We're fighting for our rights, ain't we? We're fighting for posterity."

Larry spent a restless night in his blanket under the stars listening to the curlews and trying to sort out the ideas which buzzed so noisily in his brain that once or twice he thought he was still sitting at the fire with the shearers arguing around him. He thought of his father and the scabs and of Berry and Budge and all the rest with whom he shared this new religion of mateship — it was no less than a religion to them in those days — and the idea that his father would win and rob them of the simple rights they demanded made him stiff with anger. Falling off to sleep he dreamt that he was fighting James. Huddled in the corner of the room was a naked woman — Molly Heffernan from Black Rock. He was just about to kill James when his father came in with policemen. They took him outside and he saw himself hanging there on a gallows with a lax grinning jaw and dull, dispersed eyes. He awoke trembling, and thought at once of his mother with a choking sense of wretchedness and guilt. He remembered what she had planned for him, and how differently it had

turned out! "It will kill her," he kept repeating.

Then he tried to tell himself that maybe it wasn't true about the scabs. Maybe there wouldn't be a fight. Perhaps the strike would end soon and his father go back to Brisbane and not say anything if he returned to the Reach. . . . But the idea that some final conflict between his father and himself was unavoidable now became so strong that he gave up struggling against it at last, and even found a kind of torpid, fatalistic peace in resigning himself. Till the dawn broke on the valley, with an instantaneous white blaze of heat, he lay thinking over the events of his life — Gurseys' harangues, the injustices done to Berry, the talk he had heard in the shearers' hut, the fight with his father, the estrangement between himself and his brothers, his disinheritance — which had brought him to this point where he must either go docilely off and let his father have it all his own way or fight it out once for all. He thought of these things without emotion, except perhaps a little self-pity and a certain naïve amazement at the discovery that a process of destiny had been at work within him for so many years unsuspected. Even the thought, "It won't be him licks his wounds," which ran across all other thoughts, awoke only a queer feeling of relief that this day would put an end to the knot of pain in his belly.

Chapter Five: No Escape

THE camp awakened early and went on with its argument. Just before noon an excited picked galloped in to say that a crowd of mounted troopers were coming up the road, and soon afterwards two men came out of the scrub on tired horses — one a trooper with a carbine in the saddle holster and a sword at his belt, the other Cash, who waved to the men as he passed and got their hoots and catcalls in reply.

Half an hour later they rode out of the Reach with Cabell and James. The men ran from the camp and hooted again. Cabell was carrying a stock-whip. He cracked it low over the shearers' heads, and for a while their arguing ceased and they were thoughtful. In that mood Coyle got them out on to the road, a silent, surly rabble, a few on horseback, some with rifles, some with sticks, but most on foot with only their bare, clenched fists. In Larry's belt was a revolver which Coyle had given him. With Coyle he rode in front of the mob. Behind the horsemen came Budge running backwards with his arms outstretched, trying to make the mob stop and listen.

Suddenly Goggs pulled his horse in. "Look. There they are." About three miles away a cloud of dust rose over the scrub. "There must be a coupla hundred traps," Goggs said anxiously, looking round at the men. They seemed a tiny mob bunched together on the side of the road, and Goggs began to turn yellow under his sunburn. "I reckon they ain't got orders to shoot over our heads neither."

Budge jumped on to a stump. "Men," he yelled, "think what you're doing. Some of you may be killed."

"We're done for anyway, if we let the scabs past," Coyle said.

"We're not done for while the vital spark is in us," Budge said, "but whatever happens to the scabs won't profit you or your wives and kids when you've got a heartful of lead. Look around, mates, it might be the last sight of the earth you're getting. Life's something you don't get two bites at."

"Aw, shut your mouth, Budge," Larry said, but he turned in his saddle to look at the valley where Budge pointed, insubstantial, inaccessible, behind the dust and the yellow shimmer of heat. "It's like Coyle says," he muttered, tugging his beard sideways, "you can't lose more than you've lost, so what's the use talking."

"But nothing's lost," Budge insisted. "Suppose we lose this strike

— we'll still have our lives and our ideals. We can go somewhere else and start again where there are no squatters. South America wants settlers. They'll give us land. It's a republic there already. They've thrown off the yoke. They'll take us like brothers. . . .”

“The right kind of brothers for you,” Coyle said. “Dirty dagoes.”

But Larry's imagination leapt at an eleventh hour hope. South America. A new life thousands of miles away. Was it possible?

“Like the Owenites in America I told you of,” Budge was saying. “All men are mates there. Nobody owns the land. Greed and hatred are forgotten. Why shouldn't we do the same? Be patient a bit longer, mates, and if we lose this strike through the iniquity of the bosses, come to South America where such evil powers have been driven away.”

Coyle laughed. “Come to Jesus, you mean.” And seeing how Larry still hung on Budge's words demanded, “What d'we want, cadging land from dagoes when we already got land here that's ours by a right it only needs the guts to take. We ain't cowards to give up our swag to Cabell on the offchance of smoodging charity from strangers.”

“That's right,” Berry said reluctantly. “This is our country, win or lose.”

“To hell with South America,” the mob growled.

But Coyle could not get them any farther along the road. They sat down in the thin shade of the roadside and watched the dust slowly smoking towards them.

Coyle gave up ranting and joined Larry, who had ridden apart from the rest. He sat with his chin on his chest, chewing his nails. As Coyle came up and slapped the rump of his horse he started.

“Thinking of running off with Brother Budge to Paraguay?”

“Leave me alone.”

“You couldn't, you know.” He leant his vicious wedge of a face close to Larry's. “You've been here forty years and you've never cleared out, though I'll bet there wasn't a day you didn't think of it. What kept you? Because you're tied to your ma's apron strings? Ah no, it's your old man you're leg-roped to, and not with filial love, neither.”

The horses pricked their ears and faced up the road towards a jingle of trace chains. The dust was scarcely half a mile beyond the bend of the road now. Some of the men rose.

“What I reckon,” Goggs said, “if there's a lot of traps we oughtna do nothing.”

Nobody paid him any attention. He got off his horse and kicked it savagely, gratuitously in the belly.

“Oh, no,” Coyle went on in a low voice, hurriedly, “love don't tie you up but hatred does. When you get your knife in a man you can't think of nothing else eating, drinking, or sleeping. You might get as far away as Pyke's Crossing, but you couldn't get away from the thought that he was

still walking the earth and filling up on the best of everything. That'd stick in your throat and poison every breath you drew until — he didn't walk the earth no more. Ah, no, Larry,” he said, catching hold of Larry's arm as he tried to turn away, “I'm telling you something for your own good. If you clear out on us now you'd curse yourself for a yellow bastard to the end of your days for chucking away a chance to even up your own and your ma's score.”

“Who's chucking any chance away?”

“That's the way to talk.” Coyle patted him on the back. “Besides, see here. We've got four hundred men with a hundred rifles and revolvers, and soon there'll be a lot of dust. Who'd know where a bullet came from?”

“Ach,” Larry said impatiently, “nobody'll shoot him. If you was to put the muzzle up against his heart and pull the trigger you wouldn't hurt him. He's always won. He always will.”

At this moment the procession of coaches, carts, and buggies, escorted by four mounted troopers, James, and Custard, came round the bend. They were moving slowly. Cabell was saving the horses for a last dash past the shearers' camp. He was riding in front with Cash.

The men roared, “Here they are,” then ran stumbling, jostling each other down the road. A flight of cockatoos rose from the trees, like a handful of torn paper thrown into the air, circled, and fled screaming. High above the squeak of the axles, the shout of the men, the cracking of whips, Larry heard his father's voice threatening, “Back you dogs,” and two shots whistled overhead. He glanced at Coyle, grinned sheepishly, and fell to brooding again without any interest in the scampering, yelling mob of his comrades, soon lost in the dust.

Coyle shook him. “Wake up, Larry. Ain't you coming?”

He looked around. All the shearers were gone except Budge, sitting on the stump with his wispy head in his hands, and Goggs intently fumbling at his saddle. “What you think of that?” Goggs volunteered indignantly, “Me bloody surcingle's bloody well gone and bust on me.”

Larry watched him vaguely, then tore his arm from Coyle and walked his horse into the middle of the road. Coyle trotted after.

With a stampede of hoofs the coaches emerged from the dust four hundred yards away. Cabell was belting the horses of the leading coach with his whip, every now and then swinging the lash at the shearers on horseback who were trying to get at the horses to pull them in. The coaches swung crazily from side to side in the ruts. A man had got on to the footboard of one and was half-way through the window trying to reach the passengers inside to drag them out. A trooper was beating him on the back with the flat of his sword. Volleys of sticks and stones poured on the trooper. His cap was gone and his cheek was covered with blood, as though somebody had smashed a tomato over his eye.

Larry, in the middle of the road, dully watched the horses come with frightened, upflung heads. He saw his father, whip in one hand, revolver in the other, galloping straight at him, waving him out of the way. Holding his ground before that juggernaut approach, his confused wits were lighted by a spurt of complacent satisfaction in disobeying his father's urgent command. "Thinks he'll make me move. Well, he can go round *me* this time." His horse shied and tried to turn, backed a few steps, jibbing violently. He cursed it and buried his spurs. Shaking its head it began to trot forward, crabwise and pigrooting. As soon as he felt the horse moving under him he was revitalized with a kind of irresponsible abandon. He sank his spurs again and again, whipped his hat off and thrashed the horse's rump with it. The horse sprang into a gallop straight for the racing coaches. Thirty yards off he saw the black barrel of his father's revolver and the grimace on his face as he yelled, "Out of the way you son of a bitch" and raised his hand. Larry jabbed in the spurs again and shut his eyes, thinking no more, but conscious of a rush of warm, grateful blood, like a man who has taken a dangerous jump and found it not so hard. Riding blind, with the wind whipping his ear-drums as he counted "One! Two! Three!" waiting for the shot, he had a sensation of dreamlike flying. But Cabell had raised the whip, not the revolver, and brought it down screaming as Larry opened his eyes and thought, "If he doesn't shoot now I'll break his neck. He can't turn on that crock." The lash curled round his belly, ripping the shirt across his back, and flicked the horse's eyes. It threw up its blinded head and seemed to rear on air, came down heavily on stiff legs, stumbled, twisted in the dust, and rushed on again, too maddened by fear and pain to feel the pull on the left rein as Larry tried to turn it back towards his father. They passed, smashing boot against boot, flank against flank, each glimpsing the uncovered teeth of the other, a look of astonishment and outrage on Cabell's face, of stupid bewilderment on Larry's. "You'll have to do it all again," was his first chagrined thought as he saw the road clear for twenty yards ahead of him, then the leaders of the coach, with open, foaming jaws, and the driver on the box, cursing, leaning back on the reins, with terrified face, trying to pull them in. "What's the use? I couldn't touch him." Still spurring the torn ribs of his horse he closed his eyes again and flew on, opening them to a vision of horses pawing the air above him in the instant before he struck and fell in a grinding, shrieking cataclysm of overturned coach and fallen, kicking horses.

He wasn't even dazed. His horse went down and he fell sideways but his boot caught in the stirrup, and when the horse sprang up and pounded its way clear of the coach-horses, struggling in the tangle of their harness, with the coach and the coachmen and baggage on top, it dragged him clear and ten yards from the mêlée before his boot came off. For ten seconds he lay sprawled in the dust, gasping, before the men ran up, their

animus suspended a moment, to look expectantly at his blood-spattered face. He rose and shook himself.

They cheered. "Good old Larry."

"Reckless fool," Berry said, brushing him down.

The coachman crawled into the road and shook his fist. "Just ye wait till yer da catches ye."

"To hell with his da. We'll put a head on him."

But they went for their lives as soon as Cabell galloped up, pulling his horse on to its haunches, and laid about him with the whip. Cash was beside him. He grabbed hold of the hand in which Cabell gripped his revolver. In silence they struggled, till Cash wrenched the revolver away and threw it into the bush, but he continued to hold Cabell as he shouted to Larry, "Run, or he'll do you in."

In his father's contorted face Larry saw the uselessness of running away. He felt in his belt. The revolver Coyle had given him was gone. It lay in the dust near the overturned coach. He moved towards it looking back, but before he reached it his father broke free and rode at him, clubbing the heavy handle of his whip. Larry groped quickly for a stone and flung it as Cash threw all the weight of his big hack against the shoulder of Cabell's, forcing it round. Cabell fell half out of the saddle and dropped his whip and the stone hit Cash fair in the centre of the forehead. He slumped over the horse's neck and it galloped away with him, pigrooting with fright, towards the station. James went after it. At the same moment one of the troopers rode on Larry from behind and stretched him out with a blow across the head from the flat of his sword. He fell face down with his arms out.

"They've killed him," Berry shouted. The men rallied and ran forward, driving Cabell and the troopers with stones.

Cabell was unarmed, the troopers hopelessly outnumbered, but they managed to keep the strikers off until Custard got the carts and buggies which had escaped the collision on the move again. They withdrew them, pursued by the shearers on horseback while the mob dragged the scabs out of the wrecked coaches. There were twenty of these, all badly shaken and scared. Confronted by four hundred angry men they made no difficulties about returning to the camp and signing the union pledge, especially as they were offered free board and lodging and, from Paddy Doolan, "a pound a week for life" if they helped to win the strike.

Chapter Six: Larry Tries Again

LARRY came to with a bad headache, but he was hardly aware of it, for he awakened to the bleak prospect of a renewed fight with his father.

He was the hero of the camp. The shearers believed that he had ridden into the coach deliberately to stop it. The fuss they made irritated him: in his heart he damned himself for a coward. He could not look Coyle in the eye, but if Coyle had reproached him Larry would have knocked him down.

"You better not hang round," Coyle merely said. "Better get your horse and mizzle over the border before the Johns come down."

"Who said I'd run away."

"You might as well. Your old man's won."

The shearers pooh-poohed. They were very pleased with themselves. "We taught him a thing or two," Goggs said. "He knows the kind of men he's up against now."

"A fat lot you've all got to crow about," Coyle said contemptuously, "after having the tripe scared out of you by fifteen traps. You think because you've roped in a few scabs you've won the strike. What about the ones that got past? They'll start shearing the day after to-morrow."

"We'll talk to them in the morning," Berry said. "We'll go up first thing."

"They're working men like ourselves. They'll understand," Budge said.

"Talk!" Coyle sneered. "You won't get five yards past the gate. By to-morrow the Johns will be rested and drawn up on the slope ready to shoot the first man over the fence."

"Jesus, d'you reckon?" Goggs said.

Coyle looked at Larry. "Of course, if we hit quick and hard to-night, while they're busy licking the blood off and don't expect us, we might make up for mistakes. If we did something to put the fear of God in every squatter — but what's the use of talking."

"What's in your mind?" Larry said, eyeing him darkly.

"First we ought to raid the shed and get those scabs. Then we ought to burn the shed to stop him shearing. That for a start."

"That's arson. That's criminal," Berry said quickly.

"You're right, Berry," Goggs said. "It's trespassing too."

The rest assented. "We done enough to-day."

"And you, Larry? You think you done enough too?"

Larry twisted his beard till the flesh came up in white ulcers on his chin. "I'll go with you."

"You're mad," Berry said. "You're just talking."

"Who said so?" Larry fired. "I'll burn his bloody shed for him."

They shook their heads. "The less you tempt the devil in your father the better," Berry said. "He came near finishing you off to-day."

"Anybody'd think he wasn't a man, an old man, and half-blind at that," Larry shouted. "What're you scared of?"

They shifted and muttered ashamedly.

"Sure, he's only mortal man," Doolan said. "Didn't ye see that other fellow holding him with one hand like a babe?"

"Sure. That's right. We had him beat there." They began to cheer up and taste the excitement of the fight again.

Coyle watched till they were going well, then stood up. "Come on, Larry. We'll go alone. They're all talk."

Larry rose slowly and followed him.

"Wait a minute," Berry said. "If you're going we'll come with you."

The men shifted again. "Aye, we'll come."

Berry and Wagner and two or three others joined them. Budge groaned and joined them too. Paddy Doolan crept out of the firelight and stood close behind Larry looking round nervously at the darkness. Then everybody stood up, and Goggs said he'd go too, but shouldn't somebody watch the prisoners and if they insisted he'd risk having his throat cut and stay. But he changed his mind when Coyle began to organize a raiding party and called for volunteers to watch in the garden for alarms at the homestead, with nothing more dangerous to do than whistle three times when they heard a stir and run for their lives. He was assigned for the job with Paddy Doolan, and from the rest Coyle chose himself, Larry, Wagner, Berry and Budge ("Just so you won't feel tempted to whiddle after," he told Budge), to creep into the shearing-shed, saturate the walls with tar and kerosene, and set fire to it before rushing the hut where the scabs were. They were to bail the scabs up and signal for thirty men who had surrounded the hut to close in and hustle them back to camp. If the scabs resisted they were to take one man and make a quick example of him.

"How?" Budge wanted to know.

"Wait and see," Coyle said, enjoying with his bitter smile Budge's helpless misery.

It was close on eleven o'clock by the time they were ready to start. The night was starless and stifling. Sheet lightning illuminated the fat clouds but did not penetrate the solid blackness of the earth. The lights in the homestead shone through a halo.

The raiders lay along the fence in the dry grass waiting for Cabell and the policemen to turn in. They were tramping about the veranda making

up beds. Half an hour crawled by while Larry chewed the end of his beard and Budge listened to the thunder in the hills, "marching nearer with the rain," he told himself hopefully. The only light left was in Cabell's room. They heard him come out on to the veranda and knew that he was looking down at the camp where the fires were dying peacefully. Then he returned to his room, the light went out, and the homestead slept.

A faint stir in the air started the trees whispering and showered sparks from Berry's pipe. Thin threads of fire zigzagged across the grass. Berry smothered them hastily.

Coyle nudged Larry. "Time to go."

They climbed the fence and followed the dark shape of Larry, who went ahead slowly, whistling now and then to call in the dogs which came sniffing at a familiar smell and wagged their tails as soon as they recognized him. Here, at the foot of the slope where the homestead lot ended, Goggs and Doolan hid themselves. Two hundred yards farther on, a hundred yards from the shed and the hut, the men who were to wait for the signal lay down in the grass and the others went on, stepping high lest the swish of grass on their boots disturb anybody on guard in the hut. The wind came in a sudden, violent gust, beating the grass flat, hissing in the trees, and blinding them with dust, and under cover of the noise they reached the shed and circled it to make sure that no one was watching.

At the door they stopped and Larry went ahead to find the tar and kerosene stored in the shed for disinfecting wounds in the sheep.

Budge caught the back of his shirt. "Don't do it, Larry. It's only yourself you'll injure. It's only more strife and hatred you'll create."

Larry turned quickly and hit him across the mouth, then dived into the viscous, greasy darkness of the shed. But alone under the echoing roof, with rats scampering about his feet and boards creaking at every movement, he hesitated with his back to the wall, convinced that he saw the huddle of his father's form behind the press. His legs edged him back to the door, but he turned before he reached it and with the same sense of joyous abandon he had felt that afternoon when riding at the muzzle of his father's revolver walked across to the press thinking that every step might be his last. There was no one behind the press, of course, only a heap of rotting skins.

Ashamed of himself he went back to the locker quickly and set to bursting open the door. Muttering to himself, "I'll burn the bastard's shed for him," he tore his nails on the staple as he wrenched at it with a vindictive pleasure even in his pain. But a clap of thunder, breaking directly overhead, made him spin on his heel, and several seconds passed before he realized that he was holding his revolver. Coyle's voice urgently whispering, "Larry! Larry!" and in the next flash of lightning a glimpse of his companions at the door, brought back his breath. "Get a

move on," Coyle said, "it's going to rain."

At the next attempt he broke the lock and in a few minutes was rolling the drums of tar out of the locker. Five minutes later they hustled each other through the door again. The flames climbed over the skins with a low zooming and reflected themselves on the grease-polished floor. Coyle stayed, leaning in at the door to see them lick the wall and catch the oozing stalagmites of tar. Bending low against the wind the five of them ran to the hut.

They had brought neck-cloths to cover the lower part of their faces, and this done hastily, they crept to the door, Coyle first, then Larry, then Wagner, with revolvers ready, and at the rear Berry and Budge.

The hut was in darkness. The sound of fifty weary men snoring, tossing, moaning in a heavy sleep told them they were not expected. They entered. Coyle pushed Larry against the window and Wagner towards the door, and himself groped across the table for the slush lamp. A bottle rolled and smashed on the form. Loud snoring in the bunk near the window ceased and blankets rustled. A flash of lightning, illuminating a thousand chinks in wall and roof, shone on startled eyes and a hand poising a piece of bright metal.

"Drop it," Coyle whispered.

Before he finished, as the thunder fell, they heard, under its obliterating roll, the thin piping of a police whistle. Larry grabbed and caught a handful of hair, smothering a second blast. In the next flare of lightning he saw he had a man by the beard and when Coyle got the lamp alight they found that it was Custard. He jerked his beard from Larry's damp fingers and darted a hand towards the whistle which had fallen between them, but a jab from Larry's knee laid him groggily on the bunk and Coyle put the whistle in his pocket.

Immediately the room was full of men, grouped around the table in a half-moon of surprised faces and pasty-white legs protruding from shirts.

"Get back." Coyle flourished his gun and they pushed away from the table.

Wagner began to laugh and pointed to a pair of spindle shanks in the front row. The owner huddled up and pulled his shirt-tails down. "Ere, what's the joke?"

"Just thinking what'll you do holding one of Rusty's prize stud rams with them pair of loins. It'll run clear off with you."

"Come off it," Coyle said. "We ain't here merrymaking, men, as you can guess. We're a deputation from the camp down there. We're sent to take you back with us. The hut's surrounded. If you come quiet nobody'll hurt you."

"Not in the least," Budge put in. "We're all brothers, we must stand together."

"That's all right. If you don't come quiet you'll carry a mark to

remember us affectionately by a long time.” He motioned to Larry. “Call the boys.”

Larry leaned out the window and whistled and received a faint whistle in reply.

“There. Are you coming — like loving brothers?” The handkerchief on his face moved and Larry knew that he was smiling.

The men commenced to pull their trousers on and gather their swags together, looking at each other and helplessly at Custard, who stood with his back to the bunk rubbing his jaw. “Stay where th’art,” he growled. “They can’t touch thee. It’s nowt but a bluff.”

To answer him the wind puffed in a haze of black smoke and the stench of burning tar. Between the almost constant thunder the low roar and crackle of the flames was becoming louder. He looked out and saw the shed on fire, stopped rubbing his jaw, and grinned maliciously at Coyle. “Tha’ll get ten years for this. Just wait till boss and Johns see they flames.”

Coyle weighed his revolver. “We’re waiting.”

“No, no,” Budge said, beating his hands together. “Hadn’t we better go before worse befalls?”

Coyle strolled over to the window. Tongues of flame, like tattered flags, fluttered from the cracks in the wall of the shed. Here and there across the paddock to leeward sparks were starting the tinder-dry grass. He felt Larry shivering beside him. “Buck up,” he said. “You don’t want to have to try a third time, do you?”

“Leave me alone.”

An impatient whistle came from the dark windward side of the shed. They saw the dim shapes of men closing in. Coyle whistled back and returned to the table. “All right, men. It’s time to go. Out the door and straight for the trees behind the shed and the one who tries any tricks gets a pill.” He pushed the nearest man towards the door and the others like sheep herded after.

But Custard pushed Coyle aside and held up his hand. “Stand still,” he shouted. “It’s a gammon. What’s five to fifty? Let they carry thee aht.”

“A gammon is it?” Coyle pushed his gun into Custard’s ribs. “Does that feel like a gammon?”

Budge pulled the revolver away. “Don’t do it. It’s not needed. They’re going quietly. Aren’t you, mates? Nobody will hurt you. We don’t come with hatred. We go down on our knees. Come and fight with us for our common cause in the brotherhood of man.” In his excitement he let the neck-cloth slip from his face, uncovering the tattered beard and childish blue eyes. He looked so absurdly harmless now and his nervousness, exposed by his twitching lips and trembling hands, was so plain that the scabs began to think it might be a gammon after all. They drew back from the door and collected behind Custard.

The man with the spindle shanks shook his fist. "Ere, who're you callin' brother? We ain't your brothers. You better get out of 'ere afore we chucks you out."

"That's the ticket. Chuck 'em out."

Coyle turned his gun. "Through the door, you swabs."

No one moved.

"They won't," Custard said. "Tha'd best go thyself before boss wakes up."

"They won't, eh?"

"Na."

"Right, you crawler," Coyle said. "We'll learn you a lesson." As he spoke he swung his boot hard into Custard's groin. The man doubled with a hoot of pain and Coyle struck him down unconscious with the butt of his gun.

"Please," Budge cried, addressing Coyle and the scabs by turn. "Please go quietly, brothers. Please, Coyle, don't. In the name of humanity . . ."

Coyle had picked up the bottle which had fallen from the table. There was a jagged saw edge on it where the neck had broken off. "Watch. Watch closely, scabs, and see how you are branded for life," and kneeling beside Custard he ripped the sharp edge of glass down Custard's back, tearing the shirt and four instantly red weals in the flesh, from the nape of his neck to his belt. "That's our gammon for you." He flung the bottle under the table and stood up.

"Ere! 'Ere!" the man with the spindle shanks said disapprovingly, then his jaw dropped and his tongue hung out.

Berry was the first to find his voice. "That's a dirty trick to put on us, you murdering rascal," he roared. "D'you want to get us all hanged?"

Coyle pushed his hat on to the back of his head, and Berry saw his eyes with the mad will-o'-the-wisp light in them as Larry had seen them the night before. He turned to Budge and Wagner. "Come on. Let us get out before it's too late. It's not what we came for."

Only Larry seemed unmoved by what had happened. He was half-turned from them, listening. "Hist. I heard a whistle."

He heard it again, clearly, then a shot, then a man shouting, then the sound of many feet running. He looked out and saw the men who had surrounded the hut fleeing past the shed. When he glanced round again Berry and Budge and Wagner were gone too.

He went through the window head first, but before he was around the shed, which sowed hot sparks upon his face as he ran, Coyle caught and held him. "Look."

Larry looked back and there was his father, running towards them in his night-shirt.

Coyle's fingers closed on Larry's wrist. They were stone cold. "If you don't shoot now you might as well shoot me and yourself."

Larry tried to get free and they struggled. He battered Coyle's head and face with his free fist, but Coyle held him, watching over his shoulder till Cabell was hardly twenty feet away. "Now. Shoot him or he'll shoot you in the back," and tried to spring from between them, but Larry caught him round the waist and lifted him from the ground and threw him straight at his father's feet. Cabell fell, and looking back as he ran Larry saw them wrestling.

Chapter Seven: On the Run

THE men were crowded round the dead camp-fire when Larry came in.

"Where's Coyle?" they demanded.

"I don't know."

"Which way did he go?"

"I don't know, I tell you."

"All right. Keep your shirt on. Only they've got Goggs."

They sent out a party to reconnoitre for Coyle along the fence but there was no sign of him. Coyle was gone too.

Larry sneaked off and rolled himself in his blankets. For a long time he heard the men arguing whether they ought to go up and rescue Goggs and Coyle, but there was no one to lead them and anyway they'd had enough for one day. The burning shed, the fire in the grass, the noise of the men fighting it and of frightened animals, and the lurid glare of clouds and the window-panes of the homestead scared them for what they had done. "There'll be hell to pay for this," said those who had not helped to spread the tar or light the blaze. At last the rain came, just as it seemed the fire must sweep through the dry valley and consume every stick and living thing. The storm lasted long enough to save all except a square mile of grass and the shed, which burned merrily to the stumps, then rumbled off to the south. The stars came out, and the shearers went miserably to bed on the wet ground and uneasy thoughts of the day to come.

Larry's head ached and the whip-burn across his back was like a tight, hot wire cutting him in two. He was feverish. He hoped that Coyle was dead, but he would doze off and dream that Coyle came back and in front of everybody accused him. "This man was my mate and he did the dirty on me . . ." In the bushman's simple values the scab, the betrayer of mateship, was the only criminal. Scabs, and Chows, and kanakas, they were the same blood. He dozed again and dreamt that he had crept up to the homestead and rescued Coyle, awoke and lay thinking how it could be done, thinking of his father and the police. "Perhaps he's dead, anyway."

It was the black, chilly hour before dawn. Berry came and shook him. "You're wanted."

He had to repeat it several times before Larry understood.

"Your mother. She's waiting on the road."

The air, still again, was heavy with the smell of burning. "I don't want to see her. Tell her to go away."

Berry would take no such message, and Larry had to go.

She was waiting for him near the gate, very small and bowed in the tight wrapping of her shawl. As he came up she took the shawl from her face and in the starlight he saw the changed expression which Cabell had noticed, as though her face had been broken in pieces and put together with a different look.

It was nearly four months since she had last spoken to him and all that had happened since was between them. Her hopes of seeing him a wealthy and respected man were ended now and with them everything she lived for. She could not be tender with him: he had sacrificed her to a cause for which she had, because of those hopes, no sympathy. Looking at him now, at his face, the real, surly, Surface face, she thought, for all its fine features — black and bad and obstinate — she almost hated him, as the embodiment of that black, bad, and obstinately spiteful spirit which in her father, her cousin, her brother, and herself had caused her unhappiness. And he almost hated her too, as she shook her head at him, for he knew what was in her mind. He hated her in self-defence against a feeling of remorse and because he hated himself and everybody else.

"What d'you want?"

"You've made a pretty mess of things," she began.

"Shut up. If you've come to rouse I'm going back."

She hissed a breath back through her lips. "Yes, go back to your trash. It's where you belong. And more fool me for ever thinking different."

"Aw, go to hell, will you?" He turned and fled.

At the edge of the camp she caught up with him. "Wait. You can't stay here. I came to tell you that they caught Goggs and Coyle last night. Your *mates*."

"Well?" he said anxiously.

"What d'you suppose? Goggs split on you."

"I don't care."

"You don't care? Are you mad? Do you think it's nothing to go to jail for ten years." She breathed resentfully. "Thank God I won't be here to see you when you come out."

"Who says I'll go in. Just let him try . . ." But the threats stuck in his throat. He was ashamed to make them.

"Oh, don't deceive yourself. You've done enough to be sent up for twenty years, enough to be hanged in the old days. And you needn't build any fine hopes on his mercy. If he'd had a gun last night he'd've shot you."

"He didn't have no gun?"

"No, lucky for you. Why, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," Larry said.

Up at the homestead a rooster crowed. The horses in the horselines shook themselves. A wash of opal light was beginning to separate earth and sky in the east.

"I'll have to go now," Emma said. "Here, take this." She put a small package in his hands. "There's fifty sovereigns. They'll help you on your way till you find work."

He would have been surprised to know that those sovereigns came from his father's pocket barely an hour ago. True, it was no act of kindness on Cabell's part. He was afraid of Emma. ("You let the police lay hands on Larry and I'll tell what became of M'Govern.") But he was afraid of Larry too. He remembered the look on Larry's face as they were riding at each other the day before. Now he had destroyed four thousand pounds' worth of Cabell's property and mutilated Custard in a diabolical way. He had no doubt that Larry had done this, as some kind of a sign, a threat to himself. The devil was in the fellow and down there he had four hundred men behind him. What couldn't he do before the police had time to get reinforcements? The same thought worried Emma. If Larry killed his father how could she save him? Or Cabell might kill Larry in self-defence. So they agreed: she must get Larry out of the valley.

Larry refused. He would not leave his mates. He pushed the money into her shawl.

"You're daft. In the morning the police will come down and arrest you — and Berry and Budge and all the others. Don't fool yourself, they know everything."

"I won't go. I can't go."

Men had been hovering around them for some time. They came up. Berry and Budge were there. "Is something wrong?" Berry asked. "I heard you say my name. Nobody's gone and . . ."

"Goggs split on you, and the police are coming at sun-up."

Berry glanced at the eastern sky. It had lifted itself from the ragged hills and the birds were waking. "It's what I more than half-expected from a bad night's work," he said.

"No use talking pious now," Emma said. "That won't serve in the dock. You'd better get on your way and take Larry with you."

"Much obliged to you, missus. Much obliged. If you'll wait till I roll my swag up, Larry . . ."

"I'm not going."

"Not going?"

Larry gestured angrily, but when he spoke it was in rather a forlorn voice, "Where would I go?"

"You're still a young man," Berry said. "If you're driven out of this you could make a place of your own. You can come to my place. There's room for a mate."

Larry almost groaned, looking at the eager, sympathetic faces of the

men and wondering what they would say when they knew. They were all talking at once, trying to persuade Larry to clear out. "You've done enough for the cause, Larry."

"Aye, nobody done more."

"You'd best come to South America with me," Budge said. "It's a losing fight here. Now I know that there's too much bitterness between men for Jerusalem ever to be built on this soil. The place began with cruelty and hatred and time has only increased it. Your father'd be a kinder man if he'd never had convicts to flog, and we'd never have done the devilish things we did last night if we hadn't had the fear and poison of the evil old days in our blood. Will you come?"

"No."

They could see each other's faces clearly now. Emma saw that no words would move him. She drew the shawl over her head and turned impatiently away. But at the roadside she looked back and said, "Good-bye, Larry."

He watched her clump heavily over the bridge and up the slope in her outsized, ugly boots, and wished that he had answered her.

When Berry and Budge and Wagner and most of the others who had taken part in the raid were gone, the spirit of the camp began to go to pieces. The strike was as good as over and all hopes of the great bushmen's revolution and the Utopia of underdogs which men had talked about since the First Fleet landed its cargo of unhappy outcasts at Botany Bay a hundred years before. The scabs and the quieter men drifted away from the camp, shearing began, the rains came, and only the little group of homeless bushmen remained to defy the police. Then the rains washed their camp away, more police and soldiers arrived, and they scattered over the country-side in bands, burning fences and gates and grass and beating up stray police and infantrymen and scabs.

Larry went with one of these bands and did great damage to his father's property, but the soldiers drove them out of the valley at last, and one by one his mates left him till he found himself alone in Pyke's Crossing one night with a tired horse and a heart sick of its own futile reproaches. He blamed himself for the misery of the shearers he met every day tramping home without work or money. If he had not been a coward, how different the end of the strike might have been. He had Coyle's word for it.

Larry would have derived no comfort from reflecting that there were thousands of other men in the strike, which had spread over an area bigger than Europe, and that they had all caved in before the power of squatters and police and soldiers when the time came. His mind was incapable of seeing the struggle as anything but a struggle between himself and his father, the apotheosis of all the evil which the word squatter meant to the bushman, between the contemptuous, tyrannical "aristocratic mug" in his father and that passionate feeling of injury and

injustice nurtured by Gursey and Coyle, his dealings with his brothers, and his pity for his mother. When it came to the point he had been afraid of his father and had let his mates down. His personal integrity was deeply outraged, his pride was gone, and he thought everybody looked sideways at him.

He went and got drunk. When he sobered up a month later he heard that Coyle had gone to jail for three years. He got drunk again till his credit ran out, then rode away westwards to the Never-Never.

Part V: Love and Integrity

Chapter One: Aurelia's Daughter

AND the irony of it was, Cabell gained on the strike. His wool was not worth much by the time the scabs got it off and he had to build new fences and a new shed, but the loss the McFarlanes suffered along with the other squatters gave him the chance, a few months later, to foreclose on their ninety thousand acres of good land and thirty-five thousand sheep. He was only sorry that old McFarlane was not alive to see him march into the homestead and take possession, but then there might have been no marching in, for that dour shell-back would not have yielded to the excitement of the times and overborrowed to build fancy washpools and an elegant house and send the children home to Edinburgh for their education.

While this affair was maturing, Ludmilla returned to Ningpo to get ready for Julia and her mother, whose visit the strike had delayed, and Cabell and Ludmilla began sparring over the details of the arrangement they had made at the Governor's ball. Larsen resigned from the chairmanship of the mine, and Cabell became chairman *pro tem.* till the annual meeting of shareholders could put him into the chair in the regular way. The wedding they fixed for a week before the meeting.

Ludmilla's plan was to send the couple to England for their honeymoon, she and Cabell to share expenses, and to settle on them the Ningpo property and all her shares in Waterfall, reserving only a small income for herself and Aurelia. Cabell was to have control of this property till they agreed that James was competent to look after it. On the same terms he was to settle a hundred thousand pounds' worth of the land he had bought in Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne.

Cabell was very satisfied when the parleys were finished, considering that he still possessed the land he had given away as well as all that Ludmilla possessed — or would when she left for the Old Country and gave him a power-of-attorney over her goods. The idea that James would ever interfere in the control of this property he did not consider for a moment. James was “a prig and a fool and a milksop”; he would go to England and stay there like most other rich colonials who went abroad. Cabell wrote off a debt of fifty thousand pounds which Ludmilla had lent to help him out.

Now he controlled half the best land in the valley and a rich goldmine. His dreams of money and power took a fresh lease of life. The panic of

selling in Brisbane and down south had died away. Shares were rising, speculators nibbled at the real estate market, the defeat of the shearers cheered investors, bankers became more genial, and people decided that the boom was as solid as ever. He began to play the market again, but cautiously this time. Experience had taught him.

Aurelia arrived with her daughter at last and Cabell waited impatiently for a call to present himself and James, but at the end of three days he lost patience and carried James off to meet his bride. James had dressed himself carefully, and Cabell was pleased with him. "There were Cabells a couple of generations before this Ningpo mob was thought of," he growled as they rode up the drive to the homestead, a trifle peeved that he had to show how eager he was to have the marriage settled.

Ludmilla came out on to the steps to receive them. "We're still in a mess unpacking," she said, not very warmly.

"We won't stay if you're busy. We were just passing."

"No-o," Ludmilla said. "Come in and I'll get you some tea." She frowned. "But Aurelia's indisposed, you see. You'll have to excuse her."

She left them sitting on the veranda for a long time, so long that they became uneasy, feeling an atmosphere, nervous and unwelcoming, in the house. Suddenly a querulous voice spoke within, and they heard Ludmilla answer soothingly. A woman laughed. A door banged. Ludmilla's footsteps returned along the passage.

Cabell cleared his throat and commenced to talk about the bad shearing done on some sheep that were grazing around the house.

Ludmilla appeared. She too seemed uneasy. She gave James a severe look before she said, "Julia will be here in a moment. Of course, we weren't expecting you."

She sat down at the wicker tea-table and the maid brought the tea. Cabell repeated what he had said about the sheep, and while they were talking about the shearers and the recent troubles the fly-proof door opened again and Julia stepped on to the veranda.

Cabell and James rose and Ludmilla, blushing and awkward all at once, introduced them and fiddled with a bow at the neck of her dress, which looked like a sugar-bag beside her niece's beautiful tea-gown.

Julia bowed in an off-hand way, a decidedly off-hand way, as though they were old acquaintances or nobody in particular, like servants, and took a seat near the railings.

"A deuced boneshaking torture that coach ride from the Crossing," Cabell muttered. "I don't wonder your mother's done up."

"Oh, that's nothing," Julia laughed. It sounded a shockingly hard laugh.

Ludmilla became interested in the inside of her cup, as though she had lost her grip on the situation for a moment, and Cabell, rebuffed, threw back his head, and with the shameless unreticence of the old looked Julia up and down.

Serenely unconcerned she turned away to the canary tweet-tweeting in its cage on the veranda post.

She was tall, "a bit underfleshed like her mother," he thought, but handsome in a glassy way. Her lips were thin and wellshaped and beautifully balanced by her thin, straight nose, thin sloping eyebrows, and fine, long, grey eyes. "A thoroughbred," Cabell decided, and turned to look at James, who sat on the edge of his chair with his hardhitter between his knees, his toes turned in, and a gawky shyness on his face. "What's the matter with the fool?" Cabell wondered, annoyed to have his son cutting such a wretched figure beside Julia's calm detachment.

James himself could not have said what was wrong, but one look at Julia had made him wish himself a thousand miles away. As Ludmilla introduced them Julia had passed him a quick glance in which, it seemed to James, she had said quite plainly, "So you're the 'fine stamp of a lad' I've been brought here to marry!" commenting upon him with the faintest twitch of a smile at the corner of her lips.

By a stroke of intuition he had penetrated Julia's thoughts accurately. In her eagerness to paint Julia's future in the brightest colours Ludmilla had rather overstressed the manly charms and virtues of James. Not that Julia was disillusioned now. She could have preserved few illusions with a mother like Aurelia. When Ludmilla had said, routed like James by her air of a grand lady, "Oh, I hope you won't be disappointed," Julia had replied, raising her eyebrows with surprise, as though such a considerate thought was unexpected, "The fatted calf is not disappointed if you kill it with a woodchopper instead of a jewelled scimitar, Auntie dear."

"Oh, but no," Ludmilla had protested. "If you don't like him you don't have to marry him. Choose for yourself."

"Beggars can't be choosers," Julia replied uncompromisingly, while belittling her bitterness with that ambiguous little smile. "Only don't expect me to lose my head over this paragon on sight, will you, Auntie?" And with a toss of her head, which had learnt to hold itself so proudly under a heavier burden than Ludmilla proposed to lay upon it, she discouraged her aunt from prying any further in search of whatever private wishes or whims she might guard under her astringent, equable and always slightly sarcastic surface. Before that dignity and sarcasm Ludmilla quailed whenever she thought of bringing the subject up again so as to assure Julia that she did not want to *force* her into an unsuitable marriage. As though Julia could be forced into anything! As though anything she did could be unsuitable! That was to be thoroughly understood between them. To suggest otherwise would, Ludmilla felt, be a terrible breach of good taste.

So with a little trick of turning everything into a jest and, when pressed too hard, of blanking her eyes and mind and stupidly misconstruing, which forced poor Ludmilla into the most awkward explanations, Julia

kept her aunt, as she kept everybody, at a distance. After three days of this and Julia's elegance, fresh from the English dressmaker and the English finishing school, Ludmilla was beginning to feel dowdy and inferior and even, forgetting what good intentions she had in view, as though her plans were a sharp piece of business at Julia's expense. She would have changed them if she could have done so without explaining that she was ashamed of herself and if she had not already gone too far with Cabell. But on one point she was decided: however much Cabell and James had to suffer for it Julia should not feel at any disadvantage as Aurelia's daughter, because what hurt Julia's feelings, Ludmilla had discovered, came back upon her with interest.

That was the reason why she had sent no word to the Reach and had received them so coldly, for Aurelia's indisposition was only an amiable state of boozy befuddlement. Impossible to let them see Aurelia, equally impossible to take Aurelia's bottle away or shut her up in her room till she was sober. Julia's austerity and innocent aplomb admitted not the slightest doubt of any but the most ladylike habits in her mother. When she said, in her casual, bantering way, "Oh, coaches always make Mamma dizzy, you know," Ludmilla had to agree. She gushed sympathy over her sister while Julia watched them with amusement, perversely pricking her own and Ludmilla's pretence now and then with equivocal remarks about the "peculiar odour" in the room, fastidiously wrinkling her nose while Ludmilla sniffed and denied that there was any smell, and Aurelia thickened the air with the breath of whisky. Very soon Ludmilla was hiding empty bottles so that Julia should not be cruelly disillusioned, but so expert was Julia at this little game that Ludmilla could never be sure whether Julia was taken in or was laughing at her, and by turns felt guilty and foolish.

So while Cabell noisily sucked his tea up, and Julia fed a piece of sugar to the canary, and James's cup stood untouched on the table, Ludmilla fidgeted with the lid of the teapot, kept one ear cocked for sounds within the house, and wished that Cabell would come to the end of his long-winded story about the days when his wagon cut the first track from Pyke's Crossing and would take himself off.

He finished at last, put his cup down, and looked at the sun. "Time we were making tracks." He stretched his legs and rose.

But it was too late. Shuffling footsteps in the passage preceeded an explosive opening of the door and Aurelia catapulted on to the veranda, corkscrewed towards them, missed a step, and in the hands of the good angel which looks after drunks settled more or less gracefully into a chair.

James and Ludmilla jumped up, but Julia seemed to see nothing remarkable in the way her mother appeared on the scene, merely glanced round and went on feeding the canary.

“Aurelia!” Ludmilla said crossly, but at once squeezed out a smile and asked, “Do you feel better then, dear?”

“No, I feel worse,” Aurelia said. “What do you expect when you keep me cooped up in this place while you creep off and entertain company.” Her voice drooped and tears filled her eyes, magnifying the raw-red rims and the mesh of bloodshot veins. “I’m very sick, you know,” she informed Cabell. “Very poorly. Ever since my poor husband died.”

Cabell looked the amazement he felt. Was this Aurelia, the slight, silent girl whose hidden glances had been her only tragic speech? Even twenty years seemed hardly enough to account for this fat, this sodden, debauched face, with the jowls that hung down like drops of wax on the end of a candle. Slumped in her chair she looked like something that had been floating about in the sea for some time — waterlogged. Moisture oozed from her, in tears, in sweat from the wrinkled bags of fat round her neck and from the backs of her fat hands.

Cabell mumbled an apology for disturbing her, Ludmilla struggled with her tongue, trying to cough out words like a cat trying to be sick, James's eyes rolled from face to face, Julia, coaxing the canary to sing with pursed up lips, detached herself from them, as though she was a tactful visitor who wished to spare their feelings.

A loud, guttural, indecent hiccup broke the silence. Aurelia patted her mouth and began to complain again. “Aren't you going to introduce your friends? Or are you trying to disown me like this — oh, ungrateful girl. I hope you haven't got any children,” she said to Cabell. “I don't know what they're coming to. We were brought up to honour our parents, but *she* only sneers. No sympathy for her poor mother. Would you believe it?”

“But Aurelia, you remember Mr Cabell.”

“Mr Cabell?” Aurelia blinked. “Of course.” She lowered her eyes to his legs, stiffly astride in his usual stance of a horseman balancing himself on the unstable earth, and an absurdly depraved look, which turned out the damp, red inside of her lips, crossed her face. “Oh, my! Mr Cabell, fancy meeting you again. You were such a naughty man. What excuses you used to make up to come here, until Father chased you away with a whip. And such looks you gave me. Oh, I knew. I knew,” she giggled.

“Aurelia! Don't be so foolish.”

Aurelia oozed gently again. “There she goes. She won't let me open my mouth — the harsh, cruel, uncharitable . . .” Her voice drivelled away into snuffling, incoherent reproaches.

James's eye turned irresistibly to Julia, still playing happily with the canary, and he blushed to the ears for shame, not shame of Julia but of himself, such as one feels when the juggler makes a mess of his trick in a crowded theatre. He felt he had no right to be there, was guilty of a sneaking insult to Julia for which she would never forgive him.

How he got off the veranda and on to his horse he could never remember, except that in the process he bumped against the table and upset his cup of tea on to Ludmilla's lap.

"It's nothing. It's nothing," she screamed when he went down on his knees to wipe the tea off her skirt. "Go along. Your father's waiting for you." And as he persisted she kicked him on the shin.

Next day Cabell received a note from Ludmilla:

I suppose you think you stole some kind of a march on me yesterday, coming when you weren't expected and Aurelia was *drunk* (She had underlined the word so violently that the pen had torn the paper.) But if that's how you feel we had better call the bargain off. Anyway, James is not going to marry Aurelia. I shall take her off Home with me when I go, and they need never see her again. The poor thing is sick. That's how her misfortune came on her. If you wish it we'll call next Wednesday for dinner. But your wife must be there, so that Julia can see for herself that James has no room to laugh up his sleeve. I absolutely *insist* on this. Otherwise I shall cancel everything.

They went to the Reach on Wednesday, without Aurelia, and Emma sat down with them to the agonizing meal. Agonizing to Ludmilla because she was torn between wondering what, behind her indifference, Julia thought of Emma's sad, wizened face, and a disappointment that Emma was not worse, made no disgusting or absurd show of herself to balance the scene with Aurelia. Agonizing to James because he was ashamed of his mother and felt that Julia knew he was ashamed and was laughing at him for it, so that he felt ashamed of his shame. Agonizing to Cabell because he could see Ludmilla was angry and feared for his schemes. Agonizing to Harriet because of Julia's cool, unharassed beauty, set off in a simple white muslin frock and big sun-bonnet, which must, she thought, reflect a pure and noble mind that would be horrified to know what sort of a girl Harriet was. Agonizing to Emma because she saw in Julia the woman she had hoped that Larry, *her* Larry, would marry. And agonizing finally to Julia, though she showed no sign of it, because she had to choose between letting them shovel her on to a man who would marry her only to please his father, apparently, and continuing to walk the earth for an indefinite time to come with a drunk and flirtatious old woman tacked on.

So it was a joyless meal, heavy with unspoken thoughts.

On the way home Julia asked, "When is it scheduled for the young man to pop the question, Auntie? I'm suffocating with excitement."

"Oh, it's not like that," Ludmilla disclaimed quickly. "If you don't like him you only have to say so. Perhaps when you get to know each other . . ."

"We know the worst about each other. That's something."

The ice was broken. There were picnics, a visit to the mine, a cattle

muster . . . Julia was mildly interested, thawed a little.

James set his jaw, did his duty, proposed, and was accepted. He told himself that he was very pleased to be doing his duty, making up for the unhappiness Harriet had caused his father, but comparisons between Julia, hard, sarcastic, detached, and Jennie, so pliant, so loving, so tender, were not always to be suppressed and they made duty very hard. The harder it was the more virtuous James felt, the more superior to his errant sister, and the more confident of his power to stifle sooner or later the devils which danced in his heart.

He was married at the end of the winter and the happy couple left at once for England.

Chapter Two: Poor Sick Little Harriet

CABELL permitted himself to feel satisfied. James was married, Ludmilla was gone, he was chairman of the mine, the McFarlanes were getting ready to leave the valley, his ventures on the market were prosperous, Emma his old enemy had given up fighting, Larry had disappeared into the west whence men did not generally return, and Harriet, his dear little Harriet, had changed into the gentle, loving, dependent daughter he had always wanted her to be.

Poor Harriet. She had swallowed a great deal of port wine and iron, but it did not seem to set her up as the doctor promised. Then under Miss Montaulk's treatment she had swallowed a great deal of cod-liver oil with no better results. She continued pale and ready to weep at the first hard word. Compared with the rapt vivid creature she had been in Brisbane she looked as bleak as the charred remains of last night's splendid fire. She sat about the house, round-shouldered and listless, staring sightlessly at the floor for hours on end. Not boredom oppressed her now, as once it had done, but an inexhaustible flow of fresh thoughts, for no matter how long she dwelt on it the memory of her fiasco in Brisbane, of Doug Peppiott's horror and anger and abuse, of James's high-minded indignation never lost its edge. She must go over it again and again, from the first time she met Doug till she ran across the ballroom with everybody gaping and, when she was gone, whispering about the depraved things she had done.

As she lay in bed on the night the shed was burnt she heard her father say to her mother, "It's your blood in him coming out, your dirty, gipsy, jailyard blood," and she told herself, "Yes, yes, that's true. It's in me too, her wicked blood. Perhaps I'll do something worse and be sent to jail." A dreary kind of humility replaced the pride in these stigmata with which she used to assert herself against the good ladies of Brisbane. "My mother and my grandmother and my grandfather and all my mother's ancestors were depraved people. Doug couldn't have loved me any more than he could have loved a blackgin."

Cabell of course was full of tender, anxious sympathy. To tempt her appetite he had fish and turtle steaks brought in blocks of ice from the coast; succeeded, after years of opposition from Emma, in engaging a Chinese cook for the homestead, and immediately scared three of them away with his ravings when they could not make Harriet eat. Two or

three times a month he brought a doctor from Brisbane and for some time kept a trained nurse in the house to take her temperature every few hours and report every day upon the smallest variations in her health. All the time he was running in and out of her rooms asking how she felt, did she want anything, would she like the blind down, up, the window open, shut, had she taken her medicine, had she drunk her port wine, putting a hassock under her feet, a cushion under her head, sniffing for draughts, bringing a fan, a shawl, fussing, petting and waiting on her hand and foot. How pale and delicate she was — as his mother had been, like a ghost. He insisted on it: she was ill, very ill. She mustn't excite herself, mustn't read too much, mustn't think, mustn't do anything except lie there — and be ill. In his room he tramped up and down half the night worrying because she had not eaten enough at dinner, because he had heard her tossing sleeplessly on her bed when he tiptoed to her door, or because Miss Montaulk told him that she had been crying again. Poor little Harriet. Poor sick little Harriet.

Worrying, fussing, tiptoeing, and muttering over her sad state — he had never been so content. The wretched look which came into her eyes when he told her that he would give half his fortune to see her as happy as she had been in Brisbane and she remembered again that she had betrayed him in front of his enemies — how it cut him to the heart and how its abject appeal for forgiveness delighted him. What a pitiable sight to see her melt into tears and what a joy to see her hang on his words of comfort and his promise of happiness in the future. No more bad temper, no more shrinking away, no more distrust, opposition, and ingratitude.

“A change of heart,” he called it, sensing the profound collapse of that hard, inner core of her wilful spirit which had been the backbone of her integrity, of her struggle against his efforts to fulfil through her longings defeated by life. Now when he talked for hours about sending her home to Owerbury to marry and become a great lady she did not look at him sceptically, or frown and say that he wanted to use her only for some selfish purpose, or that she did not wish to marry the young man with the Byronic side-levers and the fine, dark face who would take her walking across the yellow moors in May as once, long, long ago, he had walked with a girl. When he described how she would lord it over his family, show off her jewels, and “make that mob in Brisbane bite themselves with envy,” she did not protest that she had other ideas for herself. Pliant, submissive, she listened while he planned her life with a wild outpouring of day-dreams which satisfied him only to be spoken.

This was what he had always wanted of her, her submissive presence around which he could erect fantasies of that “handsome young man's” love in the lilac arbour of Owerbury come true and of his triumphant return to the family that had cast him out; but this she had always denied him by demanding action, the enemy of his fantasia. Now she demanded

nothing and let him dissolve her in his day-dreams, which dissolved also the harsh realities of his own being until, through a curious dissociation of his personality, emerged that part of him which a hard life had frustrated, injured, and repressed. In a room filled with the scent of heliotrope, which he liked her to use because it reminded him of his mother, this young Englishman lived and breathed again. Ludicrous sessions of selfhypnosis they were, when the phantoms of desire and memory seemed more real than the real things in the room, and he even talked in a stilted way which belonged to that period of his life — ludicrous and rather terrible, for there were the germs of madness in it.

Harriet had dimly understood how he extracted the force to live from the ideas he built around her future and had resented it, perceiving that these ideas were illusions from which she could expect nothing while they put on her the heavy charge of fidelity to him before herself, so that if she asked for anything which broke the illusion he accused her of ingratitude. But now she listened with a different mind, a mind which was losing its self-respect. She was badly scared. She saw herself hedged in by smirking, gossiping people. She wanted to placate these people, to be forgiven. They had magical powers; if they said a thing was nice it became nice whatever it had been before, and if they said that she was nice all the whorishness in her, all the nasty, gipsy, jailyard blood would be gone. So she listened to her father's promises that some great gentleman would marry her and that every Mrs Bowen and Mrs Peppiott would envy her place in the world, and she tried hard to believe it. Thus she had come to desire the very thing which, in the first flush of her naïve and youthful frankness discovering the meanness and lies and petty vanities of society, she had revolted against — the cloak of money, or a title, or a high position to cover the un-nice past and the unnice little secrets in oneself. The desire was eating into her, slowly corrupting the passion which had vitalized her before, till she was ready to give herself up to any man, old, repulsive, she did not care what, as long as he could spread the cloak of that social lie over her and protect her from the universal contempt which James had so eloquently described. As for love, her old romantic ideal and criterion, she thought of it with shame and disgust, as if it was some sort of filthy disease she had had. Her emotions did a complete aboutface. She began to hate her mother, who was declining rapidly into decrepit senility, and soothed herself with snobbish reflections, worthy of Mrs Peppiott, on her relationship to the Lords of Felsie. Where the process would have stopped God knows Cabell would have gone on play-acting the little comedy of the young man and the young girl in the lilac arbour to his dying day, and the only satisfaction Harriet could have had was an old maid's sad, sentimental satisfaction in an illusion. But fate was kind to her. One afternoon James

and Cabell carried Cash home with a broken leg, a broken arm, two broken ribs, and concussion.

His horse had dragged him half a mile through the scrub before James caught it, and he was alive only by the grace of his good luck and constitution, but just alive, it seemed for two months while Harriet spent several hours each day at his bedside sponging his face with vinegar and fanning the flies away. She did this in her role of a humble person which about this time had led her to seek consolation in certain pious works belonging to Miss Montaulk where she read of saints who had shriven their sinful souls with menial offices for the sick. Fugitively she even thought of becoming a nun or going on a pilgrimage, but decided that looking after Cash was a good substitute. "It's nearly the same as abasing yourself like St Seraphina. He's such a frightfully common man. He goes with barmaids." This was supposed to evoke a feeling of merit, to soothe and elevate her tireless conscience, but it produced suddenly a reaction of most unsaintly anger, a salutary anger which put colour into her cheeks and light into her dull eyes. "He is the most disreputable man in Brisbane and even he looks down on me." How dared he! Why, the beam in his eye was much, *much* bigger than the mote in hers! The feeling that you have been unjustly put upon, that you are really not the worst but only the second worst person in the world is a grain for pride. Thinking angrily of her right to be annoyed with such a hypocrite and preparing haughty speeches with which to crush him as soon as he was fit to be crushed, Harriet thought less of her own depravity and that unassailable abstraction of virtue, the Nice People of Brisbane.

She never delivered these speeches. When he was well enough to recognize her and understand that she had been sitting beside his bed through half the summer, he was so grateful that she hadn't the heart.

"You shouldn't be doing this," he said. There was scarcely a whisper of his voice left.

"Why not?"

"It's nurse's work."

"Haven't I done it well enough?"

"It's not that. It's not proper for you — a lady." Harriet blushed.

"You shouldn't be thinking of that lot down there," he said after a long pause.

"Who's thinking of what?" she bridled. "And anyway, how could you tell a lady from a — a Queenie?"

He fell back on the pillow and groaned and sweated.

She was sorry she had spoken sharply, he was so ill, but she tried not to show it as she bathed his face and neck. He looked at her, closed his eyes, and groaned again. Here was genuine humility. "I can't understand your father letting you. You ought to be practising at the piano or something."

“Oh, nonsense,” she said, but she was pleased.

The nurse who had looked after Harriet when she returned from Brisbane was looking after Cash, but she did not get along with Miss Montaulk, and as soon as he was on the mend she packed up and left. Miss Montaulk, now official housekeeper at the Reach, took over the nursing, but Cash did not get along with her either, so most of the nursing fell to Harriet. Luckily Cabell was away in Brisbane.

Imperceptibly her days filled with somebody else's problems. She had to watch the clock and see that he had his powders at the right time, and keep watch on him for the doctor who came from Waterfall every second day, and quarrel with Miss Montaulk over the food she sent in. Then she had to be sure that he slept at the right time, that he did not talk too much, that the mosquito-nets were drawn properly at night and the room aired. By slow degrees she became extremely officious over Cash, who protested more, as his strength improved, that she should leave Ah Lung, the new house-servant, to look after him and return to her own sublimer affairs. She always won the quarrels which followed these protests, and enjoyed winning them. Her domineering will came to life again and belief in herself fed on his helpless dependence. Each day brought its little victory and each little victory gave her confidence against the gloomy thoughts that fumed around her pillow at night. To make this giant of a man who had been everywhere and seen everything, who was so important among the greatest people in Brisbane, submit to having his hair brushed or being fed with a spoon, to see him looking at her afterwards like a guilty lapdog, started a feeling of conceit which revealed, more than all her tears, how bitterly hurt she had been. The stages by which she had raised Cash from absolute pariahdom to a position of such glory in the land were unconscious, but his price kept on going up and up as it raised her own. She remembered how people like Peppiott senior ran after him for advice and assistance and how her father had always depended on him; she forgot Queenie. He looked up to that was enough. And when he protested, called her a lady, said he wasn't worth all her trouble, she could trust him. Yes, absolutely. He wouldn't lie to her, or whisper and smirk behind her back, or like James, feeling forlorn on the eve of his wedding, come to her and apologize for the hard things he had said merely, as she knew, because he wanted sympathy in return.

So Cabell, returning from Brisbane, found her less sallow and miserable and attentive, and was put out. She was continually running away to see if Miss Montaulk had remembered to take Cash's temperature or bring his tea or mix his medicine.

“That's no business of yours. That's a Chow's work.”

“Florence Nightingale did it,” she said, and with such defiance, when he was used to seeing her hang her head dumbly, that he found nothing

more to say, but he thought a lot and as a result privately damned Cash for bringing his broken limbs to the Reach.

"Your father's angry," Cash said. He knew that when he saw Cabell staring at the chair where Harriet now sat all day and her fan on the table among the medicine bottles. "He's right, too."

"Oh, well," she said. She had put on weight and the dark rings had gone from her eyes. Her mind was easier too — not happy by any means but less active. After a day's working and wrangling and wondering whether the jelly would set in time for his dinner she went straight to sleep without remembering that it was at this hour seven months, two weeks, and three days ago that she did the dreadful thing which had outraged the Nice People and branded her for life. She did not think about it, but she had not forgotten.

Cash gazed for some time at the white line of parting on her head bent over her needle. She was mending the shirt he had worn on the day of the accident. "You'll be getting ready to go to England now?"

Harriet said nothing.

"Your father says it's only a matter of months now — as soon as he gets a letter. You'll be glad, I daresay."

"Glad? Yes — well, yes."

"He thinks it's time you were married. Some handsome young chap, he says — some Lord Tomnoddy." He got some of his old banter into his voice, but became confused suddenly and reached for the cigar-box on the table.

Harriet frowned at him. He withdrew his hand quickly. "I've only had one to-day," he grumbled.

"Why a Lord Tomnoddy?" she said.

"A gentleman, I mean."

"What do you think I ought to marry — a tinker?"

"Good God, Miss Harriet, don't be angry. I was only talking."

Her eyes filled. "I suppose that's the only kind of gentleman who would marry me — a fool."

He tried to laugh but he looked very miserable under his turban of bandages with his face ossified in plaster.

"Oh, you know what I mean. You know what happened. I disgraced myself for ever."

He turned his head away and watched her out of the corner of his plated eyes. "You're not still thinking of the fellow down there?"

She looked as if she was hesitating whether to jump up and leave the room or slap his face, then her eyes hardened as though the tears had frozen to a thin layer of ice upon them. "Yes, I think of him, but not the way you mean!"

Her mouth widened and her eyes sank deeper into their sockets, and Cash noticed that her mouth and eyes had changed since he saw them

last in Brisbane. The eyes had lost the sharp, cold clarity of iris and white, as though something had touched and smudged them. The lips had lost or gained something too. The sensuous, soft pout was gone. They lay flat against her teeth and the muscles at the corners of her mouth quivered as though she was trying to stop herself from speaking. But the words forced themselves out, hardly audible at first, then in a strident flood, "I've thought of him and them night and day, and I hate them, hate them, hate them," she said. "I hate everything about them — their white hands, their voices, their clothes, the way they smile, the way they eat, the way they walk. I hate their shoes that never get dusty. I hate their faces that never get red and wet from the heat and their heads that never get a hair out of place. I hate the way they call sweat 'perspiration,' and a smell 'an odour' — and all that. I hate their goodness and I hate — oh, how I hate — the way they know they're good." Her voice trembled and she raised it to steady it. "How would one of them ever marry me? My mother was Emma Surface, the convict, and my grandmother was a gipsy, and I'm like my mother. What I did proves it — I'm — I'm a slut."

Without moving his eyes from her Cash groped for a cigar from the table, put it in his mouth, and drew energetically. A puzzled expression settled on his face. He took the cigar from his teeth and looked at it sharply, reached for the matches and got it alight. But he seemed puzzled still.

Harriet's needle prick-pricked the silence. She glanced at him suspiciously. "I know what you're thinking — that it's sour grapes. Don't you dare!" She pushed her needle at him. "I hate all men. I hate everybody. I don't want to marry."

Cash let the tasteless cigar go out. The smoke lay in a stagnant fuzz on his chest, and when he nodded two or three times clung to his beard, seeping through the tight curls as though he had dipped his chin in a dish of wax. He raised his head as she spoke, and now he lowered it into the pillow again as though he would never lift it any more.

"There, she doesn't want to marry."

There was no need for her to forbid him to question her. His simple man's romantic conception of a lady ensured that he would take whatever she said at its face value. A lady — a rare creature. What that he had learnt from the caprices of girls who welcomed sailors home or helped a bushman to knock a cheque down could help him to elucidate a puzzle as far removed from his experience as an angel from gross flesh! Soft and childish and innocent one minute, wilful and resolute the next, now hostile, now friendly, now cold, now passionate, and always surrounded by a dazzling aura of mystery — what was a man to make of it? He had long wondered about ladies — señoritas with white faces and black eyes looking down from grilled windows, always cool, always untroubled in a land of incessant heat and trouble; English ladies walking among the

crowds in Hyde Park with undiminishable dignity. What were they — women or what? And their remoteness, their incomprehensibility, lent them, beyond the promise of their careful beauty, the same irresistible fascination which drew him to places with strange names and baited the future of his episodic life with an assurance, ever renewed and ever belied, of lasting romantic excitement.

“There, she doesn't want to marry. That settles it.” He turned the cold cigar in his mouth. “She's young enough to be your daughter anyway, you fool. A fine one to lecture anybody on infatuation you are. That cove up on the Mary River blackbirding coons for love of a tart he'd never spoken to, he'd got nothing on you. It must be old age creeping on, and softening of the brain. You married to a piano-playing, French-speaking lady! Come on now, own up — is that what you had in mind? Is that what you've been choking yourself in boiled shirts for, and acting in front of mirrors to look like Lord Alford, and learning up long words? Lucky for you, Jack Cash, you didn't put your foot in it!” He jeered for half an hour with the careful over-emphasis of a man who has just almost made a fool of himself until, having reminded himself of the days when “you hadn't a seat in your pants down in Surry Hills,” when “you were a bum in New York,” when “you lay in Cartagena jail and passed the time catching your lice,” the distance between Jack Cash and Harriet Cabell seemed so nearly astronomical that grieving about it was absurd. “That schooner's more in your line,” he told himself, and recovery set in at once with a vision of escape from boiled shirts, board meetings, worry about stock markets and wearing efforts to call a spade anything except a spade, into blue seas and lands of new adventure. He felt, contemplating such vast freedom with a stir of his old hunger for the fresh scenes and action which were his assurance of being, even a relief that he had been saved from a difficult and dangerous role. “I've kept my head out of the bail for thirty years. What would I be doing with a wife now?” And not only a wife but a lady! “Boiled shirts, chimney-pot hats, and watching your step every inch of the way till your dying day. No, that's not your lay, my lad.” Yet, as he squinted at her from the corner of his eyes, he could not quite smother a regret that he must pass by this adventure, the greatest perhaps with which life had tempted him.

Harriet was annoyed with herself because she knew that she had told him a lie, realizing for the first time how important it was to her that the truth should be kept intact between them. She wanted then, badly wanted, to tell him everything — how she meant fear instead of hate when she spoke of the people in Brisbane and how she longed above anything else to be married and respected and safe — but when she raised her eyes and met his she could not say it, she felt ashamed. How could she tell him that after all her boasts, after what she had said about James? How could she confess that she would be grateful even to a Lord

Tomnoddy for marrying her? She threw the half-sewn shirt on the bed. What right had he got to talk about "Lord Tomnoddies" anyway? "That's the second cigar this morning," she said severely. "You know what the doctor told you."

"Damn the doctor," Cash said. He felt easier then and laughed, and Harriet laughed too. "What nice wrinkles at the corners of his eyes: he'd never hold anything against you." She jumped up and got the matches from the table. "Here, let me light it, and we won't tell the doctor — this time."

Cash winked. "And we won't let on it's no use him coming here making eyes at you because you hate all men and you're going in for an old maid."

Harriet patted his pillow. "I didn't mean exactly that."

"No?"

"I like some people very much. Bill Lavery the coachman and Sambo — oh, and a lot of people like that."

"They're the best kind of people there are."

"Yes," she said thoughtfully. "That's true. Why?"

"I don't know why. Perhaps because they're such damn fools. Sambo got a mouth-organ and an electric belt for curing his rheumatism out of his share of the mine and he's satisfied, but your old man's not satisfied with only owning nearly half of it. When you can't be satisfied with what you've got you're a nuisance to everybody and a bigger fool than the fool." He was talking to himself, not to Harriet, but she glanced at him, sensing double meanings, took up his shirt and sewed again, frowning.

He came to the end of a long heavy pondering with a sigh. "Oh, well, I'll soon be sound and on my way again."

"Oh, doctor said you couldn't move for three weeks," she said quickly.

"Be patient."

"It's not that. I'm glad. I mean — it's so dull here."

"You'll remember me, then?"

"I might manage. If I try hard till I see you again."

"That'll be a long time. I'll have a grey head — if it's not been turned into Dyak currency."

"Oh?"

"I'm going away," Cash said. "I've had my eye on a schooner in Sydney for the last two years. Damn it, I should've made a break before. It's easy to give Jimmy advice."

"Oh, you're going away," Harriet said. "Oh, I see." But she did not see anything except the empty sweep of paddocks and her father riding home across them in the dusty afternoon sun. Soon he would send for her and she would have to go and listen to his day's list of complaints, she thought, impatience breaking upon her long forbearance, a reawakened scepticism deprecating in advance the promises he would repeat, "like a

parrot.” Oh, she was tired of his talk, she realized, tired of his specious promises which meant nothing at all, perhaps. All her life she had been listening to them, ever since Miss Todd came, and thinking of her first governess, who used to say, “In six months' time we'll be picking buttercups in England,” a flash of understanding illuminated that dumpy lady's sudden, mysterious collapse. Of course, she had lost faith in Cabell's promises, his tireless “Two years from now you'll take Harriet home to Owerbury.” Lost faith in his promises and taken to drink. She remembered the red face, tear-stained, pressed against hers, murmuring, “He promised me. I trusted him.” “More fool her,” Harriet thought, “and more fool me too, I suppose.” She turned away from the window and sewed again. “That will be nice for you, won't it? You like adventures,” she said. She thought of those adventures, endowing them with more courage and romance than perhaps they had, of the air of freedom he breathed into her narrow life, of the rocklike assurance which surrounded him and gave her, in his presence, a feeling of absolute trust. Why, had she not been building herself up on that trust these last weeks? she asked. And when he was gone — what then? Whom could she trust as she trusted him. Nobody. Not a soul.

Cash laughed. “Oh, adventures are all right, as long as I can scare young ladies with them after.”

She looked at him quickly, looked away, and drooped over her sewing. A question was dinning in her mind — a hideous question. Oh, yes, it was hideous.

Cash stared at the ceiling. “You like adventures, don't you?” He tried to recapture that liking, but it would not come. He saw only the fly-spotted ceilings of a hundred brothels, smelt the stink of mildewed blankets in leaky fo'c'sles, the back streets of towns with splendid names, tasted bad food, bad drink, sweat in the mouth, and an accumulated and long-suppressed disillusion. He was alarmed. Age? No, only convalescence. Anyway, just to prove that the future was not as bad as it looked he began to whistle.

Harriet looked at him reproachfully.

Thereafter she spent less time by his bed, hardly spoke, and seemed depressed and nervous. “Her old man must be giving her hell for sitting in here,” Cash decided and hurried his departure. In less than three weeks he was gone.

Cabell was relieved to see the last of him. It was he who got hell. He hardly dared open his mouth, Harriet's temper was so touchy. God and damnation, was it possible the girl had fallen in love with Cash now? “I'll get rid of the fellow!” But he did not mean it. Cash was too useful . . .

In his mail, these days voluminous with business letters, begging letters, prospectuses, reports, he found an envelope postmarked Dorchester. It was from his nephew David, his brother David's son. “A

puffed-up turkeycock of a fellow that!"

DEAR SIR

I took the liberty to open your letter, and observing from its contents that you are not aware of my Aunt, your sister's death two years ago, on the eve of her seventieth birthday, I hasten to inform you of that melancholy event.

Harriet dead! Harriet seventy years old! Incredible. He had to stop reading the letter to imagine Harriet, his applecheeked sister, as an old woman. Time stands still in the exile's homeland. The mist, the wave breaking on the beach, a man bent over a torn fishing-net, a spray of pear blossom scattering on the wind — all this has been enchanted by his last glimpse of it as he looks back, fixed for ever in memory where seasons do not change nor men and women grow old. Harriet dead! Well, well, well! He read on:

My Aunt often spoke of you and would have been very pleased to have your news. She left us your portrait sent from Sydney and this has been put in the Album beside the portraits of my uncles.

My wife and myself hope that you will not allow the regrettable death of Aunt Harriet to interfere with your plans for sending your daughter to Owerbury. We should be only too pleased to take her under our care and to introduce her to such amenities as a quiet country life, varied by an occasional visit to London, affords.

Hoping to hear more from you on this matter,

I am, sir,

Yours sincerely,

DAVID CABELL.

Cabell snorted. "Let that fop look after my daughter? Never." But he showed Harriet the letter, hoping to reopen through it their sessions of quiet communion. "You'll soon be gone, soon be married," he said, slipping his arm round her waist.

"What, to some Lord Tomnoddy?"

"To some gentleman — some man of your own class."

"My own class, what's that?"

"Why, an English gentleman, of course. Something a cut above Australia."

"It's not my class then. It can't be."

"What're you getting at?"

"I mean I don't want to marry a Lord Tomnoddy."

"Who d'you want to marry?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't want to talk about it." She wriggled away from him.

“You've changed a bit in the last few weeks.”

“Yes, thank God.”

“Huh,” he growled, taking himself off in a pet. “We'll see about that.”

Chapter Three: Splendid Fellow Cash

THE new year came — Cabell's greatest year when he ruled over the valley's best land, saw a fierce, quick panic end the boom and the fortunes of many old enemies in Brisbane, and began the reconstruction that was to make Waterfall one of Australia's wealthiest goldmines.

Under easy-going old Larsen development had been slow. He had built a confused pickle of works around the mountain and was satisfied when only fifty per cent of the gold went out into the river with the yellow flood of tailings. But Cabell lay awake at night thinking of the gold he lost and small boys and Chinamen found gilding the roots of grass along the riverbank. He brought chemists and metallurgists from Germany and America and soon had a method of treating the stone which gave five instead of three ounces and lowered the cost of production from an ounce to half an ounce per ton. He built new works, new batteries, new dams to store water during the dry season so that the digging, crushing, sluicing, baking, and smelting of his gold need never cease. When the new works were opened Waterfall's output would rise from five thousand to eight thousand five hundred ounces per week or one million eight hundred thousand pounds' worth of gold per year. Now he saw a dream come true. The mountain was covered with burrowing men, drays and wagons carting the stone, with chimneys, furnace sheds, chutes, truck-lines, boilerrooms, and cranes, and he was master of it all.

The huddle of shacks and matchboard shops solidified into a town where people would be born, grow old, and die. The court-house and the post office changed their slabs for stone. Pepper-trees were planted in the street to give shade to the next generation. Ludmilla had bought a library for the school of arts, Larsen built an Oddfellows' hall. A cemetery straggled across the ridge from Larsen's Bakehouse. The old Stock Exchange became a kirk and manse, and next door the O'Connors built a Roman Catholic church three feet higher, so David Kyle, the Mayor, renamed the main street William of Orange Place; but it continued to be called Monaghan Street in honour of the marker and floor-sweeper in Shaftoe's old billiard-saloon — a sad fellow whose wife was now Mrs Mavrodelos, Ike the hawker's wife, and mother of a multiplying litter of yellow children with eyes like little black flies. It was a red town with red-skinned people breathing red air through which, from year's end to year's end, you could look straight into the eye of the sun. The heat was

like a barber's towel over your face.

Occasionally Sambo drove a mob of cattle up to the slaughter-yard and goggled at the mountain from which they had blasted away the sugar-loaf top.

"Stone the crows!"

"Weren't you the bloke that discovered the first nugget?" they asked him in Danny's bar.

"Whatya talking about? I was the bloke that shot the blacks on this here identical spot and incinerated them single-handed!"

When Cabell was in town they hoisted a flag over the Assay Office, where he ate and slept among piled ingots of gold worth four hundred pounds each.

Cash wrote from Brisbane, where he had returned from convalescing in the south. He had an urgent matter to discuss but did not feel up to a two-hundred-mile jolting in the coach. Would Cabell meet him at the Royal Hotel?

Cabell went to the meeting prepared to knock Cash down as soon as he began to propose that Cabell should let him marry Harriet. With the barest civility he greeted Cash in the lounge. "Good day. How's your arm?"

"Right as a trivet."

"Huh."

"I reckon that whack on the head did me good. Nothing like a couple of months in bed to remind a man that he's got legs and arms and make him want to use them."

"And nothing like a pretty nurse to make a man forget he's fifty years old, eh?"

Cash laughed, but soon stopped laughing and shook his head. "I'm not likely to forget that."

They found a retired corner among the potted palms and sat down. Cabell took a cigar from his case and bit the end, eyeing Cash closely all the time as if he expected the fellow to spring on him. The spring had gone out of Cash. Illness had taken weight off him. The vigorous little animal of a mouth had given up burrowing through his beard and lay discouraged and bloodless in its crevice.

It was Cabell who sprang. "I'm going to take Harriet back to England."

Cash looked up quickly. "You're going back to England?"

"Why not? Emma's on her last legs. As soon as she's gone and I get things running properly here there's no reason why I shouldn't take a trip. I'll go back and buy Owerbury and see Harriet settled there with a husband."

"Have you told Harriet?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Don't do it, Cabell."

“Upon my word, Cash . . .”

“Don't do it. A girl's got a right to her own life and to picking a husband for herself — if she wants one. You can't expect them to be cooks and bottle-washers to their fathers for ever. Send her to England if you want, but don't go with her. Let her get herself a man and a bit of peace. She certainly needs that.”

“Upon my word, Cash, you've got a hide. What's your interest in Harriet's future?”

“A lot.”

He put the cigar between his teeth and showed his teeth gripped on it.

“The interest of being a good friend — to her and to you too,” Cash said quietly. “Now quit looking at me like that, Cabell. It's not the first time I've told you you're a fool — to yourself more than anybody else in the long run. You won't keep Harriet down. Not with all the snooping duennas in the world. She's got as much lead in her pencil as you. You'll only break her heart or your own.”

“By God, Cash, you speak with feeling!”

“Sure. I got a lot of feeling for Miss Harriet. A fine girl.” He lit a match and put it to the end of Cabell's cigar, blew it out, turned the charred stick thoughtfully in his big fingers, sighed. “A man could settle down and be pretty content with her.”

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“Are you trying to tell me you're the man?”

“Me! Miss Harriet marry me! You're off your rocker. Harriet's a lady and me — I'm a hobo, and an old one at that.”

Cabell fanned a rift in the smoke and tried to see what those mica shields hid.

“A hobo,” Cash repeated, “dyed in the wool and bred in the bone.” He stirred, stretched his shoulders, grinned. “And that's what I brought you down to talk about. The long and short of it's this, Cabell, sticking round here's getting on my nerves. I want to push off. You're too big to need me any more, so let us wash it up. What d'you say?”

“Where're you pushing off to?”

Cash could not help laughing at the obstinate doubt in his eye. “Not to England. I'm not going to set up for a Marquis of Milparinka and run off with the heiress from the colonies. I'm going up north to have a look at the cannibals with the only wife I'll ever have. See, isn't she a beaut?” He opened his wallet and took out a photograph. It was of a big white schooner lying over on her beam ends with Sydney Heads in the background. “I bought her last month, and as soon as she's ready for the sea and you say the word I'm off.”

Cabell examined the picture, looked shiftily at Cash, then smiled apology and relief. Not till now that he saw how far his suspicions were

out did he realize how afraid he had been. Doug Peppiott and Cash — they were two very different propositions. He had come prepared to blast Cash to hell, but not sure by any means that he could do it. Ungrateful dog that he was to think of such things — and of a man he owed so much! A splendid fellow. A splendid, honest fellow. “I don't know what to say,” he began. “I'd never be so big I could do without you — the only fellow I've met in fifty years who hasn't tried to do me down. Lucky Jack Cash, eh? It's helped me, your luck.”

“Lucky in some things,” Cash said, as if it was an affliction.

“Lucky with money.”

“Oh, aye.”

In a burst of comradely affection Cabell put an arm around Cash's shoulder. “No, I can't let you go. There are big things in the wind. I can smell them. This new loan's going to fail in London. There'll be a hell of a crash, and this time we'll be on top of the storm. We'll be millionaires five times over. The Dennises are in the soup already and so is Flanagan. See, read that.” He opened a copy of the morning paper and pointed to a paragraph.

Cash took it and read:

IMPORTANT ENGAGEMENT
OLD FAMILIES UNITED

The engagement is announced of Miss Jennis Bowen, well-known daughter of Mrs Bowen and granddaughter of Sir Michael Flanagan, to Mr Douglas Peppiott, son of Mr and Mrs Albert Peppiott, of Moray Street, New Farm. The wedding, which is expected to take place shortly, will unite two of our oldest families. The marriage gains added interest from the fact that Mr Peppiott and Sir Michael, who have sat on opposite sides of the House for some time, recently joined the new Coalition Ministry . . .

“It'll unite Flanagan's bankruptcy to Peppiott's fortune,” Cabell chuckled. “That's my guess. He's as cunning as a garbage-rat, Flanagan. They reckon it was him who got Peppiott into the Cabinet.”

Cash was silent, pondering over the paragraph.

It flashed into Cabell's mind that he was thinking of Harriet and Doug Peppiott. He took his arm from Cash's shoulder.

Cash put the paper down. “It's no good,” he said gloomily. “I've made up my mind. I'm going.”

“How soon?” Cabell said.

“Early after Easter.”

“Ah,” Cabell said. “Time's short with you then.” His suspicions were alive again. (“He's wondering what effect this will have on Harriett,” he decided. “He wants to change his mind.”) “You won't even have time for

a trip to the Reach.”

“That’s the point,” Cash said, rousing himself once more. “I want to ask you a favour and make you an offer. I’ve got eighty thousand quids’ worth of assets — fifty thousand in Waterfalls and odds and ends. It’s not much beside your hoard, but it needs watching and I’m sick of the game. So I want to put by enough to see me through the rest of my days — in some steady way that doesn’t keep you on the hop.”

“Consols?”

“Something like that. But first of all I want to make Miss Harriet a present — a wedding-present if you like. So I’ve turned over half the Waterfalls in her name.” He took a paper from his pocket. “Give her this from me. It’s the lawyer’s claptrap. I’m sorry I haven’t the time to give it to her myself.”

“But she’ll never need . . .”

“Yes, I know it’s only a fleabite beside what you’ll leave her, but just in case — I mean, why the hell shouldn’t I?”

“It’s devilish handsome of you,” Cabell said uncertainly, wondering what was behind such generosity, what it would do to Harriet. He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. “Too bad you cannot come to the Reach and let her thank you herself.”

“Impossible,” Cash said quickly. “But I’ll drop her a note before I leave. A hobo’s blessing, eh? Ha-ha. Hmn.”

“Hmn.”

They were both silent and shifty for a while, then Cash said briskly, “Well that’s half the Waterfalls. You can have an option on the rest. And now for the favour. My assets’ll need careful selling. How about doing it for me? You’ll have a finger in the pie and my lawyer will give you a hand. Otherwise I’ll have to put my trip off a couple of years.”

“Not at all. Not at all.” Cabell leant eagerly across the table. “You do me an injustice to doubt it . . .”

So it was arranged. Cabell was to buy the Waterfalls for twenty-five thousand pounds and purchase consols with the money — at his convenience. The rest of Cash’s property, shares, a couple of mortgages, and some land, he was to realize on as the chance turned up. Cash signed the papers making Cabell and his lawyers joint trustees and left for Sydney to oversee the fitting out of his ship.

A splendid fellow! If Harriet had any nonsense in her head she’d soon get over it now.

Chapter Four: Change of Heart

HARRIET had already made strenuous efforts to get over it. Fifty times a day she told herself that she did not, could not love Cash, and once a day, as she was falling off to sleep, she admitted that she did.

Harriet, as her father noticed, had changed again, not back to the old Harriet with the cold, clear, confident, untouched eyes of a spoilt child who thought that worlds could be remade by her whim, but into a woman more strikingly like Emma than ever, the dangerous, sly, stubborn Emma he remembered. She looked at him tearfully no longer, neither did she fly into peevish tempers when he argued with her. She listened. She let him put his arm around her. But whether she heard or felt there was nothing on her face like a sallow wax mask to show.

“You're not human. If somebody cut you, you wouldn't bleed.”

It was as though all that flux of passionate feeling had turned to lava, stiffening her.

The change dated from the moment when Cash startled her with the news that he was going away and she realized what an emptiness of days lay ahead. Maybe for ever, he said. She was barely conscious of the cold reply she made. She was thinking that there would be nobody left whom she could trust as she trusted him, and as she thought of that feeling he gave her of absolute safety behind his rocklike body, his serene, tolerant mastery of a difficult life, a hideous idea presented itself — that she loved Cash, that she had started to love him the first day he came to the Reach ten years ago, when he used to call at the house in Brisbane and she put on her new dresses to show him, and that jealousy of Queenie had cut the flow of her love and turned it towards Doug Peppiott. Hideous! Oh, yes, it would be hideous if it were true because what would become of her when he was gone? It was on the tip of her tongue to say, “You can't go. You can't let Father send me to England to marry a man I won't ever be able to love.”

She searched his eyes for some sign that he would understand, but Cash's eyes gave no signs. The hard core of the iris returned only the image of her own face.

She turned her head away quickly and bit her tongue. Thank heavens, she hadn't let it commit her. Clearly he didn't care a button.

“You like adventures, don't you?”

“As long as I can scare young ladies with them after.”

Young ladies. Not her, not any particular young lady. Just one of a kind. That's all she was to him — a young Lady Tomnoddy. And it was true, too! He'd seen through her and he despised her as suddenly she despised herself for wanting to be the wife of a man he could talk about so witheringly.

She glued her eyes on her sewing and he began to whistle softly to himself.

"See, he's happy now because he's going away. Oh, I wish I was in his place and he was in mine. I'd break my arms to stay."

Now when she sat by his bed she spoke hardly a word. She had plenty to say and she counted the days that remained as though there would be no more for her after, but she waited for him to speak first. Every time he opened his mouth her heart stopped beating. Why? she asked herself angrily. Wasn't it plain as daylight that he would never say *that*? And yet — the way he had talked to her at the ball: hadn't he seemed to mean something quite different from what he was saying. What had he said? She could not remember, except that he had tried to stop her from going to Doug Peppiott and had confessed, hadn't he, that he wasn't really so concerned for her father. Could he have been jealous? No, that was absurd. He would not merely have talked to her — not he. He'd have dealt with Peppiott as, she admitted now, she would have liked to deal with Queenie the day she saw them in the gardens. Perhaps it was only for her father's sake he spoke, and because he liked her and was sorry for a silly girl. And yet — the way he had talked last week about her going to England: did *that* mean something? No, it only meant that he thought Tomnoddies were fools and so was she.

Still hoping but pretending that she did not, that the new, burning pain of love was a fancy, telling herself that she only wanted to marry an English gentleman and have the Peppiotts and the Bowens crawling at her feet, pumping up a feeling of indignation at the idea that he, such a common man, should dare to talk about Lord Tomnoddies, she counted the last few days, the last few hours and the last few minutes as they stood on the veranda in the early morning and he offered her his hand. "Good-bye, Miss Harriet. I've got some deep scars to remember you by."

She wanted to throw her arms around him and say, "Take me with you. I'm not spoilt. I'm not silly. I'm not a lady any more if that's why you can't love me. I'm lower than Queenie. I've got my mother's blood in me, and I'm glad."

She hung on to his fingers when he tried to release her hand. "Oh, Mr Cash . . ." But she could get no farther.

"Shake a leg," Cabell said testily. "You can't keep the coach waiting."

Then he was gone, and the house was deadly, dully silent again. The air in it suffocated her. She went for long rides alone. "I was a coward," she told herself. "I should have confessed. What if I did make a fool of

myself? It might have been worth while."

The valley turned brown in the summer sun with great patches of bare red earth in the dry grass. The inhumanness and poverty of it soothed her after the orgy of misery and her father's too opulent dreams. In the aromatic, silent scrub she felt that she was being washed clean of these overheated emotions. Now she hammered her way back through the wreckage of her integrity and tried to recover some of that brave self-assurance she had felt, and which she believed Cash had seen and admired, the day she made him understand that she was a little girl no longer. Of course she did not recover it. It had broken itself against the unsympathetic backs, the derisive smiles, the shocked grimaces of the Nice People. She must build herself a new pride, stronger than the old one because now she knew the power of the Nice People and the shame of her own momentary capitulation to them. That new pride was already born. It was born the moment she heard Cash talk of Lord Tomnoddies.

The word had sardonic overtones for an Australian ear. It was a caricature of all pretence, incapacity, unmasculinity — what Harriet had felt when comparing James and her father, Todhunter and old Purvis. Now she realized with shame that the ideal husband she had dreamt of these last few months was a mingling of all the most pretentious, incapable, unmanly qualities of her brother and old Purvis's grandson, and her pride, born as a revulsion from her own pretences, weakness, and corrupted feminine integrity which had seen their imago in James and Todhunter, sent her to seek her imago in Cash, the diametrical opposite of all Nice People and all phantoms. As she had tried to make herself worthy of the Nice People by reflecting that the Lords of Felsie were her cousins, she now tried to make herself worthy of Cash by telling herself that she was Emma Surface's daughter, closer to Cash than to the Lords of Felsie, heir to her mother's quiet, passionate strength which Cash admired. She saw, too, in her father, the old landtaker qualities she was happy to think were bred in her bone, not qualities brought from Owerbury, but those forged in his long struggle with the land. Thus, paradoxically, she felt more affection and respect for him as she turned away from him again and perceived, at the same time, the pathos of his divided spirit, damned to lie with ghostly loves and fight for certain failure, which had nearly been the tragedy of her own. In this new change of heart, this requickening of desire for life and love which had seemed to be dead, she understood, what she had guessed before, that the niceness of the Nice People, the flight from crudities, was a corroding lie against their most precious selves, most precious because most passionately living and, anyway, inescapable except by suicide. That suicide she had nearly committed, that corroding lie she had let into her own heart, and asking herself what would have become of her if Cash had not turned up, she was horrified by the answer that in the fullness of

time she would have grown into an old maid like Miss Montaulk. But what now? What better fate was in store for her? She lay on the dry, red earth and wept. "Oh, come back, come back and take me away!"

When she rode into the homestead yard Cabell was waiting on the veranda for her — always waiting and prying. Half a dozen times a day as she sat in her room she heard the door open softly and knew that he had crept down the passage to see what she was doing. If she was five minutes late for a meal he was running about the house shouting for her, and every time they met he tormented her with questions, "Where had she been?" "Who did she see?" "What was she thinking of?" "Was she tired?" "Was she happy?" "Did she want anything?" — indefatigably solicitous and distrustful. She knew it was none of these questions he wanted answered — that the real question in his eye was about Cash. "Do you love Cash?" "Are you hatching some plot?" "Do you want to kill me with another treacherous blow?" That was what he was asking.

At every meal he ranted. Cash was a vagabond — a blackguard — an upstart — a vulgarian — a swine he'd picked out of the gutter — had nearly been hanged — kept low women . . .

She listened without hearing, impenetrable.

He rapped the table. "You're not eating again. Why? Tell me that. Skylarking all over the place one day and looking like a wet hen the next — what's the reason for it? Am I a bad father? Do I deny you anything? Haven't I spent twenty-two years planning and grafting for you? And now you sulk. What for, eh? That's what I'd like to know."

The next instant he was leaning across the table to pat her hand, murmuring, "Don't be angry with me, darling. I'm an old fool. Only I can't stand seeing you . . . Eat now — just this piece — just to please me . . ."

She took her hands away and rose from the table.

"You refuse to please *me*, eh?" he shouted after her, "but you're quick off the mark when it comes to pleasing other men, making clandestine appointments or sitting on the side of their beds."

She closed the door and he put his head in his hands and groaned.

The year passed. Cabell was away a good deal of the time, at the mine and in Brisbane, and Harriet had some peace, except for the incessant spying of Miss Montaulk, who kept a minute account of her activities and apparent state of mind.

At the New Year Harriet took stock of the situation and made some resolutions. She kept telling herself that Cash was gone for ever, but she tried not to believe it. Well, she must believe it and, what was more, she must get over it. She would grow old in the valley, old and ugly — very well, she must resign herself to that, too. No more love and no more thinking about love. She must imagine that she had a little stone in her breast instead of a heart. She *must*. Ah, it was hard. Her heart would beat

and send hot blood into her veins, but if she tried, if she told herself every day, "I do not love him," she would conquer it at last.

She found little jobs round the house helping Miss Montaulk, she set to work learning the difficult Beethoven Sonatas she had never been able to play, and whenever the thought of Cash broke through she worked harder and played harder till she was ready to drop. "I don't love him," "I don't love him," she repeated mechanically to the rhythm of her music and her needle. She had settled that in her mind, but she could not settle it in her young fractious body. She did not despair: she believed in the firmness of her mind and the dulling, deadening touch of the long years to come.

Cabell returned from Brisbane in an almost hilarious mood. He brought a load of presents, more useless jewellery for Harriett, a dress for Miss Montaulk, a pair of silver spurs for Sambo, even a shawl for Emma. As he was unpacking Miss Montaulk came to his room with her report. He drove her away. "Stow your gossip, woman. You must make the girl feel like a criminal, always snooping on her!"

At lunch he chattered and chuckled about the doings in Brisbane — the plight of Flanagan and the Dennises, the imminence of great disaster for every one else and splendour for himself. He did not notice, or refused to notice, that she hardly touched her food. Eagerly she waited for some mention of Cash. Surely he hadn't left yet, without a word! But Cabell's good humour was a bad sign. The questioning look had left his eye.

She listened to his rigmarole about the stock market, the loan market, the real estate market, her teeth buried in her under lip to stop her from crying out, "But tell me about Cash. Is he well? Is he in danger like Flanagan? Does he look happy?" But when the table was cleared and Cabell said, smiling, "Now I've got some real news — about Cash," she wanted to run away and stop up her ears. She didn't think she could hear that Cash was gone, gone for ever, without bursting into tears.

"A splendid fellow," Cabell said. "One of the best. I did him wrong talking as I did. That's how it always is — a man never realizes who his best friend is till he's gone."

"Gone?"

"Gone from our ken. Always was a rolling stone, you know. Now he's off again. He's got hold of a schooner and sailed for God knows where."

"Oh! He's sailed?"

"Yes," Cabell lied. "He's sailed." He watched her through the smoke of his cigar, but saw nothing on her petrified face, though to her it seemed to twitch and burn with tell-tale signs. "That's his way, you know. Here to-day — gone tomorrow. Not the kind of man you can count on. A wife in every port and a couple on board as well. Ha-ha! But a generous fellow, mind you. Devilish generous. He left you a little present."

"Me?"

"Yes, twenty-five thousand quids' worth of Waterfall shares to put in

your stocking.” He gave her the papers. “Not so little either, but a drop in the ocean of what I’ll leave you.”

“Oh, but didn’t — could he afford it?” Harriet said, changing her sentence in the middle.

“Don’t worry about that. He’s well lined his pockets. I’ll soon be paying twenty-five thousand into his account at the Queensland Incorporated, and I’ve got another thirty thousand worth of shares and land to realize on for him.”

“But didn’t he . . .” She twisted the paper in her hands and stopped again.

Cabell rose. “Come now. Enough of Cash. I’m going over to Ningpo. Get your hat and we’ll ride down the river.”

“Oh, but didn’t he send any message?”

“What message should he send?”

“Didn’t he say anything — anything at all? About his present, I mean.”

“He said it was to be a wedding-present. Something of the sort.”

“I’ll never need it then.”

“And why not?”

“Because I’ll never be married.”

He laughed. “What d’you think I’m going to do with you? Shut you up with the nuns. Now, no nonsense, girl. You’ll be married when we find you a decent young fellow. I was thinking,” he looked at her slyly, “I might take you Home myself in a couple of years’ time, if everything goes well. I’d buy Owerbury. It must be crippled with debt. And settle you in there with your husband. Now, how does that sound?”

“I wouldn’t go.”

“Rubbish. Of course you’d go. Last year you said . . .”

“I don’t care what I said last year. I was mad. I don’t want to marry any of your young men. I won’t. You can’t make me. You can stop me having the man I want but you can’t force me to marry one I don’t want.”

“Who the hell do you want to marry? Or don’t you want to marry? Or what the devil do you want?”

“I want to marry the man I love. Not the man you know I *can’t* love.”

“Oho. And who’s the man you love?”

Harriet looked at the dead centre of his eye. It was not like Cash’s eye — it quailed under her gaze and pleaded for mercy. “Jack Cash,” she said.

“So!” he said. “I was right then. You were carrying on in there — like — like Florence Nightingale, eh? A little ministering angel, eh? Like a bitch!”

Tears ran down Harriet’s cheeks into the corners of her mouth, but she kept her voice firm. “Say what you wish. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters. I love Cash. I’ve always loved him. I always will.”

Cabell grinned, but his voice was not as steady as Harriet’s. “Always,

eh? But you flung yourself at Peppiott's head just the same. A fine story I can tell you about him. He's going to marry Flanagan's granddaughter."

"I was ready to fling myself at any man's head," Harriet retorted, "if only he could rescue me from you." She dried her eyes on her sleeve. "Oh, you needn't worry. I'll never try again. You've finished me as you've finished James. It's what you wanted, I suppose, for some beastly reason. But you can't kill me and keep my love at the same time, don't you understand? I'll never care anything for you any more. I hate you."

"Harriet! You're angry. You don't know what you're saying."

"I'm not angry," Harriet said. "I don't think I'll ever feel even anger again," and she covered her face in her hands and ran out of the room.

When that fit was over she reviewed the situation once more. Why did Cash give her this money? She would never need it — he knew that. For a wedding-present? Oh, the fool — didn't he have any eyes? Or was could it be a sign? She laughed at herself. A fine sign from a man already miles at sea. No, enough of looking for signs and enough of snivelling. Cash was gone — months ago. He might as well be dead. That was a fact and you couldn't alter facts. She must give up fighting, resign herself. James had done it and so, by clearing out, had Larry. Poor James! What would he feel when he heard about Jennis? Or did one really outlive this dull, burning pain?

Chapter Five: James Invents a Father

JAMES would have been extremely annoyed and a little puzzled to know that his sister pitied him, for James was thoroughly taken in by his public pretence of dignified, perhaps a trifle smug, contentment. As he saw himself he was very happy to be fulfilling his duties to his father and, on this ground, was stoically prepared to fulfil his duties to Julia too. Passengers on ships and guests in hotels thought that the young Mr and Mrs Cabell were an ideally assorted couple, rather undemonstrative for newly-weds, but that was in the best taste. They did detect occasionally a slight taste of vinegar in the young wife's conversation, a spark of unquenched fire in her eye, but her husband never seemed to notice it and, if he did, never let it ruffle his genteel temper. A strong fellow that — he could afford to let her chafe at the bit for a while as young wives often do: his firm hand would break her in. So James took in society as well as himself, as well as Harriet, for the poor devil was far from resigned, far from content in the narrow path of filial duty along which Cabell was trotting him. In the depths of James's heart the devils still danced. Would they ever dance themselves out? That was the question. Not if James could help it.

His mouth, once a happy, generous mouth had set tighter, and his eyes, bridged by a deep wrinkle between the eyebrows, had the dull, worried, preoccupied gaze of a man who feels a cancer growing in his vitals and cannot, does not wish to locate it. Lines were deepening on his forehead and about his mouth. On his twenty-sixth birthday he was solemn, wooden, seigniorial. Certainly not a man to pity, not a man who would wake up at night from painful dreams to pity himself. Yet he often but only at night, when the thought that he might have married a woman he loved instead of tying himself for a lifetime to this sarcastic vixen Julia, and that his father had used him without caring a tinker's cuss what became of him, broke through his guard. In the daytime that guard was impregnable. His devils were locked up, his mask was down, and he moved discreetly, indecipherably among his fellows, reassured by their respect and the high esteem in which filial duty and self-abnegation were universally held. In the day-time James was satisfied with himself and before long, no doubt, would be satisfied with himself at night too. The only thorn in his satisfaction was Julia's tongue. Even his daytime armour could not quite protect him from that.

Julia was not a bitch — yet; but she was in a fair way to become one. The wedding over, her scandalous mother out of sight, and a new life opening before her, she had been happy and prepared to fall in love with James. She was young, as attractive as Jennis Bowen, with a sight more intelligence and spirit. She had passion too, a queer, romantic, tender passion which had already begun to reach out towards him. She was, he would have been astonished to discover, grateful for the tactful way he had done his love-making and looked upon him as a deliverer now that all the awkward moments were passed. If only he would make an effort to be cheerful and human she would uncover a personality very different from the one which terrified him so. It was up to James, but James was not up to the job.

On the morning after the wedding at Ningpo, when the coach was carrying them out of the valley on the first lap of their honeymoon, Julia sighed and said, “Thank heavens, that's over. Weddings are detestable, aren't they? Now for the next stage.”

She did not mean that she would thank heaven when the equally detestable honeymoon was over but that was how James understood her. He did not reply but stared gloomily at the dawn breaking over miles and miles of flooded country-side. It was the worst season to travel. The roads were almost impassable, bridges shaky, hills scoured, and mud knee deep. He was to be shut up in this jolting, stuffy box of a coach with Julia for three, perhaps six, days, and all because his father refused to wait another month to become chairman of the mine. In the grey light Julia saw him frown and loose a dejected breath as he wondered how many times he would have to crawl out into the rain to help the coach over a bog and what Julia's comments on his bedraggled appearance would be.

Julia felt snubbed, but she would not let herself be discouraged. She suspected that James and she had a great deal in common; that he was just as glad as she to see the last of the valley and the people in it. His terrible father — how he bullied James and how, she guessed, James disliked him. And that extraordinary old mother, with her lurking eyes, who had never spoken one word to her — an old convict woman with stripes on her back, her own mother had told her. She had watched James in this family circle and knew that he felt as ashamed before her as she had felt before him. If they could show their cards and confess that neither had more reason than the other to be ashamed surely they could clear the air. He was so stand-offish! Why, he had kissed her only once, when the wedding service forced him to, and then his lips had scarcely brushed against hers.

“I mean it's a relief to be away from one's relatives,” Julia said, feeling her way cautiously. “They're such a bore. You've no idea what a nuisance Mother was when we travelled.”

Mention of Aurelia jolted him. It was the last subject he wanted to discuss: for one thing it usually stimulated Julia's tongue to sharp, oblique reprisals; and for another it reminded him that marriage had added the bibulous old harridan to his load of family disgrace. "Yes, yes," he muttered, "you told me — she gets dizzy in coaches."

"She gets dizzy anywhere," Julia admitted nobly.

"Some people are like that," James said quickly. "I knew a man — it's bile."

Julia laughed and laid her hand on James's knee. "You're a dear to pretend, James, but now we can be honest, can't we, and make a mutual confession?"

"A mutual confession?" James tried to look politely surprised but only looked horrified.

"Oh well, you know what I mean. We didn't make our parents, so it's perfectly ridiculous to pretend that we're responsible for their odd ways."

James sensed a treacherous thrust maturing behind Julia's suspicious open-heartedness, and stiffened himself to receive it.

"It's not my fault Mother drinks like a fish and behaves like a you-know-what."

"Indeed!" James said feebly, "your mother is a most excellent woman."

"A most excellent fiddlesticks, James. She's an old rake, and that's putting it mildly. She's always drunk, she flirts outrageously, she takes off her clothes in public if you don't watch her, and there isn't a respectable hotel in any French or English watering place she hasn't been asked to leave."

James crumbled. "Good Lord, Julia, what are you saying?"

"The simple truth, my dear. See, I've owned up."

"I don't believe it," James said and the words comforted him. Yes, it was unbelievable — just another of Julia's dirty tricks to make him squirm. A week ago he could set the skeletons in Julia's cupboard against the skeletons in his own, but now they were all in his own! "Really," he said, getting his spine up again with an effort, "I admire your mother. Woman of the world — little eccentric — sad bereavement — but dash it all Julia, it's not nice talking like that about our — your relatives."

Julia's eyes widened. For a moment she thought that James must be a tremendous simpleton, but she saw what heavy weather he made defending her mother and credited him with generous feelings on her account. "That's nice of you, dear," she said, with a tender smile, "but there's no need for us to feel like that about each other if we're honest in the beginning. Now, I don't care a hang about Mother's eccentricities, as you're sweet enough to call them, if you won't look as if you've got all the sins in the *Newgate Calendar* on your conscience every time somebody talks about *your* father or mother . . ."

James's spine stiffened without an effort this time, as though Julia had

stuck one of her hat-pins into him. "My father is a very excellent man, and my mother . . ." he began, but broke down.

"Oh, I don't mean to say — I mean, I liked your mother, James, I really did. There's something about her . . ." Then Julia broke down too. This was not at all what she wanted to say. She wanted to be honest and she wanted James to be honest, so what was the use beginning with an obvious lie.

It was such an obvious lie that it maddened James. "That's not true. You looked down on my mother," he said, blushing. "You know what she was. But let me tell you . . ." he took a deep breath, "my mother is a fine woman just the same and my father is a gentleman. And my I know you're thinking about the disgusting business in Brisbane last year (Julia was thinking no such thing. She had never heard a word about Doug Peppiott and had hardly noticed Harriet), but it's no concern of yours. And anyway . . ." He floundered, gulped, "I don't wish to discuss the matter further."

Julia had no more wish to discuss it either. She saw that she had put her foot in badly and was vexed with herself and with James. She retreated into her elegant shell, though not so far that James would have failed to coax her out if he had tried. But a coach jolting over washed-out roads is not a place to nurture sweet temper in a man who believes that he has a grievance. James's belief that he had been cruelly put upon seethed stronger and hotter at each bone-rattling pothole. Fat, damp, hungry flies buzzed and bit, the slush washed up through the floor of the coach, breathing the steamy air was like trying to chew hot cotton-wool. He was aware that he cut an absurd figure as he tried to sit upright and dignified in the extreme corner of the seat, gasping, sweating, his hat jerking over his nose every time the coach swayed and plunged, but look dignified he must: it was the only defence against the arrows in Julia's eyes. There happened to be no arrows in Julia's eyes just then, but James did not look at them too closely.

In the four and a half days they took to reach the railhead he got out into the mud and rain twenty-eight times to plod up a hill or help the coachman and outsidings with a fallen horse or put his shoulder to the wheel. It was a beginning to test the fortitude of the most devoted honeymooners. They spent six more days in trains and hotels before they reached the seclusion of their staterooms on the s.s. *Austral*, and by that time the habit of addressing each other as though they were in a public restaurant had settled on them.

Julia did not give up hope. She knew she was beautiful and believed that what she had failed to do with gentle, tactful words she would do with gentle, tactful deeds when the time came. The time came at last, for James's duties as a husband could be shirked no longer, and, alas for duty . . . he failed miserably.

He was awkward, resentful, and cold, and he made Julia cold and awkward and, at last, resentful too. Poor James, he felt ashamed. He could not understand the blight which had descended on him. He could only soothe himself by saying, "If it was Jennis it wouldn't be like this," and the image of Jennis rose before him, alluring, profoundly disturbing. Through these first days it haunted and tortured him with a fierce, lusty fire at the centre of his vitals which left him gutted and dead within. To the vision of the wife he had lost he could not help comparing the wife he had got, and as the one was a vision and the other flesh, peaked from seasickness and sleepless nights, the comparison was hopelessly to Julia's disadvantage. Her mouth was too small; her eyes too narrow; her voice too hard; she was too tall, too pale, and too damned conceited. Poor James . . . if the placid Jennis Bowen, in her quiet dreams of lovers kissing the palm of her hand, ever found the spleen to wish James some evil for deserting her, she had her wish now.

James cursed everybody except himself — Cabell, his sister, Ludmilla, Aurelia, Julia. It was all his father's doing: for the sake of money he had sacrificed James to this ignominy and loss. And who was to benefit? Harriet, of course. *She* could do what she liked — cut up rough with any man to God knew what limits and be forgiven — but he'd only loved one woman and they had all plotted to take her away from him. "It's filthy. It's unjust. But I'll get even with them." How? Even to him these threats sounded feeble. "I wish to Christ I'd made a break when I wanted to." But the time for that courageous gesture was gone and James guessed, for an instant, that his potency had gone irretrievably with it. If he had had the courage to stand up to his father, to stand up to the Doug Peppiotts of society without money to shield him, would he not have been more of a man? It was a horrible, worse, a futile thought on this side of the decision he had made four years ago. He repudiated it.

"No, a man's got duties to look to. Social and family duties. That's the test of manliness — duty. I've got a duty to my father." And his rage against Cabell, which had turned to rage against himself, melted into the sentimental thought, "Poor old Dad. He's had a hard time. A man's got to lend him a hand now when he needs it."

This was the fourth night at sea, the fourth night after James's fiasco. For three nights Julia had watched the wedge of light under the door between their cabins, heard James undressing, and longed for another chance to take him in her arms. For three nights she had seen the light go out and heard him scramble into bed. Her hands tightened on her breasts, warm through the silk of her night-dress but suddenly cold and congealed within. The stick! The idiot! The milksop! Had he really only married her because his father told him to? She had guessed it from the beginning: it was true.

On this fourth night, prepared to make another effort in the cause of

duty James came to his cabin, undressed, folded his pants, shirt, and underclothes neatly and put them away in the wardrobe, hung his coat after carefully scratching a spot of paint off the sleeve, washed, cleaned his teeth, his nails, brushed his sleek black hair, put on his dressing-gown, and after an automatic glance round the cabin to see that everything was in its right place, listened at the door. Julia was in bed. He turned the knob: the door was locked.

Next morning Julia greeted him on deck with the old familiar smile. He realized, seeing it again, that she had not looked at him with that amused, superior veiling of her eyes for some time. ("Suppose she's been too seasick.")

"Don't scowl at me in public," Julia said. "You forget that we're supposed to be an ideal couple on its honeymoon."

James had a brief struggle and got his wooden expression on. "Are you quite recovered?"

"Oh, quite. I was never far gone, you know."

The first shot in a long battle. The tireless, stinging malice of her tongue surprised even James. Not an opportunity for ridicule, scorn, or slanderous *double entente* did it let pass. He thought she must lie awake at night thinking of nasty things to say. Perhaps she did. She would not have had to work her invention hard, though: James was a very open mark.

This trip to England, legendary England, was an apocalyptic adventure and excited James to exclamations of naive wonder. London: his first glimpse of a big city; the height of the buildings; the fog; the noise of the traffic; the multitudinous life; the wealth and luxury, the poverty and degradation; the Queen ("By jove, the Queen herself!") driving down Whitehall ("In such a dingy coach!"); the changing of the Guard ("Don't gape, dear, they'll know you come from the colonies"); the Tower of London; Westminster Abbey ("And Wordsworth lies under that stone!"); the Bank of England ("Incredible!"); the Archbishop of Canterbury preaching in St Paul's; the Burlington Arcade (Good lord, his clothes were ten years behind the times); Covent Garden, Tetrassini ("Don't clap as if it was a music hall in Brisbane, dear"); Watling Street ("Caesar might have stood here!"); "And this is the Old Bailey, my dear. You must have heard of it"; dukes and marquises by the dozen, butlers and footmen ("I do wish you wouldn't look as if you thought they would bite you"); the Lord Mayor's banquet and Mr Joseph Chamberlain asking him questions with respectful attention ("He knows of my father!" "No doubt they have a record of your mother, too"); a week at Owerbury ("So he really did belong here!"); Tenterburn Hill, the gorsebush in the yard, the crack in the north wall, the chimneys worn by the weather, the murky portraits of Cabells down in the hall — just as his father had told him ("Good lord, look, Julia, my father at eighteen!" "Really? It looks like

another Tichborne Case, my dear.”)

Julia had been travelling since she was six years old. It was all as familiar to her as the back of her hand. She sighed and yawned. “Forgive me not sharing your colonial enthusiasms, my dear,” she said. Now Julia *was* a bitch, for she had once looked forward to being James's guide in this romantic Old Country.

“A Cabell came over with the Conqueror,” James's cousin, David Cabell, told them proudly.

“Indeed. You are twice distinguished then, James,” Julia said.

“How so?”

“Didn't you have ancestors who went over with the First Fleet?” She leant her face towards him, as if provoking him to smack it.

The temptation was sometimes almost too much for him. A red mist blotted out his sight and his hands itched to take her by the white, insolent throat and choke her. He went away by himself trembling, scared out of his wits by the violence of his feelings. “My God, can it be true what Cash said?”

His only protection was to deafen himself, blind himself, and make himself more wooden. He soon had a highly developed instinctive mechanism for repressing the least sign of interest or pleasure in the world around. A remarkably quiet fellow for a colonial, people thought. A bit *too* dry maybe, but a thorough gentleman.

Imperialism was in the bud. Cecil Rhodes, Jameson Raids, Kipling, and Our Splendid Empire! James found himself regarded as a distinguished visitor — son of one of Australia's greatest living pioneers, the chap who ran the Waterfall goldmine. Invitations to dinner-parties, house-parties, tea-parties, week-ends, hunts, shoots, drives, and whatnot caught him into the rhythm of a social life where his blindness, deafness, and woodenness passed for good breeding.

Politicians, journalists, investors, and the merely polite encouraged him to talk of his father and the way empires were founded. He complied, hesitantly at first. He told them of younger sons of good families leaving England like the old *conquistadores* with noble and romantic aspirations, of heroic fights with blacks, the ideal of a new British land shining before them like St James on his white horse at the battle of Otumba, and convinced his hearers

That nothing in the ages old
In song or story written yet,
On Grecian vase or Roman arch,
Though it should ring with clash of steel,
Could braver histories unfold
Than this bush story yet untold,
The story of their westward march.

In the process he convinced himself. A new conception of his father took root in his brain when he had been telling the story for two years, in fact a new father — a pioneer, a nationbuilder, a bearer of the precious torch to the earth's dark places, a selfless forerunner of progress, glorious sacrifice on the altar of England's mission to civilize the world . . .

Resigned? What an idea? He was grateful and content. Except just now and then at the end of a wet, bleak day in the company of wooden people. But he would surely get over that despair which gutted him like a blunt knife and left him hollow. Given time surely his devils would suffocate themselves and he, too, become as wooden within as he was without. It was his grand ideal and would be, if you like, his tragedy.

Chapter Six: Larry's Wander Years

AS for Larry, Harriet's other encouraging example . . . When he left the Travellers' Rest he rode to the crossing in the middle of the town and gazed north where the road to the Reach crawled over the downs. Then he spat and turned away. This simple act strengthened him, seemed to cut ties which tug-tug-tugged at him all the time. Let him have the Reach, let them fight — there was a continent waiting for him, as Berry said. Riding towards the hazy, western horizon, with the rise and fall of the road visible for miles ahead, Larry had that common feeling of Australians that no custom or loyalty binds them to any spot on the earth's surface, that all the wide country, from Leeuwin to the Gulf, and all its possibilities are theirs. A spacious feeling, an optimistic feeling which gave Larry the illusion that he was on the threshold of a new life and that the old, with all its disappointments and torments, was dead.

For two weeks he rode into an unknown land, a land of unrecognizable birds and flowers and trees, the flat, red land of the Inside. Its newness excited him and wiped away the lines of painful thought on his face, as though he really had sloughed a skin and left it behind with the past. The valley was a settled place with a busy road, well-beaten tracks, and water never more than a couple of miles away. Here, for tens of miles, there was no sign of man or beast or waterholes, only the silent, flat landscape which opened, day after day, upon silent flat landscapes, like the images in duplicated mirrors. The grass was white and the stunted trees were bluish-grey with delicate leaves. Over the clay the sand was only a few inches deep, precarious foothold for pastures and men. For miles, where fires had burnt out the scrub or the stupid greed of early settlers had cut it down, the sand had blown away and exposed the red clay like a great scalded wound. The sunlight scorched as though it came through a burning-glass and sparkled with the diamond clarity of a crisp winter's day. The stars were enormous and lurid with a steely light. The sky was bleach-white, like a roof of bone. There were rivers, dry beds of sand and waterworn stones with pools of slime every twenty or thirty miles. The strip of black earth lining the banks for two hundred yards on each side was the tidal mark of the rains. An unsubduable country, where men fought a truceless war with the sun, constantly advancing or retreating as the drought was broken or broke them. Some years the rain came and men made fortunes. Sometimes the rain did not come for years and they

lost fortunes and their lives. Larry passed dried-up waterholes where the bones of cattle and sheep were feet deep. At the homesteads he found children who had never seen rain. One day he took a wrong turn at a crossing of two tracks and about sundown, when his tongue was beginning to taste like a piece of hot felt, he came on the naked skeleton of a man. The rags of the man's clothes were scattered about the track. He had gone mad with thirst and torn them to pieces. To shorten his agony he had climbed a tree, tied his belt to a branch, and tried to hang himself, but the branch had broken and the skeleton lay under the tree with the branch across its chest and the belt around its neck. Near-by was the man's wallet, stuffed with banknotes. Larry was superstitious and threw it down beside the skeleton. He knew that he was on a waterless track, within a few hours of his own end unless he could get back to the crossing and find a hole. At dawn next morning he reached a boundary-rider's hut. He did not see the man standing in the doorway: he saw only a trough of dirty brown water and plunged his head in beside his horse's.

Larry found work in the Never-Never, the land which stretches westward through the ancient, dead, inhuman heart of Australia and never ends. He stayed there a year. The obsessing struggle for life turned his thoughts outwards and encouraged the idea that the past and the thoughts which had tormented it were dead and done for. The past was not a favourite topic among the tough characters who supported life in these outposts — “every man-jack with a warrant out against him somewhere,” the overseer told Larry. They measured a man by his ability to ride, drink, use his fists, and hold his tongue. Larry passed muster.

Still, they were curious about him. They watched him. There were two of them in the hut where Larry lived out on the boundary, fifty miles from the head station. One of them was a bit off his head. Every night he used to walk a mile into the paddock, take off his clothes, leave them there and walk back naked to his bunk — “to trick the fleas.” The other one was a little man of prodigious strength, as though he had been a big man and the sun had shrunk him. He could kneel with his hands on the ground and rise with two men standing on his wrists. He was quite sane, only vague with that vagueness of men who have lived too long under the open sky with no roof to press their eyes down on the earth. His name was Chivers. He tried to talk to Larry, but before he got to the point he was trying to make, his mind wandered and he fell into silent, fierce thought. After a while he would jump up and grab his lead pencil and scribble furiously on the galvanized-iron wall, “Rome wasn't built in a day,” or “The proper study of mankind is man,” or “Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him well.” The walls were covered with thousands of these tags, scraps of Greek and Latin, Euclidean diagrams, algebraic equations — straws of a drowning mind. Every time he met Larry he buttonholed him as if he had something important to say but he could never quite get

at it. He peered into Larry's face and muttered, "Ah. Umn. Ah. Umn. Another time, another time."

Then one day the ration-cart brought some old newspapers. A couple of nights later he looked up from studying them and said, "What'd you say your second name was?"

"Cabell," Larry said.

"Ah." His eyes lighted. "That's your old man then who owns the Reach where the strike was?"

Larry grunted.

"There's a bit here in the paper about him and the goldmine at Waterfall. Now I knew there was something you put me in mind of. It must've been a great strike!"

Larry grunted again.

"I read a bit there in the *Worker* about you, how you stuck by the shearers and your old man give you a thrashing."

Larry got up to go out.

"Wait a bit. There was something I wanted to get straight. Just a minute now. Let me think. Ah yes, how many blokes did you say were in the camp?"

"How the hell do I know?"

"You were there."

"Of course I was there."

"I read that four hundred blokes were there the night Coyle was pinched and only about half a dozen Johns. They must've been a poor lot to stand by and let a mate get taken like that. No wonder your old man thrashed them."

Slow, suspicious thought reawakened on Larry's face and drew his brows together. "What d'you mean?"

"Just a minute. Just a minute." Chivers waved him off. He was thinking. After a while he dashed to the wall and wrote, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

"What d'you mean saying about us — them blokes not rescuing Coyle?" demanded Larry.

"Another time," Chivers said impatiently.

When everybody was asleep Larry got out of his bunk and took the papers down from the rafters to see what it was Chivers had been reading. He found it after a long search — Cabell's speech to the annual meeting of shareholders about the new developments at the mine. Memories of the valley came back irresistibly to him, its blue hills and green paddocks, its ever-flowing river, the rich scrub on its ranges, the purple lotus in its waterholes, the familiarity of its life, and he was all at once sick and tired of the sun-charred plains, the sand, the parching heat, the men he did not know, sick and tired for the sight of a hill and the men and the places he had known from childhood. But when he thought of

that old life he thought of his father, of the injustices he had suffered and his shameful, cowardly defeat, and when he thought of the men, his mates, the guilt of his betrayal agitated him again. There was no stopping his mind once he let it free on this tack.

Chivers watched him speculatively for several days, scratching his head and whispering to himself. It got on Larry's nerves at last.

"Who the hell're you looking at?"

"You put me in mind of something I wanted to say," Chivers said. "Something I wanted to ask."

"I don't ask you no questions, do I?" Larry said angrily.

The door opened and the madman came in, stripped to the absurd nakedness of a skinny body with a black beard like a covering in the wrong place. "Tricked 'em that time," he grinned. "Come home a new way through the scrub."

Chivers looked at his hairless legs. "That's it. You were at the strike up Cabell's Reach, weren't you, the time they raided the hut and took the scabs off without any pants? That must've been something to see."

Larry pushed his chair back.

"Wait a bit now — something I want to ask you. About that bloke Coyle who got three years. How come? Weren't you all his mates — four hundred of you? They must've been a pack of go-alongs!"

"There was a lot of police there," Larry mumbled at his questioning eye.

"I read a bit about it in the papers — about half a dozen it said."

"There was more, I tell you. There was police and guns."

"That's how it was, eh? I thought there must be something. Mates ought to stick together. Hold on. That's what I wanted to ask. I read where at the trial there was a scab who said he saw Coyle fighting with one of the shearers outside the shed and the shearer laid Coyle out and handed him over to the police."

"That's a lie."

"No, it ain't. I read it. A bloke named — what was his name? One of the strikers. He turned against his mate and helped the police catch him. It was in the *Worker*."

Larry twisted his soft beard, which licked sideways from twisting as though a strong wind was blowing across his face.

"I remember," Chivers said. "Goggs was his name — that's it."

Larry smiled shiftily. "Goggs — yes."

"Ain't it right what I said?"

"I heard something," Larry mumbled. "I didn't get the hang of it."

Next morning when they woke up he was gone. He got his cheque from the homestead and rode another sixty miles to the nearest grog shanty, handed the cheque in, and came to three weeks later in a litter of empty brandy bottles. He saddled his horse, took the bottle of rum and

the sovereign the pub-keeper gave him, and rode away, but half a mile down the track, as the plains opened out before him again with their urgent questioning of a destination, he turned and rode back to the shanty. He drank his saddle and bridle and after that his horse, then started on foot for Brisbane five hundred miles off. His body was bruised and his face was patched with flyhaunted scabs. He did not remember how he had fought the pub-keeper and his chucker-out when they turned him away to face the world again.

He tramped to the coast and back to the west and down to the coast once more. He could not rest anywhere for more than a week or two. He navvied on a new railway, drove a mob of cattle across the Downs, was yardman in a Brisbane hotel, broke horses, jumped the rattler, humped his swag, joined the rush to Kalgoorlie. In Doyle's hotel in Kalgoorlie one night a miner from Waterfall recognized him. "Jesus, mates, here's Larry Cabell. His old man damn near owns Waterfall and here he is on wages."

"Jesus, your old man owns Waterfall?"

They gathered round to hear the story of how Cabell and Larry had a fight and Cabell kicked Larry out. "He was a proper old bastard. He's got everybody dead scared."

"Who's scared?" Larry said. "I cleared out myself."

After that he thought he saw the doubtful look in everybody's eye. He hung back from the riotous comradeship of the camps and the pubs and was lonely. He felt no permanence, no continuity, no purpose in his life suspended over an uncompleted past. He worked a passage back to the east. In Sydney he heard of a boat preparing to take a hundred shearers to the New Australia settlement in Paraguay and grasped at the idea of going with them, but dropped it at once, remembering what Coyle had said to him about going to South America and understanding, at last, that what he wished to flee from would follow him like a shadow till it was satisfied or he died. In the same article he read that some citizens were getting up a petition to demand that the prisoners condemned during the last strike under an old English law no longer in force in England should be released. He never looked at a paper again. He hoped that Coyle would die in prison.

Wandering slowly north where the tug-tug-tugging in his breast drew him, he came to Pyke's Crossing. Outside Liam O'Connor's store a hearty voice accosted him, "If it isn't Larry."

Berry was coming out of the store with a bag of sugar on his shoulder. He dumped it hastily into his cart and ran across the street to catch hold of Larry's arm before he could escape. "Man, wait a minute, can't you?" Then his smile went and he shook his head. "Have you been to hell and back?"

Larry had changed — much for the worse. He was dirty and ragged.

His boots were coming to pieces and his hat had half a brim. A patch of hessian covered the seat of his trousers. Exposure had scarified his skin and burned it nearly black. Hard walking and short commons had taken all the flesh off his bones. Booze had reddened the rims of his eyes. And a hand to mouth life had given him the look, half-menacing, half-timid, of an outcast dog. He tried to get past with a gruff "Good day," but Berry kept him.

"You've got a lot to tell. Come and have a drink."

He wanted a drink badly. They went into the Travellers' Rest.

Berry was shocked to see the way he drank, tossing off half-glasses of raw spirit like water. Berry paid and watched and asked questions, but Larry would not answer. He glanced at Berry sideways now and then and reached for the bottle. At the seventh glass he became quarrelsome. "Mind your own bloody business. It ain't nothing to you where I been or where I'm going."

"Get along now," Berry said. "We been mates long enough for a man to show interest."

"I'm no mate of yours," Larry said. "You're a crawler. You ran away from my old man and let Coyle be taken by the police."

"Here, that's not a fair thing."

Larry pounded the bar. "You're a scab and a whiddler. You were scared of my old man and left your mates in the lurch. But I ain't scared if you are. I'm going back. One of these days . . ."

Even Berry's simple mind detected a hollow sound in this and he began to notice that there was something soft and sodden about Larry's mouth, his whole down-at-heels appearance. He remembered Larry as a stockman-dandy, always fidgeting about spots on his white Canton moles, and a madly reckless fellow who talked little and did wild things. "Poor devil, he's gone to the dogs."

Larry looked at the empty bottle. "How about another drink?"

Berry was ashamed. Had Larry Cabell sunk to pub-crawling? He bought the drink and hastened to excuse himself. "If you're ever out near us, Larry . . ."

Larry turned away. He felt sorry for what he said as soon as he spoke and wanted the drink to make friends with Berry over it; but he felt more sorry for himself because of what Berry had not said. He had expected Berry to protest, as of old, against his threats, as though they were real ones. Did even Berry know what a coward he had been?

Long after Berry had gone he sulked over the bar. The rum turned stale in his stomach and he looked round for someone to pick a fight with . . .

On his way home Berry turned the cart back to the Travellers' Rest, annoyed with himself for having judged Larry so hastily. When he found him lying in the gutter outside the Rest where they had thrown him half an hour before, he felt much to blame. Larry was hopelessly drunk and

covered in blood. Berry lifted him gently into the cart and took him home, put him to bed in the loft over the threshing floor, and laid out a clean shirt and a clean pair of dungarees for him.

In the morning there was no sign of Larry. Berry saddled his horse and overtook him a few miles along the road. "Come back, man," he said. "It's a rough place, but it's something. I've told the old woman and she's pleased to have you."

"I don't want no handouts from no man," Larry said.

"It's not a handout," Berry said. "I need someone round the place. It's too heavy for me and the girl and the old woman with the harvest coming on."

Larry wanted to go back. A place to live in again, a horse to ride, cows to milk, a roof to sleep under, and a mate, who knew him, to talk to . . .

"I called you a crawler yesterday," he said.

"That. Aw, you'd had one too many."

"I don't want forgiveness from you," Larry began, but turned his face away and muttered, "Besides you knew I was lying — what I said about my old man. It was *me* let Coyle down. I could've saved him but I ran like a dingo. Nobody wants to be mates with a bloke who done a thing like that."

Berry was wise enough to say nothing more except, "You please yourself. If you'd stay over the harvest we'd be right grateful."

Larry went back with him.

Berry's homestead was a slab house of two rooms and kitchen, whitewashed inside and out and so clean that after nearly two and a half years of filth and rags Larry had to be pushed into it every time Mrs Berry called him to a meal. She was a happy, fat woman who cooked enormous feeds of corned beef and pumpkin pie and laughed till the tears came into her eyes every time she looked at Larry's crooked beard. She told long, pointless stories about sick cows and dogs which had died from tick and made Larry feel at home with her tacit assumption that he was privy to all the involved relationships of Strawberries and Daisies and Blossoms dead ten years ago.

When the harvest was over Larry agreed to lend a hand with the threshing — then he did not want to go. Something had happened to change the whole direction of his life, or so he thought.

Jean Berry, Berry's only child, was twenty-one years old, big like her father, with big, red hands used to milking and guiding a plough, full, thrusting breasts, red hair, broad, sunburnt face, a little turned up nose, merry eyes, a ripe mouth, and her mother's ready laugh. She seemed to have no cares in the world, although she had to work from the first flush of dawn till late at night and got nothing for it except a cotton dress and a pair of stockings and shoes once a year.

Such happy-go-lucky ways, such uncomplaining acceptance of life on

a few stony acres when the squatters fattened on the pick of the land irritated Larry. Didn't she resent it? No, she said, what was wrong with the farm? They didn't starve.

"But why should my old man be as rich as a Jew and yours have hardly the feed for a few cows? Why should my sister get any fandangle she wants and you not have hardly a pair of shoes to your name?"

"Ach, what's it matter? Your old man can't eat more than three meals a day and your sister can't put on all her silks and satins at once, can she?"

"It's got to be made more just," Larry said.

She laughed. "Now then, don't you start in about parliaments and votes and that. We get more than a bellyful of it from Dad."

Larry thought she was laughing at him and dried up.

"Oh now, Larry, don't be savage at me for laughing. Only — what's the use of it? You talk and talk and talk and go on strike and put yourself in danger, what for?"

"Because it ain't right him having everything."

"It'll never concern me what he has," Jean said, "as long as I get feed for the chicks and pigs and my own kids." She looked at him along her shoulder. "If a man wants me, that is."

"Aw," Larry said. He was piling straw away from the threshing floor. She lay on a heap of it watching him, her loosely-bundled hair spread out behind her like a fine silk kerchief. Her brown legs were bare to the knee where her dress was caught up. Her thighs and hips and broad, big breasts pressed through the thin cotton stuff of her dress, which was stained with sweat under the armpits. She breathed quickly from the exertion of swinging her pitchfork, which she held between her knees, slowly stroking the white haft as she gazed abstractedly at Larry. Her heavy, almost stupid face, made a strange contrast with his, deeply lined by his self-obsession. It was not at all a stupid face when you looked at it closely, a peasant's face unexpressive merely of superfluities. Her big, prostrate body had the beauty of its utility and the grace of complete relaxation.

Larry moved away, stabbed the trusses and slung them into the loft in a hurry to be done.

"You'll tire yourself out working that way," Jean said sleepily. "Here, sit a while, why don't you?"

"There's no time," Larry said and went on pitching till there was no straw left except what she lay on. He paused beside it, eyes averted, waiting for her to get up.

"Oh, come here, Larry," she said. "Why must you be ever slaving and hurrying and looking black, as if the devil was on your heels. Now sit awhile or I'll make you." She reached out and caught him behind the knee and pulled. Larry's leg gave way and he fell heavily across her. He tried to rise, pushing with one hand on her breast, while she held him,

laughing, gasping, and enveloping him in her smell of sweat and hay and sunburnt hair. "Now I'll see if you've got a laugh in you," she cried. She twined her legs round his, her arm round his neck, and tickled him.

He fought roughly away and stood up, red as a turkey, tucking in his shirt.

"Oh, I'm real sorry. Are you savage?" she said, but the sparkle in her eyes belied her.

Larry gave one look at her red face and tousled hair and thighs uncovered and went quickly up the ladder to stow the straw in the loft.

She watched his legs go and ran to the door. Her father was down in the paddock mending the fence, her mother singing in the kitchen. She twisted up her hair and went back to the ladder. "Hallo, Larry, are you there?" she called huskily. "I'm coming to give you a real tickle up this time." As her legs vanished into the loft they kicked the ladder away.

Chapter Seven: Hobo's Blessing

LIFE went more or less smoothly at the Reach thanks to Harriet's firm mind and the affairs which kept Cabell almost continually at the mine or in Brisbane.

But Cabell was on pins and needles. The year was well on and Cash was not gone yet. He would go next month, and when next month came decided that the weather wasn't quite right, or he was waiting for a new sail from the sailmaker, or he was too lazy, or the crew got tired of standing by and he had to look for a new one. Now he had decided to wait over till the Melbourne Cup, and confessed that he had not even begun selling his racehorses yet. Cabell lived in fear that Harriet would see some mention of Cash in the newspapers and know that he had lied, or that Cash would keep his promise to write before he sailed. More recriminations, tears, and angry words — that was the least he could expect.

He answered Cash's notes with all the amiability he could manage, giving bright accounts of his investments to discourage him from coming near Brisbane. He even went so far as to take over some of Cash's unsaleable land so as to report fat profits paid to his account at the Queensland Bank. To Cash's inquiries about Harriet's health he replied that Harriet sent her best wishes for the journey and again her grateful thanks for his present, which she hoped she would find use for when in the near future she went Home to live. Further, she begged him not to trouble to write, as she was sure that he had as much business as she to prevent him doing so. Cabell spent a long time on this particular postscript and hoped that it was not too transparent. But he did not relax his watch on the mail, nor forget to charge Miss Montaulk, under dire threats, to steal whatever letters came for Harriet.

The letter came at last, reached Harriet by a lucky chance, and did all he expected of it to blast the tenuous peace at the Reach. Cash ran a horse in the Cup, lost, sold his stable, and returned to Sydney to prepare for sailing at once. Coming in from her ride late for lunch one day Harriet overtook the coach as it pulled up at the gate to deposit the mail. She carried the letters to the house, idly turning them over as she walked along the veranda. Miss Montaulk ran out and snatched them from her just as she saw her own name on an envelope. "Oh, wait, there's one for me."

“Let me see.” Miss Montaulk tried to get the letter away. “Now, Harriet, your father specially told me . . .”

Harriet guessed at once that it was something her father did not want her to have and wild horses would not have dragged it out of her hands. There was an unseemly struggle in front of Ah Lung, which ended with Miss Montaulk's hair coming down and Harriet flying in triumph to her room, where she paused only to lock the door before she tore open the envelope, saw the signature, and tried to devour the clumsy writing at a glance.

DEAR MISS HARRIET,

You see I'm still here talking about making a break. [Harriet's heart opened as though it would burst. For a moment she was quite blind. “Oh,” she gasped aloud.] I wonder what Jimmy would say if he knew, after all the good advice I gave him on the same subject. Well, I must be getting old as we agreed. [“I didn't agree to any such thing.”] When the time comes I find a dozen and one things to keep me, which proves I don't want to go, I expect, though God knows what else I'd rather be doing better than filling my lungs with sea air — that is, unless I could break an arm again and have you feed me pap like you used to. [Harriet crushed the letter into a ball against her lips. “Oh, you darling.”]

But the day has come when I can't make any more excuses. I've sold my horses and top-hats and your father's looking after my business, so by the time this reaches you I'll be gone. The crew is standing by to raise anchor as soon as this letter and one to your father is written. [Harriet's heart closed again. “You fool,” she whispered indignantly, “Why didn't you write before.” Then she thought of her father and the lie he had told her and she stamped. “Oh, the hateful, lying tyrant.” But her eyes ran on quickly.]

Thanks for the message you sent in your pa's letter. All the same I'm going to write as I promised. [Harriet's mind kept up an automatic fire of maledictions on her father's perfidy as she read.] I suppose the Waterfalls were a bit of a surprise, seeing that you'll have more than enough money when Cabell dies. But it struck me — it's probably like my hide to say this, but if I am wrong there's no harm done, but from a word or two you've dropped I got the notion your wishes in the matter of a husband mightn't coincide with his, and what I thought was, if you ever fell in love with a young fellow who wasn't well off (I know you told me you didn't want to marry, but then you might change your mind) when your father wanted you to hitch up with some Tomnoddy (and Tomnoddies are not in your line, believe me) you'd have enough money of your own to do what you liked with. That's how I figured. Now, Miss Harriet, don't look down your nose at me the way you used to for presuming to know what's in your mind. I'm only going by what you've always said about

not letting anything stand in your way if you ever fell in love with a man. I don't believe you would. But your father is a precious obstinate fellow and seems set on marrying you to some dude you maybe couldn't stand the sight of. So if it comes to that you'll always have this money to fall back on.

Now if I've done wrong and offended you, Miss Harriet, try to forgive me, because I only do it for your happiness which is very important to me, and give the money away to some home for lost dogs or something and accept the humble apologies of,

Your old friend,

JACK CASH.

Harriet folded the paper slowly, put it into the envelope, and stared blindly at her own name. The tears pat-patted on to the paper and smudged the ink. So all these months while she had been resigning herself to the fact that Cash was gone, he was not gone at all. She could have written and he would have come and everything would have turned out right, for he must love her, he *must* — she was sure of it now. What else could he mean by “making excuses to stay,” and “the only thing he'd rather do than go away was be near her”? Her instinct of it, which she had been afraid too sanguinely to believe, was right. All this time he had been waiting for a sign from her, and her father knew he was waiting, and had lied. “Oh, the vile wretch. I'll make him pay for doing this to me!”

She heard stealthy movements on the other side of the door. Miss Montaulk was listening. Her anger bubbled over. She took a paper knife from the table, opened the door, and threw herself on Miss Montaulk, who was crouching at the keyhole. If it had been a real knife Miss Montaulk's days would have ended there. As it was Harriet took a long sliver of skin from between her shoulder-blades and tattered the back of her dress before she escaped. If it had been a real knife Harriet's days would have ended too, for she turned back into the room sobbing and pressed the blunt point to her breast till the ivory blade bent and broke.

Cabell came reluctantly from Brisbane to deal with the new situation, luridly described in a letter from Miss Montaulk. He was tired. The grey was spreading in his beard, the weight of invisible burdens was stooping his shoulders. Worry about Cash and Harriet and the strain of guarding his fortune through anxious times was telling on him. The panic he had foreseen and prepared for was beginning. Even the sturdy Waterfall shares, in which most of his capital was now concentrated, felt the pinch of the market, and bank managers pestered him every minute of the day with testy demands for margin or a settlement of his tremendous liabilities. Thanks to Ludmilla and the lesson he had learnt three years ago he had the resources to see him through, and there was pleasure in

watching the misery of those who hadn't, but the future was uncertain. Two big banks, which had seemed as solid as Gibraltar, had closed down, and land-jobbers, speculators, and squatters with top-heavy mortgages were falling like skittles. But more destructive than worry and overwork was a question which had begun dinning his ears, "What is it all for? Who will thank me?" Twenty times a day he thrust this question aside and the memory of Harriet's face looking at him with hatred the night she avowed her love for Cash, but they returned ever more urgently, mockingly insistent. He fought on with unblunted cunning and ruthlessness, but with failing zest even in the long-imagined triumph over "that mob."

There was, for example, the famous affair of the Investment Corporation and Bank with its million and a half of capital, subscribed mostly by small wage-earners in the boom days. The Corporation might have pulled through. Samuelson had been a good manager and had seen that liabilities were covered by good investments, but all land companies were under a cloud and the public, and especially the banks who were its creditors, watched the Corporation suspiciously. A few weeks before Samuelson had told the directors, of whom Cabell was one, that heavy selling of Corporation stock, or even a rumour that the big holders in the company were trying to unload their shares, might start a flutter that would lead to the calling of loans redeemable only by the selling of assets on a bad market. Bankruptcy would follow inevitably. The seven directors, who held five hundred thousand pounds' worth of shares and debentures between them, agreed to support the market, "for the sake of the widows and orphans, our shareholders," Peppiott said. Cabell gave his word, but he did not trust Peppiott. What if it was a trick to keep his shares off the market while they got rid of their own? Besides, he reflected, a tidy sum might be cleaned up here if these gentlemen really did support the market, not to count what Peppiott would lose if, in spite of all his care for the widows and orphans, the Corporation had to close down. So Cabell discussed the matter with his broker and the next day began to sell his hundred and fifty thousand shares. Most of these the directors bought in, and not suspecting anything called on Cabell to pay his share into the pool. He replied by resigning from the board and letting every one know that he was getting out of the Corporation as quickly as he could. Then he began to sell Corporations forward in Melbourne and Sydney while using every power that prestige and his long association with the Corporation gave him to abuse its credit and spread the rumour among the bankers and speculators and journalists. The directors held out for five days, while small holders and big holders alike threw eight hundred thousand shares on the market where Investment Corporations were hardly worth the paper they were printed on at the end of the week. Three of the directors were then ready to file their petitions, three,

including Peppiott, were green with funk, and Cabell was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds in pocket.

The exploit, which Cabell had just pulled off when Miss Montaulk's letter arrived, earned him new respect and hatred, but its pleasure tasted unexpectedly stale. "What's it all for? Who will thank me?" he asked himself as the coach rattled him across the valley. The knowledge that he had done a dirty trick aggravated his sense of Harriet's treachery. Why did he make enemies if not in fighting for her? Surely the least she could give him was affection; but she had no heart, no pity. Nervously he re-read Miss Montaulk's letter. It upset him, especially the story about the stabbing. "She's got bad blood in her. She'll stop at nothing."

But there were no hysterics when he arrived. Harriet had recovered from that. She greeted her father coldly but she greeted him, and she sat down to dinner with him and ate well. She even smiled at him once or twice with spiritless affability and submitted to being kissed before she went to bed.

Cabell was not relieved. On the contrary, he would rather have had it out, whatever was stored behind her compressed mouth. There was something malign in her false geniality and in her eyes which called forth again the resemblance to her mother. He felt that they were watching all the time in the shadow of their sockets for an opening through which to strike a careful blow. What sort of a blow? Could she be making up her mind to repeat her performance in Brisbane? But Cash *was* gone now. Or was he? Plots to elope in the schooner and whatnot swirled in his brain.

Miss Montaulk's eyes rolled at the idea.

"I've got to have that letter. It will tell us everything."

Miss Montaulk considered. "There's one way. When she goes to the bath to-morrow morning lock her in and search her rooms."

"There'd be hell to pay."

"But you might save her from something worse than death!"

Cabell knew it was a mad thing to do, that it would offend Harriet brutally, but he could not help himself. The fantasies he had built up around Harriet, and the inner knowledge that he was fighting with her to keep his faith and purpose in life, made his jealousy uncontrollable and gave it a fair face. He carried Miss Montaulk's plan out.

After demanding peremptorily to be released Harriet ceased rattling the door handle and sat on the edge of the bath, silently weeping and raging by turns.

For three hours Cabell and Miss Montaulk searched her rooms — among her clothes, in her books, under the carpets, but found nothing.

Miss Montaulk egged him on. "She has it with her now. You must go in and take it from her."

"No, no, I couldn't do that."

"Think of her danger. Surely the end justifies the means."

Cabell went to the bathroom door. "I'm sorry to be doing this, Harriet, but I must have that letter you got from Cash. Where is it?"

"You'll never get it," Harriet said.

He opened the door. Harriet was standing against the wall, her hair down and her dressing-gown wrapped tightly round her body. She looked frightened.

"Give me the letter please, dear," Cabell said, nervously breaking his nails. "I know more about the world and the scamps in it than you. Remember the unhappiness you brought on yourself before and let me guide you now."

Harriet's eyes blazed. "Drive you mean — or trick."

He seemed hardly to notice her reply. He was thinking how pretty she looked with her hair down in wavy, chestnut ropes and the thin column of her neck bare — how fragile. Not for a long time had he seen her so young and fresh. Tenderness swept his hesitation away. He tried to put his hand on her shoulder, but she drew back. "Little Harriet," he said, "believe me, I'm only doing this because I love you more than anything else in the world."

Harriet pouted scornfully and drew her wrap tighter, sharply defining through the silk the curve of her hips.

He turned his eye away. "So don't make me do things which will hurt us both. Give me the letter. I know you've got it with you."

"I'll never give it to you. I've told you once. Now let me go." She tried to slip past between him and the bath, but he put an arm round her shoulders and held her.

"You must give me the letter first."

"Oh, if you only knew what you're doing to me," Harriet cried with sudden tears. "In a minute you'll make me do something dreadful."

Tenderness swept him again. He drew her closer, comfortingly. What tiny bones, what thin shoulders. Like a warm little bird quivering with fright in the hand. "You're hurt, I know. But I've got to do it. You're hardly more than a helpless child and there are evil things in the world it's my duty to protect you from, even if I make you hate me. I must do it because I love you. I'd suffer the torments of the damned to keep you fresh and innocent and young, and if a fellow like Cash insulted you I'd hang to pay him back."

Harriet wriggled out of his arm. A faint perfume of powder and scented soap enveloped him. As she struggled the dressing-gown fell open at the neck and he saw, lying on her breast where her hand held it, a fold of paper.

Instantly his emotions changed from melting tenderness to anger. The lid came down over his eye, his jaw clamped, and the colour faded around the purple welt across his cheek. He pushed her roughly against the wall. "So you carry it there, eh? The paper his dirty paws have been

mauling. Here, hand it here at once or I'll — I'll . . .”

Harriet edged along the wall to put the bath between them. “Don't dare,” she said in a shaky voice. “I'm my own mistress. I've a right . . .”

He leapt at her and they wrestled, Harriet holding the gown close to her throat while Cabell tried to pull her hands away. Suddenly she gave a terrified whimper and cried, “Here, take it,” whipped the letter from her breast, and threw it on the floor.

Miss Montaulk ran in from the doorway and picked it up.

For a moment longer father and daughter gazed at each other, then Cabell's eye drooped and he shuffled away. At the door he looked back, gestured. “Damn it all, Harriet, I'm your father.”

“Certainly,” Miss Montaulk said. “Certainly.”

Harriet slammed the door.

Chapter Eight: Flanagan Again

CABELL was ashamed of what he had done but that made him only more insistent that he had done what was right. If he was in the wrong Harriet was in the right, which was impossible, for Harriet wanted to leave him for Cash, and Cash, as every one knew, was a tramp. So Harriet must be wrong, and right and honour must be all on his side. He, not Harriet, was the one to forgive, and *his* love was so selfless that he had forgiven her already. But Cash . . .

Here was a man who owed him everything, yet he used the money and hospitality Cabell had given him to poison Harriet's mind. Why, even as he wrote this letter he was asking fresh favours and receiving them — “and no doubt laughing at me all the time, the crook!” What could be bad enough for a man like that? “He ought to be crushed like a bug.” But it was one thing to argue the moral duty and imagine the joy of crushing Cash but quite another to do the crushing. The most obvious way to get at him was through his money, but Cash was cunning. His lawyer, Cabell's co-trustee, was devoted to Cash that way, and as for strangling him, he was already safe at sea. “Lucky again,” Cabell reflected when several hours of hard thought failed to turn up any other means of making Cash suffer; but Cash's luck, as Cash himself often said, did not work in straight lines.

Cabell went to the mine for a week to escape Harriet's angry silences and console himself with the spectacle of his new works now almost complete. He was sitting in the office poring over reports from the chemists and engineers one evening when his clerk came in and told him that a gentleman, just arrived from Brisbane on the afternoon coach, wanted to see him.

“Send him in.”

Cabell glanced up at the bulky shadow in the doorway, and his mouth came open as Flanagan, staggering under his fat as though a gale was blowing against him, entered and waved a gracious greeting.

He pulled a chair up to the table and sat down. The dust of the journey was still thick on him, except where a hasty pot of beer had washed a half-moon of dirt from his upper lip.

“Well!” Cabell said, shocked.

Flanagan's impudent blue eyes, watering from the grit under their lids, were like two little pieces of ice melting slowly in the furnace of his face.

"I guessed I'd find ye hereabouts. Sittin' on yer mountain of gold."

"What d'you want?" Cabell demanded.

"Och now, ye were always an impatient fellow, Cabell. Give a man time to collect himself. It must be thirty years close on since I set eyes on ye face to face."

"I remember it," Cabell said.

"There, there," Flanagan rumbled soothingly. "Let bygones be bygones. I'm willing to."

"You!"

"Sure. Haven't I let meself be rolled and bumped half out of me skin to come four hundred miles to see ye."

"For no benefit to me, I'll be sworn."

"The answer's yes and no," Flanagan said. "A matter of give and take." He sank, gasping, into his quagmire for a moment, then pulled himself out with a hand on the edge of the table. "I've got a little proposition to make ye . . ."

"Save your breath," Cabell said. "I want nothing to do with you. I know you're in a bad way, and if you expect help from me you're a fool." He stood up. "Now be on your way. If I'd known it was you, you'd not have got in here."

"You'd've been the fool then," Flanagan said softly, not moving. "You'd've lost fifty thousand pounds."

"Uh?"

Flanagan smiled, but the cleaned circle on his upper lip made it look like a malignant grin. "Come now, man, don't be jumping round like a Jack-in-the-box and you and me old friends and might've been connected by marriage. Ah, that was a hard thing ye done there, Cabell. I doubt if Jimmy'll ever forgive ye, especially if ye bear down hard on the poor girl now and drive her to destitution."

"What the devil are you talking about? What's the point?"

"The point is simple," Flanagan said. "I'm up the spout and I need thirty thousand pounds to get out again."

His cool impudence made Cabell sit down and take a long breath before he replied, "Do you think I'd give you the smell of my breath if it was to buy you out of hell?"

"All things considered," Flanagan said complacently, "I'm sure you would."

"Look here, Flanagan, d'you remember the time I came to see you in Brisbane when you were a minister and McFarlane was stealing land from me, and you kept me kicking my heels outside your door for days on end and then refused to help me and dragged my name in the mud when I went to court. I was a young man in those days, Flanagan, at the turningpoint of my life, and you brought more misery on me than I could ever repay."

"I seem to remember something about it," Flanagan said. "But what's the misery you're yelling about. You've got on, and here's the McFarlanes and me . . ."

"Yes," Cabell said. His face relaxed as he looked over Flanagan's head at the scene beyond the office window. Dusk was falling on Monaghan Street. The pubs were roaring full — the day shift fighting in to slake its thirst, the night shift fighting out after its last drink. Away across the ridge the stampers marched, like an endless army plodding by. As the quick darkness came down Flanagan sank deeper and deeper into his bog till there was only a black round hole from which emerged tentatively his expiring breath, but Cabell's face grew clearer and uglier with a fiery radiance reflected from the furnaces which glowed on the pitchy mountain-side as though the miners had opened a tunnel straight to the earth's incandescent heart. "Yes, things have changed a bit," Cabell said. "*You're* sitting on the wrong side of the table to-day."

"Well now," Flanagan said, "I wouldn't be so sure of that — I mean about who's sitting on what side of the table."

"No?" Cabell chuckled.

Flanagan chuckled too. That merry sound coming from the depths of his black pit was disquieting, as though a man should laugh up from the bottom of a well when you'd pushed him in.

Cabell's eye turned with the furnace light prinking it.

"You've forgotten your fifty thousand pounds," Flanagan said, "haven't ye?"

"Fifty thousand pounds?" Cabell racked his brains again. He had no fifty thousand pounds in danger. Every penny of his money was tied up snugly against the storm. "What's your bluff?"

"What's yours? I just happen to know you've got fifty thousand pounds in the Queensland Incorporated under Cash's name."

"Oh? What of it?"

The clerk came in quietly and lit the lamp. Its yellow glow revealed Flanagan on dry land again, dripping moisture, his face streaked with red mud, and panting hard as he clung to the arms of his chair. "There now. Who's on what side of the table? Ha ha."

"If you've got something to say, say it."

"I've got a lot to say — but what for?"

"I'll pay what it's worth."

Flanagan pulled a paper from his pocket. "Ye'll sign my guarantee?"

"Be damned."

"Ye'd rather lose your fifty thousand?"

Cabell understood at last. "You don't mean to say . . ."

"That the bank's bust? Yes. If the Government moves three hundred thousand of its balance and there's a run, as there might be any minute, the bank's done for. And the Government will move its balance within

forty-eight hours.”

Cabell whistled.

“And that's where I'm as good as a fairy godmother to ye,” Flanagan said. “I can get ye that money out.”

“You can save it?”

“Sure,” Flanagan said. “For a friend.”

Cabell got up and pulled the blinds down thoughtfully, went to the door and looked into the outer office. The clerks were putting on their hats to go home. He closed the door, returned to the table, sat down, and pondered. It was strange to see what life had done to these two men, who had been young together in Moreton Bay fifty years before. The crude young Dublin tough it had fattened and softened into a good imitation of a gentleman; the nervous young English gentleman it had coarsened into a tough. “Listen, Flanagan,” Cabell said, “I'll see you through your trouble.”

“Good for ye. I knew ye'd be sensible. And I'll see ye through yours.”

“Never mind that. You'll forget that you've ever told me a word, see? Whatever happens you'll keep your mouth shut, or I'll have you sold up on the spot.”

“But the fifty thousand?”

“I told you to forget it.”

“But you'll lose every penny, man, I'm telling ye.”

“That's my affair,” Cabell said. “Now let us see what security you've got.”

Flanagan's urbanity of a man for whom the world holds no more surprises deserted him. His eyes burst the scummy surface of the morass like two bubbles. “Here, sign this quick,” he said, pushing his paper under Cabell's nose, “before you're took off to the asylum. . . .”

Cabell returned to the Reach, and for three days waited eagerly for the coach to bring his letters and papers from Brisbane. On the fourth day a terrific storm drenched the valley, and the coach did not come again. News filtered through of floods on the land and storms at sea. Half of Brisbane was washed away — millions of pounds' worth of property destroyed, hundreds drowned. He sent Sambo to Pyke's Crossing for his mail, but Sambo had to turn back. Another fortnight passed before a reasonable account of the great flood of Ninety-three reached the valley. Victoria Bridge was gone, miles of houses and buildings put up in the boom time were destroyed, the city which he had seen grow from a collection of humpies was a waste of waters.

The news depressed Cabell. Even the reflection that this would be a terrible blow to “that mob” and that his own fortune was safe did not cheer him as he read of the destruction in Brisbane, of English investors taking their money away, of hungry men marching in the big cities, of old squatting families, older in Australia than his own, losing their

properties. It seemed to be the end of an idea of nationhood which had taken hold of everybody during the last decades when Australia was called "The Land of Promise," "The New America," when railways and roads spread thousands of miles into the wilderness, cities grew, population doubled itself, and wealth flowed from mines and stations and factories. He never talked of that idea, as Dr Barnett was so fond of doing, but, in spite of himself perhaps, he had given the best years of his life to it. He was one of the landtakers who had made the country habitable for human beings. He had cut the first roads, helped to improve the breed of the sheep which carried the country on its back, developed fresh resources of its wealth in Waterfall. True, what he had given was only the by-blow of his money-grubbing, but it set him above all other money-grubbers of the Peppiott kind. Though he revolted against this conception of his purpose and would continue to revolt till his dying day, still he knew that whatever dignity and significance his life had must depend upon the dignity and significance of the country he had made. So if after all Australia was to come to nothing, what was left in his life except a long, sordid, and not always honest struggle for money? What was it all for? All the hardships, disappointments, hatreds, and crimes? He had lived to see his enemies broken — Emma dying, Flanagan crawling for help, the smirking, gossiping mob in Brisbane brought down: was that his fulfilment? No, no, there was no flavour in triumph he found, for triumph emptied the springs of hate. Was it the glory of wealth and power? When those who had called him "a voluntary jailbird" were dead? Was it for his family — for James and Geoffrey and Larry? "They hate me like a black snake." Only one thing was left to ennoble the shifts and brutalities of his long struggle — his love for Harriet.

So he turned to Harriet with the exigence of a man protecting his last illusion, his last spark of an excuse for living and suffering.

Harriet would have nothing to do with him. Though he knew he was in the right he begged her to forgive him. He begged abjectly, like a lover, but Harriet had his own iron in her heart. He complained of pains over his sound eye and pretended to be sick, but she took no notice.

"You don't care for your father any more?"

"After what you've done to me, and to Larry, and to James?"

"It's not what I've done to Larry and James, it's what Cash, the swine, has done to you."

"He's done nothing."

"Don't tell me, girl. He must have. To love a man like that — it's incredible!"

"A man like that! He'd've protected me from you."

Cabell laughed wildly. "Him protect you! He couldn't protect himself. Look at that." He pushed the paper in front of her and pointed at a splash

of headlines. "The Queensland Incorporated Bank's bust. All his money was in it. D'you understand? He's a pauper. He couldn't buy you a loaf of bread."

Harriet looked at him. "But how could he lose his money? Weren't you to look after it?"

"Yes, yes," he muttered, turning from her eyes, "but accidents happen."

Chapter Nine: He Loves Me; He Loves Me Not

HER father had ruined Cash: Harriet was sure of it. But for the moment she was less concerned with the cause of the calamity than with the awful fact that Cash was penniless. What would become of him? She thought at once of the twenty-five thousand pounds. He must take that back now, but how was she to tell him so? Apart from the insurmountable difficulty of writing and sending off a letter under Miss Montaulk's eye, where should a letter be sent? She looked at the map. Months might pass before he touched at one of those little pinpricks of land on the blue waste and learn what had happened. She guessed how he would take it, not very tragically, and she guessed, too, that he would not return to Australia. He would fear the very thing she wanted to do. He had given her the money for a special purpose and nothing would persuade him to take it back. Writing letters, she admitted on second thoughts, would be a waste of time. There was nothing left for her except to spend her compassion on the picture of a victimized, and therefore still more lovable Cash.

Cabell hung round the house for a week complaining of pains over his eye, trying to wring some sympathy from her, but Harriet hardened her heart, refused to go to meals, and finally locked herself in her room with a vague idea of forcing him to make up some of the damage he had done to Cash. Heavily he took himself off to Waterfall again.

The day after he left Geoffrey came up from Brisbane. The collapse of the Investment Corporation and its bank had mercifully relieved him of a job, and the flood had interfered with his more serious activities around Frogs' Hollow, so he returned to the Reach for a spell. Also, he had an end in view.

"I say, Sis, heard about Cash?"

"Heard what?"

"He's ruined."

"Oh, Father did say something."

Geoffrey looked at her slyly. "Did he tell you how?"

"Some bank closed up."

"But the old man didn't have any spondulicks in it to lose. He saw it coming, didn't he? And yet he was Cash's trustee!" He winked. "I say, Sis, you know what they reckon down in Brisbane? That it was the old man who put the kibosh on him."

“He says it was an accident.”

“*He* says.” Geoffrey sniffed at her simplicity. “Then why aren't they on speaking terms?”

“They were. Till Cash went away.”

Geoffrey thumbed his arm-holes and rocked on his heels. “D'you want me to tell you something, Sis — something that will make your little maiden heart go pit-a-pat?”

Excitement tightened Harriet's throat. She could hardly say “What?”

“Cash didn't go away.”

“Oh, but . . . are you sure?”

Geoffrey grinned as he watched the colour rise in his sister's face. “So the yarn going round Brisbane *is* true, is it?”

“About Cash?”

“About Cash and the old man and you.”

“What do they say?”

“What do you expect them to say when a girl nurses a fellow for three months (a fellow who wants to knock off blokes' heads in pubs for talking about her, mind you), and then he makes her a present of twenty-five thousand quid and her old man turns round and does him out of all his dough?”

Harriet's face burnt. “I don't know what they say, but it's a lie if it's . . . that.”

“No need to try and pull my leg, Sis,” Geoffrey reassured her. “I'm a man of the world. I understand.” He strutted round the room and stopped in front of her with a sympathetic look. “I always liked you, Sis, and did you a good turn more than once, didn't I? I might be able to do you another some day. By the way, did he really give you twenty-five thousand quid?”

Harriet was impatient to know what Geoffrey meant by saying that Cash had never gone away, but she knew better than to put a high price on the information by asking outright. “Yes, yes,” she said, “he did. Before he sailed he gave Father some shares in Waterfall for me.”

“Oh, shares. Not dough. And the old man's got them.” Geoffrey screwed up his nose. “That's different. I thought if you had all that dough lying around you might like me to invest a few hundred for you. I know a dead cert down Randwick for next month. Don't expect you'd tap the old man . . .?”

“No.”

“There,” Geoffrey said indignantly. “That's all the thanks a bloke gets. Well, you wait till the next time you ask me . . .”

“I've got my jewels,” Harriet said to placate him. “Perhaps if you wanted it badly . . .”

“You can keep them. There's not a pop-shop open in Brisbane and Cash hasn't got a bean. The other night in the Royal he couldn't lend me

a fiver.”

“Oh, then he's at the Royal Hotel in Brisbane!” Harriet cried.

“Cash? Yes, of course. I was going to tell you. He gave me a message for you. Only, by jove, Harriet, a chap oughtn't to be carrying messages to his sister from a fellow like that. I ought to tell the old man by rights.”

“Tell him then,” Harriet said disdainfully, but Geoffrey's “Serve you right if I did, you stingy little beast,” brought her to heel. “No, Geoff, don't. I'll get you the money somehow if you'll wait. I promise. Only . . . what did Mr Cash say?”

Geoffrey nudged her. “Jacky, you mean, not mister. Now no tricks, Sis. You'll get the money?”

“I swear.”

“Well, he just said to tell you that a storm blew his mast out but he expected to be ready to sail again soon.”

“Is that all?”

“And he said it wasn't as serious as it seemed at first and nobody was to blame. D'you know what he means?”

“He means his ship.”

“Aw, my eye. He means his money, and that it's not the old man's fault.”

“But it must be.”

“Everybody knows that. But what follows? That the old man found out that you and Cash . . .”

“Geoffrey!”

“I'm only telling you what they say.”

“Then Cash knows — I mean that Father . . .”

“Knows? Aw, Sis, come off it. He could make a long guess, I suppose, even if everybody wasn't talking about it. And isn't that why he tells them that it wasn't the old man's fault he lost his money, just to cover up your tracks? But the way he says it — you'd think he was ready to fetch them one for slinging mud at the *old man's* honour.”

“But why doesn't he come and see Father and have it out with him?”

“Why?” Geoffrey said. “And naughty echo answers why? What *d'you* think?”

“I don't know what to think?” Harriet said worriedly. “But how is he? How does he look?”

“How d'you expect a man to look after losing all his dough? But as a matter of fact, he doesn't. He looks nearly cheerful. Perhaps he's saved some. They reckon the bank will pay — in years to come.”

Harriet caught his hand. “Does he? Looks pleased? As if he'd just found out something good? Or as if he'd just suspected it, eh? As if it was just dawning on him? As if he didn't know whether to believe it or not?”

“Hold on. Stop jabbering. What d'you mean?”

“He might have found out that I love him,” Harriet said excitedly. “I

told Father and he turned on Cash, the beast. He kept us apart and lied to me and searched my room and stole a letter. He thinks that Cash knows too. But he doesn't. Unless he's guessed now and . . . Wouldn't he ask himself why Father should have done this unless I'd . . ." She covered her face in her hands. "Oh, I'm going crazy. How could he suspect? There must be some other reason why Father ruined him, something we don't know of. Or just Father's greed perhaps. And even if he did suspect, perhaps he wouldn't care. Would he, Geoff? What do you think?"

"Perhaps he would," Geoffrey said, preening his side-levers with a faraway look in his little currant eyes.

"What makes you think so? Did he say something more? A word?"

Geoffrey winked. "I'm not saying he did and not saying he didn't. But what suppose he did?"

"Oh, if I knew for certain I'd . . ." She hesitated.

"Yes?" he prompted.

Her eye penetrated his solicitous interest. "You sneak, Geoffrey, you're trying to make me say something so that you can tell Father like you did with James."

Geoffrey was affronted. "I'll be blowed, if that's not the last time I . . ."

Harriet ran after him. "I didn't mean it, Geoff. I trust you. Haven't I told you everything?"

"As if I wanted to know. Only that I felt sorry for you . . ."

"Oh yes, Geoffrey, I do want your advice. You know what men are like. Did it seem as if he might — perhaps — not exactly love me — but . . ."

"Well, now I come to think of it perhaps . . ."

"But can't you say for certain," Harriet cried impatiently. "Oh, if I could only be sure!"

"You'd clear out again?"

"Yes, I would, and take him back the money he gave me."

"So you would?"

The satisfaction in his voice alarmed her. "But you won't tell Father?"

"By jove, a chap ought to resent aspersions like that." Geoffrey said, "if he didn't know you were a bit unbalanced!"

Harriet locked the door on him and sat down to think. Her brain was unbalanced, as Geoffrey said, and what wonder? What she had dreamed of secretly for months past had happened, when she had at last given up hope that it would ever happened: Cash had come back. Among all other uncertainties and possibilities that stood out clear and positive in her mind, but when she tried to resolve the muddle of theories and rumours and doubts around it she became confused again and depressed. Cash was back, but what then? Was she to write and tell him that he was the man without money whom she loved against her father's wish? What would he answer? A few weeks ago she was sure he loved her, but now

that she looked for the reasons which made her sure they turned out to be as tenuous as the suspicions she had already discounted. He gave her a present and told her that her happiness was important to him? What did that prove? To the scandal-mongers it proved that she and Cash were lovers already, so might not her deductions be wrong too. "If only I could see him and talk to him." But how? By running away? It was all very well to make glib, heroic resolves, but how was she to run away without money, even supposing she could evade Miss Montaulk and her father. Besides, to run away and go to Cash, with everybody in Brisbane already whispering and remembering Doug Peppiott . . . Oh, the shame if Cash sent her back, the terrible uncertainty, if he married her, that he might do so because he was generous and chivalrous, not because he loved her. No, she could not run away, not unless she was sure.

And yet . . . why did he not come to see her father, unless he knew that Cabell had ruined him through some spite it would be useless to argue against? Mustn't he suspect the truth? Surely, if there was some other reason than that which the gossips in Brisbane gave him, such as greed for instance, he wouldn't try to pretend that Cabell was blameless. Yes, it *must* be true, as Geoffrey said, that he did so because he knew and wanted to put people off the track for her sake, and that he avoided her father because . . . why, of course, *because he felt guilty*. Yes, yes, that's what his message meant. "It's not your father's fault, it's my own, because I fell in love with you and tried to interfere with his plans." That was what he meant. Wasn't it possible that he had actually told her father that he loved her and that they had quarrelled about it, which would explain why her father had been so vindictive even before Cash gave her the present and she confessed . . . Then there was that other part of the message — that "it wasn't so serious as it seemed." But it was serious. He had lost all his money. Her heart leapt. But it wouldn't be serious if by losing all his money he had discovered that she loved him — supposing he loved her. And mightn't he guess that when he tried to explain why her father had turned on him suddenly. It wasn't impossible even that Cabell had written and told him why he had ruined him. Yes, Cabell would do that. And if he had written, or if Cash had guessed it for himself, and if his message meant that he had found out and that he was glad of the calamity which had opened his blind eyes, didn't she have all the assurance she needed? He might even have said more and Geoffrey not told her, for Geoffrey was her father's sneak. But he had hinted, hadn't he? *Surely* he had hinted!

Ah, but could she trust Geoffrey? Or any one else? Doubt pricked the hopes which had run away with her and down came all her sophistical arguments. "What rot. Why should any of that be true? He doesn't come to the Reach merely because he doesn't want to give me the chance to offer the present back — or else he's too busy, which is more likely. And

why shouldn't his message mean exactly what it says and all the rest be Geoffrey's invention, even the tale about people talking? And how could he guess what had happened up here, unless he had second sight? And . . . and I'm a fool."

Up and down the room, up and down all the afternoon she went, churning these vain hypotheses over in her brain till she felt sick. Oh, for somebody to talk to about it, for somebody to advice her!

She went out on to the veranda. Geoffrey was there, smoking a big cigar. He put it away guiltily when he heard a step, but grinned when he saw her and stuck it jauntily in the corner of his mouth. It was one of Cabell's, which he had stolen.

She turned away impatiently from his fat, over-indulged face and eyes of a dog which never knows whether it is to be stroked or kicked. How could he help her? She wanted somebody to steel her against her father and the smirking, whispering world, and of course there was no one. Under this roof he had broken them all.

Chapter Ten: Mother and Daughter

SHE stopped on her way back to the room, remembering her mother. There was one who could help her — if she would. For a moment she hesitated, then hurried around the veranda to the back of the house where the old kitchen jutted into the yard. There was a new kitchen now, for when Cabell brought in a Chinese cook and appointed Miss Montaulk housekeeper Emma refused to be driven from her old haunts and even began to sleep across the hearth on a dirty bundle of rags. A devastating and final change was at work in her. She was over seventy now and the weight of all those years seemed to have fallen upon her suddenly. She had begun to look dirty. Grease-spots mildewed on her dress and the soot of the fire caked in the fine wrinkles of her face. The kitchen, which had been her pride, with its shining brass pots and shining black stove and flagstones and walls whitewashed once a week, was invaded by rats and by flies which buzzed about forgotten scraps of meat. “She's going back to type,” Cabell told himself, and Miss Montaulk said she was going mad.

The kitchen door was ajar. Harriet paused and looked in through the crack. Emma was sitting on her heels before the fire with her shawl over her shoulders and her few wisps of hair hanging down, and the glow from the flames glittering on her face. She was whispering to herself, frowning, waving her hands. Her face looked more squawlike than ever in its emaciation — the face of an old gipsy woman weaving spells with sibyllic patience and fore-knowledge, Harriet thought. As she watched, the faith she had always had in her mother's power and knowledge of life was reinforced by a sudden, literal belief in the old woman's witchlike wisdom. It overcame her shyness at the door and took her to the table where she stood waiting for Emma to look round and see her. But she had to say, “Mother, may I speak to you a minute?” and repeat it twice before Emma turned her head, cringing, with her eyes at the corner of their narrow lids.

“I have something to tell you. I want your help,” Harriet said.

Her mother looked away as though she did not recognize her, but the unsteadiness of Harriet's voice, or perhaps the unwashed tear-stains on her face, had caught Emma's attention, and she glanced up again smiling.

It was an unpleasant smile, and disconcerted Harriet. She backed defensively against the table and jerked out a nervous, “But if you're

busy I'll go away."

Emma grunted. "Been grizzling again? You're always grizzling. One day you'll get something to grizzle for."

"Oh, don't you start, Mother," Harriet said. "I'm . . . oh, Mother, I'm so unhappy."

Emma cackled. "You spoilt brat. Have you felt a pea under your feather mattress or what?"

"Can't you see I'm not like that — not a spoilt brat?" Harriet protested. "I don't want his money and his presents. I'm like you."

"You look it," Emma said dryly, eyeing her dress, her bracelets, her boots which fitted her tiny feet like gloves, her manicured hands.

"But I am. In here I'm like you." Harriet pressed her hands to her breasts. "I couldn't be a lady. Not without pretending that a part of me didn't exist, and I don't want to pretend. Besides, they despise me, all the ladies, all the Nice People in Brisbane."

"Huh, told you about your mother, did they, like they told James?"

"Oh, don't think I'm ashamed like James. I'm glad. I'd rather be you than Mrs Peppiott."

"Oh, aye," Emma said sarcastically. "I've had a high time of it."

"I know you've had troubles, Mother. It must have been terrible. But nothing could be more terrible than feeling ashamed of yourself, wondering what other people are thinking of you, and perhaps for that reason losing everything you want in here." She pressed her breasts again. "Can you understand? I did something dreadful in Brisbane — with a man. Everybody knew about it. I was so ashamed of myself I could hardly hold my head up. I wanted to marry any fool, any Tomnoddy, who could protect me. What if one had come along and taken me because of Father's money and looked down on me afterwards. That would have been more terrible than physical pain."

Emma turned up her face, which age had withered till it seemed hardly bigger than a baby's face. It had lost its old expression of sad restraint, and in their shrunken setting the eyes seemed to reflect an uncontrollable fire which had charred the skin around them and now was eating deeper and deeper into her. "A fat lot you know about pain," she said, "or shame, or losing what you want." She pulled the shawl close and shivered slightly, though it was suffocatingly hot in the little kitchen with all the windows closed. "When I was younger than you they took me, the traps, and put me on the ship for Australia. The filth, the stink, the rotten meat, and the men — you didn't get any chance to pick and choose what your fancy stomach wanted there."

Harriet put up her hand in feeble protest. "Oh, don't. I know."

The old woman grinned spitefully and lifted her voice. "And then when we arrived they drove us ashore, and there were the men waiting on the beach with their tongues hanging out — drunken soldiers and brutes

from the bush who hadn't seen a woman for years. They drove us up the street with the men running along and singing out at us and trying to touch us. Then they put us in the factory and men came to look at us like cattle, and I was sent into the country with one and I ran away."

Her voice dropped until she was whispering her story to the fire, frowning, waving her hands, as she had been whispering it when Harriet came in. She seemed to have forgotten Harriet, lost in the enormous memory of her pain. "Yes, I ran away and they caught me and in public, yes, in the streets with all the men standing round and grinning, they stripped me half-naked and flogged me till the skin broke on my back. And then the man who had ordered me to be flogged and watched them do it, a drunken swine named Major Mowlatt, he took me off to be his servant and bought me dresses and silk shoes. That was on the Murray, fifty-three years ago."

Harriet whimpered in a deep breath.

Emma sniffed at her. "You wouldn't like to have a man who looked down on you, eh? How would you like to have one who sent for you when he had his drunken friends in and pulled your dress off to show them your back with the scars down to your waist? Yes, I was young enough to feel shame, but soon I gave up caring. I thought I was too dirty for any man ever to want, and when it was time to go free I didn't care whether I stayed or went, until my cousin, Jem, came and took me."

The two women looked at each other, the old woman and the young woman, the one filthy, in rags, with her features almost eaten away by the years, the other with hardly a line on her face, carefully preserved against the sun, and as fragile in its small, clear features as a cast in delicate porcelain; yet between them was so plain a likeness that you could see, pathetically, in the young girl the old woman's wasted beauty and passion; and in the mother, tragically, the hatred and despair that could ravage the daughter.

Harriet saw it and shuddered. "I understand, Mother. I felt like that too. A man called me a whore. I felt dirty too, as if I was finished for life. I could have killed myself. But now I'm glad. I can't explain it, but I'm glad I'm what *they* call depraved, because it must be what they're not, all those women. And that's why I'm glad I'm like you, because you're not like them."

Emma sneered at her defiance. "Just like your father, that's what you are — eaten up with pride. A proper Cabell."

"But I'm a Surface too. I'm your daughter as well as his."

Emma held her off with a look of distrust. "What d'you want then? Sympathy? Hasn't he given you enough? Hasn't he robbed my Larry so that you can have your silks and necklaces? What d'you come in here snivelling for?" She grinned again, and the fine tattoo lines shifted their pattern.

"Aye, you'll snivel for some reason, my lass, when Larry comes back."

"Will he come?" Harriet said to soothe her. "How do you know?"

"Will the sun rise?" Emma said. "Because he *is* a Surface, that's why? Because he *is* like me in here." She pressed her own flat breast. "And because he hates all your aristocratic mugs as I do. He had his chance to be a gentlemanly Cabell, but he wouldn't take it. He was right. To hell with them. They flogged and insulted me, and now my Larry and his mates will do the same with them." She nodded and mouthed over the fire, more than ever like an old sibyl calling up evil chance. "Oh yes, my fine young lady, you'll snivel with a vengeance then."

"Don't wish me evil," Harriet said. "I don't want to take anything that is Larry's. I want to do what Larry did — escape."

"Escape — what from?"

"From Father. I want to go away from the Reach. I love somebody — Mr Cash. Do you remember him? He was Father's partner, but Father turned against him because of me and ruined him. I don't know what his feelings are. I wish I did. If he loved me I'd . . . perhaps I'd run away."

Emma studied her excited face. "You're play-acting," she said. "I know you hysterical young chits."

"But I would," Harriet insisted fiercely, and she told her mother everything that had happened between Cash, her father, and herself, and what news Geoffrey had brought.

Emma listened closely and an ugly expression of cunning sharpened her eyes. "Well, what's stopping you? You're not locked up."

"I'm so afraid," Harriet said. "I might make a mistake and be lost. I could never come back."

"You're frightened of the ladies in Brisbane."

"I'm not."

"Oh, yes you are. You're thinking of the ladies in Brisbane you pretend not to care about, but you care about them more than about your man. Like me, you call yourself. A lot you'd care for anything else but your man if you were. What does it matter whether he loves you or not, if he's in trouble? You love him, don't you? D'you think I served your father all these years and spent myself for Larry because I thought they loved me? Love means give, not take." She waved Harriet off. "Go and take a pill, girl. Tight-lacing and rich food, that's what wrong with you."

Harriet was indignant. "That's not true, Mother. I don't care about anything. But how can I go without money. I'm all alone. They watch me like a prisoner. Even now they'll be watching, and when Father comes home they'll tell him I was here and that will bring trouble on you."

"You needn't bother your head about that," Emma said. "I'd be pleased to see him if you'd gone. Aye, very pleased." She stirred the fire and huddled closer to it. The sun was sinking and it was dark in the kitchen behind the cobwebbed windows. "And if you had the money," Emma

asked, "you'd go?"

"Well — yes."

Emma broke some sticks on to the dying flames. The fire leapt up, on her face, in her eyes. "I'll give you the money," she said turning. "Oh, it's not mine. Don't thank me. Thank him. It's his money. It was meant to bribe my Larry out of the way, but he refused it. Now you can have it. That's fair, isn't it? I'll remind him of that. Oh, I'll remind him of a lot of things when he comes in here. You needn't worry."

She got up from the fire and shuffled across the flags, cackling merrily to herself. From the shelf behind the door she took down an old biscuit-tin and fished out a small paper packet. "There," she said, laying it on the table. "There's fifty pounds. Go on, take it. Lost your nerve, eh?"

"No," Harriet said, "but I should go, shouldn't I, Mother? I'm so frightened."

"Of course. Of course," Emma said impatiently. "Go tonight when they're asleep. Nobody will hear you. You'll be in Brisbane before he gets back from the mine."

Harriet looked away from the ugly, gloating expression on her mother's face. "She's only saying it to spite him. She doesn't care what becomes of me." Then she turned back and threw her arms around her mother and clung to her, peering into her eyes. "Don't lie to me, Mother. Tell me the truth. Do you think he loves me? Am I mad? Don't tell me to go because you think it will ruin me and hurt Father."

Emma pushed her off and returned grumbling to the fire. "I've given you the money. Take it or leave it."

Harriet sighed. It was useless to expect understanding here. The rift between them was too wide. She walked over to the table and fingered the little parcel. A sovereign slid out and rolled around the table.

"Harriet," Emma said, "come here, girl."

Harriet glanced around. The old woman was holding out her hand. She closed it on Harriet's arm. "Perhaps you'd better not go," she mumbled. "What's the good of my advice? I'm a wicked old woman."

"No, no, you're not," Harriet said, pressing her hand. "It's been terrible for you. I know why you hate him. I'd hate him too if I had to stay much longer. The other day he broke into my room — I could have killed him."

Emma searched her face. "Perhaps you're right. Perhaps there is a lot of Surface blood in you." She ran a finger down Harriet's cheek. "And you're not ashamed of it?"

"No, Mother."

"You used to hide behind my skirts when you were little," Emma said softly. "Do you remember?"

"I've always wanted to hide behind them," Harriet said, "but you wouldn't let me. You kept me off. That day I came in here — you

laughed at me.”

“Yes,” Emma said sadly, “it's a terrible thing to be ashamed, as you said. It makes you suspect even your own children. But it was him who kept me ashamed. God knows, I was ready enough to forget what had gone, but he was always throwing it in my face. You're right, child, don't marry a man who'll look down on you.”

“I'd kill myself first,” Harriet said. “He wants me to go to England for a husband, but I couldn't, Mother. It would be you and Father all over again.”

Emma nodded. “And you love this man Cash?”

“Yes.”

“He's a good man. He's been through the mill. He must love you too, leaving you all that money.”

“Do you think so? Really? Truly?”

“I'm sure he does,” Emma said, “but I don't know what to tell you to do. I only know what I'd do. I'd go. But all Surfaces are reckless fools.”

Harriet threw her arms round her mother again and kissed her on the mouth. “Then I'll go, Mother. I will. Aren't I a Surface?”

“It would be better, maybe,” Emma said uncertainly. “Anything would be better than sitting here year after year hating him and waiting for him to die.”

Harriet could not stop kissing her mother. Her heart was light and gay all at once and her whole body felt radiant, fortified by an act of decision.

Emma had to tear herself away. “Well go, child, before they come spying out what you're up to. Go on.” She pushed Harriet towards the door. “Here's your money. Be brave, child, and God bless you.”

Harriet kissed her a last time and ran back to her room in wild and joyous excitement. . . .

Part VI: Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Chapter One: Bad Conscience

ABOUT this time it was that Jean Berry chased Larry up into the loft. Once more Larry felt that his old life had died and a new world opened before him. Occasionally, for politeness sake, he let Berry take him to a meeting of the Pyke's Crossing Labour League, which Berry had helped to form in the hope of returning a Labour member to parliament at the next elections, but the speeches about wicked squatters and the Utopia of Democracy did not touch Larry. His mind kept wandering to Jean, who would be waiting in his room at the farm, a promise beside which prophecies of the Golden Age of Human Brotherhood seemed nebulous and dull.

But as he fell more in love with Jean, and began to think that it would be good to marry her and have a place of his own, children perhaps, an itching little uneasiness irritated his mind, so he put the idea aside without trying to understand why he felt guilty about it. A few nights later when he was lying in his bed in the harness shed with Jean, Berry came to the door to tell him something and nearly caught them. They were both so scared that Jean did not go again, and they had less of each other and were both unhappy. So Larry lying in his lonely bed thought of marriage again and the uneasy feeling came back and gradually concreted itself into the sense of a duty to his mother neglected. "I ought to write and tell her that I'm going to marry and settle down and won't go back to the Reach no more," he told himself, but that did not soothe the guilty feeling at all, only made it worse. One day soon afterwards when he was in Pyke's Crossing buying stores he met a swaggie who told him of the change that had come over Emma. Only the swaggie said that it was all Cabell's doing and that he refused to let Emma live anywhere except in the kitchen or eat anything except the scraps from the table. He told Larry that Emma was sure he would come back one day, and that she spent all her time watching for him. "But you'll need to go soon if you want to see her alive," he said. "She hasn't got the condition of a half-starved rabbit on her." Larry said nothing to the swaggie, but he flared into anger within. "Why should I go back? I didn't tell her I would. I've wasted half my life already hanging around because she wanted me to. If it hadn't been for her I'da had a wife and a place of my own twenty years ago." Later he was surprised at himself and ashamed. "I'll go back and see her one of these days," he promised, "before she dies." *Before*

she dies. Months passed and he did not go, but every time he was in Pyke's Crossing he kept his ears open as if he expected to hear some important news, and the more expectantly he listened the more guilty he felt, until suddenly he refused to go near Pyke's Crossing any more, and when Berry came back one day and said, "Heard a bit of news that'll interest you," Larry shouted, "Keep it to yourself. I've finished with the Reach, I tell you." Berry did not press the news on Larry, for it was bad news and he was afraid of what it might make him do.

The year brought a fresh crop of troubles. The shearers' union had decided to call another strike. It was to be a different strike from the last. In 1891 the men went into the struggle with vague, idealistic notions and the squatters severely beat them and severely punished them afterwards. As a result the shearers split up into three camps — the dyed-in-the-wool Utopists like Budge cleared out to South America to start afresh; the men like Berry who believed in democracy and the vote and the power of ideas renounced strikes and violence for a parliamentary party; and the third group was left to do its worst. By and large these were native-born bushmen, descendants of the old hands, who had grown up to a tradition of hating squatters, landtakers, bosses, toffs, governments, and police. When the Budges and Berrys took themselves off they were ready to start the new strike where the last one finished and fight it for the sheer joy of harassing an hereditary enemy.

Berry and the selectors round about had been discussing the strike to come for weeks. They all belonged to the union and spent three or four months each year shearing in Queensland and New South Wales. Berry tried to persuade every one not to go shearing this year as, according to him, the sooner the strike was over and lost the sooner the men would realize that their only hope was in putting representatives into parliament. Larry listened to the arguments but said nothing. He did not want to go away from the farm just now; Jean's love was still too new and near. And yet — he could not hear all the talk about burning fences and kicking scabs and "getting even with the squatters" without a stir of excitement and a twinge of self-reproach. At last the selectors began to go off for the shearing, taking their rifles with them, and Larry and Berry and a few older men were the only ones left behind. Larry's conscience pricked him. "You're a scab. You're scared. That's why you don't go to see your old woman. That's why you hang on to Berry — because he gives you arguments why not to go . . ."

One afternoon he was chopping wood in the yard when Jean came round the house and said in a worried voice, "There's a man out here looking for you, Larry."

"What sort of a man?"

"A bad-looking sort. He's got eyes like a dead man."

Larry dropped the axe.

“What's wrong, Larry? Will I send Dad out and tell him to go away?”

“No, don't tell your dad. I'll go.” Larry went round to the front of the house and found Coyle sitting on the steps.

“Good day,” Coyle said. “They told me down Pyke's Crossing you were here.”

“I'm helping Berry a while.” Larry examined Coyle's face. It was thin and as viciously wedgelike as ever. He was something like a dead man, as Jean said, like a cadaver animated with galvanic energy, not with human feeling. It made his eyes shine with a glassy light and kept his hands and mouth twitching in a queer, unco-ordinated way. As he looked up at Larry he chewed a stem of grass in the corner of his mouth, biting at it with quick little bites as if he was excited, but his voice was calm and soft as of old.

“Berry must have a bit of a goldmine to keep you both here without going shearing,” he said.

“Ain't no use him going shearing and there's a strike,” Larry said. “He's got a wife and daughter.”

“And what about you?”

“Well, I ain't going neither if you want to know,” Larry shouted.

“Keep yer hair on,” Coyle said. “Nobody's calling you a scab.”

“I'm no more a scab than you,” Larry shouted. “It was your own bloody fault.”

“But who's saying? I ain't.”

“It was your own bloody fault,” Larry kept shouting. He shook his fist in Coyle's face. “You tried to get me caught. And I didn't know he was that near. The light was in my eyes . . .”

“All right,” Coyle said gently. “All right. Me and you were mates, weren't we? I ain't going to start chucking mud at a man who was my mate.”

They were silent. “Anyway,” Larry burst out again, “what's the use striking. You won't win. There won't be no republic or rise in wages or nothing.”

“Who's saying there will be?”

“Then what's the use?”

Coyle spat. “You wouldn't ask that if it'd been you instead of me they boned that night. They brought me down to Pyke's Crossing where there were five other blokes they'd arrested and they handcuffed us all to a chain. ‘Screw 'em together like dogs,’ the Inspector says, and they kept us like that for ten days. Even though I had a touch of the fever, not even to bog. Then they got out a law the English ain't mean enough to use for the last seventy years. When they were taking us into court the mob booed the four Johns with us and when the Beak comes in he asks what the noise was and they told him, and he said ‘It's a nice place where this can happen. How many police were there?’ And the Sergeant said

‘Four.’ And the Judge said, ‘Let me see. You all had six-shooters and four times six is twenty-four shots. Not many would have booed a second time if I'da been there.’ And even the John said, ‘You can't shoot men for disorderly conduct,’ and the Judge said, ‘You could've found some excuse.’ And then he give us a three stretch on bread and water and lousy stew, and we were kicked from pillar to bloody post by warders, like criminals.” He grinned. “All right, we're criminals then.”

“Aw,” Larry said disparagingly, “You go and do your own dirty work, Coyle.”

“My dirty work! What about yours?”

“It can wait a bit,” Larry said. “One day I'll go up and see my ma . . .”

“That's about how long you'll need to get the guts,” Coyle sneered. “Till the sod's piled on you.”

“Eh?”

“Eh what? Didn't you know your ma's dead?”

Larry started. “Dead?”

“Come off it!”

“Struth! I didn't know.”

“Nor that your old man killed her.”

Larry looked incredulous.

“You ain't heard about your sister and Cash? She ran away with him while your old man was at the mine once, and when he come back he went in and roused hell out of your old woman for putting them up to it, as your young brother Geoffrey reckoned he seen. But she only laughed in his mug and told him straight she'd given your sister the dough to run off with. Then he pulled off and socked her on the jaw and she fell and cracked her head on the flags. Pat Doolan was there talking to her at the kitchen door at the time and seen everything that happened. She didn't kick the bucket that minute, but they carried her to bed and she never got out again and pegged about six months ago. Sure, it's gospel. Your old man's been running about the country like a madman the last nine months looking for your sister, but never got a smell of her.” Coyle chuckled. “She's clean knocked the stuffing out of him. He's up the Reach now and they reckon he can't say boo to a baa-lamb.”

“I never heard a word.”

“No? Nor what your old woman said to him just before she died — that you'd come back one day? ‘I tried to make him into a gentleman,’ she says, ‘but you wouldn't let him, so now you'll have to swallow what he is.’ That's her identical words.”

“How'd you know that?” Larry said angrily. “You're making it up.”

“I know it because she told me. She heard I was back in the valley and sent for me and give me a message for her loving son. Lucky she died then and never found out you'd scabbed on us both.”

“Who scabbed on her? I'll break your lying jaw.”

Coyle only grinned.

He stayed at the farm for the night and had fierce arguments with Berry. Larry listened closely, anxious to be convinced that the best way to get at the squatters was to stay out of the strike so that everybody would put their weight behind the parliamentary party.

"Parliamentary party me eye!" Coyle scoffed. "It's only an excuse for poling on your mates when there's danger."

Larry shifted uneasily.

"You're a murdering hypocrite!" Berry exploded after a glance at Larry. "I know what you're after, carrying tittle-tattle here. It doesn't matter to you what becomes of your mates — it's only an excuse for getting hanged like your father you want."

Coyle laughed wildly. His eyes shone with the mad fire Larry had seen in them twice before.

Larry left the room and went to bed, but he could not sleep. Arguments went on and on in his head. At last he dozed off and dreamt that he was in a court, shackled to a chain with Coyle, and the Judge was pointing at him and saying "You killed your mother, you murdering hypocrite." On the bench in front of the Judge lay the body of his mother with her face smashed in. He was looking at it sideways, not game to take a good look, wanting to make sure that she was *quite* dead. As he looked the body stirred and sat up and it was not his mother at all, but Jean. He called out to her, but she paid no attention and walked out of the court. Then the Judge put on a black cap and turned into his father, and Larry tried to run away but Coyle cunningly twisted the chain around his legs and he fell. In his despair he dragged Coyle down and they fought, and he strangled Coyle, got free, and escaped. . . .

He woke up and sprang quickly off the bed and went out into the yard. For an hour he walked about muttering to himself. Then he went into the barn where Coyle was sleeping. He crept over the floor and touched Coyle's boot, crept nearer, and had his hand on Coyle's shoulder when Coyle awakened. "What's the idea?"

"We better go," muttered Larry.

Coyle laughed softly. "I reckon we better."

Larry rolled up a swag and they departed as the cocks were crowing at the false dawn. "I'll be back in a few days," he comforted himself as he took a last look at the dark farmhouse.

They tramped north slowly. At night whenever he woke up Coyle was sitting at the fire watching him, and in the daytime, as they plodded over the dusty hot Downs, lagged a hundred yards behind. He seemed to be driving Larry before him, and as every day brought them thirty miles nearer to the Reach Larry hated him more.

They heard that the strike was on. A coach-driver told them that the strikers at the Reach had caught Goggs, who had been working for

Cabell since the last strike, and drowned him in the river, that miles of scrub and grass were on fire, and that the strikers had thrown a cordon round the homestead and allowed no one to pass without a ticket from the union. "Old Rusty's cracked up. There's no fight in him." A couple of days later a posse of mounted infantry and police went by.

They were in sight of the ranges now. Larry turned on Coyle and chased him a mile along the road before he landed a stone on the back of Coyle's knee and brought him down. He rushed up, but the look in Coyle's eyes, a jeering look, made him stop and bluster, "What're you looking at, you sod? The way you lag behind and sit up all night, as if I was going to cut your throat — it'd get any bloke's gall."

"Well, aren't you?"

"Why should I?"

"To save yourself walking fifty miles and meeting your old man at the end."

"You're a liar." Larry began to kick him. After two or three savage kicks he went to the side of the road and sat down. "It's not the same for you," he said in a pleading voice. "You've got nothing. But I have."

"A blanket and a billy and a pair of Berry's cast-off duds? A fine inheritance. Did you read the bit in the paper where your brother James's bringing back five stallions he paid four thousand quid for?"

"If I can get married and settle down, that's all I want," Larry said. "They can have the rest."

"Don't fool yourself," Coyle said. "You'll never settle down. It's not in you, nor any of us. We ain't that kidney. That's why we're here. That's why they kicked my old man and your ma out, because they didn't have the blood of lickspittles. Some they hanged and some they sent to America and the rest they sent here, because they were funky. We're rebels like them and always will be as long as the blood isn't watered out." He picked himself out of the dust and limped over to Larry. "It's not to settle down you want — only an excuse for not having another go at your old man. But what's biting you? You heard what the cove said, that he's got the stuffing knocked out. By your sister! Jesus, Larry. Can't you finish what she begun? Besides," he added after a long pause, "there's your ma . . ."

"She was off her nut."

"Suppose she was. Who sent her?" He stood up. "But just say the word — just say that you could settle in peace and have it in your mind that there was a bloke who'd robbed your ma and half-starved her and then cracked her on the mug — just say it and we'll turn round and go back to Pyke's Crossing this minute . . ."

They reached the camp three days later. It was a bigger camp than the last and a lot rowdier. Police and infantrymen and strikers fought all day. The strikers pelted them with stones till they charged and beat the men

down with the flat of their swords. Miles of fencing had been burnt and much grass, as the coachman had reported, but it was not true that they had drowned Goggs. They had belted him with his stock-whip and thrown him in the river, and now he was in bed at the homestead dangerously ill. Larry knew few of the strikers but they all knew Coyle and of his quarrel with his father, so both were received as heroes. The strikers took it for granted that they would do something especially outrageous and Coyle winked.

Larry was not at all pleased to have so much expected of him. The liberties the strikers were taking with his father's property scared him. In a minute Cabell would surely wake up and take some savage revenge. The strikers expected that too. Not for a moment did they believe they would win the strike, but this made them only more anxious to destroy as much as they could while they had the chance. A regiment of artillery was coming up from Brisbane, they said, to blow them out of the camp. So they went to work firing the grass and buildings and beating up policemen, laughing and joking about it as though it was a good game, but underneath they were full of despair. The financial collapse had ended the era of wild hopes: wages were down, work was scarce, people were starving in the cities, immigrants returning to England, the dream of a working man's paradise abruptly blown up.

"We've lost everything, but Cabell and the rest eat their three meals a day" was the burden of the speeches.

Larry could not listen without feeling the knot of pain tighten once more in his belly, but the thought of Jean still detached him from them.

One day his father rode by with the police inspector to visit Ningpo where the strikers had been trying to burn the old homestead. As soon as they saw him the men rushed out of the camp and pelted him with stones and cowdung. The cowdung plastered Cabell's back and the strikers ran along the side of the road booing. Larry held his breath, expecting his father to turn and ride them down. Instead he hurried his horse and never lifted his head. Larry caught a glimpse of his father's face and it looked as though another face had been clapped on top of the old one. It was grey and the pride was gone out of it. "We got him bluffed," the strikers exulted.

Next day Larry received a letter from Berry:

DEAR LARRY,

You needn't have sneaked off in the night without saying good-bye. I'm enclosing the twenty pounds I owe you for wages, as I don't expect we will see you again. I was beginning to hope that you might settle down in these parts. But I wish you luck just the same.

JACK BERRY

Larry was in an agonizing frame of mind. Jean, too, must think that he had sneaked off and left her for good. She might stop loving him or look out for another sweetheart. He wanted to leave the camp and hurry back to her, but that was impossible. All Coyle's lying, jeering taunts would be true. Yes, he must go through with it now if he ever wanted peace of mind, and the sooner the better.

He brooded all that day and as soon as night fell went up the road, climbed the fence out of sight of the sentries at the gate, and crept back to the homestead. In the darkness of the orange-grove he paused. He could hear his father walking on the veranda. He was talking to himself. Larry could not hear what he was saying, but the savage sound of the words belied the theory that his father had no anger left in him. Larry crept away again. Safe in the camp once more he was ashamed of himself, and next night returned to the garden; but Cabell and the inspector of police were together in Cabell's room drinking whisky. On the third night he waited till all lights were out in the homestead except his father's. This time he found Cabell alone in his room. He was sitting at the table with his head in his hands talking to himself. The grey, prideless look of defeat was on his face. It gave Larry courage to climb on to the veranda and tiptoe to the door. With his hand on the knob he paused to look around and listen. The sound of snoring came from the open French lights. "It's hopeless," he thought. "They'll catch me before I can move." Then his mind went blank with the unself-consciousness of a reckless moment and he was standing before his father's startled face.

For a long time neither spoke, but Larry raised his hand to his beard and twisted it till his mouth seemed to be grinning drunkenly down at the old man.

"Larry! Where the devil did you spring from?"

Larry let his beard go. It made a faint crepitation in the mutually embarrassed silence.

"I've been looking for you the last six months," Cabell said. "I . . . but sit down." The way he spoke, nervously but not as though he was annoyed at seeing Larry, far from it, took Larry off his guard. He found himself reaching obediently for a chair and pushed it violently away.

"I've got no time to sit down."

Cabell drummed his fingers on the table and his eyes shifted between Larry and the floor. Larry noticed again the grey, abject look, the haggard pouches under his eyes. He was trying to say something, but the words stuck in his throat. Half a minute passed before he managed to mumble, "You heard about your mother, I suppose. She . . . passed away seven months ago."

"I heard."

"Hmn." Cabell licked his lips, glanced up and down again. Then he blurted out indignantly, "It wasn't my fault she died. The bitch starved

herself to death. I was never hard on her. Other men would have used her a damn sight worse. I married her, didn't I? And as for you — you'd've had your due." He looked at Larry again shiftily. "Haven't I had men looking all over the country? I wanted to make you manager at McFarlane's."

"He's trying to get round me," Larry thought, but felt at the same time that his father's eager, conciliatory words were not really addressed to him, that there was someone else in the room. Cabell's eye wandered restlessly and he seemed hardly to see Larry, as though he was concentrating his attention on making some eavesdropper hear what he was saying. This so affected Larry at last that he turned and peered into the shadows beyond the light's circle. When he looked round Cabell was peering there too, and his gaze remained fixed on the corner for several seconds before he raised it to Larry and asked hoarsely, "Did you hear something?"

"Hear what?"

Cabell gestured, "Oh, nothing," looked back at the corner and laughed uncertainly. "Nothing, of course. It's the damned loneliness of the place since — this last year. It gets on your nerves. But now you're back . . . You'll take over McFarlane's, won't you?"

Larry answered nothing, twisting his beard again.

"Confound you, man," Cabell flared. "Can't you speak? Isn't it enough?"

"I don't want any favours."

"Favours?" Cabell said, conciliatory at once. "It's not a favour. You're my son, aren't you? When I die it'll be yours, along with the rest. Don't look as if you didn't believe me. I offered to make you manager before, didn't I? In front of her. And you refused it? Didn't you? Now you can't deny that."

"I don't want nothing from you."

Cabell stood up. "You sulky dog, you'll take it. D'you hear? Hell and damnation, it's *me* who pays for your dirty temper. She robbed me of my daughter for it." He sat down again, breathing heavily, and there was a long pause. "I don't say I wasn't a bit quick off the mark myself in the past," he admitted mildly, "but you didn't want to be handled with kid gloves, did you? Just the same, I'll" — he frowned, swallowed — "beg your pardon if you want it. And now let us be friends." He held out his hand. "Eh? You'll shake on it?"

"No!" Larry banged the table, making the lamp-glass rattle and the flame splutter and leap on the wick. "I won't be bought. You killed my mother."

Cabell shook his head. "No, Larry, that's a lie."

His meekness had put fire into Larry. "Yes, you did. You starved and neglected her. Then you hit her on the face and knocked her down."

“Don't say it,” Cabell said miserably, glancing right and left. “Don't say it. You'll bring bad luck on me.”

“It's the truth,” Larry cried, whipping his rage up. “You robbed her. You hit her. You killed her. You . . .”

Cabell sprang from his chair and tried to put his hand over Larry's mouth. They struggled. Cabell half fell and started to rise, and Larry kicked him on the temple and he fell again. He lay, semi-conscious, trying to cover his face with his hands and catch hold of Larry's foot, which struck him again and again on the head, and the jaw, and the mouth, with its heavy metal toe. Larry did not see the door open on Geoffrey's fat face, which shook like a jelly as he squealed, “Murder! Help! Inspector Carmody.” As though his boot was controlled by a spring which had started to unwind in the pit of his stomach and could not be stopped, it rose and fell, missing its object three times out of five, while Larry observed its movements as if it was somebody else's boot and somebody else's rage propelling it. Once, when it left off kicking Cabell for a moment to stamp on a set of false teeth which had fallen from his father's open mouth, he chuckled; and all night, as he sat in the woolshed handcuffed to a beam and heard the sentries walking up and down outside, he kept thinking of those teeth and grinning. “He even spewed his teeth,” he kept saying to himself, as if it was a confession of Cabell's final, hopeless impotence.

Chapter Two: The Dutiful Son

THE news that Harriet had run away uprooted James from London.

Julia was annoyed. "Leave civilization and comfort again — whatever for?"

"My father's an old man," James said. "It will be a terrible blow to him — terrible."

"You mean you hope it will."

He strode about the room muttering, "I foresaw it. I tried to prevent it. I reasoned with her. But she'd have none of my advice. And now! Poor Father. How he spoilt her. Every wish anticipated. She could do no wrong. Little did he think . . . poor old Dad." He turned his eyes up. "But God disposes."

He looked the picture of misery, but that was his normal look these days. His face, framed in mutton chops already sprinkled with grey, was long and lugubrious, with vertical wrinkles, like the wire basket of a muzzle, round his tight mouth. He was as thin as a rake and a martyr to indigestion and colds in the head. Impossible to imagine that recklessness had ever sparkled in those yellow eyes, or happy boyish laughter rung from that thin throat with the drooping Adam's apple, from which his voice came in a fluty monotone that gave his most complacent utterances a baffling note of complaint — impossible yes, for any one except James. He still fought nightly battles when his devils danced before him the pageant of a gay, brave, defiant lad and he buried his face in the pillow and moaned, "Say, could that lad be I?" It was some comfort, some little bitter comfort to reflect then upon the Will of God which excuses and justifies the will-lessness of men.

"You seem to overlook the fact that Harriet is apparently very happy," Julia interrupted, "although she neglected your advice."

James stopped in his striding and re-read Harriet's letter.

DEAR JAMES,

You will be surprised to learn that I have run away from Father to marry Jack Cash. No, you shouldn't be surprised, Jimmy, because I always told you I would. Oh, how glad I am. How happy, happy, happy. Jack was just the man for me. It took me a long while to find out, that is, it took me a long while to find out what other men were like and what a priceless, dear gem of a man he was. Be pleased for me, Jimmy. I'm going to have a baby. If it's a boy, one of its names shall be yours. Oh,

Jimmy dear, hasn't everything turned out right after all. Hasn't it? . . .

"The ungrateful little beast!" James muttered. His hands trembled on the letter and his upper lip shook like a leaf on the sharply intaken breath. "But she'll pay for it. Such selfishness won't go unpunished."

"Otherwise what reward for Esau?" Julia said with a wry smile.

"I know my duty if that's what you mean," James said loftily.

"*Faute de mieux!*" Julia said. "So I must go and live amongst sheep and cattle and stupid people again."

"Naturally my place is at my father's side."

"Oh, James," she pleaded, "try to tell the truth for once. You know you hate the Reach as much as I do. You know you hate him too. He's a horrid old man. He bullies you."

"Indeed!" James's surprise was almost genuine, so far had the oft-repeated story of the noble Australian *conquistador*, and the tales of Mr Kipling, and the reverence of investors sunk in. "Father is human like the rest of us," he said in that studiously equable way he had cultivated for intercourse with Julia, as though she was a very irritating child he was determined to treat kindly, "and he has his — er . . ."

"Eccentricities?"

"Moods," James said judicially. "But they are justified by his position, his age, and the stupendous work he has done for his people. It's not for us to judge him. If he spoilt Harriet he has had to suffer for it. Ahem."

"He's an old brute," Julia said, "and I'm not going to live under the same roof with him."

This was very bad psychology on Julia's part, for if anything was needed to turn James's pleasant little dream of confronting a penitent and broken father with forgiveness it was the additional satisfaction of making Julia do something she did not want to do.

"Of course you will live under the same roof. Where else is there to live at the Reach?"

"I won't go. I won't leave this house."

"I shall put this house in the agent's hands to-morrow," James said, and he did.

But when the time came to leave his home in Westminster, his club in Carlton Terrace, his dinners with Imperialist statesmen, his nodding acquaintance with peers of the realm who borrowed money from him, he weakened a little. Even the joy of having his father all to himself now promised hardly to balance the ordeal of eating at the same table with Julia and his mother. He put his departure off from month to month. Then came the news of Emma's death. He wrapped a crape band round his arm, received the condolences of his friends with a resigned melancholy, and sailed for Australia.

In advance he savoured the homecoming to the lonely and desolate old

man who would understand at last which of his children really loved him. As the ship ploughed with aggravating slowness across the Indian Ocean James paced the decks and planned magnanimous speeches. His father had been unjust, cruelly unjust, but far be it from James to tell him so. He would say, "Father, I have given up my beautiful home in London and all my friends and a most congenial life to come back to you when others, in whom you wrongly confided your trust, have deserted you. What more can I do for you? Don't be afraid to lay your burdens on my shoulders. I am young and strong and willing. I will take over your work while you spend the evening of your days in peace."

Of course it did not work out that way at all. The first newspaper James opened on landing at Sydney told how Larry was in jail waiting to be charged with feloniously wounding Cabell with intent to murder, and that Cabell was to give evidence against him as soon as he was well.

"Another scandal in the family?" Julia said. "Dear me, what will your dear Lady Beavershank say?"

James put his hands under his coat-tails and cracked his knuckles, but his face, as always when Julia spoke in that mocking voice, leaning her own towards him as though inviting him to slap it, was blank except for the slight uplifting of an eyebrow at an incomprehensible impertinence.

A week later he was in his father's room at the Reach, not supporting a tottering ancient with assurances of devotion but absorbing through wide eyes and tingling ears and gaping mouth the forgotten form of a hateful and obscene old tyrant.

"Don't talk to me, you young jackanapes," Cabell said. "I'll see the bastard gets his deserts if I have to drag myself to the court on crutches." His face was blue and lop-sided with contusions, his mouth fell in on his bare gums, and his brow was gone from his sound eye where the toe of Larry's boot had flayed it.

"But the scandal!" James protested, his high, smooth voice slightly mincing after Cabell's. "Think what people will say — a father sending his son to jail!" He pulled a silk handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed his perspiring forehead. A faint perfume struggled through the room's stench of horse medicines and greasy old harness.

Cabell looked at him blackly and spat on the floor. "What's scandal to me!"

"But my friends in London!" James wailed. "It might leak out. Have some consideration, sir."

"What do I care for your friends," Cabell said, eyeing him again, jealously — his stylish clothes, his appearance of a highly respected gentleman. "They're not my friends. I can't lose any more than I've lost." He ranted around the room. "His bitch of a mother robbed me of the only thing I'd ever loved. She poisoned Harriet's mind against me. Well, I'll show her. I'll show her. If she's got fifty thousand devils in league with

her she can't do any worse now."

"How can you say it, sir!" James said shocked. "Mother is dead."

"Aye, and damned!" He stumbled back to his chair and sat down.

"Perhaps you do her an injustice," James said cautiously. "Of course, far be it from me to say anything to Harriet's discredit, but she was always extremely wilful and a trifle spoilt. She was always talking about running away. God knows, sir, I argued with her. If she'd listened to me you'd've been spared, but she'd made up her mind long, long ago. You can see from this." He showed Cabell Harriet's letter. "I only show it to ease your own mind, Father. You may think that there was something, some kindness you neglected. Also to disabuse you of any feelings against Mother."

Cabell read the letter, snarling. "I heard about the brat. So it's true. Says he married her. I don't believe it."

"Oh, yes, yes," James said quickly. "I'm sure they're married. I'm sure it's perfectly regular."

"Think so, do you? Well, I don't. Mark my words, he'll leave her. He's a tramp. He's deserted women before. One day the coach'll drive up and out will step your precious sister. That's how it'll be. Out she'll step, with a brat on her hip — if it hasn't died of starvation before that. And she'll come in here and beg me to forgive her. She'll stand there and confess what a mistake she made. Oh, yes, she will. I know it. I know it."

"Ah, Father," James said soothingly, "hope deferred maketh the heart sick. Harriet will never come back."

"Who said anything about hope? She's got whore-house blood in her. Let her go there when he abandons her." Then his head sank into his hands and a heavy sigh shook him.

It was the cue for James's little piece. "Believe me, sir, I know how these events must have distressed you, but it's not right to say that you have lost everything. In London some very distinguished gentlemen expressed their *highest* esteem for you. Mr Joseph Chamberlain himself . . ."

Cabell seemed not to hear. He was sneering down at the letter.

James's speech died in his throat. Was this really the man Mr Joseph Chamberlain esteemed? Was this the man who "kept the Light burning in the Outposts of Empire?" It would be putting it mildly to say that James was shocked at re-discovering the little details sentimental memory had repressed during the last three years — the tilt at the corner of the mouth, for example, the indecent tongue, and worst of all the stamp, on every feature, of an equivocal past. He was revolted, outraged, and, finally, speechlessly angered. Why, this man was by no means at the end of his wicked days, James thought, as he watched his father crush the letter into a ball and throw it across the room. He still had the energy for black deeds, and the inclination too.

But comfortingly, as he looked at the grey beard, the skin almost transparent on the ravaged skull, the back humped under the weight of sorrow, he realized that the hard years had left their mark, and he thought of those gum-trees which flower long after the ants have eaten to their heart, strong-seeming, till one night the wind comes and smashes them and everybody marvels to see how only a little fibre was left intact to sustain them. This thought quite melted his heart again and he said, feelingly, "Besides, I hope that you don't doubt my anxiety to serve you and my deep affection, sir."

"Affection be damned," Cabell snorted. "Take your starched pants where they belong. There's no place for them here."

James was hurt. "Indeed, Father, I'm no less of a man for trying to look and behave like a gentleman. And as for where I belong, sir, that's here. I wish to take up your work where you leave it — this glorious work of an empire-builder for which you are so esteemed abroad." He got this interpretation of his father's purpose in life over quickly and looked up anxiously to see how Cabell took it.

His head sunk in his shoulders, blinking on vacancy, Cabell said nothing, so James expanded, "If I may say so, sir, the country is now beginning a new phase of its history. The work of the pioneer is done, and we have now entered the epoch of politics and culture. Australia and the Empire will never forget what they owe to those who blazed the trail, but even those deficient in physical strength, like myself, may now take a part in the work. In fact, as I see it, what is most needed now is not physical strength but the moral and civilizing influence of the — ah . . ." A light in his father's eye choked the words back again. He gestured and added less rhetorically than he had begun, "gentleman."

Cabell's eye flickered at him for several seconds. "I don't understand long words," he said, "but it sounds mighty like as if you were telling me I ought to go and bury myself."

"I hope you'll be spared to us many years yet," James said quickly, jutting his jaw, and added, "but . . ."

"But what?"

"Why, sir, you can't go on like this for ever," James said, furiously. "The business between you and Larry — it's barbaric. Decent people don't do such things. The times are changed. You — yes, you ought to retire."

Cabell stood up and kicked his chair away. "So that's what's brought you back. Thought you could smell dead meat, eh? You were wrong. Understand? I'll see you all under the ground." He marched the room again, waving his hands, cursing, and repeating, "I'll see you all out. I'll live to a hundred."

Then a surprising thing happened. The chair he had kicked aside was standing in the middle of the room. He blundered against it and knocked

it over. James picked it up and put it out of the way. When Cabell returned he swerved away from where the chair had fallen and blundered into it again. "Is the old fool blind?" James wondered irritably, and as he picked the chair up a second time and stood it against the wall, he looked at his father's swollen, blackened eye. Cabell was coming down the room. As he passed where the chair had been he hesitated and put out a hand to feel his way.

"By jove," James thought, "so he is."

Chapter Three: Poor Old Dad

CABELL was not blind, not quite. He could recognize James across the table, could read a letter if he held it close to his face, but ten paces away forms were capricious. He refused to admit it. The doctor warned him that Larry had injured his sound eye, which had been doing double work for years, and that his only hope of keeping the bit of sight he had was to stay in his room with the blinds down; so he got rid of the doctor. "See as far as ever I could." Even to himself he pretended that he could see the top of Black Mountain, the road across the valley, the cattle he heard splashing in the river mud. He bathed his eye in salt water, sat up till the early hours figuring over mining reports and stock lists, and fearfully watched the circumference of light contracting about him every day.

To spy out what went on behind the fog, cover for thieves and conspirators, he kept Geoffrey at his side. "Looks like rain," he would say, staring at the sky he could not see.

"Looks a bit that way," Geoffrey would agree. "There's a cloud on Black Mountain."

"I can see it," Cabell would say testily.

Geoffrey took care he did not see him grin.

No hint of blindness passed between them. For months Cabell had been swearing that he would go and belt the life out of Cash as soon as his detectives tracked Harriet down, but Geoffrey knew that all the time he had in his drawer a report from the detectives telling him that Harriet and Cash were in Sydney, married, and that he could do nothing. Geoffrey listened to his father's rambling, savage threats and helped him to curse the stupidity of detective agencies.

But Cabell was not mad. When Geoffrey was least expecting it Cabell would pounce and grab him by the collar. "That's a new suit you've got on."

"It's not. I got it last year."

"Don't lie to me. Where'd you get the money?"

Geoffrey argued, swore, and fought in vain.

"You're skinning me, you young leech. I know. You and Custard have been selling cattle." Cabell clouted him till he howled for mercy.

"Ow, Pa, don't hit me. I'll tell you. We sold the Durhams on Stony Creek."

“Where's the money?”

“Let me go and I'll tell you. You're choking me.”

Cabell let go his collar and he skipped around the table. “It's a lie. We didn't sell anything.”

Cabell went for him again, but he kept just within the grey fringe of the fog. “Go and see for yourself, why don't you,” he squeaked, impudent in his safety while Cabell groped after him. “Who wants your rotten Durhams? I could've had all the money I wanted, couldn't I?”

The old man paused. “Eh? What d'you mean by that?”

“I needn't've called Inspector Carmody, need I?”

“You dog. Wait till I get a fist on you.”

“There you are, that's all the thanks a bloke gets. A bloke saves your life and you're always picking on him. I could've been having a good time now. I could've owned my own racehorse. I could go to America. But a bloke tries to be a good son and you treat him like this. All right, Pa, next time I'll know better.”

Cabell threw the inkstand at him. “Get out of this before I kill you.”

“All right,” Geoffrey said in a hurt voice. “I'm going. I'll get a job in Brisbane. I'll go at once.” He faded from the doorway.

“Come back here,” Cabell growled. There was no answer. Geoffrey's feet pattered away along the veranda. “Come back here, I tell you,” Cabell shouted. A door slammed. The house was silent. “Geoffrey! Geoffrey! You young sod, come back here at once.” He heard Geoffrey go whistling down the slope.

He returned to his table, piled with letters to be answered, ration sheets to be checked, confidential orders to brokers to be written . . . and no amanuensis, nobody he could trust. At the end of the day when Geoffrey came in to dinner he said, wheedling, “What was that horse you said was for sale?”

“Thunderlight.”

“Yes. How much did you say?”

“Eight hundred guineas.”

“I might buy it for you. A little Christmas present, eh?”

“Ugh, Christmas. By Christmas I'll be in America.”

“America? Damn it, you'll be here.”

“What's a bloke want to hang around here for? A bloke's not appreciated. A bloke's only a hanger-on. I'm going to America.”

Cabell bit back his anger. “I'll buy you the horse and double your allowance right away — how's that? What could you do in America? You've got a good home here.”

“A good home!” Geoffrey grumbled. “Where a bloke's always being accused of pinching off his father! I tell you, a bloke's got pride. I've had enough. I'm going.”

Of course he did not go. Cabell gave him a racehorse, paid his bills,

doubled his allowance, submitted to being robbed, and had miserable nights wondering what would happen if one of his business enemies ever discovered how cheaply they could buy Geoffrey, and the hundred ways they could use him, or if Larry were to get free and come back.

So really he was not sorry to have James in the house once more. James had always done as he was told and Cabell had no doubt he would go on doing it. No backbone and a prig, but honest. As his proxy in Brisbane and at the mine he would obey orders, and if he didn't Geoffrey would smell him out. Thus the indomitable old man prepared to go on fighting, though no longer with any purpose except to hide from himself that he had no purpose for which to go on fighting and amassing wealth. He did not want to see the blind wall, hear the question, "What was it all for? Who will thank you?"

From the first peep of dawn when he awoke till well after midnight when sleep came reluctantly over his sharp, obscure, and unconfessed pain, he sat at his desk and tried to keep his eye turned out by loading himself with worry about the most trivial details of the mine and the stations. He scrutinized every line in the mine managers' reports, every figure in Custard's schedules of stock and rations, checking them again and again with mercifully time-wasting calculations and tormenting the life out of his small army of administrators with niggling demands for an explanation why the boilers had consumed 2.2 tons of wood for a crushing of 9.5 tons of stone on 11 May, and 2.3 tons for a crushing of 9.1 tons on 14 May, and where the devil were the hundred lambskins booked at Ningpo on 15 February last and not included in the stocktaking on 30 June? And when there were no reports to read and no complaints to write he filled in the black gap of hours with long sums estimating how many pounds of wool he would take from his sheep by the year 1900, how much gold there was in Black Mountain, how many years before it was worked out ("Twenty, eh? I'll see the end of it then!"), what his share would be . . .

But best of all he liked to pass the hours nagging his family — especially James. Any excuse was good enough.

"That horse Sambo showed me this morning, is that the horse you wasted a thousand guineas on?"

"I don't think it was wasted."

"*You* don't!"

"He calls it Cabell's Pride," Geoffrey put in with a snicker.

"Oho, does he? Crowbait — that's what Sambo calls it."

"Its grandfather won the Derby," James said, "and its mother ran third."

The old man laughed. "Don't tell me. Some horse-butcher saw a fool coming."

"Excuse me, Father, Lord Blackenridge is my friend."

“Oho, listen to him. The Lord's his friend.” He changed his attack, becoming nastier. “Think you're a gentleman, don't you? Think you're too good for us? You're the son of a bitch, that's what you are. Your mother was a criminal and so is your brother and your damned sister — she'll be on the streets before long, mark my words. She'll come back here one day and I won't see her. I'll let her have her say and I won't answer. I'll shut the door on her. She'll have to sit on the steps till the coach comes and beg a ride to Brisbane. You'll see. You'll see.”

Geoffrey yawned and drowsed. Miss Montaulk tut-tutted and nodded her sweat-streaked mask of cosmetics over the inevitable bit of dingy crochet, murmuring “Ah me! That I should have lived to see it! What did I tell you!” Julia watched James. James looked down his thin, disgusted nose.

“It's the truth I'm telling you about yourself,” Cabell sneered at him. “Look at the colour of your skin. Is it a white man's skin? Is it?”

Sometimes there was the faintest yellow tinge under James's cheeks, jaundice or indigestion most likely, but Cabell loved to insist that it was a mark of gipsy blood. “It'll spread,” he taunted James. “You'll see. Your mother was fairly white when I met her, but your Uncle Dirk Surface was as yellow as butter. It'll come out after you're forty. Just watch yourself in your glass, you snob. A fine sight for your London friends you'll be. Mr Joseph Chamberlain, eh? By God, they won't touch you with a poker. All your flash duds and la-di-da manners won't cover it up.”

Behind his wooden face James writhed, but Cabell could not see that. The insults he heaped on James frightened him. “Why doesn't he say something. Ah, they're all like her. They don't speak. They store it up and stab you in the back.”

“What's in your mind there?” he cried. “What're you thinking? I'll tell you. You think I'm going blind, don't you? You think you won't have to put up with me much longer. Oho, don't you worry.”

“It's the truth,” James spat through his tight, colourless mouth. “You're nearly seventy. Your eye will never get better.” He took a breath and added soothingly, “Really, sir, you ought to try to compose yourself. You should think of the future and seek some spiritual consolation.”

“Christian forgiveness, eh? Oho, I know what that means. Forgive Larry so that he can come up and finish the job, eh? If you want my brains kicked out, do it yourself why don't you?”

A week after James's return they brought Larry up for trial, but Cabell was still afraid to take his eye out in the sun and Larry was remanded for another month. By that time Cabell's face had healed and the hair was growing on his brow again. His sight was worse but he swore to himself that it was better and to prove it took Geoffrey off to Pyke's Crossing and gave evidence against Larry, who was sentenced to seven years' penal

servitude. The scandal was terrific. The Labour newspapers reported how Larry had to be dragged from the dock shouting, "He starved my mother. He hit her in the face."

Outside the court a crowd waited to hiss Cabell as he walked to the hotel. Geoffrey took one look at them and deserted his father. But they did not hiss. The stiff set of his jaw made them think twice about it. He looked as if he was printing every face there on his memory for future reference. Actually he was floundering like a bat, and he had locked his jaws to prevent himself from singing out for someone to lead him down the street.

When he'd put Larry out of the way he was quieter, scared — scared of ghosts. He believed that Emma was haunting him. At night-time James heard him talking in his room. "I offered to make him manager twice, but you let him do this to me, so that I couldn't go after her and bring her back . . ."

One day he went out to the flame-tree under which Emma was buried and dug the coffin up and carried it on his shoulder down to the scrub and buried it there. No use. He could still see her crouching in dark corners at night, wizened, foreknowing, and full of hate.

James wanted to pack up and clear out of the madhouse back to London, but his conscience pricked him. He called it his conscience. Under the thought, "Poor old devil, he's half off his head, half-blind, and nearly half-dead," was the assurance that if he waited a little longer the foul old brute who dishonoured his father's name would be out of the way; for James found that he had two fathers, this one and the romantic, aristocratic old pioneer who was esteemed in London. The second was much the more real. He was always slightly surprised when he went into Cabell's room and found the battered face squinting at him.

Poor James was learning more than he wanted to know about the way Cabell had performed his historic mission. Less abusive now, the old man prepared him for work by letting him into the secret of complex financial wanglings and wirepullings. How he had done the McFarlanes out of their land, how he had made a hundred and eighty thousand pounds out of the Investment Corporation, how he had speculated in land, how he circumvented the miners' attempts to get better wages out of the Waterfall Goldmining Company by bribing their leaders, how he used money and influence to prevent awkward inquiries into accidents at the mine, how he subsidized the election funds of politicians who sent him soldiers during a strike, and the dozen other shifts by which he, like all rich men, contrived to remain rich and grow richer — these aspects of empire-building hitherto unsuspected stunned James's innocent mind.

James protested against taking part in such infamous affairs.

"Infamous, you think? I've had to fight for every cent with cut-throats and droughts and stupid sheep and God knows what else." Cabell spoke

quietly, with a note almost of entreaty in his voice. "It's easy to talk now. I didn't do these things because I liked them, but because — because . . ." He sheered away from talking about the motives which had driven him through the last half-century lest he should see that those motives no longer existed.

"I know that," James said. "In the early days it was unavoidable. Lands aren't won without . . ."

"I didn't come to win any lands," Cabell interrupted irritably. "Don't you see you can't gloss it over by telling me that some confounded politician in London esteems me. I don't give a damn for his esteem. A lot of good to decorate a dead conscript with honour and glory." His irritation passed and he spoke beseechingly again with his hand on James's arm. "Glossing it over isn't just, James. You've got to go back and find out how every drop of sweat and blood was spilt, and understand that it couldn't have happened otherwise and . . . no, not forgive, damn you, sitting on your pedestal. If you could understand you wouldn't be the kind of smug bastard who talks about forgiveness. You'd go down on your knees and ask for it from all the generation of poor devils whose lives were wasted before this country became a place you could wear your starched pants in." He turned back to the papers they were studying. "What's the use talking. It's all plain black and white to you."

This kind of talk distressed James more than straight out cursing. The entreaty in the old man's voice hinted at dark, dark deeds and asked James not to judge too severely those deeds which had loomed in James's nightmares since boyhood. Something worse than cheating shareholders and robbing men of their land? James never again talked of the infamy of his father's business methods or encouraged him to speak in that apologetic and horribly suggestive strain, but industriously set to work to master the intricate workings of station and mine and real estate market so that as soon as possible the power of doing mischief to the name of Cabell might be taken from the old man.

He trotted to and fro between the Reach and Brisbane and Waterfall, interviewing bankers and cabinet ministers, addressing directors, bossing managers and foremen, as his father ordered him. He was forced to know unpleasant people, shady lawyers, stock-jobbers, and real estate touts who slapped him on the back and called him by his first name, made him smoke bad cigars and listen to dirty stories, choke down vile liquors and exchange banter with their favourite barmaids. The heat, and the noise, and the dust, and the smell of Waterfall sickened him, continuous travel made his digestion worse, and with alarm he noticed that coarse talk was coming easily to his lips and sharp business trickery to his mind. In the beginning he had been disgusted to discover that his father had a share in a slum property in Sydney — one of the nastiest slums in the world,

people said — at the end of a year he was automatically haggling to invest money in more places of the same kind.

But he didn't like it at all. He could feel his hands getting very dirty. Couldn't they invest the money in something more respectable? he suggested. Perhaps pull the slums down and build new modern tenements where people wouldn't die of typhoid at quite such a fearful rate? The old man listened wearily, then told him to go and see that the prices in the station stores had been marked up in readiness for the shearers or to threaten the manager at McFarlane's with the sack for overserving the hands five pounds of tea in their rations last month. A devil of a life it was. Ten times a week James determined to put an end to it, but obedience to his father was an old habit with him now — or filial duty, as he called it. As though being bullied by his father, spied on by Geoffrey, and humiliated by the work he had to do wasn't enough, Julia began to nag. She was bored sick at the Reach. She wanted to go back to London.

"Quite impossible," James said. "You see how it is with Father. Somebody has to look after things."

"Do you flatter yourself you're looking after them?" Julia scoffed. "You message-boy!" She was beginning to use her rapier like a meat-axe. Also her face was hardening and her body was growing stringy.

James regarded her with his usual cold surprise. What a common grating tone her voice had nowadays! "I would be much obliged if you would let me know my own . . ."

"Duty?" she sneered.

"Yes, duty."

"Duty, buncombe! Duty, my eye! You'd smother him in his sleep if you had the bowels. Don't talk to me about duty, you snivelling, hypocritical, stuffed imitation of a man."

"Really, Julia . . ."

"Yes, an imitation of a man. You've always let that old pig have his own way. That's why you married me and that's why we're living in this filthy, rat-ridden hole. Because he says so. You know you don't like it. You much prefer being stroked by fat, elderly peeresses. My, it's a wonder, James, you ever learnt to do up your pants by yourself."

He dribbled out a smile. "I don't understand a word you're saying, my dear."

"You don't? I'll mighty soon make you understand. You get me out of this house soon or I'll take to drink like my mother."

"Julia!" He came down off his high horse in a hurry. "Of course I understand — dull life, yes. But there are nice people. You'll get to know them. And, of course, I intend to have this wretched house pulled down and re-built. It is, as you say, a little . . ."

"You re-build the house!" Julia laughed. "Have you told him."

“Not yet,” James confessed. “But at the first opportunity . . .”

He did try to mention it but somehow never got to the point. As a compromise he had a talk with Custard about moving the drafting-yards and the slaughter-house a few miles down the river and planting a garden in their place.

“What's boss say?” Custard asked.

“No need to trouble him with such a trifle,” James said. He hoped to spring the accomplished fact on the old man, who now rarely went out, but he omitted to grease Geoffrey's palm.

Cabell rushed down to the yard and shook his fist in Custard's face, and threatened to put a head on him if ever he took orders again without making sure that they were his boss's orders.

Custard cringed. “Aye, sir. Aye, muster.”

Nobody guessed that he could hardly see Custard's face as he held his own so close that their beards mingled. Slowly, stiffly, he marched back to the house. A rail from the partially demolished yards lay in his path. James put out a hand to guide him, then took his hand away. He stumbled over the rail and stamped on quickly, trusting to luck, knowing that their eyes were upon him.

Goggs was standing near. He had seen James's hand move. He glanced round to make sure Geoffrey was not near, then grinned at James.

Goggs was a cunning fellow — he knew that time was on James's side.

Chapter Four: Blind

YES, time was against him. Every day the smudge of light on his eye grew smaller. Last month he could see the far edge of the table, and last week the stain of spilt ink in the middle, and two days ago the knot in the wood near the corner of the blotter. It was as though he watched his vital essence melting away on the table before him.

For days he nurtured it, this little grey circle of light, sat motionless, hardly breathing, in his room with the blinds down, his eye closed, glancing out from under his hand now and then to see that it was still there, still intact, the final, guttering dregs of sight. If James came in with papers for him to read or sign he would storm him out of the room and lock the door. Traitorous swine, trying to gouge the eye out of him! Hours passed. He sat at the table with his head in his hands. When he opened his eye again the visible patch of blotter, paper, pen, was almost gone, and as he stared, leaning over the table with a look of outrage and consternation as though he had discovered a bug or a centipede crawling across it, the darkness swallowed everything. He floundered to the window and pulled the blind aside and bellowed, "Hey, what's the time, you?" to the man he could hear rattling milk cans in the dairy.

"Somewheres near six, I reckon," the man shouted back.

"Ah, thank God, it's *all* dark."

He went on like this for days. From without came the sounds of the station's life, horsemen arriving and departing, Sambo and Custard arguing, plates rattling, a stock-whip, dogs barking, the bellows in the blacksmith's shop, a swaggie begging at the back door, the jingle of trace chains, creak of dray-wheels, a brief splutter of quarrelling between James and Julia, James and Geoffrey, cattle, sheep, and the opaque bush silence roaring up between these fretful human interludes — sounds so accustomed that he was hardly aware of them till he realized suddenly with astonishment that his station and his mine went on working without any co-operation from him, as though he was already dead. Then he opened the door and bawled for James, Geoffrey, Custard, Miss Montaulk, the book-keeper, the storekeeper, demanded to know what was being done, why something different wasn't done, changed every one's plans, upset the house, and produced convulsive twitchings even on the petrified face of Ah Lung.

Within half an hour he was galloping across the valley towards Black

Mountain, potent and assured once more on his big piebald stallion, which rushed him on with his retinue of sons and sycophants spluttering far behind in his dust. He reached down and felt the muscles cording under the soft, hot hide and his own mastery in the horse's response as it quickened the clatter-rap of its gallop to a fluid thunder of hoofs, which stampeded sheep and cattle browsing along the fence and started dogs barking miles away at the mountain echo of an affrighted flight. Five miles down the road he rested the horse and waited, chuckling, for the others to come up.

Now again he discredited the cold imminence of darkness. In the mine the roar of the furnaces, the stink of the chemical vats, the shrieking of the new overhead tramway bringing rock from the terraces, the rumble of blastings, the chink of pickaxes, the marching stamp of the batteries all reconstructed for him, to its minutest detail, the burrowing industry of this golden mountain in which his will had already triumphed over fate and the rapacity of men. He went to the ingot room and fingered the smooth, heavy bricks of gold. One of the richest men in the southern hemisphere he was — despite ill fortune, despite enemies. “No, they can't get rid of me yet.”

He sent the others back to the Reach and stayed on in his office designing a new chimney to catch the tiny fragments of gold that went out in smoke. His flag fluttered over the mine. Engineers, managers, foremen waited upon him, obsequiously petitioning, explaining, defending themselves and bowing to his judgments. He sacked this one, grudgingly commended that one, ordered another one to America to study new machinery, commanded the town council to build new footpaths in Monaghan Street, sent a sick miner's wife a hundred pounds to buy the family a holiday at the sea, refused to shorten the gruelling shifts of the furnacemen by half an hour a week, and capriciously, “just to show who's boss,” suddenly declared a public holiday in the middle of the week for no reason at all.

‘No, they can't get rid of me yet. I'll live to a hundred.’

Then one evening he returned home sagging in the saddle as though every bone in his body was broken. He felt his way on to the veranda and into his room without a word to James and Geoffrey, waiting at the top of the stairs for him. On his table lay a heap of papers James had left. He felt them but could not see them. “It'll come back,” he kept muttering to himself. “Of course it will. I'll just rest and wait a while.” He locked the door and lay down and waited. After an hour or two he slept. When he awoke he stared up at the ceiling for a long while before slowly, doubtfully he raised his hand and held it in front of his face, closer, till it touched his nose, hot, clammy. “Maybe it's all dark.” He climbed off the bunk and went to the window. People were moving in the yard. He raised the blind and called softly, “Hey you, what's the time?”

"Somewheres round nine, I reckon."

"Nine you reckon, huh?"

"Well, ain't the sun a good bit over the hills?"

He moved back into the room and steadied himself against the end of the bunk . . .

James sent for a doctor from Sydney, the best there was in Australia.

"Why?" Julia said compassionately. "Why not let him be?"

"It is best that he should know."

"Know the worst, you mean."

"One hopes for the best," James said. "Naturally."

There was no hope, the doctor said, none at all.

James broke it to him, firmly, gently, "No hope, Father. No hope at all."

"Quacks are sometimes wrong," he said in a quiet voice.

"He is the best man in Australia. One of the best in the world."

"But he could make a mistake. It's easy to make a mistake even when you think you know everything. I've made mistakes crossing sheep and I ought to know about sheep. Maybe — it's possible, don't you reckon?"

James put his hand on his father's shoulder. "It's best not to encourage false hopes, Father. A little nerve was broken, he says. It was hardly as big as a pin-point but it can never grow again. It's scientifically *impossible*."

"A little nerve hardly as big as a pin-point! That's funny — being done in by a thing like that when you've come through being speared, burned, nearly drowned, starved, lost in the bush and worse, with only a few scratches. There must be a devil right enough — or a God. The same thing — a damned unjust devil of a God."

James tut-tutted.

"No, wait a minute. I didn't mean that." A repulsive expression of terror and cunning crossed the old man's face. He caught James's hand. "Son, you don't hold anything against me, do you?"

"Me hold anything against you, Father! Good heavens no," James said, shocked. He tried to free his hand. The look on the old man's face, the damp cold of his hands disgusted him.

"No, tell me the truth. I've done you many wrongs. Harriet told me. But try to understand and forgive me, James."

"You exaggerate, Father. I've nothing to forgive you, and I'm sure nobody else has. You've led a noble life of service."

"I've done terrible things, James," Cabell said. "Terrible things."

"Not at all," James retorted, almost indignantly. "You're letting this unbalance you. You must try to bear it like a man, sir." Alarmed by the success of his efforts to save Cabell from the anguish of false hopes, he added, "Besides, who can tell, your sight may come back — by a miracle. Wonderful things have happened."

Cabell's grip tightened. "That's it — a miracle. Men have been raised from the dead, eh? Not saints — sinners like me."

James got his hand away and wiped it on his handkerchief. He turned his eyes up. "God's will be done, Father. We can only hope for the best. You must try to take it more philosophically. You have years to live — years of rest. You've earned them."

"Years!" Cabell murmured. "Years like this. No, blast and damn it." He shook his fists in the air. "It's impossible. It's bloody impossible."

James shrugged, sighed. "Now, Father, you musn't be unreasonable. What is to be will be. All flesh is mortal."

James's droning platitudes reminded Cabell of something. He dropped his fists and said, "That parson fellow who's always nosing round Miss Montaulk, what's his name?"

"Mr Tomlinson?"

"That's it. I'd like a word with him. Perhaps you're right. I ought to take a bit of thought. I've been pretty violent."

James grimaced. "He's such a gossip. Nothing to gossip about here of course, but in your present state of mind . . ."

"Do as you're told, damn you," Cabell growled.

So the Rev. Mr Walter Tomlinson came to see Cabell. Very nervously he entered the dark room and gasped for breath in the hot, rank air. He was a young man from Oxford, who preached in a galvanized-iron church on Monaghan Street, ovenlike and bare except for an altar cloth embroidered by his mother and arum lilies from Miss Montaulk. He had fifteen parishioners. The rest of the population were Roman Catholics or played two-up. He regarded Cabell with horror and awe as the wickedest and richest man he had ever known.

"Sit down," Cabell said. It was the first time Cabell had spoken to him. He thought Cabell had sent for him to make some complaint, and was ready to forswear and abjure anything rather than be roared at as he had heard Cabell roaring at men in Waterfall.

He sat down. "I came at once," he said anxiously.

"Thank you." Cabell pondered. "Damn it, I don't know how to begin," he said at last. "I'm blind — blind as a bat. But you've seen that for yourself."

"Oh, indeed?" the little parson said politely.

"Some nerve's been broken. As small as a pin-point they say, and it won't grow again. So I've got to sit here like a stuffed dummy for the rest of my days — like a castrated bull."

"Doctors are very clever," Mr Tomlinson suggested. "I heard of one who made a nose grow on a man." Then he noticed that Cabell's nose had set crooked after the fight with his son, and he was confused.

"I know, I know. But they can't do anything for me. I'm cursed."

"Oh?" Mr Tomlinson said, as if Cabell had told him that he was

catarrhal.

"I haven't thought much about religion. Haven't had time. No excuse, I suppose. But damn it, I had to eat or be eaten."

"You've lived a very busy, useful life," Mr Tomlinson said approvingly.

"I've lived a hell of a life," Cabell said. "I suppose you'll tell me a man reaps as he sows, but surely if there's a God who sees everything — it says every hair on your head is numbered, doesn't it? But no man who saw everything from start to finish would do this to me. Surely there must be some possibility, some hope. Eh?"

It was beginning to dawn on Mr Tomlinson that Cabell was not going to roar, but expected some spiritual aid from him. He wriggled and cleared his throat and said "Just so, just so" several times, feeling, before this eager, ugly, blind, but still vividly living face, rather as a taxidermist might if called in to deal with a wild tiger.

The old man put a bony hand on his knee. "You think so, eh? It's possible — a miracle."

Mr Tomlinson leant away from the pungent breath and the lips curled back viciously on bare gums. What a horrid old man. "Quite, oh, quite. God is merciful and — ah — merciful, and his only begotten Son has taken the burden of sin from us and ah . . ." As he pressed back in his chair from the twisted face pushed close to his and thought, "He's mad. He'll strangle me," his voice went on "ah-ahing" with the detached volition of a reflex. "Afflictions sent from Heaven — measure of God's love — redeemed in Paradise . . ."

"Yes, yes," Cabell interrupted, "but stop beating about the bush. Have I got to spend the rest of my days rotting in darkness, and what for? It can't be God's will. I wouldn't wish it to a dog."

"God has seen fit — many blessings — loving children all around you — especially Mr James, I mean . . ."

"While I could keep my eye on him!"

Mr Tomlinson disentangled himself from Cabell's clutches and his voice ran more smoothly. "Ah, Mr Cabell, who can tell what sweet grace may descend on you in this adversity. The outward eye is blasted so that the inward eye may see more clearly. The outward eye has been fixed on base and worldly things, but the inward eye shall see the things of God."

Cabell listened attentively to the braying, cultivated voice, which became louder and more eloquent as Mr Tomlinson realized that this horrid old man was really a frightened old man. He called on Cabell to repent, promised to pray for him, was polite, a little condescending.

The eager look left Cabell's face. He muttered deep in his throat.

Mr Tomlinson paused.

"How old are you?" Cabell asked.

"Thirty years come September."

“You know what God feels about things?”

“I am His ordained minister.”

“Have you ever felt a man's hands round your throat?”

“Indeed, no.”

“Have you ever committed murder?”

Mr Tomlinson stared.

Cabell nodded. “I was a fool.”

“We are all foolish, weak, and sinful,” Mr Tomlinson said.

“I was a damn fool,” Cabell said. “Now shut up and get out of here.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Cabell rose.

Mr Tomlinson departed.

So much for spiritual consolation.

Chapter Five: James Takes over the Good Work

A MONTH later James delivered his ultimatum.

"I've been thinking things over, Father, and it seems to me that one or two adjustments are advisable."

Cabell winced, but said nothing.

"To begin with, there's the mine. In your present condition . . ."

"I know, I know," Cabell said. "I'll have you put in as chairman, but, by God, you'll do as you're told or . . ."

"Of course, I'll never want to do anything except serve you," James said, "as I've done in the past."

Cabell moved uncomfortably. "Look here, James, I didn't know Julia was going to turn out a nagging bitch."

"I don't know what you mean, Father," James said coldly. "Julia and I are very happy together."

"Then what're you always harping on past favours for?"

"Only to reassure you."

Cabell snorted. "Save your breath, but if you try any monkey tricks at Waterfall . . ."

James hemmed and hahed and made a few false starts before he got it out: "I've just written to the directors to tell them that neither you nor I will want to have any personal control in the future."

"You've what?"

James repeated it. "The type of man one has to associate with and the work one has to do — I'm not cut out for it, Father. You remember I was afraid of that years ago, but you insisted and I gave in. The last eighteen months have made me sure that I've no aptitude for money-grubbing. I've other plans in view — of course if you approve."

"To the devil with you. I'll put Geoffrey in."

"I've been wanting to tell you about Geoffrey, Father, but you've kept the door locked and I didn't like to disturb you. He expressed a desire to go to America when he was in Brisbane last week, so I've promised him an ample allowance — as long as he is abroad."

"You false dog," Cabell exploded. "But you can't get around me. I'll put somebody in, and you can take yourself off this instant."

"You're not serious, Father. Leave you to the mercy of the first scoundrel who comes along to take advantage of your affliction. You can't wish that?"

The old man stood up and strode across the room, turned to come back and ran foul of the end of his bunk, took a few steps, lost his nerve, and felt his way hesitatingly to the table, sank into the chair, swore. "I'll be damned if I don't put someone in just the same."

"You've a perfect right to use your vote as you wish when the matter comes up," James agreed, "but, of course, I too . . ."

"You? You're only my damn puppet."

"Of course I'll only want to do what pleases you," James said. "But I took the liberty of telling Miss Ludmilla by cable about your illness and she agrees that . . ."

The old man hung on the arms of his chair — with his skinny elbows out and his head sunk in his shoulders like a spider at bay and ready to spit poison.

" . . . you should be relieved of the responsibility of looking after her shares."

"I won't have it. I'll cable her myself. I'll . . ."

"Why certainly, Father," James interrupted quickly. "Would you like to send it now. I've got a pencil and paper here. I'll see it goes off to Pyke's Crossing at once."

Cabell stood up, sat down, then felt for something to throw.

James moved the inkwell out of his reach.

"James, you're a bastard," Cabell said, in a tone of dawning, amazed discovery and did violence to his own hair instead.

James was hurt. His face acted all the emotions automatically, although there were no eyes to see. "You make it very difficult for me to do my duty, Father," he said reproachfully. "Frankly, it's no pleasure for me or for Julia to live here when we might be living in England. I don't expect you to understand what we have both given up, but I think I have a right to ask you to remember that I'm the only one of your children who hasn't abandoned you for his own selfish pleasure." He walked to the window and left the old man breathing quickly as though a hot, bitter draught had just been forced down his throat. But he turned at once and smiled forgivingly. "Pardon me, Father. I'm afraid I sometimes forget you're not quite your old self these days. Now there's another small matter. Larry. He's in jail."

"Thank God for that," Cabell said. "I wouldn't like to be at the mercy of two of you."

"But your son! My brother! And a Cabell!"

"It's nothing new in the family."

James cracked his knuckles under his coat-tails. "I quite understand that in sending Larry to jail you acted under great provocation and in the heat of the moment . . ."

"I sent him to jail because he tried to do me in and would try again if he got out."

"I quite understand," James raised his voice, "that you acted in the heat of the moment and that in your heart you were sorry for it after. So I've taken the liberty of telling the Minister for Justice that you'd be much obliged if he'd use his influence to get Larry's sentence shortened."

"My God, I'll put a stop to that. I'll send Custard to Brisbane." He got up and fumbled his way to the window. "Custard! Hey you, where's Custard?"

James drew his father away and pulled the blind. "I'm sorry if you had any special affection for Custard, Father. I gave him the sack a week ago. He was robbing you shamefully."

Standing in the middle of the floor with his mouth hanging open, his stiffened knees slightly bent, his shoulders bowed, Cabell looked lost, ludicrous.

A smile escaped James, but he disowned it at once, hastened to push his father's chair up and force the old man into it. "This is all very painful for us both," he said, "but I'm sure you'll agree that the times have changed. The country is becoming civilized. Violence is archaic. Your action against Larry excited some extremely disagreeable publicity. Some low Labour papers in Brisbane and Sydney make a practice of writing about you in the most exaggerated terms. Nobody with any sense would pay attention to such drivel, of course, but for the sake of your good name I've decided to make a gesture."

The old man ran his hand over his face and rubbed his eye, as though he hoped to awaken himself from a bad dream.

"As you are aware," the wooden, didactic voice of James droned on and on, "some foolish idealists who were defeated in the strike of Ninety-one went to Paraguay and set up a so-called Utopian colony there. Needless to say it failed, and although they brought their sufferings on themselves, these newspaper fellows have made a pathetic story of it and attempted to misrepresent your part in locking up the land. It would be more than a reply if we were to divide up, say, fifty thousand acres of good agricultural land and offer it to be settled by the men who say that they struck against you because you had grabbed their land from them and that you turned Larry out for taking their part."

"Give land away? My land?"

"It's very simple," James said. "I've asked the Government to send a surveyor to cut the land up into blocks. Then we'll invite the men to take up selections and call the settlement the Derek Cabell Memorial Settlement. It would be heard of throughout the Empire."

Cabell got a grip on words again. "You fathead, James. D'you think I'd give a unionist the value of a scabby sheep!"

"On second thoughts I'm sure you'll agree that it would be a very good scheme, Father. We'll talk about it another time. And that reminds me — sheep . . ."

“You'll not say another word or I'll . . .” He felt over the empty table. “Anyhow, you'll not say another word. And what about sheep?”

“That's a trifle. I had a government expert up to look over the pastures and he agrees the country is wasted on sheep. The fine grasses are all eaten out and . . . in short, I propose that we put the studs up for auction and get rid of the rest of the stock and try out what we can do breeding horses and stud cattle. Of course we wouldn't need all the land. We could sell some perhaps. But that's another thing to discuss later. Sometime I'd like to have a word with you about the new house, too. I don't ask anything for myself, Father, but one has to think of Julia. She's giving up a lot to let me stay here and carry on your work. Oh, I'm not saying that to ask for any special thanks from you. It's only my duty . . .”

The old man listened to the toneless, wooden, eloquent, righteous voice. It stopped at last and he raised his face to James and whispered confidentially, “I wish I could see for a minute, James. Just for one short minute. *I'd choke you.*”

James looked down at his father's blind eye. It did not look blind, flashing up into his with a concentration of all the room's light. Inwardly, for a minute, he shuddered at the memory of the power that was in that eye once. Broken by the breadth of a pin's point — but broken for ever! He shook his head compassionately. Poor Father. Poor old Dad. He put a hand out to press the fist lying on the table, but thought better of it, sighed, and left the room.

Chapter Six: Husband and Wife

NEEDLESS to say these things were not done all at once, but time was on James's side. The old man was like the great ant-eaten tree which has ridden gales for a century, stunting everything that grows in its shade, sucking all the blood of the earth to itself with its long, greedy roots till one night comes a little wind which hits it just in the right place and down it goes, and everybody sees with wonder how frail a tree it really was.

Having delivered his ultimatum James was alarmed at his own temerity. Surely that shattered stump of a giant would put forth new limbs, new choking and ineradicable roots. The old man stayed in his room for a week, taking his tray of food from Ah Lung at the door. One night as James was walking along the veranda, wondering nervously what schemes the old man was hatching in his dark lair, he heard the harsh, ugly, ridiculous and most moving of all sounds, a man crying. He stopped, unable to believe his ears, then tiptoed to the door and listened. Yes, his father was crying.

He opened the door and entered, struck a match. The old man was sitting on his bunk with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, his face twisted in that funny grimace which makes grief seem most terrible. Around him on the dirty and rumpled bed-clothes Harriet's jewels were scattered. In the brief splutter of the match they sparkled with cold, hectic gaiety, repudiating the old man's sorrow and his effort to draw from them some warm comfort of memory, some odour of the personality they had decorated. They were like pitiless eyes turning from the boredom of his tale with coquettish interest in a new-comer, like an old man's weary and derisive whores.

James's first emotion was of jealousy, then of Spartan disgust at the sight of a man's beard wet with tears and a face which had seemed dead to feeling so helplessly contorted by its grief, and then amazement at the discovery that all these days his father had not been gathering his forces for a struggle but brooding childishly — like an old woman rather than a man, James thought — over these bits of jewellery.

“Come now, Father,” James said, “what's the matter?” He had to repeat it several times and shake him before the old man noticed that he was in the room. But he paid no attention nor tried to control himself, his broken manliness for the moment without shame.

A second match showed James the unexpected meagreness of his half-naked body, the ribs sticking through the white skin, the chest fallen in, the arms withered to the bone, and all the irrecoverable wastage of age; but what most astounded his mighty awe of his father was the realization that he, who kept little grudges burning for years, had forgiven Harriet. James took after his father in that; his heart was a storehouse of unforgotten injuries, too, and he felt that forgiveness was a more convincing sign of weakness in a man than even tears. James began to believe what he had been telling himself for weeks, that the old man's will was dying.

Cabell was about the house again in two or three days, as crapulous and combative as ever, but his voice sent cold shivers of apprehension down James's spine no more. With the aid of new managers and new spies, among whom Goggs quickly insinuated himself into a high place, he set to work on his plans for reorganizing his father's affairs, hardly bothering to explain what he did but, when he became too obstreperous, letting the old man taste his impotence in an attempt to make men who took their cue from James and were no longer in awe of him do as he wished. Furiously then Cabell, guided by Sambo, the only faithful one, rode about the station cursing at overseers who listened and said, "I'll ask Mr James about it," enjoying his futile shinnanikan after going in terror of his name for so many years, till he wore himself out and returned, with voice frayed and palms torn where the nails of his clenched fists had cut into the flesh, to sulk a week out in his room. Hard times they were for Sambo, who went back to punish them with his own enfeebled fists for the grins Cabell could not see.

At the end of a year the valley had changed again. Surveyors cut up the lush river flats. The old shearers of Ninety-one came and listened suspiciously to James, winked at each other, and went away baffled. "A catch in it somewhere," they opined. But some of them returned, the settlement filled, humpies and fences went up, corn and cotton and fruit plantations patched the grey landscape with alien colour. The O'Connors built a store, Mr Tomlinson, with James's help, a church and later a parsonage where Miss Montaulk became his housekeeper. Goggs, genuine old Ninety-one, borrowed money from James and opened a pub, borrowed more and lent it at interest till he had half the struggling poor devils in his clutches. But that was still in the future. For the moment James contemplated his work with a glowing sense of feudal largess, strutted among his tenants like a true country gentleman, and delivered bad advice about experimental agriculture.

Then there was Larry, freed after two years in prison and married to the daughter of Berry, not perhaps a very creditable connexion, as Berry was one of these Labour fellows who had got into parliament somehow and kept alive the fiction that the pioneers of This Great Free Land of Ours

were men of the basest, mercenary motive, to illustrate which, James was annoyed to see, his father's name was still often cited. But it might have been worse with Larry, who had shown an inclination, on leaving jail, to tramp around the country in the lowest kind of company, refusing all James's offers to send him to America and pay him a remittance as long as he stayed there, until Berry found him and took him home. A less upright man than James would then have washed his hands of Larry, but he saw, in drafting Cabell's will, that Larry was not forgotten. "Nobody shall say I did my brother out of what he had a right to expect."

Cabell's opposition flared and died, flared and died, becoming weaker and weaker, but he had one victory. James did not succeed in pulling down the weather-beaten old homestead, in the fusty darkness of which he, like his father, felt the ghosts scuttle from a room as he entered it, leaving the air vibrant with their passing. James almost saw the hem of his mother's dress swish round the end of the passage, her sad face staring from the little windows, almost heard the lisp-patter of her feet on the kitchen flags. Here, still alarmingly, the past spoke to him. The place smelt of rot, decay, and death. Its beams crumbled at a touch, and James had fantastic moments of forgetting about white ants and imagining that the walls were saturated with some evil virus distilled from the deeds done here, a virus transmitted into his own blood and bones perhaps, he thought, because he was never able to forget what Cash had told him. He wanted to burn the place down, scarify with flames the earth on which it stood, dank and infested with fungoids and sickly grass. He sent to England for photographs of Owerbury House, had architects design a mansion in the same style, only bigger, to crown the slope, engaged builders, and prepared to move into the homestead at McFarlane's till the new house was ready. Cabell listened to his plans without comment, but at the last moment, when the coach was ready to carry them across the valley, he rebelled. If they wanted to burn the house down let them, but they'd burn him in it. They could rob him of his money but they weren't going to build a prison for him. He was less lonely with his ghosts than he would be in the new life James was bringing to the Reach, new snooty servants, gentlemen jackeroos, chattering hordes of "society jackanapes" who had begun to visit Julia. Short of carrying him to the coach, with the hands and servants looking on, there was nothing James could do, except smile compassionately, crack his knuckles, and say, "Why, of course, Father, it's just as you wish. I thought you'd be more comfortable, that's all." So the luggage was unloaded and they came back into the house, its floors bereft of covering, its walls of the books and pictures and bric-a-brac James had brought from England, more repulsively hostile than ever. James could not stomach it, so he cleared away the garden on one side and built a new wing, temporarily he promised Julia. Surely time was on his side. Time

would burn the old house, purge the haunted air, sweeten the smell of the past, and even, at last, bury that foul parody of a father that the other, nobler father might shine before men.

“If you're depending on him to die we'll be in this cowshed of a place for the next fifteen years,” Julia said. Julia's voice was a sustained, shrill, metallic vibration of nerves screwed down as tight as piano wires. Her astringent elegance was turning to sharp points of bone, her wit to a waspish, spinsterish exasperation, her insouciance to a dead formalism of smiles, words, and gestures which covered her personality as frost covers a lovely flower. She was still beautiful — or rather one felt that there was beauty somewhere under the hardened face, the beauty rusting from a musical instrument which no one any longer tries to play. Looking at herself in the mirror she saw the epitome of her desolation in the spectacle of her body withering and fading from the beautiful clothes which once had husked it as harmoniously as the orange-skin the orange. When she compared the two Julias, the one which belonged to these dresses, the one which belonged to them less and less, she sometimes wept a little.

“Good heavens,” James said, “of course I'm not depending on him to die. What an idea!”

“What *cant*.”

James put his chin up and looked at her along the knife-edge of his nose. “I suppose I can hardly expect you to feel a jot for my father when you showed so little feeling for your own poor mother.” He eyed the dress of powder-blue foulard she was wearing and glanced at the band of black crape on his own arm.

A few months before Aurelia had fallen down the steps of a house in Rome and ended a last fling. James had received reports of her junketings with horror, but as soon as the news of her death arrived he stretched his face, went into mourning, bought a stock of black-edged note-paper, and advertised the sad event in all the papers:

At the Villa D'Este, Rome, on 15 March, 1897, Aurelia Considine (widow of the late Martin Augustus Considine, brother of Sir Josiah Considine, of the Oaks, near Fairlight, Sussex), and mother of Julia (Mrs James Cabell).

A gracious friend from us is gone,
A voice we loved is dead.

Inserted by her loving Daughter and Son-in-Law.

Julia's mirth was obscene and rather desperate. She got out her brightest clothes and wore them, flung anecdotes of her mother's most purple passages at him. He was coldly amazed. “Have you no respect for

the dead, even if you had no love for the living?"

Now she said, because she knew that nothing got through the wood so painfully, "You're a prize humbug and hypocrite."

A retort, hot and sour like bile, came up his throat, but he swallowed it.

James was not a hypocrite. The suspicion of it would never torment a hypocrite as it tormented James. Which was the truth in him — this grave, equable, gentlemanly fellow whom everybody respected, whose aspirations were lofty, thoughts moral, and habits exemplary; or those dancing mad devils which made a witches' sabbath of his nights? If he was a hypocrite, the truth in him was this ugly thing which had come to him, he believed, from the past, from his mother the convict and that evil old man who had usurped his father's name. No, that could not be true. He denied his devils: they didn't exist. He denied his hatred and resentment against the old man on the veranda. He denied his unaccomplished desire. He denied the past: it was all a lie. Feverishly he clung to the forms and conventions of gentlemanliness, correct behaviour, respectable feeling, as interpreted at the heart of civilization.

Here, on the edge of outer darkness, where devils breathed their native air, a starched shirt at the dinner-table was more than a starched shirt — a buckler behind which you fought for your soul. A gentleman could afford to walk down Piccadilly unshaven or, in the unimpeachable purity of a Carlton Terrace Club, dispute the opinions in a *Times* leading article, but put him in the middle of darkest Africa and he would sweat and suffer in the proper clothes at dinner each evening and become furiously Anglophile . . . or go to the dogs. So James, among horse-trainers and cattle-buyers, constantly reminded by his father of the changes bush life could work in a man, became, like Dr Barnett's father and many another colonial, more English than the English. But below this façade, what wretchedness, what confusion!

Flanagan wrote to him saying that he would not be able to pay the money he owed Cabell, for which a bill was falling due within a month or two, and suggesting that James should call and see him next time he was in Brisbane.

James went — oh, no, not in any spirit of revenge, not with hardened heart. Why should he feel that way? Flanagan had given him good advice, he had followed it, and he was very glad he had followed it — for to-day he was in a position to send Flanagan a message telling him to present himself at James's hotel within an hour and Flanagan would have to come. He could tell Flanagan that the bill must be met; he could sell Flanagan's house over his head. What would become of Flanagan then. And what would become of Jennis and of her husband, Doug Peppiott, who, as everybody knew, lived on the thin bounty of Flanagan and his father, both deeply entangled since the crisis of Ninety-three had brought them together? And what would be left of Mrs Bowen's fussy

pride if he cared to pay her back for the things she had said to him in the drawing-room that day? If . . . but of course such an ignoble idea would never cross his mind.

As he entered Flanagan's study and remembered, with the clarity of his life's sharpest experience, what had happened in this room nine years ago the idea did more than cross his mind: it possessed him in a convulsion of loathing for the fat, crafty face beaming up from the depths of an arm-chair.

"Jimmy, me boy, me boy!" Flanagan cried with a joviality all the more patently hollow because he was laid out by a gouty foot. "Och! Ugh! Ow!" he interrupted his blandishing welcome, turning up the whites of his eyes with pain. "It's the devil of a thing to be old, Jimmy. Me sins are finding me out."

James said, in his woodenest voice, that he was sorry.

"There now, waste no words on the shell of a man but sit down close and tell me about yeself. It's mighty wrong in ye not giving your friends a sight of ye before this."

"I've been busy," James said unresponsively. "You wished to see me, I believe?"

"Sure and I wished to see ye. Aren't I telling ye the sight of ye's worth pounds of physic. Ah, Jimmy, Jimmy, it was a sad day for me when your da cut the silken threads which bound ye to this house."

"I believe you wanted to talk business with me," James insisted.

Flanagan abandoned poetry for base matters with another smile, bravely distilled from his agony. "That's generous of ye, Jimmy, saying that, because it's ye that have the right to all the talking."

"I received your letter of the fourteenth instant," James said, "intimating that you would be unable to meet your obligations to my father."

"That's a fact, and I blush to confess it, even to an old friend like you."

"I believe the sum is thirty thousand pounds, plus current interest, which you owe him?"

"That's the sum right enough. But of course it's only a manner of speaking to say that I owe it."

"I think the bill has your name on it?"

"Sure, sure, but what's Michael Flanagan, Jimmy? Behold the man. A breathing corpse, a crayture nearly delivered from the cares of the world and responsibility for mortgages and bills of sale. It isn't him owes ye that thirty thousand, me boy, it's his poor, innocent, helpless granddaughter that must turn in the bloom of her young womanhood and pay for the mistakes and extravagances of her grandfather." He shook his sly old head. "Ye can imagine the weight of it on me conscience, leaving that child at the mercy of heartless creditors. Och now, don't take offence. I'm not calling ye a Shylock or nothing, but it sends cold shivers

up me when I think what could be done to her according to the strict letter of the pitiless law.”

James stared into the garden, defending himself behind the memory of the day he sat in this very spot, perhaps this very chair. “Have you anything to suggest?” he said, unwilling yet to decide whether he would punish Flanagan with magnanimity or a writ of attachment.

“What would I be suggesting to you?” Flanagan said humbly. “Whatever ye say I’ll thank ye for with a gratitude that will echo through every heart in me house and make us your devoted slaves for ever.”

“Why should it be something you’d thank me for?” James snapped.

Flanagan became busy with his mummified foot and pretended not to hear. When the corners of James’s mouth relaxed and the dangerous moment seemed past, he stopped blowing and panting and said, “But of course I wouldn’t see ye letting yourself in for any unbusinesslike arrangement out of your generosity. What say we renew the bill for another five years?”

James was still enjoying the Jovian pleasure of balancing Flanagan’s fate, but the bland impudence with which Flanagan arranged the affair took all the sting out of magnanimity. In a pique, he said, “I’m afraid that wouldn’t be satisfactory.”

“No?”

“Thirty thousand pounds is a lot of money, Sir Michael, and this is a time when one can make good use of it.”

“Jimmy! Jimmy!” Flanagan cried in dismay. “Have I got the gout in me foot or me ear that I hear ye say your money would be better used than in saving a poor orphan girl that you once had a soft spot for from destitution?”

“This is a matter of business, Sir Michael. I wish you wouldn’t try to confuse the issue.”

“Sure,” said Sir Michael tearfully, “business is business and the soft feelings of the heart are another thing to be kept in a different compartment, but woe the day that I hear young Jimmy Cabell saying it.”

“You gave me my first lesson in keeping them apart,” James said, then bit his lip.

Flanagan was on to him like a weasel. “Then it’s not only business makes ye so hard? Ye think ye’ve got something to pay me back for?”

“Certainly not. Why should I?”

“Ye think I let ye down the day ye came to see me here?”

James laughed. “Good heavens, I’d forgotten about it — almost.” He felt that this did not ring quite true, so he added loftily, “A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. I married, and er . . . a charming girl, and er . . .” He floundered, and at last had to dispose of the charge by saying, “Anyway, the decision rests with my father. I’m only his agent.”

“Ah, but ye can do a lot, Jimmy, for the sake of old times.”

James rose. “I’ll do what I can. I’ll tell him what you say and communicate with you later.”

Flanagan struggled out of his chair. He had yet another card to play. Tapping the floor loudly with his stick he hobbled across to James. James was backing to the door but Flanagan hung on his arm. “I’ll come and see ye off. Easy now, me boy. Ouch, a bit slower. I’m not as spry as ...”

A knock on the door leading to the next room halted him. “Who is it now? Come in.”

The door opened slowly to a smell of violets, and Jennis poised on the threshold with a slow, soft coo of surprise.

“Och,” Flanagan said severely, “didn’t ye know I was busy, didn’t ye?”

Half-smiling recognition, half-confused, she started to withdraw, but Flanagan said, “Come in now ye’re here, and give an old friend your greeting.”

She stepped close to them and offered her hand, and James felt again the full, soft, fleshy weight of it against his palm as a revelation of her body’s nakedness. He dropped it quickly, and all the studious self-possession went from him, leaving him embarrassed and incoherent as her dreamily speculative eyes searched his face and asked, he imagined, why he had delivered such swashbuckling speeches, then run away. He was annoyed with them both and wanted to escape, but could not find the formula which would get him through the door. With relief he saw the fatuous smile with which Flanagan looked from face to face turning into words, but it seemed an interminable time before Flanagan said, “Have ye lost your tongue, Jenny? Ye bellyache because he never comes to see ye and when he does ye’ve got nothing to say.”

“Grandfather!”

“Ye little witch, I’ll tell on ye.” He pinched her cheek and laughed, then pretended to be shocked at himself, “Here, what am I saying? Me mind’s wandering. Forgive a sentimental old fool, children. Seeing ye together just brought back the drame of me life.”

“I came to ask if you wanted tea?” she said.

“No, no. Take Jimmy along with ye. I don’t want no tay.”

Her eyes melted into James’s. “I was going to ask him.”

He heard himself saying, “Really, no, really. You must excuse me. I’m due back in town. I’m late.”

Only when he was out on the street, fuming, “It was all arranged. It was all a trick. He tapped his stick to bring her in,” did the image of her begin to burn clearly on his senses — the ripe maturity of her body which mothering two children had brought to the fullness of its weighted perfection, the soft flesh of her arms peeping through slashed sleeves, her lusciously half-open mouth, the tender sing-song of her lazy voice, and

her eyes more provocative than ever with a woman's happy knowledge in place of the old wonder and discontent. He rubbed the palm of his right hand vigorously against his coat and hurried on. People called to him across the busy pavements and waved, but he hung his head and pretended not to notice. He wanted to get back into his room and shut the door. He felt that something was working to pieces in him and some unpleasant expression coming out on his face which they would see if he stopped and let them look. A ridiculous fancy, but when he reached his suite in the Royal he could not make himself go to the mirror. He opened the window and stood in the cool breeze from the river, breathing deeply. Gradually the sweat dried in elastic bands round his jaw and he went across to the dressing-table and looked. What he saw was only the pale, melancholy face he was used to, of course, so pale that the tight cap of black hair was like a wig over it. He sniffed at his folly; but as he gazed the face in the glass became slowly unfamiliar, unreal. For the first time, studying it with the eyes of nine years ago which that afternoon had reopened, he saw that youth had gone from it. He saw the unhealthy blotches round the eyes, the hollows under the cheek-bones which only yesterday it seemed were full, the hair thinning from the temples, and the dyspeptic wrinkles at the end of the mouth. He returned to the window and sat down in the arm-chair frowning. Again, vividly, he felt the heavy, boneless hand on his palm. He took up the morning's paper and tried to read but the words would not come together. "It was a trick," he said aloud angrily, but he felt no anger, only a sharper stimulation, and then he was looking out across the roofs of the town towards Frogs' Hollow with his heart swelling across his chest, so that he could hardly breathe. "This is appalling. I must be going off my head." He pulled the blind down and turned on the light and forced himself to write a long, technical letter to a horse-trainer who was preparing Cabell's Pride for the coming Sydney Cup meeting.

Then it was time for dinner. He took a bath, dressed, and went downstairs. The dining-room was nearly empty. His quick glance around counted five women, four waitresses and a woman sitting alone at a table. After a second or two he realized that there were seven or eight men at the tables, some of whom had looked up and nodded as he entered. He tried to concentrate his attention on the men, but the women stood out of the picture as though a spotlight was on them, on their swaying hips, their necks, their mouths. While he was staring at the woman eating, she looked up at him and smiled. His heart bolted, his breath caught before he realized that she was a woman whose husband he knew and that she was merely smiling recognition. In the anticlimax his heart contracted to a little, cold ball against his ribs. He ordered a quick dinner, ate it quickly and tastelessly, and went back to his room.

There were yellow pools of light around the street lamps and the shops

now. He stood at the window again, looking across to Frogs' Hollow, thinking of the stories he had heard, thinking, thinking, thinking, while the blood beat into his temples and drew a tight band around his brain. "It's appalling. You must be off your head," but on the other side of his mind he argued, "It's not natural — the way I live. A man's a man. Others have gone there, not hooligans like Geoffrey. The very best people kept mistresses. Look at Lord Blackenridge and the Earl of Coverdale. Nobody thought any worse of them. Wellington, too. Some of the women are quite ladylike."

He put on his hat and coat and went downstairs again. As he passed the corner he looked across the dark wastes of Edward Street which led towards the river and Frogs' Hollow, turned and stepped out briskly for his club. In the smoking-room he found a man who wanted to talk about the acceptances for the Sydney Cup, and James clung to him long after the subject was exhausted, repeating over and over the genealogy of Cabell's Pride and the history of its sire's achievements in England till the man stared, then yawned, and at last dozed. James left him reluctantly. Ten o'clock. Soon he could go to bed, sleep, and in the morning catch the first train home. Work — that was what he needed, work. He compressed his lips and wandered into the billiard-room. An absorbing game of Russian pool excluded him. Glancing into the bar he saw Jeffers, a lawyer, one of the men he had dealt with for his father, a bawdy fellow who . . . "My God he knows those places. He's always making up parties." He withdrew in a hurry and went on to the library, where he read the English papers mindlessly for an hour, trying to visualize names and places and recover the feeling of his spiritual fellowship with that untarnished world, but the feeling would not come and his efforts to evoke it ended in a sense of disillusion, of vapidness. As he passed the bar on his way along the hall to get his hat he heard the rich burst of men's laughter. He paused at the door again, breathing the male smells of whisky and cigars, but the faces at the bar, glancing up from Jeffers's lewd histrionics, held off an uninitiate, a notorious prude. He was furious because he felt snubbed and for the moment could marshal no pride against them.

A hansom was waiting at the kerb, but he waved the cabman off and started slowly towards Queen Street with his coattails flapping in the wind. It was a hot wind now, blowing from inland. "I can't sleep in this. I'll take a walk to the river first," and his heart commenced to pop again; but he passed two riverward side streets before he plunged, after a quick glance back along the lighted thoroughfare, into the darkness. "Hypocrite," he sneered but did not hear himself. Unconsciously he hurried now, between the high walls of warehouses and decayed remnants of the old town, lop-sided little buildings so shrunken and twisted that light shone out through the walls. For a while he lost his way

in the unfamiliar terrain and the darkness smelling of rubber and tar and stale horsedung and the unaired miasma of slums, saw a light at the end of the labyrinth of galvanized-iron fences at last, and hastened towards it.

He hastened with the inert, dizzy compulsion of a straw in a cataract, unaware of his pistoning legs, towards the stirring scent of joss sticks and the sound of a woman singing at a piano. Suddenly he was out in the light with women all about him. They sat on the kerb, on the steps of the houses, or lounged against veranda posts, their kimonos billowing open in the wind. The light was hazy, filtered through red window blinds, but he felt, with their languid curiosity on him, that it was broad daylight. Above the noise of voices bandied to and fro across the street, some men quarrelling with a woman around a distant lamp-post, a drunken sailor singing, a burst of Chinese gabble from a door which opened surprisingly upon the plush interior of an apparently deserted shed and shut again at once, he heard girls calling, "Hallo, dearie. Looking for someone? Won't I do?" But he did not understand yet that they were speaking to him. He stood with one foot in the lane and one in the street orientating himself and recovering from the shock of finding how blatantly these things were done, three hundred yards from the quiet respectability of Queen Street. This was not at all what he had expected. Now he did not know what he had expected, and in the quick moral revulsion from the publicity and sordidness of the street tried to deny that he had expected anything at all. "What a cesspool. Right in the middle of town where a man stumbles on it walking to the river!"

A girl detached herself from a post and came across the footpath. "Hallo, dearie. Looking for me?" Her kohled and carmined caricature of beauty, which reminded him of someone he knew, breathed stale powder and stale booze into his face.

He drew back sharply.

"I'm not going to bite you, old codger," she said. "I thought you was looking for a friend. Lost your way, have you?"

"Yes," he said severely.

"That's the way back to Queen Street if that's what you want." She pointed up the street between the lines of kimonos.

He peeped around the corner at the gauntlet he would have to run, then spun about and careered down the lane, back through the tar and dung-smelling darkness which tasted like the water of a stagnant pool befouling him as he rushed through it. He pulled himself back into the shadows as he was about to re-enter the street leading to the club. Some men were passing. He recognized Jeffers's voice. What if they were to see him — *him* who had always turned up his nose at their dirty jokes and their plans for a "night out with the girls." He flattened against a wall and hung there till their voices faded in the distance.

Back in the hotel he bathed once more. The devils were under hatches

again. His only emotion now was fear. Would that girl recognize him if she saw him. He had heard stories. Sometimes they blackmailed you. But acuter was the fear which came over him as he lay on the bed thinking of what he had done, the risks he had run, how for those five minutes no considerations of propriety, morality, or honour had been able to restrain him. He realized now that the whole evening had been a violent struggle against the evil, ugly thing in him, which had broken his will like a match-stick at last and scattered the careful poses of nine years. Was it so strong? "Well, nothing happened," he tried to console himself, but it was no consolation to discover on what a volcano he lived. In the early hours he dropped off to sleep and dreamt that he was walking down endless corridors with Miss Montaulk. She kept saying something which annoyed him until he hit her savagely across the cheek. Afterwards he was trying to wash some filth off his hand — the paint from Miss Montaulk's face. Then it wasn't paint at all, he saw, but his own dark skin

...

He awoke with a depressing sense of guilt which sent him back to the Reach determined to be mild and long-suffering with Julia in future and to devote himself more strenuously to uplifting work. He was mild, he was equable, as he had the strength to be, yet every effort he made only increased the ferment in his mind and the tension between Julia and himself. He felt, as he watched himself staring back into her mocking eyes and cracking his knuckles behind his back, that a climax was maturing, and he looked away quickly, not wishing to see what it might be. Desire surged up again, he forced it back, it curdled into hate. But the struggle was wearing him down, the struggle not only against the act of taking Julia by the proffered throat and shaking the insolence out of her, against the impulse to kick the old beast on the veranda who disgraced him to his visitors, but also the struggle to support the fiction of contented matrimony and filial pride which was his facade to the world and to himself. His hate was like a hot stone he juggled in his hands because he had nowhere to throw it.

Flanagan, uneasy at his long silence, wrote offering to discuss a compromise on his proposal if James would call again. Gout, he said, still held him. Panicky, James replied that he could not leave the Reach. Flanagan could have the money for another five years. He would rather Flanagan kept it than run the risk of seeing once more what he had lost.

But that was not to be evaded. It was all around him. Every time he heard the stockmen laughing with the maids in the dairy or at the kitchen door of a Sunday afternoon he became irritable, and afterwards was humiliated. He forbade the stockmen to come into the yard, found fault with the maids till they turned up their noses and left. It was better when the agency refused to send any more girls and they had to have Chinamen again. From the dark orange-grove came no more unsettling

warm laughter on moonlight nights.

The year dragged on and the time came for him to go south for the Sydney Cup, his first big race. He packed with relief at escaping for a while from the strain of keeping up pretences against Julia's perpetual nagging and the senile but persisting old brute on the veranda.

But Julia announced that she would go with him. No use arguing. "I wouldn't miss old Crowbait for the world."

"Don't you think that joke's a little threadbare by now?"

"No, I think it's one of the best jokes I've heard, your paying a thousand guineas for that horse because old Lord Thingumajig put his arm around your shoulder and called you his dear James."

"That's utter rubbish. I bought the horse from his agent. It has won races, anyway, hasn't it? Father's forgotten what a good horse looks like."

How badly he wanted the horse to win, not for the sake of the horse, not for the glory, not even for the pleasure it would be to come home and crow over his father, but for the same reason which made him stay out on the run and eat in a stockman's hut rather than face Julia across the table when she was in a bad mood. Inside him there was a big sore just waiting for a touch to burst. He was afraid of the bursting, afraid of the corruption he would see.

But, despite Julia, he began to enjoy himself as soon as he set foot in Sydney and the excitement of a big race meeting obscured his troubles. There was a dinner at Government House, an aide who remembered meeting him with Lord Salisbury at Ascot, an Americo-Italian Marchesa who put herself under his protection on the racecourse because he was the "first real gen'leman" she'd met in the Antipodes.

On the afternoon of the big day he was at the stalls looking over a horse with a number of his friends, including the Marchesa, when a young man with a happy mouth and a pair of sloe eyes twinkling in a face faintly coffee-stained touched him on the shoulder and said, "You're James Cabell, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Put it there. I'm your cousin, Rab Surface."

James looked at the checks on the waistcoat, the grey derby over one ear, the dark complexion, and pressed the man's hand furtively as though he was taking a tip out of it.

The Marchesa got out her lorgnette, turned it on the young man, on James. The shape and colour of their eyes, the silky blackness of their hair agreed.

"Not thinking of buying this nag?" the young man said.

"What's wrong with it?" said the owner, who could almost feel James's money in his pocket.

"Too much bone," the young man said.

"I'm not selling it for sausage meat," the owner snapped, and they

laughed.

“What's that?” the Marchesa demanded. “What? What?”

“Mr Surface is our leading family butcher,” somebody explained and laughed again alone while every one copied James and examined the horse intently.

The young man became aware of their backs. Only the Marchesa continued to look at him, entomologically through her glasses. “My dad owned the mare, you see,” he explained. “She cracked up on him after five starts. You don't like to see one of the family rooked, do you? I wouldn't buy it for the cart.”

It was a parting shot as he rejoined his friends. As his loud, good-natured laugh dissolved into the crowd they heard him say, “Oh, my cousin. Too much of a toff to . . .”

James made a point of buying the horse, off-hand, grandly, but when they got back to the paddock the Marchesa spotted someone she knew and that was the last James saw of her.

Oh, *how* badly he wanted to win the race, but Cabell's Pride was not even placed. “Unless you count from the other end,” Julia said.

The exasperation of a wretched day, of wretched months, coruscated around this harmless remark. Back in the hotel, before she had time to remove her gloves, he pounced. “You're pleased, aren't you? You've got no pride, no loyalty.”

“You should try the other branch of the family,” she said. “They seem loyal enough.”

He tried to get away from her. Again he felt things working to pieces inside, the strange disarticulation of his face as though a mask was slipping off it.

“They might even buy Crowbait from you — for the cart.” She leant against the head of the lounge offering him her cheek.

A shocking thing happened. James slapped the cheek, and finding a delight in doing so, a sudden freedom around the heart as though his too constricted chest had burst, slapped a brisk one-two on both cheeks. It was the most passionate contact they had ever had.

Julia flopped on to the lounge, her face red, her eyes shining with pain, her features loosened around an expression of drunken astonishment. His blows had broken the glassy surface of her elegance: her hat hung over one ear, her hair was coming down, a tear left a little snail's track of silver along the side of her nose. She looked, all at once, miserably unhappy and defenceless as her lips trembled, her nose puckered up, and she began to blubber.

“My God! Julia!” James cried, stricken by pity and tenderness at the sight. He sat down beside her and put his arm around her shoulders. He could hear his heart, like somebody walking on the carpeted floor overhead. Each beat was like a stone dropping into the pool of his blood

and sending wave after wave of warmth against his skin. Then he was conscious of nothing except his compassion for her tears.

She stopped blubbering and looked at him, not as she usually looked, through half-closed eyes, but through very wide and frightened eyes, with one hand pressing against his chest . . .

Afterwards, when she sat on the lounge smoothing the creases out of her dress, her hair down, her hat crushed under the cushions, her still-gloved hands adding the last touch of bizarre abandon to the scene, he could not believe that it had happened.

He sought in his chaotic mind for some formula of explanation or apology that would exonerate him, but found only an unspeakable self-disgust. What a vile thing! What a vile feeling of brutal joy! It had overwhelmed him in a second as it did that night in Frogs' Hollow. As though to show the measure of this madness the door, carelessly half-shut, came slowly open in the draught. He had not even thought whether it was locked or not!

Instinctively he turned to the mirror over the mantelshelf to straighten his tie and pat his hair into place, and the pale, melancholy, worried faced rising from the tall collar, the beautiful frock-coat out of Bond Street mouthed at him, "You hypocrite!"

But feeling his collar tight around his neck again, the weight of the coat on his shoulders, he began to regain control of himself, as though the knowledge that those clothes, those accoutrements of a gentleman, were his, reinforced him. "I'm sorry," he said, with frigid politeness, apologizing for a minor breach of good manners.

Julia looping her hair up, smiled. It was the kind of smile he had often thought of her smiling if she knew what he had done in Frogs' Hollow. No reply was possible except to leave the room pretending that he was not sneaking away . . .

Of course, after this he was more wooden than ever . . . for a while. But the devils in both of them had learnt a dangerous lesson. They were to repeat the scene with many variations before reaction completed the petrification of James and led Julia on to whatever was the next stage in the dissolution of her elegant sensibilities.

Each of these backslidings — bouts of fever, as he thought of them, from an inherited virus — one may detect by the refreshed vigour with which James crusaded his father's good name. Returning from the Sydney Cup of Ninety-eight he inaugurated the Foundation Day ceremonies of 23 February, the anniversary of Cabell's arrival in the valley. He built a marble obelisk at the ford where Sambo said the landtakers had crossed their sheep and cattle and "had a swig." A brass plate at the base of the obelisk said:

DEREK CABELL

(of Owerbury Court, Owerbury, Dorset, Eng.)
And His Five Gallant Comrades
Here Completed Their Arduous Trek From Moreton Bay
And Opened New Lands to the Heritage of
The British People
on
23 February, 1847

On 23 February each year the school-children from the Derek Cabell Memorial Settlement marched to the obelisk and heard James deliver an oration on Our Legacy of The Pioneers:

CHILDREN, — We have met here to honour the names of Great Men and in particular One Great Man, my Father, who fifty-two years ago to-day drove his small flocks across this river and suffered loneliness and hunger that you and I might live in This Great Land of Ours and enjoy its fruits. His achievement was all the greater because his birth and training had not prepared him for such hardships. He came of a family which had sent its sons for generations to the Church and the Army, where many of them had made the name of Cabell famous in the Homeland. One of his brothers was a Colonel of Hussars and another was a bishop. If Derek Cabell had chosen to follow in their footsteps there is no doubt that he would have won distinctions for himself in England too, but he preferred to serve his Queen and Country in another way, by spreading the light of Civilization into the dark corners of the earth and planting The Immortal British Traditions in the Fifth and Oldest Continent. He was an Empire-builder, or as Mr Joseph Chamberlain calls him, “a Torch-bearer.” Withal he is a generous, just, and noblehearted man as any who have been privileged to know him intimately will agree. . . .

The Rev. Mr Tomlinson prayed that they should remain worthy of the heritage the pioneers had handed on to them and the children sang “Advance Australia Fair” and “God Save the Queen” and marched away to eat buns at James's expense.

The more touching ceremony, in which ten little girls from the settlement school laid a wreath each year on Emma's grave, “so prettily set among the tall, silent gums beside the river,” as the Waterfall Gazette described it, came some time later — after a political crisis when one of the parties was depending on a by-election in the Cabell Valley district and James helped with liberal funds and got in return every scrap of paper which proved that one Emma Surface had ever been a guest in Her Majesty's penal settlements.

Chapter Seven: Beginning of the End

UNWITTING of his slow but certain apotheosis the old man followed the sun along the veranda through hours no longer apprehended. Time was now a flicker of nights and days in his brain pausing upon attenuated instants — images mostly irrelevant. A smell of lilac, a girl's taut nipples staining faintly pink her wet muslin bodice blotted out a lifetime: or the remembered bite of water on a parched throat, or the dry touch of land under his feet in a swirling river, or a black ridge of gum-trees mirrored in a winter's crystal dawn, or a horse arching its back under him, or, as though it was yesterday not seventy-five years ago, a face leaning tenderly down to his. . . .

The beginning of the end.

For a long time after James had finished clipping his old claws he had brooded over the singularly ordered pattern of his life, the pattern of a long retreating battle — from his young aspirations, from Owerbury, from his soft English skin, from his ideals of decency and honour, from his dream of seeing Owerbury again, from his plans for Harriet, from his power in the world — till the one thing left to evacuate was his body, and had demanded indignantly that James should try to grasp the pathos of this battle which was doomed to have only death for its fulfilment. James replied, soothingly, that he could be assured of an illustrious place in the Empire's roll of honour, that he was sending a paper to the Royal Colonial Society which would make clear what Imperialism owed to the Australian pioneer. In vain the old man damned the Empire, fumbling incoherently to make James perceive that the better colonist he had been the farther he had drifted from the little English village he had longed for. Oh, it wasn't the sea which lay between them, it wasn't even Emma, it was himself, the fellow he had become through murdering blacks, whacking the bush, fighting men, and keeping himself afloat in a land where the law was every one for himself and the devil take the hindmost. “Don't you see? Don't you understand?” But James had tiptoed away. He did not encourage these distorted memoirs of senility.

The old man was left to talk with his ghosts, mutter, mutter, mutter all day and all night.

“You treated me like a dog,” Emma said. “Don't you remember that night?”

“I remember, woman. But it's been all I could do keeping my own head

above water.”

“Pooh, you were running after shadows.”

“That's a fact — shadows. Like a donkey after his carrot, eh?” His cracked laughter echoed through the empty rooms of the house which James had deserted. “But you had your carrot too, didn't you? It was Larry. And you never caught up with it either. He he he! We all had our carrots. That's the way they keep you jogging, see? It's as simple as falling off a log. I discovered it once and forgot it again. I wanted to forget it, I wanted to live, and living is fighting for something. No, no, not for something, against something, against finding out what's at the end. D'you understand? It wasn't for the money, it wasn't to hurt Larry, it wasn't to beat you — that just happened.”

“Pooh. And what did you get out of it?”

“That's a fact — nothing.”

“You could have lived like a king.”

“That's a fact. I could've spent the money, eh? I never thought of that.”

“Well, somebody else is spending it for you now.”

“Yes, the squirt! Did you see what he eats? Oyster soup yesterday. That's the first oysters I've tasted for years. And cigars! He brings them from America. Two shillings each!”

“It's him who got what you slaved for,” Emma said, and this time her laughter cackled in the dusty silence of the old rooms, where wasps nested and spiders hung their grey webs and the axe marks flaked off the walls and showed the great slabs powdered and honeycombed within. “It's him who hobnobs with the lords and ladies. It's him who wears fine clothes. It's him people bow and scrape to. Ha ha! Where's your goldmine? He's selling the shares in it. Where's your sheep you fought the crows and the dingoes for? He's got rid of them. Where's the land you lost an eye over? He's giving it away — to *unionists*. Ha ha — ”

“Shut your trap, woman. I'll live to see him sweat the starch out.”

“You'll not live another year.”

“I'll live to a hundred.”

“Listen! Can't you hear it nibbling?”

“That's mice.”

“It's death. It's inside your own head, eating you up a little bit at a time while you sit there. That's how it goes — day and night, day and night.”

“It's mice, I tell you. See, when I make a noise it stops.”

“You think it stops. But it doesn't. Listen! Can't you hear it nibbling?”

“You old witch, you get out of here. I've had enough of your gas.”

He felt his way out on to the veranda, along the rotting veranda rail, until his foot touched the rocking-chair, and sat down. Her dress swished across the floor behind him, but he pretended not to notice. He sat on the edge of the chair with the rockers tipped up trying to push himself through the darkness, out into the sunlight, out into the valley; but there

was nothing to grip. The smell of sheep was gone. The old voices were gone. The stockyard was gone with its happy hullabaloo of men breaking horses, cutting out, branding. Even the bush silence was gone. The clatter and buzz of a lawnmower, the hiss of steam from the engine-house where they generated electricity and made ice, the clerks skylarking in James's new model store and office, telephones ringing, the pit-pat, pit-pat of tennis balls where the orange-grove used to be, women's voices, and James saying, "Mrs Astley, won't you try a game?" Mrs Astley? Who's she? By God, Curry's daughter in my house! I'll put a stop to this.

The maid brought him his cup of tea.

"Hey, you, what's the time?"

"Who're you calling you? Ask civil and I'll tell you."

"By God! By God . . ."

"It's four o'clock if you want to know. Now hurry up and finish the tea. I don't want to come all the way back here for the cup."

He finished it obediently. "Hey, you, what's for dinner?"

"Wait and see." The maid snatched the cup and went off.

He slid back into the chair. "How long the days are!"

"They've chopped all the orange-trees down," Emma said. "Do you remember the day I planted them?"

"Yes, damn you, I remember."

She cackled through the house again. "You thought you wouldn't see them bear fruit, didn't you? You thought you'd be in England by then? And now he's cleared them out because they've stopped fruiting. Ha ha!"

"Shut your trap." Then he muttered peevishly, "I'm hungry."

Gradually, in a year, two years perhaps (he lost count), the pattern shifted, the links between its events dissolved, and before he could piece inexplicable hieroglyphs together again he dozed off in the sun. He awoke and tried to identify a nameless face with silky dragoon whiskers and account for the feeling of irritation they caused him and why they reminded him of Harriet crying and old Peppiott beating his wife with a stock-whip. Unbidden, unsorted, his memories flowed, bright and painfully moving. He started up in a rage to go somewhere, but before he touched the veranda rail he had forgotten where or why. He shook his head sadly and sighed, but already the scene had moved twenty years back or twenty years forward, or perhaps to something which had never happened, something he had only dreamed. To and fro, to and fro the pictures shuffled, like pebbles in a sieve, and every day some of them escaped, till only a few grey grains caught in the mesh, a few heavy, sharp stones. All the rest — gone, forgotten, except when some special stimulus charged the cells of his brain and the old masterful personality leapt out on his face and his tongue in a quick flare of anger or scorn. Sometimes it was Sambo's voice, sometimes when James or Julia tried to thwart him. He had begun to crave for the things he had denied himself

all these years — wines and food and good cigars. He sat for hours thinking greedily of oyster patties, turkey stuffed with chestnuts, smoked salmon, grilled trout, scones heaped with jam and cream, the sucking pigs they ate in Owerbury at Easter, partridges and pheasants, haunches of venison, pickled herrings, the Westphalian ham his father used to cut in thin shavings and eat with sherry and olives. . . .

James had laid in a cellar of wines and kept a good cook. Obscenely the old man stuffed himself till the food ran out at the corners of his mouth and they led him away and shut him in his own stronghold yelling that they were trying to starve him.

One night a governor on tour came to stay at the Reach. All the afternoon the old man sat in his chair sniffing excitedly and rubbing his hands. He could smell the poultry and fish and hear the ice-cream churner and the clink of bottles going to the freezer.

James came and said, placatingly, "Now, Father, I've got a nice little dinner for you."

"Ah."

"There's whiting, grouse, roast lamb, asparagus, ice-cream, and a bottle of whatever you please. How's that?"

The old man licked his lips.

"I'll have Foo serve it in your room in half an hour."

"Eh?"

"Now, Father, you'd be much more comfortable in your room. I'll see to it at once."

When he had gone the old man began to think, "What's he want to keep me away for? There's something he doesn't want me to have, something special. I can smell it. Roast pork — that's what it is, and he gives me roast lamb. The swipe. I won't have it. I'm going to the table."

Cunningly James had his father's meal served half an hour before dinner, knowing that he could not resist eating and that after eating he would go straight to sleep, but he underestimated the yet unsubdued fury of the old man. He ate his food all right, but when James came into the dining-room five minutes before the meal to see that everything was in order for a distinguished guest he found the old man sitting in the governor's place demanding roast pork and swearing that nothing short of dynamite would uproot him. It took five Chinamen to carry him to his room and lock him in. Fortunately his voice was not what it was: horses no longer pricked their ears down in the paddock when he roared. A remote hiss and whisper of blasphemy, inaudible, as far as James could see, to august ears, soon died away, and the servant left to watch at Cabell's door came to report *sotto voce*, "Boss he snore velly quiet now."

This was one of the grains which did not go down the sieve. It rolled around and around the old man's brain, collecting other grains, till it became the token of every affront he had suffered in the last sixty years.

It was the burden of an incessant complaint to Sambo, the servants, whoever would listen: "He tried to keep me away from the table and starve me because he had some toff to dinner. That's the sort he is. Spends my money on roast pork and locks me up in my room so I won't get any. Him and the Chows — Chows, mind you!"

There was even a worse indignity in store. Julia had him forcibly bathed. He refused to wash, refused to change his clothes. He must have known how it annoyed them. His beard matted, his hands were black, his cuffs and collar stiff with greasy dirt, rooms needed airing when he left them. One day Julia had the bath filled with hot water and carbolic and ordered the Chinaman to dump him in and scrub him. There was a merry half-hour in the bathroom, from which he emerged spluttering and malevolent. "I'll show you up for this," he told Julia. "You wait."

Julia laughed.

"A blackgin's daughter. That's what you are. I can prove it."

"The dregs of a noble man," James sighed, but consoled himself that that noble man was now an unassailable fact of national history. Landtaker — empire-builder — and now philanthropist. Movements for ameliorating the lot of unfortunate aborigines, rapidly becoming extinct, for carrying the consolations of religion to boundary-riders on distant outstations, for fighting vice, building churches, educating workers, uplifting the poor, always commanded the purse of one Derek Cabell. Such philanthropy could not go unrewarded, and the new King Edward was pleased to bestow a knighthood of the British Empire on this old man whose name, even as an object of abuse, people had forgotten in the noisy events of the changing century.

Chapter Eight: Old Men Remember

SUDDENLY the old man would start up and demand to have his horse saddled, and go tearing across the country. It was generally after Sambo had been delivering him one of his sardonic commentaries on the decadence of men and beasts.

Nobody knew how old Sambo was, but he must have been nearly as old as Cabell. The years had fined him away to a thin transparency of skin and delicate bone and almost falsetto voice, so that it seemed as though a touch would make him fall into a heap of white ash. At the door of his hut, where he had nailed up the bleached skull of a horse — “That selfsame identical roan the boss pinched offa Flanagan down Moreton Bay sixty year ago” — he sat and watched with faded eyes, which could tell the age and ancestry of a cow a mile off, the incredible mutations of his world, now arguing with himself, now belittling the wonders of modernity with tales of heroic horses and riders. With his whims and fancies — a habit of calling James “young Jimmy” and threatening him with a terrible visitation of wrath from the boss (“Kick the backside offa you he will, shifting them young bulls off green feed this time of the year”), and with an annual attempt to reach Brisbane and the elysia of Frogs' Hollow, doomed to perish at the first grog shanty, whence he returned, a miraculously animated cadaver, two months later — James forbore. It was hard to do otherwise. Sambo's tongue was something he went a long way to pacify.

“You — you ain't hardly crowbait in comparison to your old man, young Jimmy. Could youa done for all them black savages, like him, with the fever on and the blood coming out his face by the bucketful from the brand they give him? Up there on Black Mountain it were — one morning just after the rains. We shot 'em all, every black son-of-a-gun, and burned 'em after with a smell makes your mouth water every time you think of it. A proper barbecue. They was pretty fat after tuckering up on our Durhams and there wasn't much tinder needed to get a start. Only we couldn't burn old Tom. He was nothing but bones and greenhide, and every time I chucked him on he put the fire out. So we dug him a hole. And then the fever come over the boss and he collapsed down, and that's the only time I ever did see him collapse down, but the fever came over him extra-special bad then. I'da like to seen you do for a whole tribe of black myall savages with the fever on you like he done.

You ain't turned out nothing like him, young Jimmy — you musta chucked back to them new-chum blokes in England he usta talk about. Your old man wouldna stood for cutting up the land the way you done and getting rid of good monkeys and breeding them skinny-legged horses that can't hardly walk offa the grass without going lame on a bloke. Not to mention you letting them union blokes come in planting things. Cocky farmers! No, it ain't regular, Jimmy. You know what your da said straight out about them — how he'd brain you, for just suggesting it. Cripes, he's a savage man, I'm telling you. Like the day me and Monaghan discovered a bit of a goldmine up in the hills. My oath, I was scared. He had every blooming bloke scared then — a fine swearing man that'd knock you down soon's look at you. Jeez, wasn't you bluffed of him! All for running away and not being a ingyneer, wasn't you? And you didn't run away and you was a ingyneer. Ingyneer! Blimy, what's a ingyneer know about cattle. You're turning them there Herefords into cocky farmers' milking shorthorns. Ain't nobody been gored round these parts the last coupla years . . .”

On moonlight nights he went up to the old homestead and sat on the steps and played his mouth-organ. After a while Cabell would come out. “The moon's up, eh?”

“Yeah.” He went on playing softly. Down in the settlement the dogs were howling. A cow came to the river to drink, and the moon spangles on the water tinkled against the roots of the trees along the bank.

Sambo wiped his mouth. “Say, boss, remember that night it was full moon and we got the old red bull that was taking the cows offa Andy's Camp?”

“It wasn't the red,” Cabell grumbled, “it was a roan scrub that had a white calf with her.”

“Garn. Whatya talking about! It was a red bull I tell you, with a strawberry heifer — the one that chased you the time we was running in fats for Smiths at Ipswich. Remember?”

A long pause. “I remember,” the old man said, and after another long pause chuckled, “She was a randy old tart, she was — a calf off one of the first lot that came up from Moreton Bay.”

“Yeah, that's right. That was her sister, that big brindle cow we usta milk.”

“Be damned. That wasn't her sister. Her sister was a white cow that McFarlane pinched and was always with the mob up near where I set fire to the boundary fence.”

“Her! Cripes, you must be going offa your nut. She was piebald, the cow McFarlane pinched. Her mother wasn't the one with the broken horn that got bogged up near Ningpo. It was the sister of that one. Their father was the yellow bull I shot in the gully out near Jardine's.”

“It wasn't you shot it. It was me.”

“Garn. I shot it with me new Snider.”

“You hold your clap. I shot it with — with — I shot it.”

They were silent for a long time, offended with each other. Then Cabell chuckled again, “By God, remember how he nearly horned Bill Penberthy? Used to run with the little down-horned heifer . . . she's alive yet . . . got another calf . . . saw them near the Three Mile . . . when I went to run in the bullock for the cask last . . . last . . .”

“That was a long time ago, boss,” Sambo said gently.

“Eh?”

“There ain't no Three Mile now. That's where all them cocky farmers are young Jimmy cut up the land for.”

“What's that? Cut what land up?”

“You know. Ten years ago that was.”

“Yes, yes, now I remember.”

Sambo went on playing. The old man got up and paced the veranda, getting angrier and angrier. Suddenly he stopped and said, “Go and put my saddle on. I'm going out.”

Sambo went and saddled two horses. At first Cabell rode the piebald stallion, one of his own breed, foaled in the rocky gullies where the colts spent two years galloping up and down almost inaccessible declivities till they were run in and broken, horses to ride and trust on the blackest night because they had learnt every hole and fallen log. But the stallion was dead now and no more horses were bred at the Reach that way. James's foals of thousand-guinea sires grew up in fenced paddocks “where they sweep away every stick and stone as if the nags had glass feet,” Sambo said indignantly, and were gently cajoled, never driven.

James had warned his father once, “These horses are not meant for careering madly round the country-side at night. You'll come to grief.”

Sambo smiled pityingly. “Whatya talking about. Boss'd ride anything with hair on.”

Anyway, he'd done his duty, James reflected, as he heard them go off down the road at a demented gallop, racing neck for neck in some old man's fantasy of recaptured youth.

Early in the morning they would return, quarrelling. James would awake, turn over and sigh . . .

One night a frantic banging on the door roused him. It was Sambo. Cabell had been riding a chestnut taffy horse, newly broken in. It had fallen with him.

They brought him home on a door. The young doctor from the settlement thought that the skull was fractured. “He can't live. He may never even regain consciousness.”

“I warned him. I tried to stop him,” James kept repeating.

Sambo sat on the veranda steps and grizzled like a child.

Chapter Nine: Return of a Prodigal

JAMES had long ago decided what duty would require him to do at this crisis. He sent off two telegrams, one to Harriet, one to Larry, and a cable to Geoffrey in New York, telling them that Cabell was dying; drew up an order for the family's mourning; and from the filing cabinet in his office took out a folder marked "Obit. Father," read it over, added a few commas, wrote into the blank space "September" with a query after, addressed the envelopes to the newspapers, set them in a neat pile on his desk, and sat down to wait.

The dusty winter was coming to an end. Down in the settlement the ploughs had opened up geometrical stretches of black and red earth, congenially suggestive to James of ordered and respectable husbandry and a page of life freshly turned and yet unmarked. The birds which had fled north from the brief spell of cold were coming back to the trees along the river. The peach-trees were in bloom and the little green and gold love-birds fluttered from branch to branch in a snowfall of pink petals.

James tried to fix his mind on solemn thoughts proper to the occasion, but it was difficult. A picture of his new house, an English lawn down that side of the slope, another tennis court over there, a bowling-green on the shady side, and all these unsightly native trees gone, kept rising to his eyes. Once or twice he fell asleep in the warm breeze. He roused himself, shook his head, and heaved a sigh. Poor old Dad!

Sambo was playing his mouth-organ under the flame-tree in the backyard. James sent one of the servants out to remind him that it was no time for mouth-organs with his old master passing away At least the doctor assured James that he was sinking fast, could not last another day — and that went on for a week. The mourning arrived — arm-bands and hatbands for the hands and the domestics, black silk for Julia. Harriet telegraphed that she was on her way from Sydney. James's message had been following her from old addresses.

James no longer relaxed in the balmy spring sunshine. All day he was tiptoeing back and forth to his father's room. The old man lay just as they had put him down — naked, bony arms on the counterpane, his head, with a black rash of blood where he had fallen, twisted slightly among the pillows. Looking down at the uptilted mouth James sometimes felt that the old man had closed his eyes when he heard James coming, wasn't

unconscious at all, but only fooling them.

"His pulse is stronger this morning," the nurse said.

"Indeed?"

"A wonderful constitution!"

"Wonderful!" James agreed. "Wonderful!"

A few hours before Harriet arrived Cabell was sitting up in bed demanding food.

The doctor looked as James could not help feeling — as though the old fiend had played a trick on them. "Only one in a hundred . . ." the doctor protested.

"All right. All right," James said, then smiled. "You must be a wonder-worker."

"Only one in a hundred . . ."

"There's no need to apologize, doctor. We are most grateful . . ."

When Harriet arrived with her three noisy young boys filling the inside of the coach Cabell was in the rocking-chair on the veranda snoring off a heavy feed of roast chicken.

James found no trace of his angular and overwrought young sister in the matron who launched herself from the coach and kissed him energetically and damply three times on the mouth. A likeness, a striking likeness to his mother there was, which brought back to mind Emma's obstinate, deep-set eyes and obstinate, flat mouth, but it was a likeness with enormous differences in the details. Harriet's face was plump, with a double chin incipient, which softened the obstinacy in her eyes and mouth. Plainly, like her mother, she demanded her own way, but she was in the habit of getting it — that was the difference. She was dressed in expensive clothes but looked untidy. Her dress, a shade too bright for her years, fitted her where it touched, her hat, a shade too luxuriously laden with bright artificial fruits, just did not match her dress, the pearl-drop ear-rings with diamond corona were just a little too ornate for a respectable woman, her laughter just a little too loud and frequent. She looked spoilt, a little, James could not help thinking, of the parvenue, a trifle vulgar. The familiar way she spoke to the coachman when he was unloading her portmanteaux from the boot — "Come on now, Joe, move your lazybones" — the size of the wad of notes from which she stripped a tip far too extravagant seemed strident over-emphasis to James.

"And how is he?"

"He's much better, thank you," James said, stressing his proprietary rights in a father whose last hours he had not intended to share with Harriet when he sent the telegram.

"Thank God for that," Harriet said, and started for the house. "I was afraid I'd be late."

"But wait a moment," James said, exerting his long legs to keep up with her. "He's asleep now, and besides . . ." He held her back. "Harriet,

you can't rush into him after . . . everything. Have some thought for his feelings."

"Feelings? Don't be silly. He's got over it by this."

"He hasn't mentioned your name for ten years," James said solemnly. "You couldn't expect it. You treated him badly."

Harriet sniffed. "I had my own life to lead."

"Exactly," James said. "*Your* own life." It annoyed him to see Harriet so well, so satisfied, so unchastened. "My dear Harriet, you must remember that you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Others . . . However, leaving that aside, I hope you'll grant I may know what should and should not be done in my own house."

Harriet shook his hand off her arm and went on without another word. The clatter of their feet on the veranda steps shook the house and awakened Cabell. He stirred and began automatically to complain in a wavering voice, "Who's that? Tell that woman of James's — it's time for dinner."

Harriet gathered the pop-eyed children and looked at her father. It was fourteen years since the night she tiptoed across this veranda. "Father," she said gently, "I've come to see you. Harriet. It's me."

"Time for dinner," the old man complained. "They're starving me here."

Harriet knelt and touched his hand. "Harriet, Father. Don't you remember? Harriet! I've come to be with you." She repeated it slowly, stroking his hand.

James noticed that there were tears in her eyes. Really, after all these years, after what she'd done — if that wasn't rank hypocrisy! He moved off to the end of the veranda to avoid looking on a — well, to say the least — disgusting scene.

One of the children began to cry and his eldest brother, a thin, tall, freckled boy with a long face, a long fine nose, and a heavy under-lip, nudged him into silence.

The old man pulled his hand away. "Eh? What's this? Harriet?" He put his fingers out vaguely and touched her face, streaking a tear across the grime of travel on her cheek, lowered his head against the frayed cane back of the chair, and murmured, "Yes, she died in Owerbury last year — no, a long time ago."

The flies buzzed back into his beard and crawled over his face, over the hairless, atrophied eyelids, like old sea-shells. Harriet brushed them with her handkerchief. A faint perfume of heliotrope overlay, for a moment, his smell of an old man. His head jerked erect. "Eh? Harriet? What's this? What's this?"

"*Your* Harriet," she said. "Don't you remember?"

He struggled half-out of the chair and sat, with his head tipped back and sideways, as though listening to a sound far, far away, a thin whisper

barely audible under the jabber of resurrected voices. "Harriet? Harriet?" he muttered, as though the distant faint sound was gradually taking a shape he could recognize.

James came back. "This is really most inopportune, Harriet. You see how you're upsetting him. He's hardly out of a sick bed."

The new voice cut across the weary darkness and scattered the blurred pictures laboriously lifting themselves into the light. The old man's lips worked and he began to complain again, "No food for hours. Tell that fellow James . . ."

Harriet stood up and wiped her eyes. "How old he is, Jimmy. I'd forgotten."

"It seems that he's forgotten you too," James said condescendingly. Duty and self-abnegation had been rewarded!

By the time Harriet had bathed herself and the children and eaten a late lunch the old man was back in bed sleeping. It would be dangerous to disturb him, the doctor said.

Harriet wandered around the empty house with the children, looked into the kitchen and saw her mother crouching over the fire-place where still a few charred sticks lay, remnant of the very fire, perhaps, which Emma had nursed as they spoke together that day. Out in the yard she found Sambo sitting under the flame-tree, looking not so forlorn as utterly dumb-founded by some *volte-face* of mechanical laws.

He recognized her at once, jumped up, took off his hat, and stood shyly treading on his toes. "Lor', Miss Harriet, you got some condition on you. Come back to see the old man, eh?"

"Yes, Sambo. *Isn't* he old though? Oh, so old. I'd forgotten."

"Don't know about him being old. What gets me's him falling off a horse like that. Cripes!" He hastened to refute any suggestion of lese-majesty. "Course I know that chestnut taffy ain't much of a horse. One of them things young Jimmy there breeds up. But still 'n' all, Miss Harriet, the boss falling off a horse like a new-chum — you can't tell me that's a nateral way to die."

She left the children with him and went on alone to that part of the house which had been her prison. The roof was rusty, the windows along the veranda were broken, the curtains hung in rags, the blinds were faded dirty white; but inside everything was as she had left it. The carpets, the crude imitation tapestries on the wall, the big gilt mirrors, the sofas and arm-chairs, and piano — nothing was touched except by moths and rats. A sharp pang went through her, not for the past, but for the old man who had preserved these last grains of a dream. "Now, isn't that just like Father, the sentimental old silly," she thought and sniffed, but her throat tightened as she opened the piano and saw the keys again, the unforgettable keys of many hours' practising — the D flat with a little chip off the edge, the A slightly lower than the rest, the F slightly

yellowed. She felt a desire to talk to these keys to which she had confided so often, which had given her something that survived all disappointments and fed a fond hope for the future.

She blew a cloud of dust off the stool and sat down. The keys squeaked as she touched them and the rusty wires hissed at her as though reluctant to be disturbed. Some of them did not answer, and others spoke with the same faded, startling unlikeness to her memory of them as the old man on the veranda. Without premeditation she began to sing a song she had not sung for eighteen years:

Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss, was ich leide.
Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt
Weiss, was ich leide.
Allein und abgetrennt
Von aller Freude
Seh ich ans Firmament
Nach jener Seite.
Ach! der mich liebt und kennt
Ist in der Weite.

It was her father's favourite song, a lonely man's song. How inexpressibly sad it sounded on these jangling, hoarse wires. As she sat with her hands resting on the keyboard she thought of the last time she played it — that evening she made up her mind that she would run away from him and he came in with blood on his beard and tried to tell her a story about the past, something he wanted sympathy for, and she had kept him off, afraid to feel sorry, afraid of being engulfed in pity for him. Well, she was afraid of him no longer, nor had been since the night she ran away. Then, when she was most ruthless, she began to understand and pity him most, with the only true understanding and pity, of the strong, the fulfilled, for the uncompleted. It was not perhaps a very tender feeling, rather impatient, with a little scorn in it, like the feeling Emma had had for him in the early days.

The opening door creaked and she jumped. James looked in. "I'm sorry to interrupt your sentimental reveries, my dear," he said with a smile which showed that he for one was not taken in by such humbug, "but you're disturbing Father's sleep. He's wakened up twice."

"All right." Harriet looked around the dark room for the last time and joined James at the door.

"I'll be pulling this place down — well, some day," James said. "If there's anything you'd like in here as a keepsake I'll send it to you."

"Oh no," Harriet said. "I don't keep a junk store."

"Surely you'd like something to remember Father by," James said

disapprovingly.

Harriet laughed. "I can't see us forgetting him in a hurry."

"Indeed no," James said, but he did not think it was quite the thing to laugh.

Just before dawn next morning he knocked on her door. He looked hurt. "You'd better come," he said. "Father's asking for you. Of course he doesn't understand what he's saying half the time."

She slipped a dressing-gown on and joined him in the passage. As they went along the veranda he said, "He's been bellowing for the last half-hour. He's worn out the little strength he had. Now you'll be satisfied perhaps."

The old man was propped up in bed with pillows. The tired nurse rose from beside the bunk as they entered and said, "Here she is. Now be quiet."

Harriet took her chair. "Here I am, Father. Do you want me?"

He put a hand out towards the sound of her voice but could not reach so far. She pressed it. "Harriet, is that you?" His voice was weak but crisper, as though he knew what he was saying.

"Yes, Father. Jimmy wired me that you were sick. I came at once."

"You did, eh?" He mused, as if feeling his way in an unfamiliar place that was yet strangely familiar, like a man coming back into a room he had not seen for many years and having to learn anew old and well-known things. But where's . . . where's . . ."

"Jack?"

"Jack who?"

"Jack my husband? Jack Cash?"

"Ah yes, Cash." He nodded. "Dead, eh?"

"No! He's in Sydney at home."

"I thought they'd hanged him. No, no, that's right. I remember now. I remember." He pushed her hand away. "So you came for the funeral, eh?"

"Oh, I couldn't imagine you dead, Father. But oh," she ran her hand over his shrivelled arm, "how thin you are!"

"Stop snivelling. I get enough crocodile tears from James."

James cleared his throat.

The old man lay snarling and muttering, "Tried to keep me away from the dinner-table one night because some toff was here. Had me bathed too. Wasn't clean enough for his fancy nose. *Me* — I — I could've been — been — finer gentleman only — things happened . . ." His head sank into the pillows and he drowsed away.

"You'd better go back to bed and finish your sleep," James said.

But as soon as she moved the old man awakened and called out peevishly, "Sneaking off again?" He caught the sleeve of her dressing-gown, felt for her hand, and went to sleep again.

"You'll excuse me," James said. "*I* haven't had any sleep for a week," and stiffly withdrew.

When the old man woke up again he was much recovered and he went on recovering, miraculously. It might have been the shock of falling on his head, of hearing Harriet's voice again, or the music, or maybe it was just the last automatic shudder of decaying cells, but once again the pattern of his life reassembled from the dull fragments.

"Oh, we've heard all this a thousand times before, Father," James said impatiently. "We understand it well enough, but it's all done with now."

"There are some things you've never heard," Cabell said ominously.

"And we don't want to hear them," James said. "We don't want to have our noses rubbed in sordid details."

"Hear that? Sordid details. Oh, I know it well. Tried to keep me away from the dinner-table when his fine friends were here, didn't you? Tried to disown me. Well, I disown you."

"Now, now, Father, behave," Harriet said. "James has done his best for you — everything you asked."

"He's a puppy."

"Don't be silly, Father. He loves you as I do."

James exploded. "Good heavens, Harriet, is it necessary for *you* to tell him that. *I've* given up my whole life to him."

But somehow it was necessary, and contrary to all justice and gratitude the old man seemed to love his errant, prodigal daughter more than his faithful, dutiful son. Many times in the following two months he would have tried to get lawyers in to make a will disinheriting James of the Reach if Harriet had not wheedled and bullied him out of it. James was not grateful. "Sly, false, hypocritical," he thought Harriet was as he watched her sitting at his father's feet on the veranda, stroking his hand and saying, "Yes, yes, Father, of course I understand. Because I made all those Nice People hate me, too. But I don't care. I'm glad. They'd only have liked me if I'd been a stuffed dummy in a glass case."

"That's a fact. That's what that monkey, James, my brother was — a stuffed dummy. If I'd been like him I'd've been living at Owerbury now and none of this would have happened. That's right," he patted her hand, "you understand."

"And I hated them once as you did. Oh, how I hated them. If I'd been a man I could have done terrible things — as you did."

"Yes, I did some pretty terrible things."

"Once you said it was only luck if one didn't do terrible things. That's true, too. I understand that now. I'd've done terrible things if it hadn't been for luck."

"There's a lot of luck in it, child. That's a fact."

"But you must stop worrying about what happened, Father. It was bound to be just like that in the beginning. If you were young now it

would be different.”

“Isn't that what I'm always telling them? He thinks we could've opened up a blackfellows' country with kid gloves on.”

“Yes, yes,” she soothed him, “but it is opened up now and you mustn't be unreasonable about James and his kid gloves.”

But the old man would not be reconciled. “They chunked me in a bath . . .”

“Come, Father, come, don't start again. Besides, others will understand even better than we do. My boys don't want to wear kid gloves and they'll know what it was like for you — I'll see they do.” She brought her eldest boy, Derek, with the grave face and outsized nose, replica of Cabell's. “He's just like what you must have been, Father. He's going to become a musician, a great musician.”

Cabell ran his hands over the boy's smooth face. The boy tried hard not to flinch from the fingers, like dry bones. But his grandfather was not pleased. “What's the use talking. Pious claptrap. I *was* like that — once . . .”

After Harriet left him that afternoon he sat facing the red deformed egg of the sun setting in dust, and talked excitedly to himself, now in a furtive whisper, now angrily, now in a sad tone as though renouncing something precious, while under the veranda, where glaring toadstools sprouted from the stumps, crouched Harriet's smallest boy, listening, wanting to run away, yet too scared, too fascinated by the crazy voice to move. The voice stopped abruptly and the boy crept out and saw the old man sitting up rigid in his chair, the copper light of the sun full on his face, the long purple cicatrice, the ravaged eyes, the upper lip curled back on bare gums, and the jaw like two pieces of iron clamped together. He would never forget that face, never. Under the drift of pleasant domestic and national legends it would remain indelibly clear, demanding some explanation which pleasant legends do not give.

Chapter Ten: Sad Tale Concluded

HARRIET was dressing for dinner when the child ran in and said that something had happened to the old man. The nurse and James were there before her. He was having some kind of fit. Soon it passed and they got him back to bed and sat around waiting for him to come to.

Very cautiously the doctor said that it was the end, but nobody believed him. James, Harriet, and the nurse all looked tired and resigned.

The room was like an oven. A fire had broken out in the ranges and a shift of the light breeze carried the smoke and the heat down on the homestead. The fire glowing in the trees along the hills looked pretty at a distance, almost comforting, like the scattered lights of a town. Out in the darkness the cattle huddled together and cried with fear, that peculiar cry which begins with short, irritated bellowings and ends with a loud roar sinking and rising between a murmur and a weird, cracked scream. The birds were restless, even the fowls in the yard, which clucked and cock-a-doodled without respite. The horses in the stable turned round and round on the cobbles and challenged the nervous night with their whinnys. The three children sat on the floor along the wall, forgotten, tamed by their first sight of a bushfire and a man dying, very white in the yellow lamplight under their freckles.

Julia came to the door and looked in at the old man, who lay under the sheet breathing in dry gasps. She was dressed as carefully as usual in a white evening frock cut away at the neck and the back, and the beads of sweat along her upper lip and her forehead, which sparkled in the light, only made her look cooler, as though she was wrapped up from the suffocating air in a thin silver gauze.

“What's the doctor say now?” she asked.

“He says it's grave, very grave,” James answered in a hushed voice.

“You mean he's going to die at last?”

“Julia!”

“Oh, you make me ill, James. You know perfectly well that I know you've got a house booked at Southport at this moment and that you've been re-booking it from month to month for the last three months.”

“Naturally I've hoped that Father would be well enough . . .”

“Oh!” She turned her back on him and stared out at the darkness, but the smoke, thickening so that the lamp on the table burned with a halo, sent her in choking. When she got her breath again she said, “Well, do

what you like, but I'm not going to wait any longer. I'm going to pack and get away from this heat to-night. You two can stay and amuse yourselves."

James looked pointedly at the nurse before replying. She took the hint, murmured something about dinner, and went out.

" 'Amuse' is hardly the word to use in a room where death is hovering," James said.

"I don't believe he'll die," Julia said. "He'll lie there, the old beast, till we're all half-fried, and then get up and drag his horrid old corpse around the house for another five years."

They all moved their eyes to the face on the bed, each trying to estimate how much longer the will in that gaunt jaw could go on fighting, and as they watched the sneering grin slowly widened and let the light shine on the wet gums. There was such malice in the smile that Julia, whom the old man's wildest shinnanikan never unpoised, put her hand over her mouth and said "Oh!"

The head lifted from the pillows a few inches and fell back again, and the only sound was Cabell's quickening breathing. He made another effort and got on his elbow, clutching the sheet close to his throat with his free hand and shivering. "You don't think I'm going to die, you hussy? Well, you're frank. And now, I reckon, it might be time to be frank with you. I've been thinking of it a long while — since you had me chucked in the bath. I smelt, you said. That's a fact. But you smell too, with a smell you'll never wash off. Your mother . . ."

James hurried to the bunk. "Is this the moment, Father? In your condition you'd best be trying to sleep."

"Get to the devil. Bring Harriet here."

"I'm here, Father." She crossed to the bunk and touched him.

"Sit down," he said. "You're all going to listen to me now if it's the last time you do."

James rushed at Julia and took her by the arm. "Leave the room, Julia. Leave it at once. I forbid you to stay and hear — hear lies."

Julia lifted her arm from his hand and put the table between them. She smiled, pulled up a chair, and seated herself. Perhaps she would have liked to run away but did not want the old man to know that he could frighten her or perhaps it pleased her to cross James. She folded her hands in her lap and said, "Go on, Father. We're listening, but you'll have to think hard to find anything to say about Mother that will shock me."

James stopped spluttering at her across the table and said appealingly, "Don't incite him, Julia, for God's sake. He might say something that we — you would never live down."

But the old man, groping for Harriet's hand, seemed to have forgotten them. The malice had gone from his face, sunk in the pillows again, and when he began to speak it was in a whisper barely to be heard above the

commotion from the stables and the fowlyard. The weak voice, punctuated by his gaspings for breath, sounded to the children against the wall absurdly inadequate to cause such a flurry in a great, schoolmasterly man like their uncle.

"I'm going back I don't know how many years," the old man was saying to Harriet. "I had a skin like your young colt and I had to sink or swim. I had a handful of sheep, and the overseer on the place where I was working for tucker was stealing them, a brute by the name of M'Govern, an old flogger, strong as a lion. But I had hands like James there, and couldn't tell B from a bull-foot any better, but Gursey helped me and we got away. He had six months to do before he got his ticket-of-leave — Gursey. But I swear I didn't force him to make a break for it. That was M'Govern. He thought I was putting my head down with Gursey and he was scared of Gursey. So he looked for an excuse to get him out of the way. He was going to send him to Brisbane to have him flogged and I saved him — helped him to clear out. It would've been the end of him, that flogging."

It was the old, old story of Cabell's beginning in the colony sixty years ago. James had heard it a hundred times: how the convict Gursey escaped and helped Cabell to find his stolen sheep and brought him to the valley; how later he went away and returned towards the end of his life and tried, in some mysterious way, to blackmail Cabell, but settled down at last and stayed at the Reach till he died. James became calmer. The old man's mind must have wandered: there was nothing about Julia's mother in this story, which was prompted by a bad conscience about the convict who had lost his ticket-of-leave.

"You've told us all this before, Father," he interrupted the old man. "It wasn't your fault the fellow got himself into trouble."

"It wasn't my fault — you see that, don't you?" the old man said anxiously, turning his face. "I didn't make him escape just to help me save a few measly sheep — even if they were everything I had — my last razoo, mind you — my last hope of getting Home."

"Yes, yes," James said. "We see that quite well, Father. We've assured you time out of number."

"Well, *he* didn't see it," Cabell grumbled. "Or wouldn't. 'You'd do anything,' he said, '*anything*.' And — my God, I was hardly teathed, and he'd been learning the ropes in jailyards half his life." He turned his face again, waiting for someone to reassure him.

"Oh, quite! Quite!" James said impatiently.

Cabell fixed his sightless eye in James's direction and frowned, but turned back to Harriet and went on quickly, "We got away with the sheep and came up here. There was a price on his head. But he was safe here, and he could have stayed as long as he liked — to his dying day, only . . . well, your mother came along and he let me marry her. He knew she was

an old lag and he didn't let on. It was pure spite — or perhaps they made it up between them. He told me after I'd got the buckle on, and I kicked him out. It was his own fault. Eh?"

Nobody answered. This was something new in the story. James and Harriet sat thinking of it, of their mother, of Larry, and of the strange relations between the three of them which this helped to explain.

"He was in no danger, you know," the old man said, as if to exculpate himself against their silence. "The convict days were over. Everybody was too busy making money to think of looking for a man who'd made a break seven years before. Anyway, he wasn't caught. He humped his drum to the gold-fields and did well for himself. I began to get on my feet too. I could've gone back to England. I had enough. Emma would have listened to reason. She had her brat. I'd've left her the station. I just needed another couple of years and — but you've heard about that. McFarlane and the land, I mean. He pinched a lump off me and Flanagan, he was minister then, he backed him up because of the roan stallion. It looked like a drought coming on. I had to have the land — or give up going back Home again. So I went to court. Peppiott was my lawyer. They dragged up a lot of dirt, a lot of lies, and published them in the papers, and while I was waiting for the appeal to come on Gurseys came back. He was looking pretty sick. I didn't have the heart to turn him out, and the dog betrayed me again. He had M'Govern trailing him. They'd met at the diggings and M'Govern had blackmailed him, so he came back here knowing M'Govern wouldn't drop off an easy thing. He hoped M'Govern would come and blackmail me too and I'd kill him. You see, he thought I'd do *anything*. Well," he raised himself on his elbow again and whispered, "I *did*."

In a tone of profound conviction James said at once, "I don't believe a word of it. He's making it up. His mind's wandering."

Julia bent her head and her slim shoulders shook. She was trying to suppress her laughter, but it broke out, girlish and pleasant to hear.

James looked at her, pained, questioning.

"All right. All right. I'll stop in a minute. I was just thinking — oh, forgive my frivolous mind — I was thinking of your next Foundation Day oration."

James opened his mouth to answer and swallowed some smoke and choked. She reached across the table and pounded him between the shoulder-blades, but he turned himself away pettishly and went on choking into his handkerchief till his collar came off the stud, his hair fell in lank, black locks over his eyes, his eyes bulged tearfully, and the colour streaked his cheeks as though Julia had been clawing him.

The children along the wall stared in fright. They had never seen him with a hair out of place, so now he looked bedraggled, even demoralized; and the antics of their elders around their dying grandfather's bunk were,

in general, extremely confusing.

The old man was talking again. He had relaxed into the pillow as though he was done, but Julia's laughter had roused him. "Wait a minute. I was forgetting you." He grinned towards Julia. "You and your smell. You see this M'Govern, this flogger and sixpenny bludger, he was nearly your father. In fact, so was a blackfellow."

James stopped wiping the sweat from his face, Julia stopped laughing, and they looked at each other, at the old man, uncomprehendingly.

"Yes," the old man said, "when this M'Govern came back after Gurseys he got a job over at Ningpo and Ludmilla wanted to marry him to Aurelia. Ludmilla was cleaning the place up. It had been going to pieces for years, and then something brought it all to a head. Your mother, it was — a drooping sort of a girl. I didn't see what was wrong with her at first, but it was as plain as a pikestaff after. The old Colonel, you see, he wouldn't have a man around the place, in case one of them got sweet on the girls. Crown princes — nothing less was good enough, but crown princes didn't turn up. There was nothing but myalls on the place, and your mother — I suppose she got tired of waiting."

"Oh, Father," Harriet said sharply. "How could you. Oh."

It was Julia's turn, looking from face to face, to say, "Oh, the brute. It can't be true."

The old man's voice soared laughing and cracked high up in a birdlike squeak of delight. "It's true, right enough. Why do you think Ludmilla helped me the time I was in trouble, on condition that I married James to you? 'So you'll help them to bury the past,' she says. Aye, it's buried all right. Too deep for you to wash off."

James looked at her, took four strides to the door, turned and looked at her again. As though she had confessed that what Cabell had said of her mother had happened to her — that was just how he looked. And Julia, for a moment, looked like one who has laughed at a joke and discovered too late that the joke was on herself. Her eyes asked for mercy and there was a fiendish mercilessness in James's.

Suddenly a face was beaming at them from the doorway, a round, red face equipped with a professional obliquity to family crises. The nurse. "Everything all right?" she asked. Before she had quite said it James had seized her by the shoulder and pushed her on to the veranda. He slammed the door and went back to the table.

At once, with the door shutting out the hot wind, the air seemed lighter and cooler. Julia laughed again, loudly this time and not so pleasantly. "It's sheer vindictiveness," she said. "Look at him, the vindictive devil."

Strange to say, Cabell did not look at all vindictive but rather foolish as he tried to raise himself from the pillow again fighting, it seemed, against the weight of the sheet become too much for his exhausted body. A fit of coughing defeated him. He lay for a long time breathing quickly and

hanging on to Harriet's hand as though he was afraid she would run away before he could finish.

A gust of wind opened the door and brought back the smell of burning gum-leaves. "Something's burning," Cabell muttered from the pillow. "Burning, burning . . ." and repeated it several times, trying to get a grip on an elusive idea. "Ah yes, the house burnt down, the old house. That's it — I was telling you how M'Govern — They wanted to marry him to Aurelia — yes. He told me, but I couldn't believe it. They were such a stuck-up lot. But he swore, said he didn't want to blackmail me, or even Gurse. I didn't trust him. He said he only wanted one thing — if I'd chuck Gurse out again, in case he went whiddling to the colonel. Ludmilla was passing him off on the old fool as a squatter. But how was I to know. Gurse had money on him. He might only have wanted to get Gurse away so as to murder and rob him — and after everything that had happened I couldn't allow that. And the story was true all the time. He was going to marry Aurelia. The parson was already on the way. Ludmilla had arranged it all. Any port in a storm — or perhaps she even believed herself he was a squatter who'd lost his land. Well, we all looked pretty rough I guess . . ." Cabell put his hand over the empty red socket of his left eye from which the patch had fallen. "It was all true enough, but I found it out too late. We had a fight, M'Govern and me, and he blinded me with his stock-whip. I was as stone blind as I am now for a couple of months, helpless as a kitten, and that altered everything. He'd been scared of me before, but now I was at his mercy and he was a born bully. He couldn't resist it. Chucked Ningpo and came here. Thought he had a softer racket too, I suppose. Ludmilla used to make him wear a stiff collar over there and grease his hair. So he began bleeding me. I was nearly on my feet then, I told you — everything hanging in the balance, waiting for the appeal. I couldn't afford any more dirt. He threatened to tell the police about Gurse. You could get a stiff term for inciting a man to escape and harbouring him. Wanted all my money to keep his mouth shut — everything I'd saved for England. And then one night . . . over there it was." He pointed across the room. "No, in the old house. There was a fire-place where we used to hang the billy in the early days. He was bending down to light his pipe. I could see it as plain as if my eyes weren't bandaged. A hundred times I'd watched him do it down in Moreton Bay, bending over to put a twig in the embers, and his big fat neck ruckled up on the shirt-band. I leant over and dug my fingers into it and pushed his face on the fire . . . and your ma, she came in and finished him with an axe . . ."

They sat on the edge of their chairs straining towards his failing voice, but they hardly noticed that he had stopped speaking, absorbed into the picture he had created. For many seconds, fed by the acrid smell of burning, the noises of terrified animals, it hung upon their minds,

developing its appalling details of its own volition, like a dream. One of the children whimpered and they all three started and looked at each other, then at the children, asleep on the floor.

"You see how it happened, don't you?" the old man said. He spoke anxiously again, as if he had been getting up the courage to ask that question and was afraid what they would answer. "It couldn't have happened otherwise, could it?"

Harriet pressed his hand. "No, Father. I don't see how it could have been otherwise."

"Ah!" He let himself gently on to the pillow again. "Ah!"

James's chair creaked and he rose. Automatically feeling to make sure that his tie was set in the precise middle of the collar he found that the collar was gaping and the tie under his ear. He looked at them with an expression of shocked and disapproving alarm, as though they had caught him in shameful undress, and hastily fiddled to adjust himself. With his eyes on the ceiling he wrenched the lugs of the sweated collar together, grimacing, panting, jerking his legs. The stud gave a little click, described a shining arc across the light, and disappeared into the darkness of the veranda. James dropped his arms to his side and gazed after it for a moment or two of dejected relaxation. Then he pulled himself up and went out to look for it, discouraged but persistent.

The old man's breathing quickened, his fingers slipped from Harriet's hand. She pressed them, but they did not respond. He was asleep.

She got up from the bunk and awakened the children. They rubbed their eyes and followed her to bed, pausing at the door to look back and wonder again at the mysterious drama which had passed here and left their aunt still primly, coolly sitting in her chair with her hands folded in her lap and the dew on her upper lip, like little bubbles in the glass she was made of, while their uncle crawled about the veranda on his hands and knees, mumbling to himself.

When Harriet returned in ten minutes Julia was gone from the room and James was standing on the steps talking to the manager in a subdued voice. She sat down beside the bunk, unrolled a piece of black silk, and threaded her needle. But she put it aside soon and sat watching the ruby line of fire along the hills. She could hear James's voice now and then. "... very low. His mind's wandering, you know."

"A wonderful old gentleman," the manager said heartily.

"Wonderful," James agreed. "Wonderful." After a pause he repeated it slowly, as though it was a formula his brain must but would not learn, "A ... wonderful ... old ... gentleman."

Harriet smiled to herself. There was, perhaps, a little malice in that smile.

Then she put her head on the bu-1MFS filter chain problem at processing file '/usr/ot/sup//stobett.sgml'